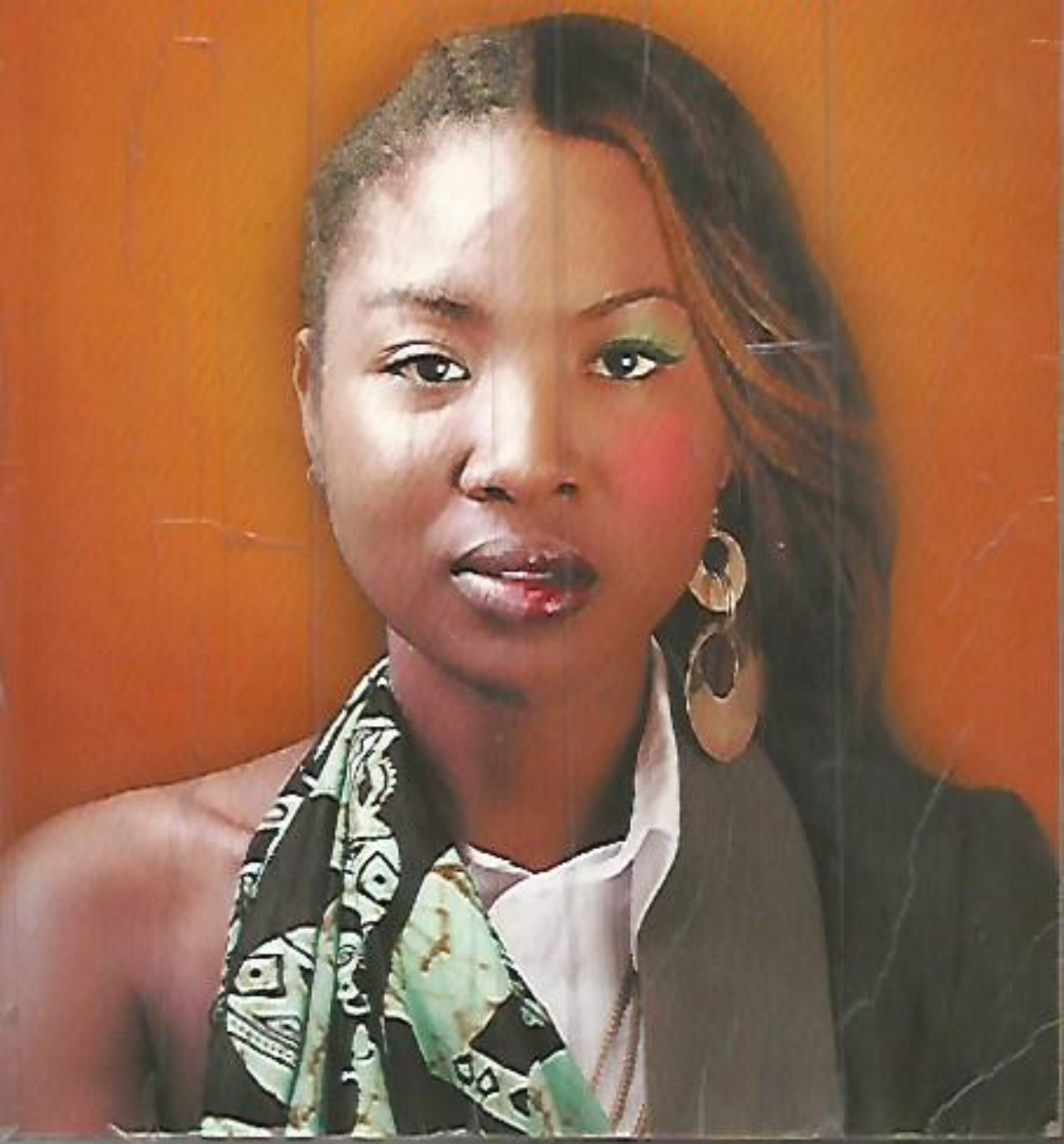


Changing SHADOWS

HENRY M. MUSENGE



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The wind was blowing strongly when the entire room was brightly illuminated by a flash of lightning. Sister Theresa tossed and turned. Still uncertain of whether she had been dreaming or not, she shook vividly. She slowly woke up and was now certain that she had been having a nightmare. The nun had been dreaming that the roof of their big house was caving in, after being ripped apart by a vicious thunderstorm. She stood up in her nightdress and fumbled for the light switch. Her rosary gripped in her hand, Sister Theresa knelt down and started praying. Just then, a bright light flashed across the room again and was immediately followed by a crash of thunder, shaking the house to its foundation. The nun trembled but continued with her prayers. She prayed for herself, her family, her friends, and indeed all the students in her school.

In another room of the same big house, another nun, Sister Mary was also wide awake. Although disturbed and slightly frightened by the thunderous lightning, she had no intention of leaving her warm and comfortable bed. Instead, she turned her face to the other side of the bed, moved near the wall, and pulled her blankets over her head. She said her short prayer in her warm bed. Just then, the rains started falling. It was fierce and full of lightning. The nun was certain that it would be yet another familiar downpour.

Inside a dormitory, about fifty metres away from the Sisters' house, some girls screamed, 'Rains!' This was somehow unusual, as the girls were quite accustomed to such heavy rains.

Someone among the girls switched on the lights. There was confusion as some girls demanded that the lights be switched off while others chorused, 'Lights! Lights! Lights!'

But then, Mwila's authoritative voice commanded, 'Shut up! Shut up, girls! Switch off the lights at once; otherwise, you'll all be punished in the morning.'

There was an immediate dead silence in the dormitory. Darkness pervaded the room except for the occasional flash of lightning. Mwila turned and covered herself properly again. No sooner had she fallen asleep and started snoring than she was interrupted again. This time, however, it was not the other girls; it was the first cockcrow, which woke her up. Mwila yawned and stretched out under the blankets and was somewhat disappointed that the new day was just around the corner. She nevertheless tried to sleep again.

It was morning, and the new sun sparkled brightness across the entire clear sky. The third cockcrow rang out and was echoed by the sweet singing of birds perched high up the treetops, in the nearby thick forests. That morning, life was busy as usual for the girls at Kalonga Girls' Secondary School.

About a kilometre away across the Kalonga stream was Kalonga Boys' Secondary School. Both schools belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. The proximity of the two schools was of administrative convenience to a certain extent. However, the students in the two schools did not mingle much.

Every morning before classes started, the boys and girls attended Mass in the big old church at the boys' school. Although they could exchange glances, innocent or otherwise, they could not talk to each other! There was a strict rule that the boys had their own permanent side of the church to sit and the girls had theirs. However, the boys and girls always exchanged glances across the aisle.

As Mass ended one morning, Sister Mary beckoned Mwila and said to her, 'You are the head girl. Make sure that all the girls return to the school at once.'

'Yes, Sister,' Mwila answered politely. She instructed the prefects to ensure that the girls did not break the school rules. It was an offence for any school girl to talk to the boys except once per week and that was for half an hour on Saturdays after the evening Mass, under the watchful eye of one of the nuns.

Mwila had no boyfriend at the boys' school. She was so well known to the girls and some boys that her relationship with a boy would have easily become an open secret. But Mwila, tall, dark-skinned, and naturally beautiful had many secret admirers among the boys. A few daring senior girls had boyfriends whom they regularly met under the cover of darkness in the surrounding bushes. However, anyone who was caught with a boy in a wrong place or with what was considered an amorous letter from a boy faced instant dismissal. So, in her influential position at the school, Mwila had the unenviable task of setting a good example.

It was a Saturday, and the girls had just returned from evening Mass. They talked excitedly; many of them were in a happy mood after talking to the boys. They always appreciated this brief change of atmosphere.

Sister Theresa, the principal, blew her whistle a couple of times. There was no doubt in the girls' minds—it was an impromptu roll call. The girls started running to their respective dormitories to stand beside their beds. Roll-calls were common, but the timing was unpredictable. Mwila ran to join the principal on the inspection, in her role as head girl. Her duty was to ensure that the girls kept their dormitories clean, made their beds properly, and were standing beside their respective beds. This way, absentees could not be replaced by their friends.

They had just finished inspecting the first three dormitories and now entered the fourth, where Mwila lived.

'Whose bed is this?' Sister Theresa asked.

'That is my bed, Sister,' Mwila answered, smiling broadly.

'Well done, it is properly made,' the principal complimented. 'You certainly are setting a good example to the girls.' As she had done with all the other girls, the principal went ahead and pulled out the drawer next to Mwila's bed. There was a letter on top of the papers. 'Whose letter is this, Mwila?' she asked.

'I did not leave any letter in there,' Mwila answered. 'But it is in your drawer,' Sister Theresa said, raising her voice.

'It must belong to someone—let's open it and find out the owner,' she said, and without waiting for any reply, she proceeded to open the letter.

There were flowers drawn all along the edges of the letter, in alternating red, yellow, and blue colours. She read through the letter with interest and shook her head as she finished. 'It is yours, all right, but why could you not tell me the truth?' she asked loudly.

'I swear, Sister Theresa, I did not see that letter! I do not know where it came from and who put it in my drawer,' Mwila replied.

'All right,' Sister Theresa commanded, 'let's get on with the roll-call, but you should report to my office first thing on Monday morning.' The expression on the principal's face suggested that something was wrong in the letter.

They went to the other dormitories and completed the inspection.

'Tell the three absentees to report to my office first thing on Monday,' Sister Theresa said to Mwila, looking at her slip of paper as she called the girls' names. 'They must know that they will be punished for failure to attend my roll-call.'

'Yes, Sister,' Mwila answered, as she walked back to her own dormitory, downcast.

Mwila still had no idea about the contents of that letter. She prayed to God that it was not a bad one. On the other hand, she knew from the experience of other girls that the principal would take a letter only if the contents were considered as immoral.

Makumba was Mwila's closest friend and classmate. She had just realised what could have happened with the letter if Mwila had not opened her drawer before the roll-call. She hastily headed for Mwila's dormitory.

'I have a letter for you,' Makumba said to Mwila.

'Where is it then?' Mwila demanded, in a rather strong voice.

'You mean . . . ?' Makumba did not finish her sentence, but could tell from Mwila's face that something was terribly wrong.

'How could you do that to me?' Mwila demanded. 'Where did the letter come from?'

'I am terribly sorry about the whole thing,' Makumba mumbled. 'It was given to me by the head captain of the Boys' School immediately after Mass.'

He said something about it being official! When I did not see you,' she continued, 'I put it in your drawer. It never occurred to me that there could be an inspection today.'

'I am not blaming you for being a messenger. I only hope that it is not a bad letter,' she said, trying to put on a brave face.

For Mwila, the weekend was filled with uncertainties. She was apprehensive about the contents of the letter and indeed the consequences of the Monday meeting. In its twelve years of existence, Kalonga Girls' Secondary School had not expelled a head girl. No head girl either had been caught with an offending letter, as far as she knew. She reassured herself of her innocence and thought that everything would be all right. She exercised her role as head girl to the full that weekend.

Meanwhile, word had circulated among the girls, and even some boys, that Mwila had been caught with a love letter!

Monday had arrived, and standing outside Sister Theresa's office, Mwila hesitated to knock. She looked at the permanent notice on the door again; it had been there since she came to the school. Until that day, Mwila had been very proud of that notice on the principal's door. In fact, if any students complained to the head girl that they were being unfairly punished, Mwila would often ask them: 'Have you seen the notice on Sister Theresa's door?' Those who said 'No' would be taken to the door by the head girl who would ensure that they read for themselves, which they did:

ARE YOU HELPING TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM, OR ARE
YOU PART OF IT?

All those times, Mwila was certain that she was helping to solve the problem, but she was doubtful about that on that Monday morning.

Sister Theresa heard a soft tap at the door. 'Come in,' she invited. Mwila entered and was shown to the chair. She sat down facing the principal across her large wooden table, on which papers were neatly placed. The Sister's usual friendly smile for the head girl was absent. She looked businesslike and serious.

'You know that all my staff have great respect and admiration for your academic ability and good-natured personality,' Sister Theresa began. 'In

fact, we were convinced that we had picked the best girl when we appointed you as head girl,' she reminded. 'Now, I am not very sure whether we made the right choice or not.' She sighed.

Feeling uneasy, Mwila remained silent.

'Tell me,' Sister Theresa enquired, 'for how long have you known this boy, and what is there between you two?'

'He is not my boyfriend, Sister. You have got to believe me,' Mwila pleaded. 'I only know him in a general way since he is the head boy at the boys' school,' she explained. 'He has never written to me before, and up to now, I do not know the contents of that letter.' She continued, 'I am naturally very sorry about the letter, but it is not my fault.' She ended apologetically.

Sister Theresa gave the letter to Mwila and said, 'Read it carefully, since it belongs to you.'

Mwila picked up the letter, her hands trembling, and her anxious eyes racing through it:

My dearest Mwila,

Kiss in bed.

My heart leaps with joy as I touch this pen to write to you. I hope that you know that you are the most beautiful girl that my eyes have ever met! You always shine like an angel that even in Church, I cannot take my eyes off you. You should know that I rarely sleep these days because my mind is full of thoughts and admiration for you.

You are simply wonderful, and I shall be overjoyed if I can see you soon. My promise to you is that I shall marry you when we leave school. Give me a kiss in your reply. I love you.

Yours for ever.

Mwamba Chibaye.

Mwila, obviously embarrassed, could not believe what she had just read. Tears were coming from her wet eyes when she handed back the letter to Sister Theresa, who took it hastily as if it was hers.

'I am very sorry and ask for your forgiveness, Sister,' Mwila pleaded, wiping her streaming eyes with a handkerchief.

Sister Theresa remained still and did not answer.

'Whatever he wrote in this letter is wrong,' Mwila continued, 'but he is only expressing his feelings which have nothing to do with me.'

'If you were not a willing partner, why did you keep the letter in your drawer?' the Sister asked.

'I didn't,' Mwila replied. 'You should know that I am innocent. That letter was left in my drawer without my knowledge.'

'Who left the letter in your drawer?' Sister Theresa pressed on.

'I have no idea,' Mwila replied. 'It could have been anyone. In any case, I don't see the importance of that.'

'I am sorry that there is nothing I can do for you under these circumstances,' Sister Theresa emphasised, showing no concern. She picked up the receiver and dialled Sister Mary's extension. They talked for a few minutes.

Sister Mary joined them shortly afterwards. It was a school regulation that whenever a student was being expelled, there should be another member of staff as witness.

'It is my duty to inform you, in the presence of Sister Mary, that you have been expelled from this school as of today,' Sister Theresa said, addressing Mwila. 'The main reason for your expulsion is that you were found in possession of a dirty and incriminating letter from a boy. As head girl of the school, you know the rules and regulations very well, and it is in the name of justice that you should be treated like any other girl in this case,' she ended.

'Sister Theresa, please . . . ?'

'Do you have any more questions?' Sister Theresa interrupted in a high voice.

'No,' Mwila answered, looking down.

'We give you three hours to pack your things, hand over your school and boarding equipment, and leave the premises,' Sister Theresa instructed, looking at the other nun.

'Sister Mary will see to it that you have returned everything before giving you your caution money,' she continued. 'All of us will miss you, Mwila,' she said, stretching out her hand. 'May God forgive you!'

Mwila stood up, looking dejected. Her world was suddenly crumbling around her.

'Good luck and goodbye,' Sister Theresa said as they shook hands.

Mwila left school that day. A few girls broke into tears; they respected and admired her. She was well-behaved and certainly above suspicion. Mwamba was also expelled from the boys' school. Sister Theresa had

reported the case to the headmaster of the neighbouring school over the weekend, and it was decided that both students had to be expelled according to the school regulations.

A bit of history had been made that Monday morning. For the first time in the history of the two schools, the head girl and head boy had been expelled and on the same day at that!

Mwila had only one more term to go before sitting for Form V examinations. Thus, her long-standing ambition of becoming a teacher was now shattered. In a way, Mwila regretted her choice to come to a mission school; she felt she would not have been expelled under similar circumstances if she had been in a government school. She was annoyed, not only because she was certain of her innocence but on other accounts as well. She realised that the Sisters often asked for favours from her.

In class, Mwila learnt easily and quickly; she was naturally intelligent. Knowing that Mwila could easily catch up on her studies, the Sisters often picked her when they had to send a girl to cycle the twelve kilometres into Mansa, the provincial headquarters to deliver an urgent letter or purchase some provisions. This happened whenever the school van had broken down.

Mwila also knew that her appointment as head girl brought her unnecessary publicity. Consequently, she was admired by many boys who she didn't even know existed across the Kalonga stream. Mwila tried, as she sobbed miserably, to put these points across to Sister Theresa that Monday morning, but the Nun would not listen to her; her mind was already made up.

'How funny,' Mwila reflected, 'that the same disciples of Western social values could not administer fair justice, which they always preached.'

Mwila until that day had been part and parcel of the establishment at the girls' school; she was in fact the chief arm of the law, which punished many girls for similar offences, all of which she had thought to be genuine. In her own crisis, her pupils dilated, and she certainly saw more light.

2

After shining all day, giving warmth and abundant light, the sun was setting in the west and the moon rising as if in reply, when Mwila arrived in Chipoma's Village. She came by a northbound bus from Kalonga, a distance of about thirty kilometres.

With a suitcase in one hand and a handbag in another, she walked briskly towards her parents' house, some 250 metres away. She was happy to go unnoticed under the moonlight by a group of young children playing nearby as she passed. Had they recognised her, they would have almost certainly alerted the villagers of her arrival by shouting, 'Mwila! Mwila!' and following her behind as they had done on many previous occasions.

Outside the house, Mwila could see a small gathering of women and children. Her mother was there too, but it was another woman who first recognised the approaching visitor: 'Bana Mwila (mother of Mwila), see!' the woman called out. 'It is Mwila. She has arrived.'

'Oh my dearest daughter!' Mulenga said, standing up. 'I'm so happy to see you!' She took away the suitcase from her laden daughter and put it down. They hugged. 'How are you?' Mulenga asked.

'I'm fine, Mother,' Mwila replied.

The other women took their turns: 'Greetings,' one of them said, shaking Mwila's hand.

'Welcome,' said another cheerfully.

'How was your journey?' asked the oldest woman among them. Her name was Chisanga, Mwila's maternal grandmother. 'Come on, wash your hands, and join us in the struggle against hunger,' Chisanga invited.

'We are happy that you don't backbite us!' One woman from the group said.

'Thank you, but I'm exhausted,' Mwila replied. 'And I'm not feeling hungry.' In *Bemba* tradition, it was regarded a good omen to arrive at a house unexpectedly and find them having a meal. It also meant that such a visitor spoke no evil of the hosts.

'Come on, wash your hands, and join us!' Mulenga commanded. 'We have just started, and there is your favourite pumpkin leaves.'

'All right, I will, Mother.' Mwila accepted reluctantly. She washed her hands in the now almost brown-coloured water and sat down on a reed mat beside her grandmother. The women arranged themselves in a circle with the food in the centre. In two big iron pots was *nshima*—steaming thick porridge made from maize meal and another from a mixture of cassava and finger millet flours. In one big deep white plate was dried fish, cooked with leeks and tomatoes, and on a small plate were pumpkin leaves boiled and then fried in cooking oil. Mwila cut off a small morsel of *nshima*, slowly rolled it with the fingers of her right hand before dipping it in sweet potato leaves cooked in peanut butter. When she placed it in her mouth, it was tasty, 'Hmm!' Mwila murmured. 'It is delicious. Full marks to the cooks,' she complimented, smacking her lips. It was such a delicious one-course meal that it would make anybody's mouth water if they caught its aroma even at a distance.

'Thank you!' answered one woman.

'Thank you!' echoed another.

'Thank you!' echoed a young boy of five.

'Hmm! As if he even knows how to cook,' Chisanga commented.

They continued eating and chatting, with short lapses of silence. This was the way the women and their children, rarely with their grown-up sons, usually took their meals in the villages. They ate meals in groups, which were more or less permanent.

Mulenga was obviously delighted to see her daughter but couldn't understand why she had returned earlier than the other pupils. 'Is your school closed already?' she asked, her eyes fixed on Mwila. 'We were not expecting you this soon.' This was the question Mwila wished her mother did not ask in front of all those gossiping women; she feared they would quickly blow it out of proportion.

'I'm not going back to school,' Mwila replied in a low voice.

'Do you mean that you have now finished?' Mulenga asked.

'No, I haven't!' Mwila answered, 'I have been expelled.'

'Expelled!' Mulenga exclaimed. 'What happened?'

'For no reason!' Mwila answered briefly.

'Hmm, how awful!' one of the women said. 'How can they do such a thing to a good girl like you?'

'It is sad and unfair!' another woman responded.

'It is certainly unfair,' echoed another voice.

'You'll tell me all about it when your father comes back,' Mulenga said.

'It shouldn't worry you so much. After all, I have always said that for a woman, you are more than adequately educated.'

Meanwhile, Mwila's father, Chansa, was informed of his daughter's arrival. He was at the *nsaka*—a village shelter made of a few wooden poles, with a grass-thatched roof. That was the regular meeting place for all men in the village; they had their discussions and meals there. The boys above the age of nine were regarded to be ready to leave their mothers and were therefore allowed to eat with and learn from the men at the *nsaka*.

Moreover, traditionally, the shelter was a place for nurturing and initiating the youngsters to manhood. A big village had several of these shelters, usually according to age groups. Older people visited these shelters from time to time just to talk to the young ones. If disputes arose, shelters also served as meeting places where the elders or the village headman came to arbitrate, and usually, their decisions were binding.

'I have come to welcome my dearest mother, the one I love more than I love money,' Chansa announced proudly—fathers commonly referred to their daughters as mothers, a traditional sign of respect. In this case, however, Mwila was especially regarded as mother since she was named after Chansa's late mother. It was believed that it perpetuated her spirit.

Chansa, smiling broadly, shook hands with Mwila and patted her shoulder. 'Do sit down, Mother,' he said to Mwila who had stood up for him.

'Tell me,' Chansa enquired. 'Did you have a good journey?'

'Yes, Father,' she replied. 'It was safe and comfortable.'

After all the women had left, Mulenga and her husband briefly talked about their daughter, who was inside the house. Mulenga then called out, 'Mwila!'

There was no answer. 'Mwila!' Mulenga shouted. 'Your father wants to talk to you.'

'I'm coming, Mother,' Mwila replied from the house.

'Now sit down, Mother,' Chansa requested. 'I think it is important that you tell me exactly what happened.'

'Yes, Father,' Mwila replied, sitting down next to her mother. 'You said that you have been expelled from school!' Chansa asked slowly.

'Yes, Father,' Mwila replied politely.

'Why?' he inquired. 'How did it all start?'

'Well!' Mwila hesitated as if to collect her thoughts.

'The Sister caught a letter a boy sent to me!'

'A boy?' Chansa exclaimed. 'What boy?' he asked.

'You won't know him, Father,' she answered. 'He comes from another district.'

'What exactly was in that letter?' Chansa interrupted.

'Well!' Mwila fumbled for words. 'He wrote that he loved me and that he wanted to marry me after we finished school.'

'So you mean to tell me that you have a fiancé?' Chansa asked. 'What is his name? Who are his parents? In which village do they live?'

'Hmm!' Mulenga nodded in agreement with her husband. 'He is not my fiancé, Father,' Mwila protested. 'He is not even my boyfriend!'

'But you have just said that he wants to marry you!' Mulenga cautioned.

'He is only a misguided boy, Mother!' Mwila replied. 'He had never written to me before. This was his first letter.'

'Are you suggesting that the letter was innocent?' Chansa asked.

'It was innocent, Father,' Mwila answered. 'I swear.'

'Why did they chase you from school if the letter was innocent?' Mulenga pointed out.

'It was a mistake. The letter was misunderstood,' Mwila said. 'The Sister didn't even give me a chance to explain!' 'Now this boy who brought you all these problems, do you like him? Would you like to marry him?' Chansa asked.

'No, Father!' Mwila replied emphatically.

'But he has spoilt your future,' Mulenga reminded. 'And after all the money your father has spent to educate you, do you want that boy to walk scot-free?'

'Mother, please! I don't even like him!' She looked very sad.

'All right, Mother!' Chansa reassured authoritatively. 'I just wished to be in the picture. Now I know exactly where you stand, but should you change your mind about this boy, don't hesitate to let me know.'

'Yes, Father!' Mwila answered.

Mwila retired to her grandmother's house, which was smaller than her parents' house. At her age, it was improper to sleep in the same house with her parents. Further, she would feel freer in her grandparent's house.

Although he remained calm, Chansa was of course terribly disappointed about his daughter's expulsion. He had great faith in the academic abilities of his daughter, a fact which made him sacrifice the little money they had saved to spend on her fees, transport, and pocket money. And this he did in spite of the protests from members of his extended family that educating a girl was a waste of time and money.

All the villagers were peasant farmers who waited for a good season when they would harvest more than they needed for their own consumption, to sell. Their subsistence farming was quite diversified and included many crops, such as maize millet, groundnuts, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, sorghum, cassava, and also a wide variety of vegetables.

'Do not misunderstand me,' Chansa said to his wife who was staring at him searchingly. 'I'm not concerned about the money I have spent on our daughter,' Chansa explained. 'But I am now scared of what I feared all along. I wanted my daughter to complete her education so that she can stand on her own two feet, but now she will have to depend on someone else for her survival,' he concluded.

'But I depend on you,' Mulenga argued. 'And what is wrong with that?'

Surprised by his wife's logic, Chansa cleared his throat and smiled before replying.

'You don't understand!' he answered. 'Times have changed. Our world is different from theirs.'

Mulenga made it clear that there was nothing to worry about. 'After all,' she said, 'my daughter at the age of twenty-one should not be at school. It is time she got married and started a family,' she pointed out. They argued until they entered their separate worlds in their sleep.

'Mulenga, my wonderful woman,' Chansa called. 'What shall we do to honour our beloved daughter?' This was in the afternoon, a day after Mwila's arrival.

'Well, what can we do?' Mulenga asked.

'Kill a chicken, of course,' Chansa reminded her.

Mulenga called their youngest son Kabaso for instructions, and in a few minutes, the boy and his friends were chasing a white cock—it was the one described by Mulenga.

'Shh!' Kabaso cautioned, putting his forefinger on his tightly closed lips.

'Don't talk!' shouted another boy.

'Shh!' Kabaso whispered. Village boys always plucked feathers off the slaughtered birds in total silence. It was believed that if anyone made noise during the process, new feathers would immediately grow on the birds. It was common to chase noisy boys away in order to shorten the period.

It was a traditional sign of respect that a chicken is killed in honour of a visitor. Any visitor for whom a chicken was not slaughtered would feel rather despised.

Although Mwila was no visitor at her parents' home, she had many chickens killed in her honour when she came for long holidays and especially as presents after passing her important examinations. This tradition dates as far back as Mwila's community could remember, and it was so highly cherished that Mwila's mother always hoped it would carry on forever.

A number of women relatives came to see Mwila after learning of her unexpected return from school. Although they were delighted to see her, they were naturally disappointed with the news of her expulsion. Among them was Mwila's favourite aunt, Chiluba, who was married and lived in another village some seven kilometres away. Chiluba was most disappointed with the sad news. Although of limited education herself, she was the only woman who encouraged Mwila's ambition to further her education. Chiluba did not hide her feelings. 'I'm terribly disappointed about your expulsion,' she said to Mwila. 'I'm sure that my husband will be equally saddened.'

'I wish there was a way around this,' Chiluba said, sighing. Mwila settled in the village with her parents, mostly helping her mother with domestic duties, especially drawing water from the river, about two and a half kilometres away, cleaning the house, and cooking. Sometimes she would accompany her mother to the fields, harvesting crops. Although she didn't mind harvesting, Mwila detested carrying large baskets full of crops over the long distances home. Such heavy loads made her head and neck ache.

Chansa had just returned from the fields that hot Wednesday afternoon. The sun was still shining brightly in the clear sky. He basked himself in the sunshine; he was having a fine time of it. Hardly had he started snoring than he was rudely interrupted by the mailman, who visited the village fortnightly. He brought him a letter. Chansa entered the house and collected his reading glasses, which had been given to him as a present by his nephew on his return from the neighbouring Zaire, now Congo Dr, where he worked on the copper mines.

Like a few of his colleagues in the village, Chansa had never consulted an optician in his life, but he regularly used his glasses whenever he wanted

to read. Looking at the envelope, he didn't recognise the handwriting. Anxiously, he opened the envelope and looked at the first page very carefully. It was all Greek to him, and he couldn't make head or tail of it; even his glasses could not help him. This letter was written in English, and Chansa could only read Bemba. He had of course never seen such words before as no one wrote to him in the foreign language. He was quite puzzled. He flipped through the two pages trying to identify the sender, but he couldn't even tell the name signed on it.

Chansa looked up and saw his wife and daughter with water pails on their heads approaching the house. They were returning from the river, where they had gone to soak cassava in shallow water ponds. Without allowing his daughter to free herself of the heavy load she was carrying, he called out, 'Mother, I want to see you immediately.'

When Mwila re-emerged from the house she came and sat beside her father.

'Here,' he handed her the letter. 'See if you can make any sense out of this.' She started reading silently, but she had hardly finished the first page when her nervousness showed in her trembling hands and tears were rolling from her eyes. 'What is it?' He asked anxiously.

'Oh no!' she cried out. 'I can't believe it. It can't be true!'

'What is it? What can't be true?' Chansa asked persistently.

'Kasongo has gone mad,' she mumbled, dropping the sheets of paper on the mat next to her father. She threw herself to the ground and burst out loudly. 'Oh God, I hope it is not true. How can it happen to him? He is our only hope.' Kasongo was Mwila's elder brother and firstborn in the family. He was not only the pride of his family and village but of the entire chiefdom. He was the most educated in the area, with two degrees from East Germany. Now he was completing his Ph.D programme in Sociology at the University of Zambia.

After hearing her daughter's distress, Mulenga came out of the kitchen in a flash. 'What is the matter?' she demanded.

'Kasongo is ill,' Chansa replied courageously.

'Is that why she is crying?' Mulenga asked.

'He has gone mad,' Chansa put it bluntly.

'No, not my firstborn!' Mulenga joined her daughter in mourning. But Chansa commanded them to shut up until he knew what had actually happened. It was then that a slightly calm but highly emotional Mwila read the letter to her parents who were listening attentively. In the letter, they learnt that Kasongo was mentally deranged.

It had all started on a Monday evening, the letter stated, when Kasongo caused a fight and assaulted a barman. The same night, Kasongo caused disturbances and assaulted girls on the campus. The following day, the letter went on, his condition deteriorated. He was shouting, insulting people and accusing every white person he came across of being a racist.

'Oh no!' Chansa interrupted, 'There is no trace of racism in my son's blood.' He sighed. 'I think there is trouble.' He took a deep breath and then quickly blew it out.

Mwila continued reading. Kasongo had become more violent and attacked two young girls on the campus. The police had come and taken him to Chainama Hills Mental Hospital in Lusaka. The letter ended. It was signed by Mathew Phiri.

'Who is this kind man?' Chansa asked. 'What is his name again?'

'Phiri,' Mwila replied.

'Oh, Phiri!' Chansa said with difficulty. 'Does he come from this part of the country?'

'No, Father,' Mwila replied. 'He comes from Lundazi, in the Eastern Province. He doesn't know any Bemba. That's why he wrote to you in English.'

'Is he our son's teacher?' Mulenga asked, joining in.

'No, he is also a student,' Mwila replied. 'But he is my brother's best friend at the University. In fact, Kasongo told me before that the two of them were like brothers in Lusaka.'

Mwila refused to eat her food that night, in spite of Chansa's attempts to persuade her. 'You should eat, Mother. You must be healthy and strong in a crisis like this, otherwise you won't be helpful. In fact, it may not be as bad as it sounds in the letter.' He sighed.

'I know, Father,' she replied, 'but I have no appetite. I'm sure I'll eat tomorrow.'

'Is that a promise?' he asked firmly. 'Because you should know that I can't leave for Lusaka tomorrow unless I'm certain that you and your mother will be all right when I'm away.'

'It is a promise, Father,' she said loudly.

* * *

Chansa and Chibale, Kasongo's maternal uncle, had just returned from Lusaka, where they had visited the patient at Chainama Hills Mental

Hospital, the country's biggest mental institution. In Lusaka, the hospital was nicknamed 'the asylum', and many residents believed that only confirmed schizophrenics would be admitted to it. Although they found him calm in the hospital, Kasongo looked dazed and slightly confused. He recognised them all right and was able to greet them, but his speech and reactions were unusually slow.

Six months later, Kasongo arrived at the village. He came in a government Land Rover and was escorted by the driver and a male nurse from the hospital. He looked cheerful but without his normal confident demeanour.

Word went around the neighbouring villages about this new misfortune that had befallen the Chansa family. The expulsion of Mwila from school was now quickly linked with Kasongo's illness. Witchcraft was quite on the cards as one of the reasons. Subject to a lot of speculation, even Sister Theresa ought to have regretted the situation in her meditation when she heard of this second blow to the Chansas, whom she had regarded as good Catholics.

Two weeks later, Kasongo went into a depression, becoming passive and uninvolved; it was clear that he had not fully recovered.

'The white man's medicine has failed again!' an angry Chibale said to Chansa. 'I told you, didn't I?' Chibale had actually told Chansa while in Lusaka that keeping his nephew in hospital was a waste of time. 'White men don't know what causes our diseases,' he argued. 'How can you expect them to know the cure? My nephew was bewitched from the village and that's where we should take him for treatment.' But the hospital superintendent, an old English psychiatrist, rejected their pleas to release the patient prematurely saying, 'We are still carrying out tests on him besides treating him, and I can assure you, he has the best chance of recovery in this hospital without your interference.'

A number of people in the village believed in Chibale's theory that Kasongo was bewitched by a jealous family because he was highly educated. To many, however, Kasongo's case just vindicated a belief held by the community since the advent of education in the land. It was believed that too much education would make people mad. It disturbs your mind instead of enlightening your head! It was for this belief that Mulenga advised her son to leave school after passing his 'A' levels twelve years previously. 'You are very educated. Now you should get a decent job as a teacher or as a big government official,' she urged. But her advice fell on deaf ears, as Kasongo would not listen. Now Mulenga wished her advice had been heeded.

Chibale promised Kasongo that he would be cured soon with the right traditional treatment, but besides recovery, he promised revenge for his nephew. 'After you have recovered, I shall ensure that the culprit is taught a lesson. He will die, but it will be a very painful and slow death indeed.'

Kasongo was obviously not interested in his uncle's talk of revenge. 'I shall be all right, I know,' he said. 'All I need is a long rest.'

But at Chibale's insistence, he was taken to a famous village healer. The medicine man instructed Kasongo not to eat certain types of fish and pork as part of the treatment. It was strongly believed that madness would recur after cure if the prescribed dietary restrictions were not observed.

With his usual humility, Kasongo agreed to follow the restrictions even though he didn't believe in them. He also realised that if he did anything funny, his father would no longer be respected in the village. He was also aware that his father's reputation had already suffered because of his sister's expulsion from school. Some villagers used to say that Mwila was a harlot and was expelled from school because of a boy. In those days, educated girls were thought to be extremely immoral. The villagers were happy and praised him as an adaptable child of their community, who in spite of his degrees highly respected the traditions of the community. Consequently, the villagers became more sympathetic to Kasongo and praised him, saying he had passed his 'shelter test' very well.

To Chibale and many villagers, Kasongo's gradual recovery was attributed to the potency of village medicines. Chibale loudly boasted about this, especially at beer parties. Little did they suspect that later it would be Mulenga who would labour by trying to keep her son's restrictions, not feeding him on the forbidden foods or foods cooked in pots in which the forbidden ones had been cooked, and that in private, Kasongo would eat all the forbidden foods with greed!

3

It was a Saturday afternoon; the sun was still ploughing across the clear sky towards the west. Chansa, his legs crossed, was seated on a duiker skin under a mongo tree outside his house. He repeatedly scratched his right earlobe as he was making a wooden handle for his hoe. Hoes and axes were still the main implements that most villagers used for cultivating their fields and cutting trees.

'Where is mother?' Kasongo asked, sitting on the bare floor near his father.

'At the river, I expect,' Chansa answered, looking up at his son.

'I am very tired,' Kasongo complained. 'Exhausted!'

'What of?' Chansa asked unconcerned.

'I went fishing in the Chofoshi,' Kasongo replied. 'I only managed to catch a few breams.' Chofoshi is a river about five kilometres away.

'Well done!' Chansa said in compliment.

'Eating fish will be a good change that we deserve.' He sighed. 'Did you go with Kabaso?'

'No,' Kasongo replied. 'I didn't see him when I left.'

An elderly man riding a bicycle slowed down and stopped as he approached Chansa's house. Chansa recognised him.

He was Murale, the headman of one of the neighbouring villages. Chansa stood up and extended his hand. They shook hands vigorously. 'Greetings,' Murale said.

'Greetings and welcome,' Chansa replied, 'I hope you have come in peace.'

'Yes indeed, and thank you,' Murale responded, 'I hope that your blessed family is in good health and doing well.'

'We are all well, and it is a good surprise to see you,' Chansa replied.

Kasongo went inside the house and brought out a chair for Mutale. Meanwhile, Mulenga and Mwila had just come back with pails of water on their heads. They took the water inside the house.

Mulenga approached them saying, 'Greetings, Mr Mutale.' She said, making a curtsy. 'How are your people and your family?'

'Very well, thank you,' Mutale answered.

Mutale and Chansa joked for a while and talked about many things, including fishing nets and the fields but not the weather, which is rarely talked about in this part of the world. Mutale then politely requested, 'Could I be honoured to see the father and mother of Mwila in the privacy of their house?' The mention of the name Mwila was a hint since parents are always addressed by the name of their firstborn child.

They entered the house, and Mutale was offered a chair, which according to tradition he declined and just sat on the bare floor. Mwila's parents then got a further hint of the old man's mission. They sat in total silence as they watched him unfolding the scarf from his parcel, tied with utmost neatness. He put it in front of them; two small white saucers, one covering the other. The actual contents could not be seen. Mutale then broke the news and announced, 'My name is Chisunka, and I'm seeking to join your great house by asking the hand of your pretty daughter.'

Chansa and Mulenga just nodded.

'This is my dowry,' Mutale said, pointing to the two plates, 'and I would like to emphasise that nothing could do us more honour than to marry into your distinguished house.'

'My household is naturally grateful for the honour to be considered and approached,' Chansa replied, rolling his favourite tobacco, wrapped in a brown paper.

Mulenga sent for Mwila, who came and sat down beside her mother. Her father then broke the news to her in Mutale's presence. Her face looked totally blank, without any sign of emotion.

Chisunka, at thirty-nine years of age, owned three grocery shops in the villages. This was no mean achievement for a semi-literate man. In fact, he was rich by village standards. Since his first wife died during childbirth four years earlier, he and his four children lived with his sisters. Now, he wanted a woman of his own again.

The role Mutale was playing in this case was a very respectable one in this society. It was the tradition that any man wishing to marry a girl or woman should send a trusted matchmaker to represent him and conduct

all the negotiations. Even when the couple got married, all major problems faced by the couple were resolved through this matrimonial agent.

'I wish to reassure this respected household that our intentions are honourable,' Mutale announced. 'And if allowed to come into your good house, we shall come with very open arms.' He sounded wise and generous.

Chansa nodded. Mulenga smiled.

'We are aware of the high esteem, in which your family holds their daughter,' Mutale went on. 'But we are prepared to compensate you for your loss.'

Mwila yawned.

'In your daughter,' Mutale said, looking at Mulenga, who was paying the utmost attention, 'you have a princess, who should be a great asset to the family.'

Mulenga nodded in total agreement.

Chansa knew his daughter very well and listened to Mutale very attentively. The million-dollar question was a direct answer in the affirmative to the old man there and then. The old man too didn't expect one. However, the plates and dowry were collected and the old man thanked. He was promised an answer after the family consortium had met to consider this very important proposal. Normally, a man like Chisunka could have had an immediate reply, but there was doubt, as Chansa really took into account his daughter's feelings. Also, it could have been a gross show of bad manners for Mwila to reply on her own.

Afterwards, Chansa uncovered the plates and looked at the K2.00 dowry inside.

Although references were not committed to paper, it was the custom for close relatives to know neighbouring villages very well. So Chisunka's kinship background was under intense scrutiny the following evening. The issue of being a widower attracted more debate; it was also considered that a husband who lost a wife in childbirth was unfaithful. So poor Chisunka was really under the microscope.

Being a widower, Chisunka experienced pangs of anxiety; he felt disadvantaged in the marriage stakes.

While Mwila was inwardly burning with fury over the prospect of being forced into marriage, Chisunka in spite of his record scored fine points in his favour, and Mwila's grandmother could never think of a surer source of salt, which was a rare but essential commodity in the villages. Only people like Chisunka in those days would maintain a constant supply. Now, however, it was Mwila's turn.

'I am sorry,' Mwila announced. 'There is no way I could be made to marry Chisunka,' she ended bluntly.

There was total silence in the room.

Mwila stared at Kasongo, obviously expecting support from him, but her brother looked calm and somehow unconcerned. She looked down and cleared her throat before she added, 'I have only seen him in his little shop. I don't know him personally and apart from being uneducated he is too old for me.'

'Hmm!' Mulenga muttered in disapproval.

'You shouldn't reject a man of Chisunka's calibre in a rush,' her grandmother, Chisanga, joined in.

'You must carefully reconsider what you are about to throw away.'

'The most important thing,' Mwila said, raising her voice 'is that I'm not in love with him.'

'That is not a problem, my daughter,' Mulenga said. 'You'll love your husband once you are married.'

There was silence.

'That is what happened when I married your father,' Mulenga confessed.

Chansa smiled broadly.

Kasongo teased his sister about the proposal and said, 'The marriage should be arranged as soon as possible before the bridegroom changes his mind!'

'That's right!' concurred Chisanga.

'That's true!' Mulenga echoed. Mwila frowned further.

'Jokes aside,' Kasongo said. 'I didn't mean what I just said,' he announced to the relief of his sister, who looked worried.

'What did you mean then?' Mulenga interrupted impatiently.

'The whole thing is ridiculous,' Kasongo pointed out: 'You can't just arrange a marriage between two total strangers and expect it to last in this day and age.'

Mwila's grandfather, Lwaba, chose to go straight to the point, which means being a little vulgar in the traditional sense. He said, 'Mwila just wants to throw away her virginity so that her father will never see a penny of *lobola*—bride price.' He sighed. 'I am sure,' he continued, 'that one of these boys writing dubious letters in the "yes, yes" language (English) must have pierced her heart.' He laughed uneasily, exposing his brown gums. In fact, one of the rumours cooked up in the village was that Mwila had been expelled by the Sisters because she was caught making love to her boyfriend and that she was no longer a virgin! 'Don't mind her,' the old women of the village would gossip, 'she's walking empty!'

'I have always suspected that when children spend most of their time in school, they gain knowledge of the white man, but lose touch with tradition and reality of the land they live in, that of their great-great-grandfathers,' Mulenga spoke with all the authority she could command.

Mulenga's mother nodded, obviously delighted with the point her daughter had just made.

'Since you won't go back to school,' Mulenga argued, 'this is a great chance for you to marry a man who is respected in our society and settle down. The young boys you are looking for might be educated, but what do they have?' She asked. 'Only papers and empty promises.' She answered her own question. 'However, Chisunka is capable of making you happy and looking after you well.'

'No, *mum*,' Mwila replied in a raised voice. 'He is not my type, and to be honest with you, there is nothing I can offer a man of his kind.'

'That's where you are wrong,' Mulenga answered. 'You are a good cook. You can sew, and most importantly, you'll bear him children. Think of me and your father. We are both old and need someone to help us cultivate the fields.'

'For your own sake,' Chansa said, 'I would be pleased if you marry a man from a good family, like Chisunka. We wouldn't like you to suffer after we are gone.'

There was total silence.

'However, it would be unfair to force you into a marriage you don't want,' Chansa continued, 'but it is important that you do not rush in saying "No". Take a few days and reconsider everything very carefully.'

Mulenga was not happy with her husband's neutral stand. Many times, she thought he was rather soft and lacked the forceful authority of a father over his children.

The family consortium was totally divided when the proposal was reconsidered. Mulenga and the majority of the extended family members wanted Chisunka to be accepted. They had no doubt in their minds that he would make a good husband. However, Kasongo, Mwila, and Chiluba were not impressed and put up a gallant fight of words. Chansa, who was much more concerned with the happiness of his daughter, finally but reluctantly, ruled that the proposal was turned down. And so the dowry was returned to Mutale. Had the proposal been accepted, the small plates and dowry would have been kept.

It was the same evening after the final meeting of the clan that Mwila was asked to go and fetch water from the stream by her grandmother.

Chisanga. Little did she suspect that two girls following her to the stream were Chisanga's emissaries sent to make her see the light and accept Chisunka's proposal. 'Wait for us, Mwila!' Chilufya called out. She was Mwila's paternal aunt. Two years senior to Mwila, Chilufya was married to her own cousin, and they had two children.

'Hurry up then,' Mwila answered, slowing down.

'How are you?' asked Mwape, catching up with Mwila. Mwape was Mwila's niece. She was twenty-five and had three children.

'I'm all right,' Mwila answered in a lukewarm tone.

'That was quite a show you put up!' Chilufya said to Mwila.

'As your close friends, we can give you some advice.'

'What about?' Mwila asked, as if she had no idea what the other woman was talking about.

'I think you are wasting your time, Mwila!' Mwape cut in. 'You know even though you are denying it that Chisunka is a very important man. On top of that, he is rich. Why can't you marry him and be happy? Don't you want to be happy?'

'I'm happy as I am!' Mwila answered. 'I don't want an old man to make me miserable!'

There was silence.

'I think you are blind, Mwila,' Chilufya taunted. 'You can't even see a good chance coming your way. I would seize it if I were you!'

'Why don't you get married to him yourself if you think he is so wonderful!' Mwila teased.

'Now you listen to me and listen well. Everyone in the village knows that you are no longer a virgin!' Chilufya said.

'And that is the whole point,' Mwape echoed. 'So which young man is going to marry you anyway?'

'Shut up!' Mwila shouted, losing her temper. 'What you are saying are lies, and I don't care about them.'

'I know about your father, do you care about him?' Chilufya challenged.

'Of course I do!' Mwila replied.

'And that is another point,' Mwape pointed out. 'The way you behaved at the meeting this afternoon was a disgrace to your father! If you had any respect for him, you should have given him the authority to accept or refuse. Now, everyone in the village thinks that he is so weak he can't even handle his own daughter.'

Mwila was silent.

'And by the way, you should know that you have a very good father,' Mwape continued. 'It is because of him that you are the most educated girl in this area. No other father we know of could do that!'

'I think it is your father who spoilt you!' Chilufya echoed. 'He gave you more than you deserved. He put you on a high platform and now see how you have repaid him—with insult!'

'You still have a chance, Mwila,' Mwape reminded. 'You still can accept Chisunka's proposal and give your father his due respect.'

'Leave my father alone!' Mwila demanded. 'He knows that I love him and that is what matters to me.'

'How about the boys that you are after then?' Mwape asked. 'Don't they matter? If one goes by what they are saying, no one is going to propose to you!'

'I don't care about them!' Mwila shouted. 'I'm not like you who are married to illiterate husbands!'

'Hah! Hah! Did you hear that insult?' Chilufya asked with dejection on her face.

'I heard it loud and clear!' Mwape replied emotionally. 'But what kind of husband are you going to have?' she asked, turning to Mwila. 'An angel? But since you cannot have that one, are you going to marry Satan?'

'My man, whoever he is going to be, will have a pen for a companion!' Mwila boasted. 'He will be educated,' she emphasised.

'Ha! Ha! Ha!' Chilufya laughed with scorn. 'You can only hear that kind of boast from a spoilt child. At least even though I'm not educated, I didn't enter my husband's house empty! I was a virgin! And my husband is a proud man to dare!'

'I also entered my man's hut unpolluted!' Mwape boasted. 'Education is actually nothing. What has it done for you and your brother?' She sighed. 'Do you mean to say that people who are not educated are not good enough for you?'

'No, they are not!' Mwila said, shaking her head. 'And you leave my brother alone.'

'Do you mean to say that they are stupid?' asked Chilufya. 'If so, how about your own father? He's the one who made you clever! Are you saying that he is stupid? Are you saying that he is useless because he has an axe as a companion? Is it not the axe and hoe which enabled him to make the money which educated you?' She bombarded Mwila with her string of searching questions.

'I didn't say that!' Mwila answered angrily. 'Leave me alone, you blatant liars. Get lost!'

The two women looked at each other in bewilderment. They realised that their mission had flopped. Mwape muttered, 'Let's go. She won't listen. She is deaf!'

'She isn't deaf!' Chilufya protested. 'She is mad! Just like her brother, because of their books! Let's go before what she is saying makes me vomit! Turo! Turo!' Chilufya spat in Mwila's direction in utter contempt.

Mwila experienced a feeling of alienation as the two women stamped away.

As she tossed and turned in her bed that night, Mwila's mind flashed back to her encounter with the two women. She couldn't sleep as she pondered on her problems. She realised that she owed a lot to her father. In the village, most fathers would have gone one better than Chansa and threatened to disown her, unless she accepted and married the man approved by the extended family or the clan. But Chansa was an exception; he was regarded as the leading progressive in the area. Largely through the persuasive influence of Kasongo, he acknowledged that some traditional practices were undesirable or out of date and would one day pass away.

This is how he regarded the *Bemba* system of obtaining a partner. Mwila was also lucky that her influential and traditionalist uncle, Chibale, was seriously ill. He did not take part in the deliberations.

Mulenga did not hide her disappointment with the decision. When she was alone with Mwila and Kasongo, she said, 'You know we can't support you forever. You have just refused Heaven on earth.' Mulenga saw only impertinence in their arguments.

No one answered. They knew she was upset and didn't want to make it worse.

'You should soon be left to fend for yourselves,' Mulenga warned.

Even Mwila's young brother Kabaso was disappointed. When the young lad heard that Mwila had been proposed to by Chisunka, he thought of nothing but an imminent wedding, when he could treat himself and his friends to a wide variety of foodstuffs and join in the dancing. As for the adults, it was the beer which they looked forward to more than anything else at such a marriage ceremony. They regretted that Mwila's rebellion had deprived them of a long drinking session.

4

The moon was rising, struggling to be seen amidst the dark clouds. Kasongo was in a tiny and smelly hut outside his grandparents' house, answering the call of nature. Suddenly, there came a clear thunderous warning from the sky; there was no doubt in his mind that it would be raining, and soon it did. The rain was heavy; it poured and poured. The water from the dark sky was leaking through the grass thatched roof of the tiny pit latrine. Although trapped, Kasongo had no intention of staying in the smelly and now wet latrine. As he made for his hut, he was caught in the heavy shower of rain and hailstones; he could hardly see his direction. As if this was not enough, a strong wind was blowing in the opposite direction, he felt for his way helplessly. The heavy rains, as if aimed at him, stopped as soon as Kasongo reached his hut. But he was already drenched and wet for a short session in the small loo!

Kasongo quickly changed his clothes and started a fire to warm him. He often expressed his dislike for village latrines. They were dug outside the living houses, or huts, and this was a terrible inconvenience, especially at night and during rainy seasons. He had no latrine of his own at his hut, but unlike many villagers in the same position, he could never go into the surrounding bushes and create a convenience for himself. He didn't wish to contribute to pollution in that way, so he always used the one near his grandparents' house.

That same evening, as Kasongo was lying on his small bed, half-dozing, he heard a soft knock on the door, and when the door opened, Mwila and her friend Mumbi stood there. 'Come in, girls. How nice to see you!' he greeted cheerfully.

'It was my idea that we give you a surprise!' Mumbi announced.

'Why didn't you come alone to really surprise me?' he said, turning to Mumbi.

'She is still a coward!' Mwila interrupted.

'A coward has a better chance of survival than the one who takes risks,' Mumbi argued.

Kasongo told the girls about *somba*, the village dance taking place that evening. The girls knew about it but were reluctant to go. They thought they had outgrown *ichila*, as *somba* was sometimes called.

'This is the only entertainment available here in the village,' Kasongo argued. 'And I see no reason why we shouldn't go and have some fun,' he emphasised persuasively.

'You won't like it. It is dull and old-fashioned,' Mwila warned him.

'You must be kidding,' Mumbi echoed.

'Good girl,' Kasongo complimented, his eyes fixed on Mumbi's chest. In the semi-darkness of his fire light, he could see her partially revealed tender and pointed breasts. He swallowed and then said politely, 'Girls, this is our only chance to catch up on our culture. Otherwise who is going to tell our children all about it?' he asked cleverly.

'Sense!' Mumbi acknowledged.

'That's right,' Mwila cut in.

The sound of the drums could be heard as Kasongo and the two girls were walking towards the dancing arena in the open air. At the arena, Kasongo quickly joined a straight line formed by the boys, most of them much younger than him. The girls joined their own line, directly facing that of the boys, their feet tapping in time to the drums. They really vibrated beautifully to the strong stimulating beat.

The dancers sang songs and clapped hands to the rhythm of the drums.

At the end of each song, the drums would die down, beating very slowly. This gave a chance for a girl with a high-pitched, but charming voice, to start a new song which the others would join while clapping their hands. Then the drums would switch to a faster beat.

Even though he had not danced *somba* during his years abroad, Kasongo had not forgotten how they used to dance during his childhood.

It was Kasongo's turn to go dancing the thirty metres or so towards the line of the girls. Facing the girls, Kasongo danced invitingly, with his eyes resting upon the girls who were very smartly dressed by village standards. In fact, he made his choice in advance, and after the formal rudimentary glances, he stopped and bowed in front of Mumbi. Mumbi accepted the

challenge with pleasure, and the pair went dancing towards the centre, then to the position of the drummers, to the amazement and applause of the audience. This was the most exciting part of the dance.

It was quite obvious that Kasongo was attracted to Mumbi and that she would be a fool not to grasp this live wire. As the drums beat faster and stronger, she expressed herself, swung and twisted her slim waist to an extent that left little to the imagination. Mumbi's hips were in proportion to her shoulders; it made her very attractive. She had that special feminine magnetism which attracted men even from afar. But Kasongo was very near, and for him, this was the only time since he had returned to the village that he totally forgot that he had come there to recuperate. He felt very much at home. His mind flashed back to the Hiedis and Ericas of East Berlin. Probably they couldn't stand the tough challenge Mumbi could pose. For Kasongo, however, this was next to Heaven. 'I am impressed. You dance so well,' Kasongo whispered to Mumbi, as he circled around her slim and beautiful body.

'Thank you,' she replied. 'One needs a good partner to dance well.' She smiled broadly, showing her white teeth.

'You are smashing!' Kasongo complimented. 'There is no single girl in that line who could match your pretty looks and beautiful dancing.'

'Please, don't you flatter me?' Mumbi protested. They looked at each other and smiled meaningfully. His eyes firmly fixed on her chest again, Kasongo murmured, 'Will you come and see me tomorrow evening?' Mumbi shrugged her shoulders and then beamed him a smile in reply.

'Don't be childish,' Kasongo insisted. 'You know you are the best thing that has happened to me in this place!'

'Really?' Mumbi asked movingly.

'I mean it,' Kasongo replied.

All of a sudden the pair danced towards the boys' line. This was Mumbi's turn to pick a boy, with whom she went dancing through the centre and back to her own line.

As the drums slowed down, a girl started the selection song. The dancers and the audience applauded. This was a very popular song, much to the embarrassment of some of the girls. This song simply went like this:

Select, select,

Select only the most beautiful girls.

Don't hesitate, don't waste time,

Just select the pretty ones.

And let the residue rest!

Mwila was happy to be selected at the peak of the selection song. The boy was Kunda, tall and handsome. He was a teacher at a local primary school.

'I'm honoured to have the pleasure of dancing with you,' Kunda whispered as they danced.

'You are welcome,' Mwila replied calmly. At 1.67 metres, Mwila almost matched Kunda's height. They looked each other in the eyes as they gracefully drifted towards the boys' line.

'Are you enjoying the dance?' Kunda asked.

'Oh, it is super!' Mwila replied.

'You look superb and very attractive,' Kunda said.

'Thank you for the compliment!' she replied.

The drums died down at about midnight and people parted with plans to meet later. The residue, as the song had suggested, were disappointed. The pairing of Kasongo with Mumbi, and possibly Mwila with Kunda, would undoubtedly provide talk and gossip for the village the following day.

In the past, somba was the most sociable event for the boys and girls in the villages. It was a convenient place for them to meet, know each other, and possibly get engaged and marry.

There were no formal parties or dances for the mature boys and girls. In fact, the custom did not allow intimate friendships between boys and girls. If a boy was attracted to a girl, he had to take serious steps towards proposing to her. Only after the engagement were couples allowed to see each other and have a normal courtship, often in the presence of the girl's sisters or brothers.

One bright sunny afternoon, a fat and smartly dressed man came walking along with a suitcase in one hand and a walking stick in the other. He stopped and looked down at Mulenga and said, 'Hellow, Mulenga.'

'Hellow, Bwalya. I'm delighted to see you.'

They talked for a while. Mulenga then collected the case and walking stick and took them inside the house. Bwalya was Chansa's younger brother. He was employed in Lusaka, where he worked as a driver for the City Council.

Mulenga brought out a chair for her brother-in-law.

'This is a great surprise,' Mulenga said. 'Why didn't you warn us that you were coming?'

'You mean you didn't receive my letter?' Bwalya exclaimed. 'I wrote two weeks ago.'

'Sometimes letters take several weeks to reach us, especially from other provinces,' she said. 'It is such a pity. Anyway, the most important thing is that you have arrived well.'

'That is true, my sister-in-law,' Bwalya nodded.

They talked about Bwalya's family in Lusaka and thereafter a chicken was killed in Bwalya's honour. Chansa was delighted to find his brother at home. Of all his young brothers, he was most fond of Bwalya. His other two brothers worked as miners on the Copperbelt.

'Welcome, son of my father,' Chansa greeted.

'Thank you, my big Brother,' Bwalya replied, extending his strong arms.

'You have put on a lot of weight,' Chansa observed. 'What do you eat, my brother? Your body is good testimony of the good life in the capital city!'

They laughed. They talked about many things, but Mwila's future was the main topic. 'I feel that it is in her interest that she goes back to school!' Bwalya suggested.

'Son of my father,' Chansa addressed his brother. 'How can she go back to school when she has been expelled?'

Bwalya explained that he could find her a place in a secondary school in Lusaka. 'Otherwise, all the years she had already spent at school would be wasted. It would be like a sharp spear left to rust.'

Chansa nodded in agreement.

They held a small family meeting the following day at which they agreed that Mwila could go and stay with Bwalya's family in order to complete her secondary education. Her mother, however, was totally against this idea. She feared that city life was not safe for a young girl and that her daughter might get into further troubles there. But Mulenga was outnumbered and so lost again. Apart from the fears she had loudly expressed, Mulenga also wanted Mwila to be at home so that she could give her a hand at harvesting; the millet season was just around the corner.

Mwila was delighted. She had always wished to go away from the dull and restrictive village life to the fast and sociable city life she had heard so much about from her friends at school.

'After all,' Mwila said to Mumbi when they were on their own, 'this is the only chance to get away from my domineering mother, who thinks she can still treat me like a baby. We'll see.'

'But you are still her child,' Mumbi reminded her. 'How are you so certain that she isn't acting in your interest?'

'In my interest!' Mwila exclaimed. 'My dear,' she continued, 'you must appreciate that my mother and I are worlds apart. If I don't grab this chance, I may end up marrying an old pig, like Chisunka.'

'I know how you feel,' Mumbi said. 'I wish you luck in the city.'

'For how long will your brother stay with us?' Mulenga asked as they went to sleep.

'You are the hostess,' Chansa teased, 'and should know better than me.'

'You are the boss,' she teased back.

'Just over a week,' he said. 'Why did you ask?'

'I just asked,' Mulenga replied, looking down, as if to avoid his scrutinising gaze.

'I can tell when you are trying to hide something from me,' he declared. 'Tell me, my wife. What's on your mind?'

'I was thinking about brewing beer for the son of your father,' she paused as if to allow him time to digest and absorb her words. 'Won't you be giving him a party?'

'You are a wonderful wife!' he complimented, smiling broadly. 'That's why I know I can't do without you, my queen.' Chansa knew that he had a good wife. At fifty-eight, Mulenga still looked beautiful even though her physique was now more prominent. Chansa depended on her to a great extent; she was not only his calendar, but his diary as well; She prompted him of his plans and engagements whenever they were due. He never hid the fact that he owed her his high standing in his society, as a consequence of which he held her close to his heart. His favourite defence, 'My wife is not wanting in any feminine qualities. I would be greedy to want a second wife!' often silenced his friends who tried to influence him into marrying a second wife. In their society, monogamy and polygamy rubbed shoulders peacefully.

The night before Bwalya and Mwila left the village was the party night. It had taken Mulenga about five days to brew the beer using the unwritten traditional formula that has been handed from mother to daughter. She used millet that she had milled using grinding stones. The millet had previously been soaked in water for a few days to allow for germination. She boiled the ground millet, and after letting it cool, she added some previously fermenting beer. She poured the mixture into calabashes and left it to ferment and bubble away for about four days.

Mwila, Kasongo, and Kabaso left the house as soon as guests began arriving. They gathered in the big sitting room in the centre of which was a big calabash placed in a wide green basin.

Chansa made a short speech to welcome his guests and told them of the main reason for party. When he finished his speech, his wife brought a small gourd, containing a cloudy solution of boiled water and ash. It was used to give the beer foam, strength, and flavour, and it also made the beer slightly warm to drink. Mulenga knelt beside the calabash and poured the solution

into it. The eager guests applauded. The party had started. Their chronic thirst would soon be quenched.

In accordance with tradition, the host had to start the drinking to assure the guests that the beer was safe. Chansa picked up a straw from the basin and knelt by the calabash. This type of straw was cut from a wild plant. He dipped the straw in and sucked three times as hard as he could. 'Gentlemen,' Chansa proclaimed, 'I'm not boasting, but the stuff is nice and strong.' He then handed the straw to the most senior man in the audience, the village headman, Chipoma, who had a long and professional swig at *katubi*; as the traditional brew is called.

'Hmm!' the headman intoned. 'It is wonderful. Your wife deserves our praises. Only a good woman can make good stuff like this.' The audience laughed and clapped.

It was Bwalya's turn to drink, and he put his walking stick down, before kneeling by the calabash. At the end, he complimented his brother for marrying an excellent beer-brewer and wonderful mother. He also complimented his sister-in-law for marrying such a handsome and hard-working man, who provided so well for his family.

Drinking continued, and when the level of the beer in the calabash was low, Mulenga would bring out the ash solution as a replenisher. Once they were satisfied that beer from a particular calabash was exhausted, a fresh one was brought in.

The men talked among themselves. They talked mostly about freedom under the new black government. They were happy that they would no longer be inconvenienced and intimidated by the white district commissioner, who ensured that a levy was paid to the government and regularly inspected the villagers and their property. Any offenders, even those on ambiguous charges, such as uncleanness of the village or clothes, were brutally humiliated in public. Many villagers disliked the *boma* messengers more than their master, the *bwana*—who humiliated them in the presence of their wives and children. Fines ranged from payment of several dozen eggs to money paid to the *bwana*, who was the government, the law, and magistrate.

The new government had abandoned the levy system and thus put an end to the daylight robbery of unemployed peasants, who lived from hand to mouth. The posts of district and provincial commissioners were abolished and replaced with officials who were geared to serve the interests of the masses instead of exploiting and harassing them.

The villagers were happy to have their pride and respect restored. Most of them were even happier that they had been staunch supporters of

the ruling party during the struggle for independence; they felt they had contributed to the downfall of the unpopular *bwanas*' rule.

The women, grouped in one section, gossiped uninterruptedly on their own.

Gradually, the room became noisier and merrier. They were getting quite warmed up, and people had to shout to make their point. Under the influence of alcohol, no one remained quiet any longer; they conversed heartily.

Then the drums were brought in to everyone's delight. They applauded cheerfully. They sang songs depicting various events, such as hunting, harvesting and wars. They were in good spirits, which was exhibited by the commotion and pandemonium in the room. The sex divisions were now ignored; men crossed the floor and were chatting up women enthusiastically.

'I challenge you to the floor!' Mutale shouted. The woman looked at him and smiled.

'Stand up then!' another woman encouraged.

'Come on, do it!' Mulenga echoed. 'Don't shame us.'

Mutale was already on the floor and had started his song. The woman he challenged stood up and rolled a piece of cloth around her waist—to bring out her best dancing. They danced stamping their feet to the ground, their bodies vibrating gracefully. Their dance was well timed to the rhythm of the drums. Everyone was amused. They applauded. Their dance was indoors and somewhat different from *somba*, for the youngsters, whose rhythm was faster. For the adults, excellent dancers were always showered with presents. The drinking continued into the early hours, but anyone who felt that they had had enough thanked the hosts for their hospitality and announced their departure.

5

The village bus stop was unusually crowded that Monday morning. Many villagers turned out to wish Mwila and Bwalya farewell. After the goodbyes had been said, it was Chansa who spoke last. 'She is entirely in your hands now,' he said to his brother.

Bwalya nodded.

'I have no doubt that she will be happy with you, son of my father,' Chansa continued. 'However, if she goes out of line, don't hesitate to discipline her.'

'Everything will be all right, son of my father,' Bwalya assured him.

Chansa turned to Mwila and said, 'Be good to your uncle. Be good to your aunt, and be good to your cousins.'

'Yes, Father,' Mwila replied politely.

'Behave well in the city!' Chansa instructed. 'Remember, no misbehaviour. Bring back glory and honour to your house.'

'Yes, Father,' Mwila answered.

Bwalya smiled and said, 'Goodbye, my big brother. Don't worry about her. She'll be all right with me.' He waved his walking stick to the crowd, most of who waved back.

'May our ancestors protect and guide both of you on your long journey!' Chansa replied. 'Bye-bye and farewell, son of my father.'

Bwalya and Mwila were the last passengers to board the bus, which zoomed off and was immediately lost in the trail of dust that followed. Mwila, sitting on the seat next to Bwalya, was reading *The Guilty is Afraid* by J Hadley Chase, her favourite author. This was the third time she had read this novel, what with the scarcity of reading materials in the villages.

In Mansa, they stopped at the main bus station. Many more passengers boarded the bus, the majority of who were women with their children, some with babies on their backs.

The bus cruised on the untarred but well-surfaced road. About eighty kilometres from Mansa, it came to a halt. There was a barrier across the road. 'This is Chembe,' Bwalya said to Mwila.

'I see,' Mwila replied, looking at the people buying and selling foodstuffs along the road.

'Hurry up!' shouted the bus conductor. 'Take all your identification and immigration papers to the office. We haven't got all day.'

They all left the bus and formed a single file into the small immigration office. Their papers were quickly stamped by an extra-friendly Zambian official. 'Enjoy your trip,' he said to each passenger after stamping their papers.

Before entering the bus, Mwila bought some fruits and a small piece of fried fish.

With all passengers on board again, the wooden barrier across the road was lifted, and the bus zoomed off. After three kilometres, they came to a big river. 'This must be the Luapula!' Mwila exclaimed, looking at Bwalya.

'Oh yes, this is it,' Bwalya confirmed. 'I forgot that you haven't been here before.' The river was wide. It meandered its broad width from east to west between Zambia and Zaire.

The passengers came out before the bus was driven onto the pontoon, where two small cars were already parked.

The passengers then walked on the pontoon, which majestically drifted across the Luapula River into Zaire.

From the pontoon, most passengers boarded the bus, ignoring Zairean hawkers selling Simba beer and a variety of groceries.

With all passengers accounted for, the conductor pressed the bell. The bus driver started the engine and drove the bus more cautiously on the narrower and bumpy road. 'See, he's driving on the wrong side of the road!' Mwila exclaimed. 'The right side is for pedestrians, isn't it?' She asked.

'No,' Bwalya replied. 'In Zaire, they drive on the right side of the road. It is an offence here to drive on the left.'

'Oh! Is it?' Mwila exclaimed.

About four kilometres from the Luapula River, they came to another barrier on the road. This was the Zairean Immigration post. The bus driver, accompanied by the conductor, took papers into a small office. After a delay of about fifteen minutes, they re-emerged from the office accompanied by a

slim, tall, uniformed Zairean official. They all entered the bus. Two armed Zairean gendarmes followed and stood in the front of the bus, waving their heavy guns. The tall Zairean officer looked at all the passengers with a scrutinising gaze before he started counting. Pointing his stretched forefinger, he counted slowly but loudly in what sounded like French. When he finally completed, he looked at the official list. He nodded to the driver and gave him back the list, before commanding his armed policemen to go; like zombies they obeyed. Then the official exchanged a few words with the driver before leaving the bus.

'What did they want?' Mwila asked Bwalya, who showed no emotion.

'Any excuse for detaining us,' Bwalya replied. 'A dirty bus. Noisy passengers. Anything at all?' he said.

'But why did the armed men come onto the bus?' Mwila insisted, 'I have never seen anything like this in Zambia.' She sighed.

'They use guns more often in this country. May be to enforce law and order, but largely to frighten people,' Bwalya explained. 'They recently fought a cruel civil war. Guns are flying about even in civilian hands. It is not really peaceful.'

Mwila was relieved that they finally left the post without any incident.

Beyond the immigration post, the road was extremely dusty, very bumpy, and with several potholes. Mwila was very quiet.

'Are you all right?' Bwalya asked her. 'Or are you missing the village already?'

'I'm all right,' Mwila replied. 'It is just the dust and bumps bothering me.' She rigidly clung to the seat in front of her.

'There is nothing that our government can do about this road,' he reminded her.

'But it is the Zambian traffic which largely uses the road, isn't it?' she asked.

'That is true,' Bwalya nodded in agreement. 'But this road is the property of the Zairean government. They get revenue from it, and they are supposed to maintain it properly.' Just then, the bus suddenly came to a halt. The passengers could hear the horrible noise of the brakes. The driver was merely trying to avoid a ditch on the right side of the road, as another vehicle was approaching from the opposite direction.

They had now travelled about thirty-two kilometres inside Zairean territory. A van, moving at a very high speed, overtook the bus, leaving a cloud of dust in its way. Even though he couldn't see clearly in front of him, the bus driver didn't slow down. Just then there was a terrible bang,

and the bus jerked and shook like a plane taking off. It swerved and came to a sudden stop along the road. There were cries and curses from the shaken passengers. Some had been tossed from their seats and landed on the bus floor. Mwila got up from under the seat where she was thrown. No one in the bus was hurt.

A few men came out of the bus to see what had happened. They were greeted by a terrifying sight. Under the bus was a Toyota Corolla, smashed to sheets, and blood was issuing out of it. Helpless, they stood there in sheer horror.

'Come back into the bus!' shouted the conductor. 'You have no right to stand on Zairean soil. It is a very serious offence.' His warning was clear.

'What if someone is still alive inside the car?' asked one young man.

'Whoever is there won't be recognised!' one old passenger reasoned.

'It is unthinkable for us to be in a bus which is seated on top of a dead body or bodies, whatever the number is!'

'It is pathetic,' another old man intoned.

The bus was partially damaged in front, and with bodies trapped under it, the driver failed to move it.

The passengers argued among themselves as to which driver was in the wrong. Under Zairean Highway Code, the bus driver was right by keeping the right side of the road, but that was no permit for him to be driving under a blanket of dust. In the grief that dawned on the passengers, Mwila's mind flashed back to her Geography lessons and remembered how the heart of Zambia was pierced by this long stretch of Zairean territory. 'What an inconvenience!' she thought. Several hundred passengers each day had no alternative but to pass through Zaire when travelling from Zambia to Zambia!

It was four hours later that the Zairean police arrived at the scene of the accident. They found two terribly disfigured bodies of a man and a young woman in the wrecked vehicle, and since it was a very warm afternoon, many passengers were sweating profusely, and several men unbuttoned their shirts.

Mwila felt hungry. 'Would you like some fruit now, uncle?'

She asked.

'No, thank you,' Bwalya replied. 'Just go ahead.' She took out one fat banana and slowly peeled it before she started eating. Just then, a young girl of about five seated in front of Mwila's seat started crying. 'I want a banana, mummy. I want a banana!' She demanded, pointing to the short piece remaining in Mwila's hand.

'Hey! Where on earth shall we find a banana here in the bus, in the middle of the jungle?' her mother exclaimed.

'Here!' Mwila offered, handing over one of her big bananas.

'Thank you!' the girl's mother appreciated. 'You are a daughter of God!' She turned to her daughter, now struggling to peel the fat banana. 'Say thank you,' she reminded her.

'Lank-io!' the young girl echoed.

'You are welcome!' Mwila encouraged her. 'What is your name?'

'Go on!' the girl's mother said. 'Tell your aunt your name.'

'My name is Mwila,' the young girl said slowly, after swallowing a piece of the partially chewed banana.

'Is that her name?' Mwila asked the girl's mother.

'That is her name,' the woman replied.

'Oh! I am also Mwila,' she introduced herself.

'Are you?' the woman exclaimed. 'My name is Chuswe. I'm happy to meet you. We might be related.'

Bwalya joined in their conversation. They eventually established that they were distant relatives. Chuswe and her immediate relatives stayed in Kawambwa, another district in the province. She was now going to join her husband who worked in the mines at Mufulira.

After spending a night in the bus, relief for the stranded and hungry passengers came about midday on Tuesday. Another bus came, to which they all were transferred. But their plight was not over yet. They were all interrogated for a total of three hours at Mokambo by the inquisitive Zairean police and immigration officials. They left Zaire to re-enter Zambia, without the driver and bus conductor of their first bus, who were detained in custody.

Bwalya and Mwila were busy talking when the ticket inspector interrupted them. 'Tickets please,' he shouted. It was Mwila's turn to show hers. She was fumbling in her handbag, looking for the ticket amongst the other pieces of paper.

'Your ticket, sir,' the inspector turned to Bwalya while waiting for Mwila. Bwalya handed over his ticket. It was immediately returned to him with a 'Thank you.'

'Thank you. Tickets please,' the inspector said as he walked towards the rear of the bus.

Mwila felt drowsy and tired. Her feet ached and were slightly swollen. They had been cramped in that sitting position since the previous day. In spite of this, she was fascinated by the beauty and size of many houses she saw in the big towns on their way; they looked superior to the mostly

thatched and round ones she was accustomed to in the village. Mwila was dozing when they arrived. 'This is the capital city you have heard so much about,' Bwalya reminded.

'So this is Lusaka!' Mwila exclaimed excitedly. She was immediately impressed by the number of bright lights.

'You have hardly seen the place!' Bwalya reminded.

It was about 22.30 hours when they reached the main bus station at Kamwala. They collected their baggage and joined a not too long queue for a local bus to Chilenje South, one of the suburbs of Lusaka, some eight kilometres away.

Mwenya heard a triple knock on the door. 'Come in,' she said, walking to the door. 'Come in,' she invited them opening the door wide.

'How are you, my dear?' Bwalya greeted.

'Oh! Bashi-Chama-father of Chama, so it is you!' Mwenya exclaimed. 'Welcome back!' She took her husband's case and the walking stick into their bedroom.

'Please, Mother, sit down,' Bwalya said, gesturing at a chair. Mwila sat down.

'Oh welcome, Mwila,' Mwenya greeted. 'I'm glad to see you.'

'How are you and my children?' Bwalya interrupted.

'Well, we are all right,' Mwenya answered. 'It is only Mumba who has diarrhoea. She has also been coughing for the last three days.' Mumba was their youngest child.

'Where is she?' Bwalya asked. 'Did you take her to the hospital?'

'She was given some tablets and some red medicine to drink,' Mwenya replied. 'She is asleep in our bedroom.'

'Why can't they give her an injection?' Bwalya asked.

'Injections are reserved for the rich,' Mwenya replied.

Many people who were not educated thought that the strongest medication was given through an injection. They couldn't appreciate that the same drug could be administered effectively by different routes. It was largely for this reason that many people preferred consulting private doctors, who wittingly exploited their ignorance.

Bwalya went to the main bedroom, leaving Mwila and his wife chatting in the sitting room. Mwenya excitedly asked about Chipoma's village, where she also came from.

'You must be hungry,' Mwenya reasoned. 'Let me fix you something to eat,' she said, standing up. Taught in the village, she fully realised that the way to her husband's heart was through his stomach and not by kisses.

After Bwalya had talked with his wife in the kitchen, Mwila was shown her new room. It was not hers alone; she had to share it with Kabinda, Bwalya's twelve-year old daughter. The other room was for the boys. Like her little sister and elder brother, Kabinda slept early that night, but she was woken up by the noise in the room.

'The room is beautiful,' Mwila announced. It was small and tidy with a spare bed for her.

'This is home,' Bwalya said. 'Make the best of it.'

Mwenya went to prepare their dinner. Mwila quickly made up her bed and then sat on it. She surveyed the room. It was smaller than her own in her grandparents' two-bedroom house in Chipoma, one of the few brick houses in the village. On second reflection, she preferred her new room in the city largely because the floor was made of concrete and therefore dust would not be coming into her face when sweeping unlike her previous room. Another attraction was a small wooden wardrobe stuck in a corner, where she neatly hung her dresses. She thought they would no longer be wrinkled as they used to be in the suitcase at home. She went into the sitting room and joined her uncle.

After cooking, Mwenya arranged the small dining table and chairs in one corner of the sitting room.

'Would you like to come to the table now? The food is ready,' she invited them, kneeling down near her husband.

'It better be big,' Bwalya cautioned, 'because I'm terribly hungry.'

During their dinner, they talked about their trip, especially the nasty accident. They retired to their bedrooms immediately afterwards.

6

Mwila opened her eyes and sat up. She could hardly see anything as there wasn't much light in the room. She stood up, drew the blue curtains halfway, and sat down on the bed, half-asleep; she began to dress up. On the other bed, Mwila saw Kabinda's head protruding just outside the blanket. She realised that the young girl was awake, as she smiled innocently and watched her move round the bed.

When everyone was up, they had a breakfast of maize-meal porridge, tea, and a few slices of bread. Then Bwalya, Mwenya, Chama, and Mwila set out for the city centre by bus. Chama was Bwalya's firstborn.

As they approached the city centre, Mwila was immediately impressed by the tall buildings and the wide range of items on display in the shop windows. She had never seen anything like it before, and she could not hide her awe. 'Hmm, there are so many people and so many cars!' she said excitedly. 'You mean there are so many shops in this place?' Mwila asked amazed by the sight. 'I would like to see inside.'

'This is only the second-class shopping area,' Chama reminded. 'You'll see more on Cairo Road.'

They looked at many items displayed in the windows and entered a few shops as they walked towards the first-class trading area. They walked on.

'This is Cairo Road,' Bwalya said. 'It is the Main Street and busiest shopping street in the whole country.'

'It looks terrific!' Mwila said excitedly. 'Just how do they manage to build such tall buildings? How can they build so high up there?' It was the first time she saw multi-storey buildings.

'There are machines such as lifting derricks and cranes,' Chama replied as his parents kept quiet. Chama was technical-minded, and he hoped to study engineering at the university.

'The whites are so clever that they can do anything,' Bwalya said, pointing his walking stick towards the upper floors of one of the tall buildings. 'Who thought that man could ever go to the moon!' he exclaimed.

'It is not just because they are whites, Dad,' Chama protested. 'It is the result of science and technology,' he explained. 'There are intelligent blacks as well.'

They walked along Cairo Road for quite a while until they came to Mwaiseni, a big departmental store.

'Let's go in,' Bwalya invited as they approached the main entrance. Inside the shop, they went from one section to another, just to show Mwila the great variety of items that a big shop in the city could offer. At last, they came to the latest fashions in ladies' gear.

'Pick any two dresses of your choice,' Bwalya said, looking at Mwila.

'Me?' Mwila exclaimed, uncertain of the offer.

'Today is your special day,' Bwalya replied.

By the time they left the shop, Bwalya and his wife had bought two new dresses, two blouses, some underclothing, and a pair of black shoes for Mwila, who was obviously thrilled. The thought of the nice presents all at once and the feeling of being in the country's most glamorous city completely overwhelmed the young lady. She smiled broadly and even forgot to thank the couple. Bwalya and his wife were, however, aware of Mwila's excitement.

They continued their sightseeing and walked along Church Road, passing through many places of importance in the central part of the city. At the High Court buildings, Mwila saw the two statues of lions guarding the main entrance. From a distance, the lions looked real and frightening.

They went to other places of interest and were pretty exhausted and hungry by 15.00 hours.

On their way back home, they went to a market, and again Mwila was amazed at the great variety of food items on display. There was nothing like it even in Mansa, which until that day had been her dream town. They bought some foodstuffs, and Mwila observed that the prices in the city were very much higher. She also noticed that unlike the village, people in the capital city did not haggle about the prices except for a few who were not encouraged. With a much higher demand in the city, vendors took on an attitude of take it or leave it.

'What a place!' Mwila sighed as they eventually reached home. 'I never dreamt it would be like this. The city looks so vast. There are so many people and cars on the roads.' This was no doubt the most thrilling day in Mwila's life, and she had enjoyed every minute of it. She was very cheerful the following few days. She wrote a letter to Mumbi describing her first impressions of the capital city.

* * *

It was a Wednesday morning, and Mwila was busy cooking in the small kitchen when there was a knock at the door. 'Come in,' Mwenya invited, as she went to answer it. A tall, slim young man was standing there, and Mwenya was certain that she had never seen him before. Standing in the doorway, she hesitated to let him in. 'Is this Bwalya's house?' the stranger asked in Nyanja.

'Yes, this is the one,' Mwenya answered. 'And I'm his wife. Can I help you?'

'I'm looking for Mwila,' he replied. 'Doesn't she stay here?'

'Please come in,' she said, opening the door wide. She showed him to a chair.

'Mwila,' Mwenya called. 'You have a visitor.' Mwila joined them in the sitting room and sat next to Mwenya. She looked at the bespectacled young man but failed to recognise him. He gazed back at her. 'Who are you?' her look seemed to be asking.

'I'm Mathew Phiri,' he introduced himself. 'I'm the friend of . . .'

'Oh! How are you?' Mwila interrupted. 'I have heard so much about you from my brother. Aunt,' Mwila called, turning to Mwenya, 'this is the kind young man I told you about. The one who informed us about Kasongo's illness.'

'Can I offer you something to drink?' Mwila asked. 'Orange or Coca Cola?'

'Coke, please,' he accepted. She stood up and went into the kitchen. She brought him Coca Cola in a glass and gave it to him.

'See you later,' Mwenya said, standing up, certain that there was no problem. She left them alone and went to the kitchen.

'I was thinking of coming to see you one day, and thank you for being so nice to my brother during his illness,' Mwila said. 'But I heard that you were on holiday.'

'Yes, I was on holiday in Lundazi,' Phiri replied. 'I returned only yesterday.'

'Did you have a good holiday?' Mwila asked.

'I had a good time, thank you,' he replied hesitantly. 'But two weeks ago, my old man left us, and we put him to rest.'

'I'm so sorry,' she sympathised. 'What happened?' Phiri then explained in detail how his old father had suffered from asthma which always became exacerbated in the rainy season and during the winter. 'And how did you find out my address?' Mwila asked, changing the subject.

'On my return, I found a letter from Kasongo, in which he informed me of you being here.' He sighed. 'Since I have heard so much about you from him, I couldn't wait to see you. Here I am.'

They looked at each other and smiled simultaneously.

'If you don't mind, I would like to ask you about my brother's illness,' she said calmly.

'You are most welcome,' he answered. 'Ask anything. If I know it, I'll tell you.'

'First,' she said, 'how did it really start? I know you mentioned in your letter that he was causing trouble, but what actually happened? The family didn't want to ask my brother about it since it might have irritated him and besides, he might not have remembered much.'

'I don't mind telling you everything I know,' Phiri said, sipping at his Coca Cola. 'But you may not like some of it!'

'I think someone in the family should know,' Mwila replied cleverly.

'I think so too,' Phiri agreed. 'But I should warn you it is X-certificate stuff.'

'You should know from my brother that I'm over twenty-one!' she answered.

They laughed.

'It all started on a Monday,' Phiri said. 'Kasongo had his orals.'

'What do you mean by orals?' Mwila interrupted.

'He had to defend his Ph.D. thesis,' he explained.

'I see,' Mwila nodded.

'Then later that day, he was informed by his professor that he was unsuccessful. The committee recommended him for a Masters' degree instead.'

'But he has a Masters already!' Mwila exclaimed.

'I think that was one of the problems,' Phiri agreed. 'It meant that all the four years he had spent on research was wasted. Kasongo was prepared to do more research in order to improve his thesis, but he was denied that chance.'

'How terrible!' Mwila intoned.

'That evening, Kasongo insisted that we go to a bar in the city centre,' Phiri continued. 'He looked excited in spite of his results, which was uncharacteristic of him.'

'How can one go to a bar after failing one's examinations?' she asked.

'I tried to talk him out of it,' Phiri explained. 'But he wouldn't listen. He insisted that he wanted to drown his sorrows. I finally agreed since sometimes it helps to get the problem off one's chest rather than brood over it.'

Mwila nodded.

'At Stanley Bar, my friend was unusually talkative. He was extremely rude to the waiter, and they were quarrelling when the bar owner, a white man, intervened. Kasongo was fuming, and he hit the waiter and insulted the bar owner by calling him a racist pig.'

'Oh no!' Mwila exclaimed.

'I pleaded with them not to call the police,' Phiri said. 'And luckily, I was able to persuade Kasongo to leave the premises. I hired a taxi, and we left at once.'

'I hope you didn't go to another bar,' Mwila remarked jokingly.

'No, we went back to the campus,' Phiri explained. 'Now, what happened?' he paused, reflecting back. 'Ah, yes! Somehow he left his room and went to October 24, which is a residence for girls.'

Mwila was listening.

'I understand he made a lot of noise there, shouting and banging on doors until he was challenged by some male students who thought that he was drunk. There was a scuffle.'

'What a shame!' Mwila sighed. 'But I thought you said that the hall is for girl students,' she reminded him.

'Yes. But boys are often there seeing girlfriends,' Phiri answered. 'Anyway security guards intervened and took him back to his room. On Tuesday, he became worse, shouting and insulting every white man he came across by branding him a racist.'

'I just can't understand it,' Mwila interrupted. 'Kasongo is the one person in my family who had always preached harmony among races. In fact, my father used to suspect that he would one day marry a white girl. Just what got into him?' she asked sighing.

'It didn't stop there,' Phiri continued, avoiding her question. 'He even assaulted two little girls who laughed at him.'

'Are you sure there was no exaggeration?' Mwila asked. 'In his condition then, could he really appreciate that people were laughing at him for instance and take offence?'

'I think he could,' Phiri replied.

'At times he laughed and smiled and sounded sensible and intelligent, quoting extracts from his thesis and also praising and defending socialism, and then suddenly he would turn incoherent, rough, or even confused.'

'I see,' Mwila accepted. 'And the girls? Were they hurt?'

'Oh yes. I was coming to that. Kasongo had lowered his trousers, and the girls burst out laughing at the unusual entertainment . . .'

Mwila took a deep breath, and Phiri looked up at her dejected face. 'Shall I go on?' he asked.

'I'm sorry,' she apologised. 'Please continue.'

'Well, one of the girls lost a tooth, but the police arrived immediately afterwards.' He paused. 'They thought he was mentally ill and took him to the "asylum".'

'Do you think it had anything to do with his orals?' she asked.

'I definitely do,' Phiri answered confidently. 'In those two days, he was very critical of the foreign influence in our educational system. In particular, he detested the idea of our university calling an external from Oxford or Cambridge instead of one from another African university. He definitely thought that he had been victimised by a biased "all-white examination committee." And the psychiatrists did suspect that the root cause of his problem was academic.'

Mwila nodded.

They were joined by Mwenya, and they changed the topic. They talked about violence in the city. Armed robberies were on the increase, and many people lived in fear. Phiri was asked to stay for lunch, which he accepted. He left later in the afternoon.

Kondala
19 March 2018

It was six months since Mwila had arrived in Lusaka, and it was now clear that she could not find a place at any school in the capital. Many schools had students seeking places on their long waiting lists, but without an official transfer letter from her former school, Mwila did not even qualify to have her name on them. Bwalya was annoyed with himself for having not thought about this.

At first, Mwila enjoyed staying at home with Mwenya and helping her with housekeeping duties. As time went by, however, Mwenya changed her attitude and behaviour; she would go to the market or the beer-hall for a quick drink or to see the neighbours. There she would stay for hours on end and come back only in time for her husband to find her at home on his return from work. Meanwhile, Mwila was expected to look after the children, clean the house, and cook the meals. When Bwalya gave compliments for cooking or cleaning the house, Mwenya happily accepted all the credit for a job well done, but if something went wrong, Mwenya would not hesitate to point out that Mwila was to blame. Mwila never complained, and therefore, Bwalya did not come to know the truth.

One Saturday morning, Mwila was sent to the local grocery shop. With her left hand laden with a basket full of groceries, she unsteadily reached for a tin of peas on top of a pile with her right hand. The tins started to rattle and shake. One by one, they rumbled down falling against Mwila's chest and some on to the floor. Just then there was a giggle behind her, and a voice said, 'Dear me, what have you done? Here, let me help you'.

The rescuer was Musonda. She worked as a secretary for a firm of solicitors. The girls soon became close friends and used to go out into the city together for shopping and to the movies. For Mwila, it was a wonderful

change. She could at last get away from the gloom and restriction of the house to have some fun with Musonda and other young girls.

One Friday night, Musonda asked, 'Would you like to go to a party?'

'I would love to come,' Mwila answered. 'But maybe . . .'

Musonda interrupted her. 'I shall ask your uncle on your behalf,' she said. Mwila nodded.

Musonda explained to Bwalya that it was her friend's birthday party in Woodlands and that she had invited Mwila to see how parties were organised in the city. Woodlands was the first low-density residence of the capital city to be built. It is in this area that State House is situated, and most of the big shots in the city lived there at the time. Bwalya had no objections, except that the girls had to come back by midnight.

About one hour later, the girls were ready and were on their way to the party. Mwila was wearing a medium-length plain green dress and a black pair of shoes, all bought for her by Uncle Bwalya six months before. On the other hand, Musonda was dressed in tight red jeans with a matching red blouse and red high-heeled pointed boots. Mwila noticed the obvious contrast in their clothes and was somewhat uneasy. She, however, accepted that she was from the village and new in the modern and fashionable capital city.

'I must admit I have never attended what you might call a city party before,' Mwila said. 'What should I expect?'

For a moment, Musonda did not answer her, and then she said, 'Well, there is music, things to eat, drinks, and many boys and girls. You'll see soon.'

'It's only that I'm not sure of what to do,' confessed Mwila. 'I wouldn't like to let you down.'

'Don't worry,' Musonda assured her. 'It will be all right.'

Several cars were parked on either side of the road. There were many people inside this house on Independence Avenue, the best residential area in the country at the time. The room was already heated up, music was playing loudly, and several couples were on the floor doing their dancing thing. Other guests were either seated or standing. Many were drinking and chatting loudly and merrily.

The girls were offered drinks. Musonda, like many young girls at the party, eagerly took gin and tonic or some other alcoholic drink. Mwila in spite of Musonda's persuasion insisted on taking coke.

'You mean, here even mature adults mingle with youngsters?' Mwila asked in total disbelief of her observations.

'This is city life,' Musonda explained. 'You can go anywhere you like as long as you can afford it.'

'Yes!' Mwila exclaimed, opening her eyes in incredulity.

'In fact,' Musonda went on, 'most of these old men in here are wealthy. They are very generous with money and gifts. We call them sugar daddies!'

'Do you call their wives sugar mummies then?' Mwila asked bluntly.

'No!' Musonda protested. 'A sugar mummy is a wealthy woman who provides goodies for a male friend, sort of reversing the role of a sugar daddy.'

Both girls were asked to dance at the same time and were jiving with two young men. At the end of the song, the boys exchanged their newly acquired partners as a *rhumba* started playing. The girls were beginning to enjoy themselves.

Mwila was sober when the two girls left the party in order to meet Bwalya's midnight time limit. She was, however, happy to have been to a Lusaka party and to have met many of Musonda's acquaintances.

Although Mwila was a very honest and courteous girl who was naturally ready to learn from new situations, her ignorance of the city parties entertained some scepticism. Apparently the Sisters at school talked about meetings of a similar nature in a religious context, but not the host of cars, exotic clothes worn by both boys and girls, and a lavish supply of drinks. There were all sorts of goodies too, which even in those days were hard to come by. For a while, Mwila went into a twilight state, totally disoriented in space. Things were becoming confused with the biblical heaven Sister Mary used to sing so much about at school.

The following day, Mwenya reassured her that the *somba* sessions at home weren't any different. But she also gave her a strong word of caution. 'No booze!' she said. 'These party fellas are only out for one thing, to entice young and innocent girls. Enjoy the occasion, but, be alert and keep your composure,' she emphasised. Mwila nodded.

At another party at another house in Woodlands, Musonda and Mwila had just arrived and both were drinking *Cinzano*. With Musonda's influence, Mwila had come to believe that many young girls took alcohol just to be sociable. She had therefore quickly graduated into the city's boozing elite.

An elderly but smartly dressed bald-headed gentleman walked straight up to Musonda. He was tall and carried his pot belly happily.

'Remember me?' he asked, smiling broadly.

'Yes, of course,' Musonda answered.

'How are you?' he asked.

'I'm super!' Musonda replied.

'Who is this beauty with you?' he paused. 'Would you care to . . . ?'

'Just come with me,' Musonda interrupted, walking towards Mwila.

'This is Mwila, my best friend,' Musonda introduced her, holding Mwila's hand. 'And Mwila, this Mr . . .'

'Call me Kangwa!' he interrupted.

'He is the Under Secretary in the Ministry of Science and Technology,' Musonda confirmed.

'I am glad to meet you, Mwila!' Kangwa said with a radiant smile.

'So am I,' Mwila replied shyly.

'Mwila, would you care for a dance?' Kangwa asked wasting no time.

'Certainly,' Mwila answered. They moved off together in a corner, near the record player.

They danced well and a number of people stopped talking and watched them.

After the second *rhumba* ended, they stood against the wall watching the others.

'Have you stayed in Lusaka for long?' Kangwa asked.

'No,' Mwila answered, 'just about nine months now.'

'That's a long time,' Kangwa said. 'Where have you been hiding then?'

'I don't go out much, sir,' Mwila answered to Kangwa's embarrassment.

They talked for a while and then Kangwa brought some drinks across to her.

'How about some fresh air?' Kangwa asked, his eyes moving down her neck on to her rounded and pointed breasts.

Mwila did not know what to say, but she eventually shrugged her shoulders as she said, 'I like it in here if you don't mind.'

'It is perfectly all right,' Kangwa assured her.

Kangwa, like most of the big chaps who would readily qualify as sugar daddies, was quick to try and entice this naive-looking, but attractive beauty. He realised that a girl fresh from the village was a hard nut to crack, but that once she crumbled; she would be the most vulnerable prey. He really was out to impress, and he did so to the annoyance of the school leavers. He talked about his busy schedule with the forthcoming national Development Plan and about the new premises of his ministry headquarters. He mentioned everything possible in the short time and how close he was to the ministers. Finally, he talked about how he would love Mwila to be in his company always.

The young men in the party who knew boss Kangwa regarded him as a big-city bluffer, who grossly abused his position to cheat and exploit young girls, whom they also fancied. They had just learnt of their G.C.E results and thought this would have been more interesting conversation for Mwila. However, Musonda and Mwila were assured of a free ride back home that late evening, and if they so wanted, a longer one to Munda Wanga Botanical Gardens the following Saturday afternoon.

At about 00.45 hours, Kangwa gave the two girls a lift in his automatic Mercedes Benz. Musonda was conveniently dropped first. Then Kangwa stopped in front of Bwalya's house, and they talked in the car for a short while, but Mwila was getting concerned as she realised it was past midnight.

'If you need help when you are looking for a job or when you are in any kind of trouble, do not hesitate to contract me,' Kangwa offered.

There was silence.

'You look pretty young and innocent,' Kangwa continued. 'It would be a pleasure to help you. No strings attached of course,' he assured.

'Thank you very much for the lift,' Mwila said, opening the car door. 'It was a pleasure meeting you.'

'Just a minute,' Kangwa said, putting his right hand in the pocket of his jacket. He reached for his business card.

'Here,' Kangwa said, his right arm fully extended.

'This is my address,' he emphasised. 'You can come to my office any time, or you can give me a ring,' he said as Mwila collected the card and put it in her handbag without looking at it.

'Bye-bye,' Kangwa said romantically.

'Goodnight, sir!' Mwila replied as she walked away before he started the engine.

Mwila opened the front door with a spare key and then tiptoed to her bedroom. She put on the side lamp, opened her bag, and took out the card. It read:

*James Kangwa Chamunda,
Under Secretary,
Ministry of Science and Technology,
P.O. Box RW 125
Lusaka
Tel: 76621 Ext. 2*

She put the card back in her bag. 'I don't think I shall ever find any need for it,' she said to herself. She almost threw it away.

The following day, Kangwa was the subject of the girls' conversation.

'It seems to me that Kangwa fancies you,' Musonda suggested. 'He is rich, and he has class. You are lucky.'

'What am I lucky for?' Mwila complained.

'He is too old for me and already married,' she said. 'Just where in his life can I fit in?'

'You wait and see. Kangwa would be a perfect sugar daddy,' Musonda advised. 'He would give you money, expensive presents, and can even find you a good job,' she added.

'How about his wife?' Mwila asked. 'What if she found out?'

'As long as he gives you what you want, what the young boys can't afford, you would be a very happy girl, and his wife is his own business,' she stressed.

Mwila looked at Musonda without saying a word.

'I can assure you,' Musonda emphasised, 'the best man for you right now is a sugar daddy. He'll give you everything you need: Money, clothes . . . Anything at all.'

'Really?' Mwila exclaimed. She laughed. 'Is this some kind of a joke?'

'I'm not joking,' Musonda replied. She sounded serious. 'I swear. They are very generous.'

'You sound so certain!' Mwila exclaimed. 'Now tell me. Have you ever had a sugar daddy yourself?'

'Of course I have!' Musonda replied, promptly. 'Did you think I was theorising? No! I'm speaking from experience.'

'You mean, he left . . .?'

'Yes!' Musonda agreed, interrupting. 'It was over!' She took some breath in and sighed it out. 'No! He left me!'

'I'm sorry,' Mwila said. 'Tell me what happened if you don't mind. How did it end?'

Musonda explained how she had met her sugar daddy at a party one night and how their friendship had quickly developed and flourished. The sugar daddy had lavishly furnished her flat. He had bought wall to wall carpets, a television set, and a double bed. He also bought her several dresses and many pairs of shoes and constantly showered her with expensive presents. He had really squandered his money and attention on her.

Mwila listened attentively.

'In short, we had a very good time together here in Lusaka and sometimes in other parts of the country as well,' Musonda went on. 'Then one night, I was with another man in the flat. We were fast asleep when the sugar daddy surprised us! I can't forget that night.' She sighed.

'You mean you didn't lock the doors?' Mwila asked.

'We did,' Musonda replied. 'He used his spare key. But I never expected him that night. He had gone on a trip.'

'Then what exactly happened that night?' Mwila asked anxiously.

'He shouted and insulted us. He set on the younger man and hit him repeatedly with an iron bar. There was a pool of blood on the bed. That is how it ended,' Musonda said, 'in a pool of blood!'

'But that was a savage attack!' Mwila exclaimed. 'Didn't the younger man file for assault?'

'He was going to,' Musonda replied, 'but they discovered that both of them came from neighbouring villages in Choma district.'

'So what?' Mwila asked emotionally. 'I think it is right that such offenders are punished!'

'Besides being married, both had very senior positions in the government. The publicity would have ruined them,' Musonda said.

'And did he apologise later or try to make it up with you?' Mwila asked.

'He didn't,' Musonda answered. 'But the following day, he sent a removal truck. They swept the flat. They cleared it of everything he had bought for me.'

'Oh no!' Mwila exclaimed. 'You mean he left your flat bare?'

'Bare like a squash court!' Musonda agreed nodding. 'And worst of all, the same day, the furniture and all items from my flat were delivered into another girl's flat. That annoyed me more.'

'And that girl, could she be a relative?' Mwila asked.

'No. She was another girlfriend!' Musonda replied. 'I used to suspect, but I had no evidence. Now, everyone knows.'

'That was a terrible experience!' Mwila exclaimed, sighing. 'May be that is all the reason why young girls should not risk their future with sugar daddies.' She suggested.

They stared at each other, and they smiled simultaneously. 'But, in spite of my personal misfortune, the sugar daddies are the best by far!' Musonda insisted. 'They have the goodies and are very generous. The young men are exactly the stark opposite. They expect money and presents from their girlfriends instead. They have nothing to offer, except empty promises of marriage.'

'Are you really sure about that?' Mwila challenged.

'I'm serious!' Musonda retorted. 'Most young men, especially in the cities, will promise you the sun when they can't even touch the moon for you.'

Mwila laughed. It reminded her of her mother; she had similar views about young men. The girls were interrupted by Chama who came to call Mwila for dinner. However, for the rest of that night Mwila thought about the nice drinks, a variety of foods, the boys and Kangwa's offers, though she had a natural aversion to older men. To her, Kangwa was just another Chisunka, but this time in a Benz and the means to find her a job. A living for Mwila totally obliged to Kangwa for a life? Not a bad idea if Kangwa meant to help her honestly, but Kangwa was not a man running a Cheshire home for charity. His real intentions were glaring right from the outset!

It was a Friday, and Mwila and her friend had arranged to go to watch a film that night. She hurried to Musonda's flat.

'How was your day at the office?' Mwila asked as she entered Musonda's flat, after knocking.

'Oh, so, so,' Musonda answered, sounding uncertain. 'My boss is away on a business trip, so I had a lazy day.'

'Business trip, where did he go?' Mwila asked, showing keen interest.

'He went to East Africa, and he won't be back until next weekend,' Musonda explained.

'Does that mean you won't have much to do next week?' Mwila asked.

'Not really,' Musonda replied. 'I'll be working for one of the partners in the firm.'

The girls left the flat and were hurriedly walking towards the bus stop when a white Peugeot 504 suddenly stopped a few metres in front of them. Mwila looked at Musonda.

'There is still plenty of time before the film starts,' Mwila whispered. 'I'm sure we can catch a bus into town.'

Musonda did not answer as they walked on up to the car. The driver of the car, a tall handsome man, came out and shouted, 'How far are you going, girls?' He took off his dark sunglasses, which he obviously didn't need as it was getting dark already.

'Just into town,' Musonda replied calmly.

'We are going your way, and for sure we can give you a lift,' the driver offered.

Musonda whispered something to Mwila, after which she said, 'Thank you, it is very kind of you.'

The girls entered the car which then zoomed off at a very high speed.

'My name is Bwanga,' the driver introduced himself, slowing down a bit, and I must say I'm happy to meet beautiful girls for the first time today.' The girls exchanged glances and smiled. 'What are your names, girls?' Bwanga asked bluntly.

'My name is Musonda, and my friend is Mwila,' Musonda replied, looking at Bwanga. 'And what are the names of your friends?' she asked.

'Oh yes, I was coming to that,' Bwanga replied. 'This is Ngoma, and this is Mwanza. Both are my good pals,' he concluded, firmly pressing on the accelerator. The car was moving very fast, but he controlled it smoothly indeed, to the delight of the two girls who were obviously impressed with his handling of the machine.

Mwanza was asking the girls about what they did for a living when Bwanga rudely interrupted, 'Where exactly in town shall I drop you?'

'Anywhere along Cairo Road,' Mwila replied. 'But maybe near the Twentieth Century Cinema would be better.'

'Do you mean you are going to watch 007?' Bwanga asked, sighing. 'I mean James Bond.'

'Yes,' Musonda replied. 'Have you seen it?'

'What a coincidence!' Bwanga exclaimed. 'We are also going to watch the same film. My friends and I adore 007. We never miss his movies.'

The boys had watched the film the previous night and had been on their way to a bar when they met the girls. If given the chance, Mwanza would certainly have preferred to proceed to the bar, to quench his dry throat, but he kept quiet in order not to spoil things for his friend Bwanga, who didn't have a reputation as a fast catcher for nothing. Bwanga was also proud and sarcastic. Without any arguments, the girls agreed to watch the film together with the three total strangers.

They watched *You Only Live Twice* starring Sean Connery as James Bond.

'It is your lucky day,' Bwanga said as they were leaving the Twentieth Century Cinema. 'We shall take you back home.' It was obvious that Bwanga paid more attention to the tall, dark-haired Mwila, as they drove back to Chilenje South. He complemented her in the presence of the others. 'You have such lovely large brown eyes. They shine like a morning star.' Mwila looked at him scrutinisingly; he was handsome even with his red eyes. That is how the friendship started between Mwila and Bwanga.

Within two weeks of their meeting, the friendship between them was blossoming in spite of the fact that they hardly knew each other. Mwila was

encouraged by Musonda not to resist the advances of the sweet-talking and boastful Bwanga.

'After all,' she would argue, 'it was fashion in the city for girls to have boyfriends and/or sugar daddies.'

Bwanga and Mwila used to meet at Musonda's flat, and from there, they would drive to Bwanga's flat. Bwalya and his family knew nothing about Bwanga; his relationship with Mwila remained a closely guarded secret between the two girls.

The girls were in Musonda's flat one evening when Bwanga entered without knocking.

'What a surprise!' Musonda exclaimed. 'We didn't even hear your footsteps.'

'He walks like a chameleon,' Mwila joked.

'I wanted to take you by surprise,' Bwanga said, depositing himself on the sofa between the two girls.

'You are making us uncomfortable,' Mwila protested.

'He's making me warm!' Musonda argued.

'You are a nice girl, Musonda,' Bwanga said, patting her shoulder.

'How was your day, girls?' Bwanga asked, changing the subject.

'My day was rather boring,' Musonda answered.

'Mine was rather quiet,' Mwila replied. She stretched her arms and yawned.

'We didn't know you were calling tonight,' Mwila said. 'Have you run out of your ambitious programmes today?'

'I didn't want to warn you,' Bwanga replied.

'Why?' Musonda asked hurriedly.

'To see what you are up to when you are on your own,' he replied cynically.

'You mean you do not trust us?' Mwila asked, getting slightly emotional.

'Women should be loved,' Bwanga said casually, 'but not trusted!'

'How can you love someone you don't trust?' Musonda protested.

'It is not nice to say such things,' Mwila agreed. 'If it is a joke, it is in bad taste!'

'Come on, girls, don't get excited for nothing,' Bwanga said. 'I came here in good faith and not for a confrontation.'

He gazed at both girls.

'Hey, it's not like you to throw in the towel so quickly,' Musonda said teasingly. 'Tell us what's up?'

'You know I can't always make appointments,' Bwanga argued. 'It is not in our culture.' He sighed. 'I came over to take both of you girls out tonight,' he continued confidently. 'We shall go to the drive-in cinema for a change.'

'That sounds nice!' Mwila said. The girls looked at each other and smiled simultaneously.

'Where did you leave my Ngoma?' Musonda asked jokingly. 'I'll bet he isn't coming with us tonight.'

'Of course, he is,' Bwanga answered. 'He is dying to see you, and we shall pick him up on our way. I don't like to be outnumbered in any case.'

'I hope we won't find him already dead!' Musonda joked.

'I bet your kiss of life can revive a two-day-old corpse!' Bwanga joked back.

They all laughed.

Musonda and Ngoma had become casual friends. Theirs was much more a pairing of convenience, and they didn't meet as often as Bwanga and Mwila did.

Mwila and Musonda entered the bedroom to change their clothes and get ready. Without the knowledge of the Bwalya and his wife, Mwila had transferred a few of her clothes to Musonda's flat. This was for convenience so that they would not know every time she went out.

Bwanga was smoking a cigarette when the girls reappeared. He put it out and threw it in the ashtray.

'You look ravishing. I could swallow you right now!' Bwanga said, holding Mwila's hand.

'Thank you,' Mwila accepted the compliment heartily. 'How about me?' Musonda challenged. 'How do I look in my new skirt?'

'You look alluring too!' Bwanga said flatteringly. 'In fact, I feel like I can take both of you on at the same time!' Mwila and Musonda exchanged glances and were laughing when Bwanga called out to Mwila, 'Honey, your slip is showing. Come; let me pull it up for you.'

'Thank you,' Mwila replied. 'I shall manage.' She pulled the shoulder strap of her petticoat so that it wouldn't show below the hem.

After collecting Ngoma, they joined the southbound road, which passed by the Lido Drive-In Cinema. It was the only drive-in cinema in the capital. The car was running at about 120 kph when Ngoma remarked, 'Not again!' There was a long queue of cars in front of them on the road.

'These gendarmes always choose the wrong time for their stupid road blocks,' Bwanga said angrily.

There were four uniformed policemen at the road block, two of them armed with automatic rifles. They were checking driving licences and defects on the cars. Any car found with major defects or considered not road-worthy were impounded. Such cars could only be collected from a police station in the city after payment of a fine. Soon, it was their turn to be checked.

'Your driving licence, sir,' the policeman said politely.

He was fat and strongly built.

'I left it at home,' Bwanga replied. 'It is not a law to carry them around.'

The police officer put down something in his notebook.

'Your horn? Your wipers?' Bwanga complied.

'Put your car in neutral and apply your handbrakes,' the policeman commanded.

Two police officers went behind the car and tried hard to push it. The car did not move confirming that the handbrakes were okay.

'Can I open your boot?' a thin, tall policeman requested politely.

'Do you think I'm carrying explosives?' Bwanga asked, mockingly. Musonda and Ngoma laughed.

'Just give him the keys,' Mwila advised frowning. 'And let him do his job.'

When the police had finished with them, the fat officer said, 'Next time, mister, do carry your driving licence with you and don't try to be too smart or else you will be detained. You understand?'

'Yes, Officer!' it was Ngoma who answered, and not the driver.

They had been at the road block for about twenty minutes, and the film was almost starting. They drove through the entrance of the cinema and bought their tickets. They enjoyed the film. They were happy and in an exuberant mood when it ended.

* * *

It was a hot Friday afternoon, even with the wind blowing strongly. Bwanga did not report for duty that day. He had given a false excuse that he was ill and was going to the hospital. He floundered restlessly on his bed. Many thoughts crossed his mind. He wondered why Mwila had not shown up yet. It was 16.30 hours, but they had arranged that she would come at 14.00 hours.

There was a faint knock at the door. He sat up in bed and shouted, 'Who is it?'

The door opened further, and he could see her face. Her voice was soft and low as she closed the door behind her. 'I thought you might have given up on me. I was delayed at home by Auntie.'

'Welcome, honey,' Bwanga said, beaming. 'Gee! You are dressed to kill!'

'Thank you,' she replied.

'What have you done today?' she asked, putting her handbag on top of the dressing table.

'Nothing much,' he said. 'I prepared and had my lunch. Since then I have been waiting for you. It was a long wait.'

'Really?' she exclaimed. 'I'm sorry I'm late.' She sat down on the bed beside Bwanga, who took a cigarette from the packet on top of the drawers. He put the cigarette in his mouth and lit it.

They sat there in silence for a while, and then he broke the ice and said: 'Look here, Mwila, you are the only love in the world that I care about. But you look so tensed, as if you were with a complete stranger. Don't you trust me?'

'You know I do,' Mwila answered. 'Otherwise I wouldn't be here with you alone.'

'That I know and appreciate,' he said, 'but I would be happier if you felt free and relaxed!'

Bwanga stood up and walked into the kitchen. He brought a chilled bottle of Cinzano from the small refrigerator. He expertly poured the drink into two glasses and gave her one. 'Cheers,' he said, raising his glass.

'Cheers,' she replied as their glasses clicked. They sat there drinking and chatting.

She put her hands down and stared at him. He could clearly see the outline of her pretty face. 'Darling,' he said holding her hand, 'you are the most beautiful girl I have ever known.'

He sighed.

'Thank you,' Mwila said. 'But you may only be flattering me or are you not?'

'Flattery?' he laughed. 'Oh no! I don't flatter girls. I tell them exactly what I feel and what I want.'

'Then what do you want from me?' she asked intelligently.

'I need you and will want you forever,' he said engagingly, as their eyes met.

'I don't understand,' she argued. 'What do you mean?'

'I love you so much. I would like to marry you, honey,' he said.

They looked at each other again and laughed, holding hands. Suddenly, she broke hold of his hand. 'Why do you love me?' she demanded.

'I love you because you are so beautiful, cheerful, understanding, and wonderful company,' he said confidently as if he had rehearsed it several times.

'It is nice to hear that,' she said. 'But I guess you say so to all the girls you meet.'

'Just have faith and be patient. Then I'll show you that I mean every word I said,' he replied assuringly.

He held both her hands and pulled her gently towards himself. His lips met hers—they were medium-sized and well-shaped, and before she realised what was happening, they were kissing fervently.

'You are sweet, honey,' he complimented. He kissed her lightly on her forehead, then on either side of her neck before their lips met again, and they kissed passionately.

'Please, Bwanga, don't,' she pleaded as he tried to undo her zip. 'Don't spoil such a nice day!'

'Are you scared of me?' he asked mockingly.

'No,' she answered. 'Except I don't want to do anything foolish.'

'Just trust me,' he said. 'I won't do anything against your will. Let's just have some fun.' He kissed her hand and held her tight.

'Do you love me?' he asked.

'Yes, I do,' she replied.

He squeezed her further. He realised that she was trembling. Then suddenly, she lost her resistance and was clinging to him; their lips remained inseparable. Her body was trembling as their young hearts throbbed in unison.

They stared at each other in the semi-darkness. They were completely lost in their own small world, and without realising it, both of them were seized and caught in a torrent of desire, and only with their devils their guides, they plunged into the fiery pleasure of their small hells. And hell it was!

Bwanga woke up and glanced at the window. The time was 20.30 hours. He then turned to look at Mwila, who was still lying on the bed with her eyes closed. He touched her gently.

She pushed her arm away. Her eyes were suddenly open; tears were running down from them.

'What's wrong?' he asked. 'Did I hurt you?'

She shook her head.

He tried to comfort her but with no success. She got out of bed in a quick motion. Her hair was undone, but her black shiny body looked very

pretty. She picked up her clothes. She was still sobbing as she stood there dressing up. Using a small mirror from her handbag, she combed her hair very quickly.

'Why don't you use the dressing mirror?' he asked. There was short silence, and when she replied, it had nothing to do with his question.

'You should take me back now,' she commanded. 'I feel rotten, and I'm disgusted with myself.' She stalked from the bedroom and entered the sitting room. She sat down on a sofa, her head low, before Bwanga joined her.

'I'm sorry if that's the way you feel,' he said. 'I realised it was your first time, but I still found you very good.' He smiled.

She did not reply.

They exchanged very few words on their way to Chilenje South.

The next morning, Mwila was still upset and angry, angry at herself for giving in to Bwanga's persistent passion. Virginitv was next to purity, she had been taught, and now she had tossed it. It had been lost in a moment of fervent submissiveness.

As she surveyed her face in the mirror and stared deep into her own eyes, tears began to fall and blurred her vision. She realised that her youthfulness and innocence had just ended. Allowing the tears to roll down her flushed cheeks, she pressed her abdomen and felt an inner soreness. Although sex was painful and not as wonderful as Mwila had imagined, there was a certain mystery about it that had thrilled her the previous night.

Suddenly, Mwila's thoughts were filled with the teachings of the Church, she shook vividly and felt quite ill at the idea that she had greatly sinned. Feeling very low and frustrated, she sought Musonda's advice.

'Oh! That's good news!' her experienced friend replied to Mwila's whispered confession. 'Join the club! I hope it wasn't too painful for you.'

Mwila was totally confused at these remarks.

Musonda comforted her friend and learnt through the sobs about Mwila's wretchedness. The serious talk that followed between the girls set Mwila's mind at rest, and she felt convinced that she had experienced a very natural event, which had been experienced by numerous girls at earlier ages than her. So, how could she have committed such a terrible sin?

When alone again, Mwila examined her body in the full-length mirror. She had to admit to herself that she had a mature beautiful body. 'I'm not ashamed of my body,' she said to herself. With this new inspiration, Mwila lived the days that followed with fresh optimism.

Somehow the forbidden fruit invited Mwila back to Bwanga, and she yielded more readily when he wanted her.

9

Saturday came; it was bright and warm under the smiling Zambian sun. Mwila was busy washing clothes and cleaning the house. Afterwards, she took a shower and put on her new dress which was bought for her by Bwanga, although she had no intention of going out that night.

At his flat some eight kilometres away, Bwanga also put on his new grey suit which he had bought at the second-class trading area at the end of the month. He entered his car and drove slowly to Lusaka Hotel on Cairo Road. At the hotel, he entered the Bambino Lounge, which was a convenient meeting place for many well-to-do young men. It was also notorious for gossip, and many rumours in the capital originated from there.

Bwanga walked over to the bar counter and just then he saw an old friend seated in a quiet corner. He went over to greet him.

'Hellow, chief!' Bwanga greeted, extending his arms to him.

'Hellow, Bwanga,' Mwindula replied as they shook hands. 'I'm glad to see you.'

'Long time no see,' Bwanga observed. 'Did you go out of town for a while?'

'Me? No,' Mwindula answered. 'I have been kind of busy. I never left town. Please, sit down, I'm all alone.'

Bwanga sat next to Mwindula who was having his third beer for the evening. They smiled at each other.

'Cigarette?' Mwindula asked, advertising a packet of Benson & Hedges from his pocket.

'Yes, please,' Bwanga replied, accepting a cigarette from Mwindula. Bwanga brought out a box of matches, lit his own cigarette and then Mwindula's. They smoked silently for a while.

'What is happening in the city?' Bwanga asked discreetly, freeing his mouth of the short cigarette end.

'You should have a drink first,' Mwindula responded.

'What would you take?'

'Mosi, please,' Bwanga replied.

Mwindula stood up and walked over to the bar counter. He brought back two bottles of beer, a Mosi and the milder Muchinga, and one clean tumbler. He poured the drink for Bwanga and then held out the glass full of beer to him. 'Cheers!' Mwindula said.

'Cheers!' Bwanga echoed, raising his own in reply.

They had a few drinks and talked about many general things. Then suddenly Mwindula said, 'The cost of living has been quite a prominent issue in the press this week.'

Bwanga smiled.

'It is no longer the cost of living, but rather that of dying!' Mwindula continued.

Bwanga cleared his throat before he answered saying, 'I don't see much that the government can do. If they subsidised every item in the shops, where will the money for education, health services, and the much-needed development come from?'

Mwindula paused and gazed at him before he said, 'The problem is that although the prices of essential items are increasing, the salaries are almost static, and we can therefore see the value of the kwacha going down.'

'I wouldn't say that!' Bwanga protested, raising his voice. 'Firstly, Zambia pays some of the highest salaries in Southern and East Africa. Secondly, people still get their annual increments, and also many Zambians since independence have moved into the high-salary earning bracket.'

'Yes,' Mwindula agreed. 'What you have stated are facts which could easily make you eligible for a senior post in the ruling party. But I'm afraid the comparison of salaries is not that simple,' he concluded. 'In East Africa, for example, where the salaries are low, they enjoy a low cost of living; what you earn is not as important as how much it can buy you.'

They exchanged glances, as if each one was sizing the other up before Bwanga replied, 'People here are just fussy about the cost of living in other countries.' Bwanga maintained. 'Many have never even gone to these countries but believe in everything they read, or every rumour they hear, especially rumours emanating from this bar!'

They both laughed.

Mwindula offered another cigarette to Bwanga and lit it for him. Then he asked, 'Oh, by the way, are you still working for the government?'

'No,' Bwanga replied. 'I work for Dixon Motors now.'

'What exactly do you do?' Mwindula inquired casually.

'I'm an assistant mechanic,' Bwanga answered. 'I'm in the servicing section.'

'What are your specific duties,' Mwindula asked, paying more attention.

'We receive cars, service them, and give them trial runs.'

'How lucky!' Mwindula stated. 'I wish I were you.'

'What do you mean?' Bwanga asked, looking Mwindula firmly in the eye.

'If I were in your shoes,' Mwindula said, 'I would not worry about the high cost of living. In fact, I would be a rich man in a very short time!'

'To be frank with you,' Bwanga said, 'even though my salary is higher than in my previous job, I'm still terribly underpaid. I have to make sacrifices to make ends meet.' He looked at his new suit.

'The majority of rich men in this country are not those getting high salaries,' Mwindula advised. 'But those with vision enough to plan well.'

'Some businesses are obviously paying off,' Bwanga replied. 'But a business needs substantial capital today.'

'In your kind of business,' Mwindula stated, 'one does not require any capital, but brains to be successful.'

'I disagree,' Bwanga protested confidently.

'Before you disagree,' Mwindula cautioned, 'listen to what I would do if I had your chances. With the access to cars as you have, I could easily get into the spare parts business. Of course, it isn't what you would show the tax collector, but I can assure you it's a foolproof path to riches!'

'Aren't you building castles in the air?' asked Bwanga cynically.

'No, my friend, its castles firmly on the ground that I'm building!' He paused as if to allow Bwanga time to absorb his stimulating words.

'We can make it work,' Mwindula continued confidently. 'However, we can only discuss details if we agree to form a partnership,' he stated, looking at Bwanga.

Bwanga did not reply. He just stared at him.

'Well,' Mwindula said, 'shall we or shall we not?'

'I wouldn't be committed,' Bwanga replied, 'unless I like your plan.'

'I won't tell you unless you are willing to take part,' Mwindula insisted.

Bwanga thought for a while and then nodded.

'Excellent!' Mwindula announced excitedly.

'Now the details,' Bwanga demanded impatiently.

'Let's start with your assignment,' Mwindula said. 'For how long are you in possession of the car keys during servicing?'

'At least all morning,' Bwanga replied. 'And then cars are collected any time in the afternoon.'

'Very good!' Mwindula observed. 'We have plenty of time for action.'

'What action?' Bwanga inquired rather impetuously.

'Just listen to me for a while,' Mwindula cautioned. 'When cars are brought in, you should select the ones which can be dismantled without the greatest difficulty. Take all the details you can on them such as registration number, colour, owners, and their addresses where possible. Then the keys of these target cars should be duplicated in the morning. Every day after work, you'll pass the duplicate keys and the information to me,' he instructed.

'I think I can manage that in spite of all the risks involved,' Bwanga said. 'But there is no way we can duplicate the keys. The law requires that car keys can only be duplicated on production of the ownership certificate.' He smiled uneasily.

'I know about that,' Mwindula replied, calmly. 'But it is no major obstacle either.'

'No obstacle!' Bwanga exclaimed. 'It is a great problem!'

'I know a trusted friend,' Mwindula answered. 'He is a supervisor at Kanyama Corporation, where they duplicate keys. We can approach him, and he won't let us down.'

'Why do you think he can risk his neck for us?' Bwanga asked. 'We shall make him an offer he can't refuse,' Mwindula replied, assuringly.

'What is his name?' Bwanga asked. Mwindula hesitated, and then he murmured, 'Nsefu. We can count on him.'

'You sound as if he knows about this already,' Bwanga said suspiciously.

'I wouldn't put it like that,' Mwindula replied, 'but he had given me his consent indirectly. He doesn't have to know the details. They are for you and me.'

'Then what shall we do with the keys and the information?' Bwanga asked, sounding unconvinced.

'That will be my department,' Mwindula replied. 'I shall track down these cars until they disappear. We shall drive them to a very safe place away from the noise of the city and the prying eyes of the police. Our profit will come from the sale of their parts!'

Their discussion was long and serious, but they eventually agreed to open a 'car spares shop' of which Mwindula would be full-time manager

and Bwanga a co-manager. Nscfu was to handle the duplication of keys and would become a junior partner. They also agreed to employ a few trusted friends in the operation, but these were not to know about the highly secretive nature of 'Operation Chuma.' Mwindula seemed to have worked out all the details in advance, which made Bwanga slightly apprehensive.

They finally agreed to allocate the shares of this capitalless but potentially viable operation as follows:

Bwanga	40%
Mwindula	40%
Nscfu	20%

It was 23.00 hours, and one ugly fat waiter shouted, 'It is time up. Finish your drinks please.'

'We have finished our business anyway,' Bwanga retorted, facing the fat waiter.

'Yes, partner,' Mwindula replied. 'All we need now is to be shrewd and confident, and we shall soon surrender our rags for riches.'

They shook hands vigorously, and Bwanga replied, 'Perfectly right, partner. I can't see how we can fail in this sophisticated operation.'

They raised their glasses, and Mwindula said, 'To our success and the future of Operation Chuma,' as their glasses clicked.

'Cheers, partner,' Bwanga replied.

Operation Chuma started well, and the plan was followed to the letter. Stolen cars were driven on a dusty gravel road to a farmhouse about twenty-five kilometres west of Lusaka. It was no coincidence that this house with a secluded and well-equipped underground garage belonged to none other than Mwindula. Parts from stolen cars were removed without any great fears. Unwanted parts were dumped secretly several kilometres away from the house under the cover of darkness.

A small car spares shop was opened on Chachacha Road with the name PEOPLE'S CAR SPARES SHOP. There was no way anyone, including the 'nose and sometimes efficient police officers,' would connect the missing cars in the city with the car parts sold in the new People's Shop. Selling car spares was a booming business despite the fact that prices had rocketed due to the shortage of spares. The added attraction at the People's Shop was that they offered a 10 per cent discount for cash payments.

The phone rang, but Bwanga hesitated before he picked up the receiver. 'Hello,' he said, 'this is Bwanga speaking.'

'How are you, comrade?' said the voice at the other end.

'I'm perfectly fine, partner,' Bwanga replied, recognising Mwindula's voice. 'I'm in a hurry, and I shall come right to the point,' Mwindula said. 'We have a problem!'

'What problem?' Bwanga interrupted.

'Nothing to worry about,' Mwindula reassured him. 'But we need to hold an emergency board meeting to discuss our expansion programme.'

'Oh! I thought we would worry about that after we got the necessary capital,' Bwanga cautioned.

'Money is no longer our problem,' Mwindula replied merrily, 'but how to spend it.'

'How much do you think we have in the kitty?' Bwanga anxiously requested.

'K140, 000 this morning, and we could have more by the month end.'

'That is very good news,' Bwanga said excitedly. 'I didn't realise we would make it so fast. So you were definitely right, partner.'

'When can we hold the meeting, then?' Mwindula asked.

'Saturday afternoon is okay for me,' Bwanga suggested.

'All right then,' Mwindula agreed. 'We shall meet at the shop 14.30 hours on Saturday. I shall inform comrade Nsefu about the time and venue.'

'Thanks for ringing,' Bwanga said, putting down the receiver.

Bwanga was very busy since the inception of the operation, and he did not see Mwila as often as before. However, on a Friday, they had arranged to go out for a drink. They went to the Pelican Bar, some eight kilometres south of the city.

'You must be extremely busy these days,' Mwila told him after he had ordered their first round of drinks.

'We have a shortage of staff,' he answered, 'and I'm being made to work overtime.' He knew he was lying, but he didn't want to give her a hint which might allow her to ask for details of what he was doing.

Their discussion was interrupted by a fat, short waitress, who quickly brought their drinks. Bwanga liked the speed with which they were served and tipped her discreetly in appreciation. '*Zikomo kwambiri!*' the waitress thanked him in Nyanja.

'Overtime!' Mwila reminded, sipping at her Babycham. 'That means more money.' She looked at his blank face.

'It isn't much,' he muttered, lighting his cigarette.

'Is anything wrong, Bwanga?' she asked. 'I have a feeling that you are not happy.'

'I'm feeling a little low,' he agreed. 'Maybe I have a cold.' He held her hand. They were soon joined by friends and so they changed the topic.

On their way back, Mwila noticed that Bwanga was still somewhat subdued. He was quiet most of the time. It was unlike him.

'Shall I make you some tea?' she offered after they had arrived at the flat.

'I would prefer a beer, thank you,' he replied.

She brought out a beer from the refrigerator and poured it into a glass for him. She drank red Cinzano herself.

'How is your aunt?' he inquired, to break the obvious silence.

'She is okay,' Mwila replied. 'But she is not as cheerful as she used to be at the time I came from the village.'

'Maybe you don't help her with housework as much as you used to do then,' he suggested mockingly.

'That could be the main reason,' she replied. 'But she is also too demanding at times. In fact, I should start looking for a job soon. I don't like rotting away in that house.'

'Oh, yes!' he exclaimed. 'What kind of job will you be looking for?'

'I'm not sure, but I think I can work as a clerk in an office,' she replied.

'Jobs are not easy these days without any training,' he reminded her. 'Why can't you do some training first and then look for a job afterwards?'

'I have thought of going to college to do a secretarial course,' she said. 'but it is six months before the next term starts. I feel bored staying at home all day.' He studied her. 'Come and sit here,' he invited.

She obeyed. They sat there gazing at each other, and their closeness generated warmth. She looked at him again and smiled gently. 'Are you hard up financially?' he asked, squeezing her hand.

'In a way I am,' she replied, 'but that's not the main reason for my wanting to find something to keep me busy. I hate staying at home and doing nothing special.'

'When you need money,' he said, 'do not hesitate to ask me. What is mine is yours,' he emphasised, patting her shoulder.

She did not answer, except for a bright smile.

'I do love you, Mwila,' he murmured.

'I love you too,' she replied, smiling luminously. They felt close to each other. He leant forward to put his lips on hers. When she responded delicately, he drew her closer. She gave herself unreservedly to him.

Saturday afternoon came, and Bwanga drove to the People's Shop. Mwindula and Nsefu were already seated in the small office when he arrived. He apologised for coming late.

Mwindula was voted chairman of the meeting, but it was agreed that in future, chairmanship would rotate among the three of them on a quarterly basis.

Mwindula took the chair. 'I hope we all know why we are here,' he said, distributing typed sheets of paper. 'I am glad to report that we are making a profit at a fast rate as expected.' He was obviously modest. 'However, it is unwise to put all our eggs in one basket. We need to diversify our activities in order to have some security.'

There was silence, and then Nsefu put up his hand. 'What exactly do you have in mind, Mr Chairman? Are we not happy that we are making a quick profit from our current venture?'

'Let's have a look at the projections for the next two years,' Mwindula suggested. They all read the typed papers, with interest. The report summarised the activities of the PEOPLE'S CAR SPARES SHOP and the profit made in the first six months. The last section was headed 'projections for the next two years'. In this section, Mwindula suggested that they start a taxi company.

'Mr Chairman,' Bwanga said excitedly. 'The projections look very interesting, and since a taxi service is already a proven viable business in this country, wouldn't it suffice if we wind up this rather risky operation and use the money for the taxi service?'

The chairman replied immediately, 'we would hardly have spent so much time and labour planning and starting the operation if it was going to last only for six months. We have just started and so we can't think of stopping with signs of sweet success in sight. It is risky, I agree, but the rule is to never get caught.' He sounded very confident.

'I think it is a reasonably safe operation,' Nsefu said, 'in the short term.'

'What do you mean by short term?' Bwanga retorted.

'A few years,' Nsefu replied.

'And in the long term?' asked Bwanga, raising his voice.

'Now, let's not panic,' Mwindula interrupted. 'I believe we can do very well if we implement the plan I have circulated to you comrades.'

'I would like to point out one thing, Mr Chairman,' Bwanga said. 'Although your proposals are excellent, won't we remain vulnerable as long as we continue with Operation Chuma? We should realise that nothing is foolproof with the law.'

'Can't we just take a vote?' Nsefu urged, ignoring Bwanga's warning. 'I'm sure we're clear in our minds now of the direction we should take.'

Mwindula thought for a while and then looked at Bwanga, who remained silent. This was a vital decision which needed a unanimous agreement; otherwise, the chairman would have to cast his vote. That wouldn't be pleasant as Mwindula didn't want to isolate Bwanga at this stage of the operation. He also realised that each one of them played a vital role in the operation. They took the vote.

'Those in favour of a taxi service in addition to Operation Chuma?' Mwindula asked. 'Nsefu?'

'For, Mr Chairman,' Nsefu replied cheerfully. Bwanga faced him across the small table. He did not let his difference with the others show and no one could tell which way he was going to vote. 'Silence! Silence,' then he said loudly.

'For accepting.'

There was further silence. Bwanga looked at Nsefu. He met his glance. 'You made a wise decision,' he seemed to be telling him. Mwindula was happy and could not hide it. He felt a great sense of triumph.

The rest of the meeting was routine. They discussed details of their proposed taxi service, which they decided to name UP-TOWN TAXIS. They were going to start with four cars but then they hoped to expand this business. Like the spares shop, overall management was left to Mwindula.

'Any other business?' asked Mwindula cheerfully.

When the meeting was over, they decided to go for a celebration drink at the Ridgeway Hotel, at the expense of PEOPLE'S CAR SPARES SHOP. They ate, drank, and toasted with champagne, with no regard to cost.

'Maybe some of these diners have already lost their cars!' a drunken Nsefu mumbled, raising his glass of champagne in the direction of people seated at the next table. 'If so, I propose a toast to them in sympathy!' 'Cheers,' the others responded loudly, trying to shut him up.

10

When Mwila missed her period that month, she did not anticipate that the worst could happen. Musonda was the first to be informed. The girls talked about it at length but came to no definite conclusion. In the next few weeks, Mwila endured silent agony, thinking that perhaps she was pregnant or perhaps nature was just playing tricks on her as sometimes it does! The very thought of herself being pregnant conjured up mixed feelings within her.

'How could it happen to me? How can fate be so cruel to me?' she thought sometimes. At other times, she surmised, 'If I am pregnant, how beautiful it is to help to create a new life!' But the agony of not knowing for sure was beginning to be too much for her. She had to tell him.

'I have missed my period,' Mwila said to Bwanga in a low voice.

'It can't be!' he protested. 'Is this some kind of a joke?' he asked anxiously.

'I'm positive!' she answered, staring at him. Bwanga's close set of red eyes widened.

'When did you know?' he requested uneasily.

'Last month,' she replied blankly.

'You mean you have missed two months now?' he asked in a high voice. She nodded.

'Why didn't you tell me immediately?' he demanded.

'Ah!' she hesitated. 'I wasn't sure!' She looked at him and then continued, 'Musonda suggested that it could have been an irregular period.' She paused. 'I am sorry.'

'Oh yes! Musonda!' he shouted, angrily. 'Why should she know before me?'

She did not answer.

'Maybe I shouldn't be worried,' he said, lowering his voice. 'I'm not responsible after all.'

'I have never slept with anyone but you,' she answered emotionally.

'And in any case, how could you go about without taking precautions?' he asked mockingly.

'What precautions?' she asked, not knowing what he was talking about.

'I mean . . . ?' He paused. 'All the girls I know take some kind of contraceptive.' He looked at her.

'I'm not a prostitute to be on the pill perpetually!' She frowned. He stared at her further with obvious ridicule but uttered no word.

She thought he was right even though he was scolding her. However, she also remembered that as a Catholic, it was forbidden to take contraceptives. She thought that he should in any case face the facts.

'It won't help now talking about what we could have done. Just tell me what we shall do. I know my parents will kill me if they find out.'

He then realised that she was near to tears; her large eyes became moist, and tears started running down her apple-shaped cheeks. He held her close. 'Everything will be all right, don't worry,' he said. He took a piece of tissue paper and gently wiped her streaming eyes.

'Who else knows about it?' he asked, still holding her hand.

'Only Musonda,' she replied.

'And your mentor?' Bwanga asked. 'What did she suggest?'

'Who is my mentor?' Mwila asked.

'Musonda, of course!' Bwanga replied. 'Or haven't you consulted her on this?'

'Don't be funny!' Mwila cautioned.

'I'm not being funny!' Bwanga replied. 'I know for a fact that your friend has experience in such things.'

'Hmm!' Mwila frowned.

'Jokes aside,' Bwanga insisted, 'what did she suggest?' He insisted.

'She suggested gin!' Mwila replied.

'Gin!' Bwanga exclaimed. 'I told you. And what did you say?'

'I told her that I don't drink gin!' Mwila replied casually.

Bwanga burst out laughing. He laughed with a kind of scorn that brought tears from his small red eyes.

They talked seriously for a long time. On religious grounds, Mwila didn't approve of having an abortion. She also had strong feelings for Bwanga and would have loved to keep his child.

'But you don't understand . . . not right for the child to be born.'

'You don't always have to know it will be fine.'

'People need to be married children properly. We don't.'

'But you are earning a lot of money.'

'No! I'm not!' he protested.

They looked at each other. Bwanga said, 'Let's not be childish, honey.'

'I'm only thinking about the future afterwards.'

She looked at him, thought for a moment, and said, 'I'm only thinking about the future afterwards.'

'Certainly,' Bwanga encouraged her.

Bwanga was very well known. The doctor used to bring his Fiat to Dixon Motors.

They requested Dr Paterson. The operation would be done without delay.

Two out of two of the necessary tests were done at the government laboratory to make sure.

The laboratory results were good. She had to go on the antenatal clinic.

The terminations were difficult if not impossible. She consulted a psychiatrist and a doctor.

The whole idea was ghastly. She decided to further her education, and on the way to trust him with her future.

Through Musonda's advice, she decided to further her education, although she was a Catholic. She decided to trust him with her future.

After what her church would have said, she sat there totally dejected in her room.

The whole world was crumbling around her. It was Bwanga.

'Hello, love,' he said cheerfully.

'I'm all right,' she replied, rather weakly.

'But you don't understand the consequences,' Bwanga pointed out. 'It is not right for the child to be born under these conditions.'

'You don't always have to look on the bad side of things,' she argued. 'I know it will be fine.'

'People need to be married first and have the money for bringing up children properly. We don't,' he ended abruptly.

'But you are earning a lot of money now,' she said challengingly.

'No! I'm not!' he protested, obviously disturbed by his guilty conscience. They looked at each other. Bwanga moved close to her and held her hand. 'Let's not be childish, honey,' he said confidently. 'Everything will be all right. I'm only thinking about your future, and I want us to get married afterwards.'

She looked at him, thought for a while, and then said, 'Maybe you are right.' She put her head on his shoulder. 'But I would like to think about it.'

'Certainly,' Bwanga encouraged, running his hands through her plaited hair.

Bwanga was very well known to Dr John Patterson at the City Hospital. The doctor used to bring his Fiat 132 for service for a few Kwachas privately at Dixon Motors.

They requested Dr Paterson for a pregnancy test, and he promised that it would be done without delay. The doctor was told that the hospital had run out of two of the necessary reagents. He requested technicians at the government laboratory to make do with the old Zondec test.

The laboratory results were positive. Mwila was definitely pregnant. She had to go on the antenatal list or else get a termination. Officially, terminations were difficult if not impossible for single girls, unless approved by a psychiatrist and a doctor.

The whole idea was ghastly for Mwila. On the one hand, she wanted to further her education, and on the other hand, she knew too little of Bwanga to trust him with her future.

Through Musonda's advice, Mwila was contemplating abortion, although she was a Catholic. She knew that her conscience would never be clear, after what her church would easily call infanticide in utero. The poor girl sat there totally dejected in Musonda's room; her head in her hands, as if the whole world was crumbling around her. Just then she heard a knock at the door. It was Bwanga.

'Hello, love,' he said cheerfully. 'How are you?'

'I'm all right,' she replied, rather unconvincingly.

They went out for a walk, during which time they talked about their enigma. Bwanga suggested the possibility of Dr Patterson helping with a termination at the hospital. The alternative was a reputed traditional healer in Kabanana, a shanty compound about ten kilometres north of Lusaka. The healer was equipped with the most efficient traditional cures. It was rumoured that even married women flocked there, without the knowledge of their husbands.

'All will be fine, and we can plan for a wedding after that,' Bwanga said assuringly. It also crossed his mind that the last resort would be for Mwila to go back to her parents in Chipoma's village.

Mwila considered the options in turn. The hospital termination would be sterile and safe but could not be kept secret. Mrs Kabongo worked there as a matron and would definitely get to know about it. She was a close friend of Mwenya and, through her, her parents at home would hear about it.

Therefore, she thought that the Kabanana idea was more attractive, even though she had heard about girls dying from infections because of incomplete abortions with the herbalists. The idea of having a child in her village was pure heresy.

On Saturday, Bwanga was driving Mwila to Kabanana to see Kaitano. When they met Ngoma, they stopped and gave him a lift. He was interested in escorting them to Kabanana, to Mwila's displeasure. For certain she would have been even more disgusted if she had known that Ngoma knew all the minute details from Bwanga. Somehow, she could not appreciate that Bwanga confided in Ngoma in the same way that she herself confided in Musonda.

When they arrived at Kaitano's hut, they were met outside by a middle-aged, bald man clad in a toga, apparently the usher. Mwila and Bwanga were let in. Inside the small house, Kaitano listened to their plight, after which he told them his conditions and fee. After a short discussion lasting about fifteen minutes, the thin, tall Mozambican herbalist came out for a break, to allow the couple to talk privately. He was smiling broadly. To his dismay, Ngoma, who had been chatting with the usher, spoke to him in Runga. He had picked up a few words of the Mozambican language on the 'Hell-Run' from Beira. The poor herbalist was seemingly scared out of his wits. He was about to discontinue the interview, but Bwanga pleaded and assured him that Ngoma was no detective trailing him from Mozambique, but had gone to that country for a short time.

Kaitano asked Mwila to lie down, and he inserted the prepared medicine. The anxious couple was assured that the foetus would be expelled.

within the next forty-eight hours. Bwanga paid the Fifty kwacha fee without the slightest hesitation.

No foetus was forthcoming in the previous three days. Instead, the poor girl felt frustrated. She was shivering and sweating. It looked as if the next stage would be the much dreaded hospital.

At midnight that Tuesday, Mwila was very ill, and she was bleeding slightly. Bwanga drove her to Dr Patterson's home and the medico was understanding and sympathetic. Mwila was later admitted to the East Pavilion, and Dr Kuchad, a Vietnamese gynaecologist, observed her.

It was then that Bwanga realised the possible danger. Suddenly he wasn't himself; he was nervous and terribly scared. Who wouldn't be with the thought of losing Mwila and after having lost his money too? Dr Patterson, apparently seeing through him, tried to calm him down. 'Mwila is now in the hands of the experts,' the doctor told him reassuringly. 'Stop blaming yourself. You have done what you can.' He looked at Bwanga's gloomy face. 'She will be all right.'

Mwila was given the maximum dose of antibiotics to kill the dreadful bugs the hospital bacteriologist had grown from her swab. The second day, Mwila was on the operating table for a D and C, and as her temperature subsided, her life was saved, with one life taken. Ten days later, she was discharged from the hospital.

It was during this time that Bwanga started dating another girl. His fling started on the day after Mwila's admission into hospital. That evening he had picked up two girls from Chelston, a suburb some twenty kilometres east of Lusaka. Driving fast as usual, he paid no attention to the fat black girl in the front passenger seat and concentrated instead on the slim light-skinned and attractive girl in the back seat. Her name was Mary, and she really looked beautiful even in her plain frock. When he dropped the girls at the government flats near Evelyn Hone College of Further Education, he had tried to fix a date with Mary, but she declined saying, 'Maybe another time.'

Two days later was 'another time,' and Bwanga was knocking on Mary's door. She opened the door and invited him in. She introduced him to two other girls he found there. After a few exchanges, Bwanga went straight to the heart of the matter and declared, 'I have come to take you to a movie.'

'That's nice of you,' Mary replied cheerfully, 'but first of all, you should take me to buy some milk.'

When they arrived at the grocery, Bwanga intimated that he would wait for her in the car. She reacted sharply, 'I thought you were giving me

company all the way. Whom are you scared of? Are you married? I don't go out with married men anyway!

'I'm not married,' Bwanga replied apologetically, following her. Inside the shop, Mary boldly asked Bwanga if he had any money on him. He agreed thinking that it was for buying milk. But Mary picked up a lot of groceries and stood clear when they reached the till. He silently paid for them, after which she pitied him. 'I hope I'm not making you broke.'

They later watched a film at the drive-in cinema. Mary was cheerful and quite good company.

In four out of the five times that Bwanga dated Mary that week, he was made to pay for her things reluctantly just like on their first date. He had no doubt in his mind that Mary was the most demanding and materialistic girl he had ever dated.

After counting his losses, Bwanga decided to get one or two back on Mary. 'I must get some returns!' he resolved.

He passed by Mary's place that night. He made it clear that he wanted her, but when she realised that they wouldn't be going out, Mary declared that she was very busy reading for exams. Bwanga patiently replied that he would wait. In turn, Mary fumbled with her books, turning pages just to discourage him, but he was unmoved. He remembered that he had given as much as he had been made to give; it was high time this was reciprocated.

Bwanga picked up a novel and started reading too. Mary was left in no doubt about his intentions, honourable or otherwise.

'All right,' Mary gave in. 'Promise me that you'll leave me to study afterwards!'

'You won't be in a position to read afterwards!' Bwanga said.

'I shall!' she challenged. 'And don't forget that I'm busy.'

'You bet I won't waste any more of your precious time!' he replied.

It was in the early and tender hours of the following day that Bwanga slipped out of the flat and left Mary to read in the fantasy of her dreams!

Two days later, Bwanga came back and found Mary with a boy. Mary didn't care to introduce them, and Bwanga took offence. He asked her to go out with him, to which she replied that she would only come if the other boy came as well. The other boy declared that he was in love with Mary and would come in any case. Bwanga was annoyed; he beat up Mary with his solid fists and she was bleeding from her nose and mouth. He then let himself loose upon the slim boy who was looking on helplessly; he was punched and kicked until he fell to the ground. He was simply no match for the tall and fast punching Bwanga. He pleaded with him for mercy, and

Bwanga responded by giving him more blows. Mary looked helplessly at the boy, who was lying sprawled on the floor. He left, and that was Bwanga's last farewell to Mary.

* * *

The whole affair of her abortion became common knowledge in Mwila's circles, and her parents got wind of it through Mrs Kabongo. It was simply awful for the young girl. If anything, her hospital experience taught her one thing: her life could be in danger at any time unless she was extremely careful.

In one mind, she would have easily blamed the whole episode on Bwanga, but she realised that it took two to tangle and was also grateful for Bwanga's help and care. Who could tell maybe without him she would not have pulled through her ordeal after all?

She couldn't sleep that night although she went to bed early. She tossed and turned and her troubled mind remained active, but her problems were too much for her to resolve. She woke up in the middle of the night, knelt, and prayed to God for guidance to enable her make a sound decision concerning her future relationship with Bwanga. Little did she realise that her problems had just started.

The ultimatum from Bwalya was not surprising, but its timing was alarming. It came too early, before she had fully recuperated. It was simple but clear: Mwila had to go back to her parents in the village at once. There was no further explanation; it wasn't necessary.

Since Bwalya was working that Tuesday morning, Mwenya was given the duty of seeing Mwila off at the station. Reluctantly, she boarded her bus, said goodbye, and waved to Mwenya at Kamwala bus station, as they left. Nervous, totally confused, her heart beating very fast, she hardly had time to think. On impulse, she decided to see Bwanga first at any cost.

The bus had hardly reached the other end of the city when Mwila pressed the bell. The bus driver stopped, but it was the conductor who shouted, 'What is it, young lady?'

'I have forgotten my second case at the station,' Mwila answered.

'What do you think we shall do—take you back?' he scolded, obviously annoyed.

'No,' Mwila replied, 'just drop me here, and I shall come by the next bus in the evening.' She was left on the road, from which she caught a taxi, 'the Up-Town Taxi' to Bwanga's flat.

When Bwanga returned for lunch that Tuesday, he was met at the door by Mwila, much to his surprise.

'Hello, love,' he said, holding her hand.

'Hi!' she answered courageously. 'Did you work well?'

'Very well indeed,' he answered, smiling broadly.

They sat down and ate together the lunch she had already prepared. She briefly told him what had happened at Bwalya's house. Throughout their meal, they joked and laughed as usual, as if they had no crisis on their hands.

When Bwanga left for work, he promised that he would come back directly so that they could discuss their situation and make definite plans; little did she imagine that that would be his farewell.

That same Tuesday afternoon, Chungu, the owner of a Peugeot 504, came to Dixon Motors, although he was not expected for another week. There was confusion. 'I'm sorry if I'm causing any inconvenience,' he said politely. 'But I need my car to go to my village to see my sick mother, I shall bring it back for spray-painting on my return.'

'We have taken the car to our other branch,' Bwanga replied tactfully. 'I'm sure they are already working on it. You can't take it now, sir!'

'I'm sorry, but I must have my car back,' Chungu insisted.

'I'll take it in any condition.'

'It is not possible to give you the car, sir,' Bwanga said. 'But I promise you that you can have it back first thing Monday morning.'

'Don't mind about what is impossible,' Chungu shouted.

'Just tell me where my car is. Do you know who you are talking to anyway?'

'Yes, I do, sir!' Bwanga replied apologetically. 'That is why I'm so terribly sorry! If you don't mind, you can take my car instead. It is also a 504.'

'What?' Chungu chuckled, 'Oh! No, I'll take my own.'

Chungu demanded to see the manager of Dixon Motors, but he was away at the time. Chungu was a VIP, being a Member of Main Committee (MMC), the country's most powerful political institution next to the presidency. He suspected that he was being cheated. The MMC was quickly driven to police headquarters. There he reported the case to the police commissioner, a personal friend of his. In a short time, a detailed description of Chungu's car was on the air and road blocks were set up on major roads.

Bwanga thought that maybe he had managed to buy some time and that Chungu would be back on Monday, but he was terribly mistaken.

There was a soft knock on the door, and Mwila went to answer it. She opened the door wide.

'Oh! It's you, Mwila. I never expected to meet you here,' Ngoma said with a sigh. 'In fact, I thought I might meet Bwanga's brother who stays here at times to see whether he's heard anything more about Bwanga.'

'Why? What has happened to him?' Mwila asked anxiously.

'Bwanga has been arrested,' he blurted out. 'I had gone to the People's Shop this afternoon hoping to meet a friend, but I found the place sealed off by the police. I heard that all the directors had been taken to police headquarters for questioning.'

'But what has all that got to do with Bwanga? He was working at Dixon Motors this afternoon!' Mwila interrupted.

'Well, then I hurried to Dixon Motors and found that Bwanga had been arrested too, but no one knows the real reason why,' Ngoma said.

Mwila was puzzled.

'No, wait a minute,' Ngoma recollected. 'At the shop they were talking about something to do with drugs!' he gasped.

'I can't believe Bwanga would be involved in anything illegal, especially drugs, since he despises people who take them,' Mwila said confidently.

'I can't believe it either,' Ngoma agreed. 'But with so many rumours flying around, the best thing would be to find out from the police station.'

At the police station, they were told that they could not see Bwanga and that they would have to wait until the case went for mention, to get any further details.

Mwila asked Ngoma to take her to Musonda's flat. In her state of mind, she needed someone to talk to. Musonda was equally surprised by the sad news. She tried to calm her friend down and asked her to stay with her. Even though Mwila was terribly worried, she still had a little hope that if Bwanga had been arrested by mistake, he would not be convicted.

For Mwila, the days passed rather slowly until the trial came up, but her optimism started to fade when she heard the full story in court: the driver was caught at a police road block near Serenje, and he was taken back to Lusaka. When the police forced the case open, they found several bundles of *cannabis* and *dagga* stuck in old clothes. The driver was interrogated for many hours. First he wouldn't give away any information concerning his work and his employers. He was obviously scared of losing his job, but then the police gave him even more to worry about. He could not only lose his job if he didn't reveal his masters; he could be imprisoned for several years. The driver thought about the oath he had taken the day of his employment

at the People's Spares Shop nine months before: never to reveal the identity of his employers! Never to talk about the exact nature of his work! The penalty was dismissal without pay or terminal benefits.

But the driver feared that either way he would be a convicted man. His fears were expelled by his lawyer from the legal aid, who negotiated good terms for him—immunity for his information and for being a state witness. The driver cited Mwindula and Bwanga as his masters and revealed all that he knew about Operation Chuma and the spares shop. It turned out to be a sensational but short trial.

Mwindula and Bwanga revealed that their company, Up-Town Taxis, was approached by Rashid Patuli, a prosperous Lusaka businessman. He asked them to transport his suitcase to Dar-es-Salaam and was prepared to pay the large sum of money they had demanded. They swore they never knew nor saw the contents. It was Bwanga who selected Chungu's car for the long trip to Tanzania. He was certain it would be returned by the weekend and that they would reset the odometer. Bwanga and Mwindula accepted responsibility on illegal possession of a missing car but pleaded not guilty on the possession and dealing in drugs. On possession of drugs, Bwanga and Mwindula cited Patuli. On cross-examination, Patuli, his voice almost inaudible, refused knowledge of the case until an unsigned covering note was introduced as evidence. A police handwriting expert confirmed that it was in Patuli's handwriting. But the three of them were found guilty of dealing in drugs.

On stealing cars, which the driver had described in court, the State had problems finding evidence. Mwindula and Bwanga who had refused legal aid maintained a plea of not guilty. They demanded the identities of the stolen cars. All the files and documents at the People's Spares Shop were seized and scrutinised but contained no grain of evidence concerning the source of the parts. Mwindula and Bwanga were challenged to reveal the source of their working capital.

A calm Mwindula told the packed court of how he came upon the money. 'Just before my late grandfather died seven years ago, he told me to dig under his bed and take whatever I found. After the old man died, I did as he had instructed me.' He sighed and looked across the quiet courtroom. He coughed. 'To my surprise,' he confirmed, 'I found a lot of money, all in notes, buried in a huge tin. That was our capital for starting the business.'

The courtroom suddenly burst out laughing.

'Silence in court,' the Magistrate demanded, fiercely hammering his bench repeatedly.

When cross-examined by the State lawyer, the accused failed to produce receipts under which they had purchased their spare parts. They wouldn't even name their main dealers. But they were stubborn enough to maintain that the receipts had been destroyed by the police who invaded the shop.

The many people who had listened to the sensational revelations in court expected harsh sentences. Bwanga and Mwindula both received five-year sentences with hard labour. Rashid Patuli received a four-year sentence with hard labour, whereas Nsefu was jailed for two years. The accounts of the People's Spares Shop were frozen, and the property was confiscated by the State.

Patuli and Nsefu looked completely dejected after their sentences were pronounced. But Mwindula and Bwanga both smiled broadly for the pursuing cameramen as they were being let out of court. Bwanga even saluted by raising a clenched fist.

Mwila cried a lot that night and blamed herself for being so unlucky. 'How can I trust a man and feel so close to him and yet know nothing about him? How can the world close so tight on me? How can the world be so cruel to me?' she asked herself a string of searching questions, as she sobbed uncontrollably.

On her own, Mwila did not know where to turn for help. She felt lonely, helpless, and completely lost. She was almost convinced that the only right thing to do was to return to her parents in the village. However, what she didn't know was just how she could dance to their music. She knew through their letters that her parents were bitter; the more she thought about it, the more bewildered and scared she became.

Musonda smiled. 'Don't look so depressed. Put your nasty experience behind you, and who knows, the future might be bright for you! Life is not a straight-line graph. There are always ups and downs.'

Mwila looked at her mentor searchingly. 'You might be right, but my position is that I don't even have a base to start from.' She took a breath and let it out. 'I don't even know what to start.'

The girls talked freely and seriously at length that night. Both agreed that Mwila had to look for a job first and save some money. Then she could undertake a secretarial course.

For the whole of that week, Mwila moved from one office to another looking for employment. The standard reply was that there was no suitable vacancy for her. In some firms, she was given interviews, and in others, she was asked to put applications in writing, and she complied.

It was now two months since she had started her job-searching escapade, but with no sign of a job forthcoming; she was becoming disillusioned and discouraged.

'There is no hope,' she muttered to herself.

She was attending another interview that morning. She arrived thirty minutes early at the company. After waiting for about one and a half hours, she was finally ushered in to meet the personnel officer.

eventually forgive her. Then, she suddenly realised a second dimension to her problem: where to find the money for transport. She was searching her handbag that night when she decided to remove the contents and place them on the table. There she saw a card which immediately caught her attention. Now she remembered Kangwa and his promise to help her if she wanted a job. 'Maybe it is too late now,' she thought. She realised that he was influential and that this could be her last chance. 'If it fails, I shall just go home and face my parents no matter what,' she resolved.

It was a clear, warm Friday morning when Mwila entered Kangwa's office. She observed that unlike the many she had visited for her interviews, his office was huge and luxuriously furnished; it looked really posh.

'Good morning,' Kangwa said. 'How nice to see you again!' He extended his arm.

'Good morning, sir,' Mwila replied, shaking his strong arm. In her warm and tender arm, Kangwa could feel her youth. He swallowed saliva but controlled himself. 'Please sit down,' he invited, gesturing at a chair across the big table.

Kangwa observed that Mwila had lost some weight but that did not worry him. She still looked as pretty as before, if not better. 'It has been a long time since I last saw you,' he said. 'Is this a social visit, or is there anything I can do for you?' He looked at her young face. It radiated beauty and innocence!

'I'm looking for a job,' she replied. 'And I need one pretty badly.' She looked down.

'Do you have any particular job in mind?' he asked, taking a cigarette from a metal case.

They talked for a while, during which time he learnt about the details of her educational background. She told him about her expulsion from school and her recent problems; being very frank with him. 'This,' she thought, 'would make him more sympathetic.'

'I think finding you a job would be no problem,' he assured her, lighting his cigarette. After making a couple of phone calls, he was eventually given the answer he wanted. His friend, a personnel manager at a Coffee Company, assured him that there would be a vacancy for his candidate! He gently broke the news to her. 'Everything will be all right,' Kangwa announced, putting down the receiver.

'Do you mean that I shall get the job?' she asked excitedly.

'You'll get it next week,' Kangwa answered confidently. 'All you have to do is . . .' Mwila shivered visibly, her heart beating faster. She coughed uneasily. She suddenly felt very cold in spite of the warmth in the office.

'Are you all right?' Kangwa asked anxiously.

'Yes, please,' Mwila replied.

'I was just saying that you should take this note,' he picked up a piece of paper and pen, 'to the personnel manager of Zambia Coffee Company next Monday. He has a job for you.' Mwila felt at ease again.

He scribbled a note of introduction in which he stated that he had known Mwila for the past three years and that she was reliable and hard-working. But he knew within his heart of hearts that he hardly knew her; all that he knew about her was that she was young, beautiful, and very attractive.

'Don't let me down in your new job,' he cautioned, handing her the envelope. 'Keep me informed of how you are doing.'

'Thank you very much,' she said, smiling broadly. 'I don't know how to thank you. I'm very grateful for your help.'

'Don't mention it,' he replied. 'In fact, since you are on your own in the city now, just feel free to approach me if you have any problems. I'll see what I can do for you.'

He put his cigarette end on the ashtray, picked up his phone again, and was speaking to his secretary this time, 'Jenny, call my driver to come in at once.' He hung up.

Mwila was driven back to Musonda's flat that day. She was obviously excited with her change of fortune, and the two girls talked about it all evening. That weekend was different for Mwila; it passed very quickly. She was happy and busy preparing herself for that Monday. She really looked forward to it.

Mwila woke up at five that Monday morning. She had a shower. She dressed-up and then hurriedly took some breakfast. She had forty minutes to spare when she arrived at the Coffee Company.

The personnel manager arrived and found her in his secretary's office. 'My name is Banda,' he introduced himself as Mwila was brought into his office.

'My name is Mwila,' she reciprocated, handing over her special introductory note from Kangwa.

Her interview was very brief. She was given a few forms to sign, after which she was informed that she would be a new employee of the company unless she failed the medical examination.

That afternoon, she went to the hospital and passed her medicals. She was obviously thrilled.

For Mwila, the swiftness with which Kangwa found her the job emphasised his influence in the city. Nobody had told her about job exchange schemes in Lusaka, by which a boss did not employ his relatives or close friends to avoid charges of favouritism or nepotism. However, a boss readily employed candidates recommended by a boss of another company, who would then reciprocate the favour!

Mwila was employed as clerk in the records' office of the Personnel Department. Her duties were general. She did filing and kept records of members of staff for the company. Whenever she was not busy, she was touch-typing office information cards. This gave her a chance to practise her typing.

As the excitement of her new job died down, Mwila realised that it did not bring any immediate solutions to her several problems as she had anticipated. Reality now dawned on her that her salary of Kwacha Sixty Nine (K69.00) was inadequate to meet her own requirements let alone save something for her parents. She also realised that she would not stay in Musonda's flat for ever, without sacrificing her freedom! Her problems therefore continued, even though they took a new dimension.

Somehow the girls didn't get on as well as before they started living together. Although they were still free and friendly to each other, there were times when they got on each other's nerves. That night for instance, Mwila came home late from the office and that was the source of adversity.

'You should inform me in advance if you are going to be home late,' Musonda emphasised.

'I should have done so if I had known,' Mwila replied soberly. 'I was told at 17.00 hours that I had to finish the filing before leaving.'

'But you could have still given me a ring,' Musonda maintained.

'I'm sorry,' Mwila apologised.

Musonda had prepared supper, expecting Mwila to return from work at the usual time. She had waited for her friend, but the food was almost getting cold when Mwila showed up.

Two days passed, and the girls were on good talking terms again.

Mwila answered the door that evening to a smiling Kangwa who said 'Good evening, Mum!'

'Oh! Come in,' Mwila replied, opening the door wide.

'Where is Musonda?' Kangwa asked as he sat down on a settee.

'She has just gone to a movie,' Mwila replied.

They looked at each other's blank faces and smiled simultaneously. 'Are you sure she was not avoiding me?' he asked, looking her in the face again.

'No!' Mwila answered. 'She had a long-standing appointment, even before I told her that you were coming this evening.'

'Who is the lucky man?' Kangwa asked. 'I'm not spying!'

'It's okay,' Mwila replied. 'She went with Ngoma.'

They talked about Mwila's new job, and she assured him that she was happy with the developments so far. He was equally glad that she liked it.

'How about your accommodation?' he asked. 'Are you comfortable here?' He surveyed the small room and looked at the old pieces of furniture.

'Musonda is very good company,' she answered. 'I'm very happy with her.'

'I don't mean company,' he stressed. 'Isn't this place too small for two big girls to share?' He paused. 'I mean don't you get in each other's way sometimes?'

'Not really,' she replied. 'Even though one would be more independent with a place of one's own.' She responded.

'That's what I mean. I have a well-furnished flat in Church Road,' he said casually. 'And since you mentioned your problems to me, I have been thinking of a way to help you.'

'As you know,' she answered, 'I cannot afford rent in a low-density area, so it is out of the question.' She sighed.

'Initially,' he said, 'you can stay without paying any rent. After you are settled in about a year's time, you can start paying some rent.' He stared at her further.

'You know,' she told him, 'you have already been very generous to me by finding me a job. However, this offer is just beyond my comprehension!'

'Let's face it, you need help,' he murmured, 'and I'm offering you help without any strings attached.' He paused. 'This is something I can rarely do for anyone, but you have already impressed me as an honest girl, and I feel obliged to help you.' He sounded sincere and generous.

She thought for a while and then answered, 'I'm very grateful for the offer.' Mwila replied, smiling uneasily. 'Can I please think about it for a short while?'

'Certainly!' Kangwa assured her. 'Take all the time in the world that you need. There is no hurry. But you can only think positively about a flat if you have seen it. Can I take you there at the weekend for inspection?'

'That will be very kind of you,' she replied.

'It's my pleasure,' he assured. He looked at her and smiled.

Later that evening, Mwila broke the news of Kangwa's offer to her more experienced confidant. As expected, Musonda gave her all the encouragement to take up the flat. 'Don't miss this chance,' Musonda emphasised. 'It may be your life's time.'

Mwila was confounded.

12

On Saturday morning, Kangwa told his wife that he would not accompany her for their routine weekend shopping. However, instead of going to his office to work on some urgent papers as he had said to his wife, he picked up Mwila, and they drove through traffic congested roads to the flat in Church Road. Kangwa parked the car at the back of the flat and then they walked to the front door.

'Here you are, my dear,' Kangwa said modestly as he opened the door for her.

'Gee! It is lovely,' she exclaimed as she saw the wall-to-wall carpet and all the expensive furniture in the sitting room. Her attention was quickly attracted by the television set, Akai stereo system, radio, and the five-piece silver lounge suite. They moved to the next room. It was a combined dining room and kitchen with everything that a modern well-furnished room should have. He opened the back door and showed her a small vegetable garden. The remaining cabbages and lettuce were withering away, indicating that maybe the flat had not been inhabited recently.

'The gardens are just superb,' she announced happily. She pulled a carrot from the bed and waved it at him. He smiled gently and then said, 'You should see the rest of the rooms.'

She followed him quietly. In the kitchen, she hurriedly washed the carrot and innocently gave him a piece.

'Thank you,' he accepted. 'I do need some vitamins, especially vitamin D.'

'Don't mention it,' she replied.

They saw the small but neat bathroom and the second bedroom before moving on to another room. 'This will be your main bedroom if you take up the flat,' he said.

'It is fantastic!' she cried emotionally. 'I have never entered such a well-furnished and comfortable room before.'

'Do you like it then?' he asked.

'Like it!' she exclaimed. 'I love it! It is wonderful.'

'Does that mean that you'll take it?' he asked politely.

'Yes, I'll take it,' she confirmed. 'But I still don't know just how to thank you.' She looked at him closely.

'Save your thanks for another time,' he reminded her. He took a cigarette from a metal case, lit it, and started smoking.

She sat and felt the comfort of the double bed and shouted, 'Isn't it comfortable?'

'If you say so,' he replied, his eyes firmly fixed at her radiant face.

Mwila looked at herself in the big dressing mirror and smiled broadly. She really couldn't believe her change of luck; it was like a fairy-story come true. It was only then that she realised that her happiness was uncalled for. She was a complete stranger in this place and all these things didn't belong to her anyway. She was suddenly filled with apprehension and her worried face showed it when he called out, 'Are you all right?'

'Oh yes,' she answered, looking down.

As they passed through the sitting room, Kangwa placed the short cigarette end in the ashtray.

The flat was the main subject of discussion for the girls that evening.

'You are lucky,' Musonda complimented her friend. 'I told you before that Kangwa fancied you. I was right.'

'He said that there were no strings attached,' Mwila explained.

'Forget about strings!' Musonda advised. 'No one offers you an expensive flat in the city unless they dig you, and when they do, it is normal that they expect some favours in return.'

Mwila thought for a moment, and then her mind opened further. She had not seriously considered that aspect at the flat. She was so overwhelmed by the property that she forgot to ask for the real terms of the offer. The look on her worried face showed her belated concern.

'There is absolutely nothing to worry about,' Musonda reassured her friend.

'I only hope it is a genuine offer,' Mwila muttered. Musonda had no doubt in her mind that this could end up just like in many other cases in Lusaka, where rich and powerful men, most of them married, kept their mistresses in luxurious flats. The girls enjoyed the privileges and comforts only as long as they behaved well and obliged. Unfaithful mistresses were

vanished by being kicked out of the flats if they belonged to the sugar babies or the flats were stripped bare and the furniture transferred to a new colony. Musonda's own past experience was still fresh in her memory. However, she felt that it was improper to put this bluntly to her friend. She cleared her throat. 'Just look at the bright side of it,' Musonda advised.

'But I shouldn't ignore the dark side!' Mwila argued. 'Which there isn't much of!' Musonda interrupted. 'Any married man who decides to have a girlfriend will inevitably be more preoccupied with his family and he won't find much time to bother her.'

'I hope that you are right,' Mwila answered meekly.

'After all,' Musonda insisted, 'some of them acquired women like they acquired property. They can hardly find time and energy to use them!' Eventually, the girls agreed on one thing that Mwila's fears were exaggerated and unwarranted. After all, she was an adult who could look after herself, if the worst came to the worst.

Mwila moved into her new flat on a Wednesday morning. She had a day off from work, and Kangwa's driver came to take her for shopping. She was given K300 by Kangwa to buy whatever she wanted. That was her new lifestyle to which she thought she was entitled, and she was enjoying every minute of her swift social transformation.

Although Mwila never really understood Kangwa's motives, she had come to respect him tremendously. Unlike many men and boys she had met in Lusaka, Kangwa so far had not mentioned a word about sex in spite of all the things he did for her, and all the several opportunities he had had with her. 'He must be honest and generous,' she thought.

That Wednesday morning, Mwila was coming out of Mwaiseni Super Market laden with her heavy shopping. Out of the blue, a smartly dressed man grabbed her handbag. He stepped ahead of her and quickly opened the bag. Totally disappointed and annoyed, the thief shouted, 'Next time we find you with a handbag without money, we'll teach you a lesson! Don't you know we work so hard every day identifying our targets? You are rubbish, lady!' He tossed the handbag in the air, quickly walked away, and mingled with the crowds.

Terribly shaken, Mwila could not even shout for help before the thief had disappeared. She picked up her bag before she quickly walked to a public convenience and locked herself in one of the ladies' toilets. Her hands still trembling, she undid the buttons on her blouse and brought out a small red handkerchief from her white bra. She could feel the notes through the cloth. She untied it, and all her money, all the K150 was there. She stood

Kondala HENRY M. MUSUNGE
19 March 2018

there, blinking away her nasty experience. Suddenly she burst out laughing as she stalked from the toilet. She hurriedly walked to the car park where the driver was patiently waiting for her.

Kangwa took Mwila for a meal at Andrew's Motel that evening. The motel was his favourite quiet spot.

'The driver told me that you were terribly shaken!' Kangwa said. 'I'm sorry.' He sighed with sympathy.

'I had never had an experience as frightening as that before,' she replied. 'He gave me such a fright.'

They entered the restaurant at the Motel. 'Let's sit in the corner,' he suggested. 'Unless you do mind of course.'

'It will do fine,' she replied calmly.

A tall young waiter recognised Kangwa and quickly walked to their table and handed them the menu. There was silence as they read the menu. Kangwa looked up. 'Have you chosen yet?' he asked, as Mwila looked at the menu again.

'I can't make up my mind yet.' She sighed. 'I think I'll have a gammon steak.'

'Not a gammon!' he protested. 'You can choose anything you fancy on my account. But I should warn you that there is as much salt as there is meat in the gammon.'

'Really?' she asked. 'Can I trust my choice to you then?'

'Oh certainly,' he agreed, nodding his bald head.

They talked about the city. Drinks were served, and another waiter brought them glasses of appetisers—prawn cocktail.

'What is this?' Mwila asked, looking at the unfamiliar stuff in the glass.

'It is prawn cocktail,' he explained. 'Haven't you eaten it before?'

Mwila shook her head and then smiled gently.

'I'm sorry. I should have asked,' he apologised. 'But I can assure you it is a very good appetiser!' He explained, 'it is sea food.'

'I'll sample it,' Mwila said courageously.

Bowls of soup were served, followed by the main meal. Kangwa had chicken in the basket and Mwila T-bone steak. They talked more freely as they continued eating and drinking, which was punctuated by an occasional laugh. Kangwa talked about himself, his work, and family; it all sounded very innocent, as he showed that he had nothing to hide from her. 'Do you want some tea or coffee?' Kangwa asked as they finished their sweet course.

'No, thank you,' Mwila replied. 'This was a wonderful meal. As a result I have eaten so much I might explode any time!'

'Don't kid me?' he protested. 'And don't be shy!'

'I'm not kidding,' she assured him. 'I have never eaten such a big meal before. I mean so many courses at once!'

'I see,' he accepted. 'In future, I advise you to train your small stomach to cope with more!' They both laughed.

Mwila was impressed with Kangwa's engaging humour and general awareness. He was very considerate and would patiently explain anything that his young escort didn't know. She thought that there was something extra special about him; in a way, he treated her like a lady, and he did it naturally and perfectly.

Mwila truly enjoyed Kangwa's company that night, and the more she came to know about him, the more she was prepared to trust him.

One warm Saturday afternoon, Kangwa and Mwila drove to Kafue. He drove slowly and cautiously. They reached Kafue within thirty minutes. After visiting one of Kangwa's old friends, they went down to Kafue River and bought some fresh fish.

'The fish is cheaper here than in Lusaka,' Mwila whispered.

'Oh yes, I know,' Kangwa replied. 'But what is more important is that here you can buy fresh fish straight from the water.'

'Look! Some are gasping for breath,' Mwila exclaimed pointing. 'Yes, they are still alive.'

'You'll take it to the refrigerator immediately,' Kangwa advised, as he firmly pressed on the accelerator on their way back to Lusaka.

'I liked the small town,' Mwila announced. 'It looked decent and tidy.'

'It is a good place to come to once in a while,' he replied. 'But you can't stay there for a week without missing the fun and social amenities of Lusaka.'

They arrived in Lusaka at sunset and were soon at the flat. Kangwa opened the boot of his car and took out the fish from the cooler box. 'Won't you take some to your family?' Mwila asked cheerfully.

'I wish I could,' he retorted, 'but my wife has plenty of fish and meat in the house.' They looked at each other and smiled simultaneously. Kangwa stepped and helped Mwila with her cooking. She could not help asking, 'Do you do the same for Chongo when she is cooking?'

'Honestly, I don't,' he replied. 'But she doesn't cook often herself. The house servant cooks most of the time.' Chongo was Kangwa's wife, and this was the first time that Mwila had referred to her by her first name, instead of 'your wife'.

'Tell me more about Chongo,' Mwila asked. 'What does she look like? What does she do?'

Kangwa took his time. He took a cigarette from the metal case, lighted, and smoked briefly before he answered, 'Well!' he sighed. 'Do you want statistics?'

'Not necessarily,' Mwila replied.

'Chongo is fat, of medium height, and she is beautiful,' Kangwa explained. 'She is running a boutique and doing quite well, at the moment.'

They ate the dinner and talked about many things. Suddenly, he changed the topic. 'Look at me,' he commanded.

Mwila looked at him searchingly—she thought that his round face and closely trimmed moustache made him look handsome in spite of his age. She looked at his bulging pot belly and smiled. He gently smiled back.

'Do you know what I'm thinking about?' he asked.

'No idea,' she replied, still looking at him.

'That you are the most beautiful black girl that I have ever seen!'

'Thank you,' she replied. 'But why black girl?'

'Well,' he said hesitantly, 'because I would like to differentiate between the beauty of white girls and that of our girls. There are black beauties and white beauties, but the two are in classes of their own.'

'Tell me, if you don't mind,' she asked. 'Have you ever had a white girlfriend?'

'Yes, I have had one,' he replied.

'And when was that?' she asked.

'That was four years ago when I was in Israel.'

'What were you doing there?'

He told her about a nine-month course that he had done at Hebrew University. She began asking so many questions, and he suggested, 'Let's change the topic.'

'But it is so interesting,' she protested. 'I would like to hear more about the Holy Land.'

Kangwa smiled. Mwila hesitated. 'Tell me, are white girls just like us or are they different?'

'Apart from their colour,' he replied, 'there's no difference.'

'Really!' she exclaimed.

'Yes,' he replied. 'But nothing is more interesting than talking about ourselves,' he reminded, determined to change the subject.

There was silence. Then he suddenly said, 'Do you know that I have become so fond of you in the past few weeks?'

'I guessed so,' she answered not too sure.

'I'm glad that you know,' he said, holding her hand.

'I didn't say that I know,' she objected. 'I only guessed.'

'You are a loveable girl,' he told her. 'I would be the luckiest man in the world if I had you even for a few minutes.'

'But you have a wife,' she reminded him.

'Yes, I know,' he agreed, 'but that is a problem I can handle.' He put out his cigarette and placed it in the ashtray. He tried to kiss her, but she discouraged him, shrugging her shoulders. Kangwa continued paying her compliments until she smiled. He moved next to her, held her close, and she responded lovingly. Her breathing quickened and she did not resist when he carried her into the bedroom. Later, she realised that he was the same man that she had thought was too old for her! 'Musonda was right,' she reflected. It was about 01.00 hours when Kangwa left Mwila and headed for his sweet but now sour home.

The time was approaching midnight one Sunday night. Unable to sleep, Mwila tossed and turned in the extra-comfortable double bed. She worried and pondered on the possible consequences regarding her secret relationship with Kangwa. Where was it leading to? That weekend, Mwila and Kangwa secretly stayed at Andrew's Morel from Friday to Sunday. Meanwhile, Kangwa's wife loyally believed that her conscientious and hard-working husband was on a business trip over three hundred miles away on the Copperbelt. Mwila seriously thought about her awkward position and eventually placed her dilemma in perspective. Her solution was vivid in her mind: to leave Kangwa and his property at this early stage, but then only a gloomy future would be in store for her. Restlessly, she turned again.

Although Mwila and Kangwa became close friends by convenience, she didn't hide the fact that she did not love him. 'I can't love a married man,' she would say to herself. She knew that his heart was at home with his wife and children. But what could she possibly do now? Where was her strength and the freedom she had so often yearned for? 'Musonda was right!' She reflected again in her bewilderment.

Mwila had a very busy morning in the office one Wednesday. Margaret, the production manager's secretary, walked in.

'Busy girl, working like a bee!' Margaret exclaimed. 'It's time for lunch.'

'Oh! Is it?' Mwila replied, looking up. The two girls had become quite friendly in the past few weeks and usually took their lunch together. Margaret walked about the office.

'Can't I just finish typing a few lines?' Mwila asked politely.

'Why not?' Margaret replied, sitting down. She picked up the day's *Times of Zambia* newspaper and started perusing.

Later, they went to the company canteen for lunch. They were eating and chatting when a tall, young handsome man, with a tray in his hands, stopped and murmured, 'Can I join your table, girls?'

'You are welcome,' Mwila answered, without paying any attention.

'My name is Nkhata,' he introduced himself. The girls looked at him searchingly.

'Call me Maggie,' Margaret replied, 'and this is my friend, Mwila.'

'What catching names! I'm honoured to sit with you,' Nkhata announced. 'I'm sure everyone here is jealous of me.' They laughed loudly and attracted the attention of the others in the canteen.

Nkhata was twenty-three and had now worked for the company for two weeks. Since joining the company, he had seen the two girls and felt that they were very attractive. Now, this was the chance that he had been waiting for, to talk to them.

'How do you find your new job?' Mwila asked.

'It is okay,' Nkhata answered politely. 'But this is really my first job, as I just left school last July.'

'Oh, which school did you go to?' Margaret asked anxiously.

'I went to Chizongwe Secondary School!' he replied. 'I'm sure you must be familiar with it.'

'They were third after Munali and Mungwi in the O-level results,' Maggie cut in.

'Yes, we did quite well,' Nkhata replied, smiling broadly.

'I would give most of the credit to our hard-working teachers.'

There was a little silence. 'Did you have new members of staff then?' Margaret asked, breaking the silence.

'We had only two new teachers,' he replied. 'Both of them from England.' At this point, Nkhata realised that the girls were capable of analysing his reasoning. He was quick to change the direction of their discussion. 'How about you girls? How long have you been with the company?'

'I have been here for five months now,' Mwila answered.

'And Maggie,' Nkhata asked. 'Can I really call you Maggie by the way?'

'Sure,' Margaret replied casually. 'I have worked for exactly five years, three months, and seven days today!'

'Gee!' Nkhata exclaimed. 'That's long service and what a good memory.'

'She is one of the longest serving girls here,' Mwila added.

'We expect you to inform us more about the company then,' Nkhata said. 'Incidentally, in which department do you work?'

'I'm the trusted personal secretary to the production manager,' Margaret boasted. 'How about you?' She asked. 'In which department are you working?'

'I'm in the Personnel Department.'

'And what are your first impressions of your department and the company as a whole?' Mwila asked, showing some interest in the discussion.

'Well,' Nkhata replied sighing, 'my first impressions are that the workers here are very friendly; the fact that I'm talking to you so freely is evidence enough.' The girls looked at each other and smiled. 'My observation is that the company could do better if they provided some social and sports facilities for employees,' Nkhata continued.

'That would be a very good idea,' Mwila interjected.

'What facilities do you have in mind?' Margaret asked, joining in.

'Firstly, I commend the idea of the company subsidising the cost of meals in the canteen, which encourages all workers to have some balanced diet, which I presume makes us all more productive,' Nkhata said. 'But we meet here only briefly during lunch hours.' As the girls were listening quietly, Nkhata paused and then went on, 'I think we should have a club where we can meet after working hours and even during weekends for drinks and indoor games and so forth. This I'm sure could broaden the outlook of the group socially.'

'Don't you think that only beer drinkers would monopolise such a club?' Mwila asked.

'I don't think so,' Nkhata replied confidently. 'I think that most people in this country resort to beer drinking because of lack of sports facilities. If we have the necessary facilities, people will be very happy to utilise them.'

They talked about other issues, as they ate their lunch. The girls felt very happy at having such an enjoyable discussion with a man they had just become acquainted with. He was pleasant and good-humoured.

'It was very nice meeting you,' Nkhata said as they parted. Mwila went home by taxi that day, and it was quite a contrast to the times when Kangwa sent his driver to collect her. Kangwa was away on business that week.

It wasn't long before Nkhata felt that he liked Mwila very much. Even though they worked for the same department, they were in different sections. Unlike Margaret, Mwila was young and pretty. There was also a remarkable element of maturity in Mwila which he could not understand, but which he found desirable.

At work, rumours were spreading fast that Mwila was engaged to get married to a wealthy and influential man. While Nkhata heard them, he

decided to ignore them, until he confirmed them with her. Nkhata and the girls continued to meet during lunch breaks. Their discussions had become more free and friendly.

That afternoon, Nkhata was determined to speak to Mwila when they were alone. He was going to ask her for a date, but the girls didn't show up. 'Where could they have gone?' he asked himself. He was unhappy with the strange coincidence. He hurried his meal talking very little to his friends at the table.

'Nkhata, you are rather quiet today,' one of the boys said. 'Is anything wrong?'

'Not really,' Nkhata murmured. 'I have a sore throat, and I don't wish to spread the infection to all of you.' They laughed, obviously taking it as a joke.

At half past three that afternoon, Nkhata reached for the phone and dialled the internal extension 216. 'This is the Personnel department. Can I help you?' a slow, but definitely feminine voice answered. He was asked to hold on, and Mwila hurriedly came to take the receiver. 'This is Mwila speaking,' she said.

'It is me, Nkhata,' he said timidly. 'I didn't see you at lunch, so I just wanted to check if you are well.'

'I'm all right,' she said, 'but thanks for ringing.'

There was a pause for a few awkward seconds, and as silence stretched between them, Nkhata asked, 'Are you there, Mwila?'

'Yes, I am,' she replied, hesitantly. 'Thanks again for ringing,' she said and hung up.

Nkhata felt that he had blown his chance. He felt despondent, but he did not despair.

Margaret didn't come to work one day, so Mwila went alone to the canteen for lunch. She joined Nkhata and others at the table. After the meal, Nkhata had a chance of his life; to walk out of the canteen alone with Mwila. Avoiding the preambles, he came right to the point. 'I would like to ask you to come out with me to a film tonight,' he requested.

'Which film do you wish to watch?' Mwila asked, slowing her steps.

'It is supposed to be very good,' Nkhata replied confidently. 'It is called *From Russia with Love*.'

'I like James Bond movies,' she said, 'but I have already watched that one. Mwila had not watched the film but hoped the young man would give up.'

'Well,' Nkhata replied, showing his extra white teeth. 'Why can't we go to another cinema and watch something else, or just go for a drink?'

Mwila got the message but felt that she had to discourage him as politely as possible. 'Thank you for the invitation, but my uncle will be home tonight and so I can't go out in any case.'

'If you can't come tonight, how about tomorrow?' he insisted. 'You are the only girl I have asked out since I came to Lusaka. I find you charming and very good company. I would be honoured if you would accept.' There was silence before she replied.

'All right,' Mwila accepted. 'I shall come tomorrow. What time is the film?'

They arranged their first date, and Nkhata walked away as a satisfied and very happy man indeed. With his date on his mind, the day passed very fast. He was cheerful and worked very hard the rest of that day.

Mwila was collected by the driver after work that Thursday, and she found Kangwa and not her uncle waiting at the flat. Kangwa used his spare key. She had a bath and then put on a long evening dress; the latest one Kangwa had bought for her. He had specially asked her to wear that dress. Elegantly dressed, Mwila looked very attractive.

'Where are we going?' she asked as they entered the car.

'I wanted to surprise you,' Kangwa replied. 'But I should as well tell you. I am taking you to the best hotel in the city tonight.'

She smiled inwardly.

When they entered the five-star Intercontinental hotel, they went by the lift to the eighth floor and then walked to the hotel's most popular but expensive Makumbi Room. Some couples were already dining and chatting.

'This is the first time I have come here,' Mwila whispered as they sat down at a secluded table reserved for two, in a candle-lit corner. She did not hide the fact that she was overwhelmed by the interior decorations and arrangements of the hotel and the impressive view of the brightly lit city at night. They sipped at their drinks as they waited for their meals.

Many couples poured in. 'Are there as many people as this every night?' Mwila asked.

'This place is always crowded on Tuesday and Thursday nights, because that is when they hold the cabaret,' Kangwa replied. 'Do you know what a cabaret is?'

'It is some kind of dancing act,' she replied, without thinking.

'Specifically, it is an entertainment provided while the guests are at table,' Kangwa explained.

'I see,' Mwila nodded.

They were eating and chatting, punctuated by occasional laughter. Mwila was drinking Cinzano. She was now used to drinking alcohol!

'I like that number,' Kangwa announced. 'Can I have the pleasure of a dance?'

'I'm also dying to dance,' she replied quickly, under the influence of liquor. 'The music is infectious!'

Both of them were quickly on their feet. The rhumba continued playing, and the floor was crowded with dancing couples. Mwila liked the way he held her waist tightly, and she loved the way he pressed against her when they danced; it was so intimate.

'You dance so well,' Kangwa complimented her. 'I had the same impression the first time I danced with you the first day we met,' He remembered.

'Thank you,' she replied. 'I used to be a member of the Ballroom Dancing Club at school. In fact, I'm missing dancing terribly.'

'Don't worry,' he assured, holding her tight. 'Now that I have found you, I will take you for dances regularly.'

Mwila smiled broadly, taking it as a joke. But Kangwa was no joker in a pack of cards. 'In fact,' he said, 'I would like to take you on holiday to Nairobi. They have nice hotels and nightclubs where you can dance until you are exhausted.'

'I have always wished to go to East Africa,' she replied.

'I'm serious,' he insisted. 'When can you get two weeks off?'

'I don't know whether I am allowed to go on leave before I have served a year with the company,' she told him.

'If that is the problem,' he answered, 'leave it to me, and I shall fix it with your boss. You know that I have some influence in this city. My friends call me Mr Fix-it because I always get what I want,' he boasted.

'Do you?' Mwila asked.

'Yes!' he replied confidently. Mwila thought for a while.

'Did you fix our relationship?' She asked cleverly.

'No,' he answered beaming. 'Our friendship developed naturally. I knew from the first time I met you at the party that night, that you are beautiful and very attractive. I never suspected however, that I would fall in love with you.'

'You better be honest about us,' she cautioned.

'I am,' he replied, 'and for my power and influence in the city, I can do great things for my friends.'

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'Can you fix anything?' Mwila asked, smiling broadly. She knew that he was very influential, and she liked the way he was boasting.

This was the third song that they had danced to, and they walked back to their table as the music ended. It was almost one o'clock when they left the Makumbi Room. They had thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Mwila, under the influence of Cinzano was laughing and smiling radiantly.

Kangwa drove Mwila back to her flat and informed her that he would be going away for a week to his village to see his sick mother. He made it clear that he would miss her.

'I trust that you'll be a good girl while I'm gone,' he said, lowering his car window. 'Don't let anyone girlfriend you!' he instructed.

'And you don't let someone husband you,' she retorted.

'For your sake, I won't,' he cheated. 'But promise me, will you be faithful during my absence?' he asked slowly driving off.

'Yes, sir!' she replied obediently. "Your wish is my command."

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Kangwa looked at his watch as he parked the car. It was getting on to two. He opened the door, moved quickly but quietly into the house from the lounge through the passageway towards the main bedroom. He didn't want to disturb the children sleeping in the other rooms. Before opening the bedroom door, he was surprised to see that the lights in the room were burning. He found his wife sitting in a simple chair, drinking. He couldn't help but shout, 'What the hell are you up to, and do you know what time it is now?'

She looked at him searchingly without uttering a word. 'And what type of married woman are you who drinks so late at night?' he shouted again.

This was his first reaction to his wife's increased consumption of alcohol in the past few weeks. His wife took time to reply, as if choosing her words. 'As a faithful wife who hasn't seen much of her husband, I have been waiting for you. And while I wait, I need company. I have discovered of late that brandy can be such a good company!' She raised her glass and took a gulp. She was trembling, and her glass slipped from her shaking fingers and fell to the ground, shattered into small pieces. They quarrelled for a while, but there was no submission from either side.

As they lay in bed that night, they hardly discussed their problem, in spite of Chongo's insistence that he should tell her where he had been. However, Kangwa maintained that they would talk about it when she was sober.

It was morning, and they were leaving for Kasama. 'Did you pack my suitcase?' asked Kangwa, staring at his wife.

'I started, but I couldn't finish,' said the calm and now seemingly sober Chongo. 'I didn't know exactly what clothes you wished to take.'

'After twenty-four years of marriage!' said Kangwa teasingly. 'And you still don't know your husband.'

'Here we go again,' she replied.

Kangwa and Chongo had been married for twenty-four years and had seven children. Their two big children were both studying economics at the University of Zambia. The remaining children were attending day schools in the city but stayed at home with their parents. Of these, the three youngest children would accompany their parents to their village near Kasama.

Their house-servant, Musuku, had just finished loading their baggage into their car boot. He was a tall and strong man in his early thirties. He came and bent down close to Kangwa and politely said, 'I have finished, sir, but is there anything else you wish me to do before you leave?'

'Did you clean the car thoroughly?' Kangwa asked. 'You may stand up,' he commanded.

'Yes, sir,' Musuku replied. 'It is clean and shining, sir.'

'Are you sure?' Kangwa asked.

'Yes, sir,' Musuku replied, 'I am sure.' He smiled briefly.

'That is why I have confidence in you,' he complimented him. 'Because you are not only hard working, but you can use your brains.' Musuku grinned, showing all his brown teeth. He had been working for them for ten years now. 'Look after the house and the children carefully,' Kangwa instructed. 'Don't bring your friends into the house during our absence.'

'Yes, sir,' Musuku replied. Kangwa gave him some money.

'Thank you, sir,' the servant appreciated politely.

Kangwa and his family lived in an old but beautiful four-bedroom house in Woodlands.

On their way out of the city, they drove to Dixon Motors to fill the car tank and buy some spare fuel in a jerrycan. They were just pulling off when Chongo burst out laughing and was joined by the children at the back, who had absolutely no idea of the joke.

'What is it?' Kangwa demanded.

'You mean you didn't hear what the petrol attendants were saying to each other?' she asked cynically.

'No,' he replied. 'What did they say?'

'It's not my business to inform on them,' she replied.

'Tell me or I'll go back and beat them-up,' he intimated, slowing the car.

She told him loudly. 'The tall thin one said that some people have become so rich and neurotic these days that they can't even change oil or put water in their cars,' she said, laughing again.

'And the fat ugly one,' Kangwa insisted, 'what did he say?'

'He wondered whether it would be long before you rich men started asking your domestic servants to give you bed-baths and dress you up,' Chongo replied.

'I think those peasants were just jealous of my Mercedes,' he boasted.

'I don't think so,' Chongo protested. 'They were absolutely right. No wonder there are so many cars with knocked engines these days.' They debated and laughed for a while before a long silence dawned.

Kangwa was a slow and cautious driver. He also conversed with his wife and children regularly as his car cut the long distance steadily. The children chatted excitedly about the towns, villages, cars, and people they saw on the way. They also played familiar games at the back of the car.

To avoid driving late at night, they spent a night at Mwanza Lodge in Mpika. After enjoying their meals and soft drinks, the children retired early and went to bed. Kangwa and his wife meanwhile sat down in the lounge bar and were drinking and chatting. They talked about many things including their differences. Kangwa explained that there was too much work at his office and that sometimes he had been attending late business meetings.

'I know that you are hard working, darling,' Chongo replied. 'But, like before, you should find some time to spend with me and the children. That's all I ask from you.' They looked at each other, none uttering a word, until Kangwa decided to break the silence.

'I'm honestly sorry, my dear,' he apologised deceitfully. 'In future, I shall delegate some of my duties to my assistants so that I can be home more often.'

They looked into each other's eyes and smiled simultaneously. Chongo had no doubt that they had reconciled. They didn't have to hold hands in public to show it; this was for the children. But Kangwa was not so certain. Later that night, they were closer to each other than they had been for many months. Chongo was thrilled and gave herself to her husband completely, saying, 'I'm all yours,' as he re-explored her expertly to her great satisfaction.

Although Kangwa felt quite relaxed, he found it hard to sleep. His mind raced back and forth, and he was obviously concerned about his predicament. How could he reconcile his new promise to his wife with his new love, Mwila, whose company and character he thoroughly enjoyed? It also dawned on him that he was not only cheating Mwila but wasting her youth and jeopardising the young girl's future. He knew at the back of his mind that Mwila was a good girl who deserved only help and protection.

He concluded that he was responsible for his family and realised that he had to save his marriage. He thought that he would see less of Mwila as his relationship with his wife was normalised.

They arrived in Milima's village to a warm welcome. Many old friends and relatives came to give their greetings. It was Kangwa's steady progress in government service which had brought fame and pride to this small and otherwise unknown village. As a result, his old father, Chamunda, was highly respected in the area. There were many children too, but it was clear that they were there mainly to satisfy their curiosity as they gathered watching and admiring his 250 Automatic Mercedes Benz. Even a number of adults could not hide their delight at this splendid modern machine. To them, it was particularly gratifying that a son of one of them could rise to such heights. For the villagers, a car was not only unique, but it was a status symbol, the ultimate sign of success. They asked for a ride, and Kangwa promised them one, time permitting.

Although Kangwa had come to the village with cars previously, all had been much smaller and less expensive. This was the first time that a Mercedes had been brought and parked in Milima's village. In fact, word spread to the neighbouring villages, and many admirers flocked to see and touch the car with utmost curiosity and admiration.

Kangwa's happiness in the village was overshadowed by the deterioration in his mother's health. He drove her seventeen kilometres to Kasama, where she was admitted to hospital. After several tests, she was diagnosed with tuberculosis.

Kangwa found that his joint grocery business with his young brother Bwembya was doing very well. Their stores were situated in Kasama, where business was flourishing due to a large and cosmopolitan population. Kangwa was, however, disappointed to hear that their application to open a bakery in Kasama had been turned down. Bwembya explained that the competition for business in the area had increased.

'I shall handle that while I'm still here,' Kangwa replied confidently.

It took Kangwa no time to make the right contacts. He found the chairman of Kasama Township Council in a bar, and they had drinks together. They talked business while they drank, and Kangwa was promised that his application would be reconsidered as a matter of urgency. That was good news since the assurance came from the popular and well-respected chairman. Kangwa of course rubbed the chairman's hands discreetly. He gave the chairman a gift of K200.00 cash and also invited him to fly to Lusaka, with his wife for a weekend, with all expenses paid for.

In the village, Kangwa went to the Roman Catholic Church grounds where he met Father Kangalu, who used to be his teacher at Primary School. They talked mostly about issues concerning the development of the village in particular and the local community in general. The reverend told Kangwa that there would be an auction sale at the church grounds on Sunday afternoon. This was aimed at raising funds for renovating the only Missionary Orphanage in the district, some sixteen kilometres north of the village. Kangwa was glad to donate. He wrote a cheque to the church for 200 kwacha (K200.00) which Father Kangalu gladly accepted, saying, 'May God bless you for your generosity, my son!'

'Thank you for the blessings, Father,' Kangwa replied politely. 'But the church deserves contributions from many more of us. In fact, we owe the church more than we can ever repay.' Kangwa was probably right. Churches played a very important role in the lives of the community. They were not only a guide and base for morality but contributed well to the education of the area through their schools and sometimes provided scholarships. Churches were also regarded by some people to have brought about general political awareness of the masses by their continued preaching on the equality of men before God. This point, however, is still widely debated. There is another school of thought which believed that the church's role in the politics of the country was negative. This faction claimed that the church cushioned and protected colonialists by condemning violence which was supposed to be in self-defence against oppression and also by telling their followers to love their enemies! 'How does one love one's enemies without capitulation?' they would ask. They argued that the churches were wittingly used or misused to extend and entrench suppression during colonialism. So the debate goes on.

In the meantime, Chongo was also busy in the company of her womenfolk. In the absence of her mother-in-law, she took over some of her domestic duties of maintaining the house and preparing meals. She found the milling of millet into flour particularly difficult. It was hard to kneel in front of a moulded stone, on which she placed the tiny grains which she milled by grinding with a moving stone. She had done this before, but that was ages ago, as in Lusaka, almost all the foodstuffs were bought except for those growing their own vegetables. She also managed to dry large quantities of fish and pumpkin leaves to take back to the capital.

Kangwa's team also found time to visit Chongo's folks in a neighbouring village. In the traditional Bemba homecoming, Kangwa, because of his great success, was given a hero's homecoming by his in-laws. He received utmost

respect, praise, and attention with hardly any mention of his wife. Chongo, who understood her tradition well, took no offence and was in fact inwardly thrilled that she had married a man who was the envy of her village; she could wish for no more personal glory.

Kangwa and his wife were given gifts of foodstuffs in many of the homes they visited. Their children, on the other hand, were quite often lost in the village in the company of many of their cousins. They played with several village children, who admired and touched their expensive and attractive clothes. When it came to sports or fights, the Kangwa children were easily beaten, even by children a few years their junior. They were simply no match for the more daring and stronger village-bred children.

Kangwa and his family got back to Lusaka on a Friday. They had had a long and tiring journey. Their children were complaining about having missed two days at school. That evening, Kangwa and Chongo decided to go to the club for a drink together, just like the good old days.

At the club, they joined old friends who were excited to see them back and were eager to learn about their journey. They had a lovely evening. At about 21.30 hours, Kangwa announced, 'We shall have to retire now as I can see that my wife is very tired!'

Chongo smiled and said, 'I feel like sleeping right away.'

At the house, Kangwa decided to look up his friend Chimba, at the Hotel Intercontinental, who would bring him up to date with current official events in the capital city.

Chimba was a permanent secretary in the Ministry of Information and Publicity.

'Chongo,' he called before driving off. 'Don't wait for me and no more boozing!'

'I'll put on my sexiest negligee instead!' she joked back.

'Don't make it difficult for me,' he retorted.

'Don't you take me for granted,' she replied, smiling broadly.

'See you soon,' Kangwa said. He drove to Mwila's flat instead.

Meanwhile, life was looking up for Mwila. At work, Nkhata joined the girls for lunch as usual. They were all as cheerful as ever.

'I hear we have a new managing director,' Maggie announced engagingly. She was always well informed, and she was a regular source of information and sometimes rumours.

'What is his name?' Mwila asked.

'He is Nkobwe,' Nkhata replied. 'He was a general manager for some company in Kitwe.'

Nkobwe was the first Zambian in the company to hold that post. He had been appointed to Zambianise Howard Jones' post according to the new government policy. Howard was one of the last few whites remaining in a senior administrative position after independence. He was known to be a strict disciplinarian and was efficient and non-racial.

After 17.00 hours, Nkhata and Mwila were walking to the bus stop when a VW Beetle passed and stopped in front of them. Nkhata recognised the car and driver who was an old friend. Jerry came out, opened the door, and asked them to get in. There were already three other passengers, two girls and a boy. Nkhata could not help asking. 'Do you think there is enough room for two more?'

'Yes, there is,' Jerry replied. 'But we should pray that we don't meet some enthusiastic coppers!' They all laughed.

After squeezing into the back seat, Jerry introduced them to the others. Jerry drove fast but cautiously towards the city centre. At that time of the day, there was always traffic congestion, as everyone was rushing home from work. After packing the car, they all walked to Lusaka Hotel for a drink.

They entered the Bambino Lounge, and it was already congested. They managed to find seats for the girls near the bar counter. The boys were prepared to stand until they could find chairs. Nkhata bought their first round of drinks. Susan, one of the girls in the group, insisted on sponsoring the second round in spite of loud objections from the men. They talked, laughed, and had fun. They drank for almost one and half hours.

When their friends had left, Mwila and Nkhata went for dinner in a nearby restaurant.

'I found your friends tremendous company,' Mwila announced. 'Are they always that funny?'

'They are good entertainers,' he replied. 'I always choose my friends well.'

Mwila, lifting her eyebrows in mock disbelief, said, 'Hmmm!'

'Mind you, I haven't seen Jerry in a long time,' Nkhata said. 'But he has always been comical, ever since we were in school.' They were interrupted by the waiter who brought them the menu, and Nkhata was quick to assure her. 'Feel free to select anything you like to eat. I would hate to starve you.'

'I'm actually starving,' she replied.

They ordered their meals and drinks. A bottle of white wine was brought at Nkhata's request. He asked Mwila to taste, and she announced that it was very good.

'Susan looked fascinating,' Mwila said as the waiter left them. 'Does she always talk so fast and so excitedly?'

'You should see her with her boyfriend,' Nkhata replied. 'She is either talking or hugging him!'

'Who is the lucky guy?' she asked.

'He is James Kamanga,' he replied. 'He is in the United States of America.'

'What is he doing in the States?' she inquired.

'He's studying telecommunication technology,' he answered.

'Oh! Telecommunications,' she exclaimed. 'When did he go?'

'He left the country about ten months ago,' he explained. 'His course will take about three years.'

'She must be missing him terribly,' Mwila observed. 'Oh, not Susan,' he protested. 'She's so full of life and likes interacting with people.'

'That's no reason why she shouldn't miss him,' Mwila argued, 'if she loves him.'

'You are the expert,' he joked.

'Yes, sir,' she joked back.

There was a short silence as they ate, but Nkhata would not allow it to spoil their first date. 'You are very quiet,' he observed.

'I'm enjoying the delicious meal,' she replied.

'This is one of my favourite eating places,' Nkhata stated boastfully. 'They never disappoint me.' These were words which he could have spared if he had known that Mwila had already been dined and toasted in the country's most famous hotel, the Intercontinental. Mwila, however, did not wish to let him down; she appreciated the fact that he was trying hard to impress her and was doing well at it. She answered that the service was excellent. They continued eating and chatting. Nkhata looked at his watch and said, 'Whee! Time always flies when in the company of a pretty girl.'

Mwila laughed, and her dimples appeared. She asked, 'And what time do you make it, Mr Oily tongue?'

'We still have about ten more minutes,' Nkhata replied, smiling. Nkhata paid the bill, and they quickly walked out.

'Why did you not tip the bugger?' Mwila asked inelegantly.

'He didn't deserve it,' Nkhata replied. 'Above all, I do not want to undo the government's policy which forbids this capitalistic practice. We should be a socialist society you know.' They talked about the pros and cons of socialism on their way to the cinema. Mwila was obviously in favour of capitalism, but both of them defended their respective cases intelligently.

'I'll pay for the tickets,' Mwila insisted as they joined the queue at the Twentieth Century Cinema.

'Next time, woman's libber!' he replied mockingly. They laughed.

In contrast to Bwanga, Mwila found Nkhata intelligent and more mature in his attitude. She was more at ease with him. Whenever necessary Nkhata let her express her feelings without taking offence. Although he lacked Kangwa's experience, etiquette, and polish, he tried to treat her like a lady, which definitely delighted her. She was able to follow the film without any interference.

They took a taxi home, and the taxi driver was asked to wait outside Mwila's flat. Nkhata walked Mwila to her door and then held her hand.

'Thank you very much for coming,' he said. 'You were tremendous company.'

Mwila smiled but said no word. 'I wish I could see you like this more often,' he implored.

She flushed at the flattery. 'I'm glad you asked me, Nkhata,' she replied. 'I thoroughly enjoyed myself tonight.'

'You are always welcome,' he said assuringly.

'Won't you come in for coffee?' she invited, as Nkhata apparently ran out of words.

'I would love to,' he replied. 'But no, thank you. The taxi driver is waiting for me. What are you doing tomorrow?'

'I shall be doing my housework in the morning,' she replied. 'How about you? What will you do?'

'I shall do my shopping,' he said, 'which does not take more than a few hours.'

'Why don't you come over for lunch?' she invited unconsciously.

'Is that an invitation?' he asked excitedly.

'It certainly is,' she replied. 'Twelve hours sharp!'

'You bet. I shall be prompt,' Nkhata accepted, walking away. 'Good evening,' he remembered.

'See you tomorrow,' she replied.

On her own, Mwila felt that she had been foolish to invite the young man. She also realised that although she had enjoyed his company that night, she had no cause to encourage him. But brooding over spilt milk would not help her either. She resolved that she would handle the situation carefully.

Nkhata was indeed punctual for lunch. He arrived at five minutes before noon.

'You are welcome,' she announced. 'I'm glad you've come.'

'Gee, what a flat!' Nkhata exclaimed. 'I didn't know you were living in such luxury.' They talked about the splendid furnishings of the flat for a while.

Mwila had prepared nshima and fish with vegetables. They sat there eating and talking. Mwila was happy to hear that he enjoyed her cooking. Afterwards, Nkhata helped to clear away the dishes, and Mwila did the washing up. Both of them were happy and felt freer with each other than ever before. They talked less about their work and more about themselves that afternoon.

They had just finished washing up when they heard a faint knock at the door. Mwila answered, and it was her friend Musonda with Ngoma, who had now become Musonda's steady boyfriend, and they went out together regularly. They looked happy. Mwila made the introductions and the foursome played cards for a few hours before they decided to go to a Disco in the evening. They went to Lagondola, a popular night club in the heart of Lusaka. The place was jammed with patrons, but they still managed to squeeze in and later discovered that it was worth it. They enjoyed their night out, dancing to the latest pop songs, until they decided to go back home.

Getting out was not easy either. Musonda was knocked to the floor near the door by boys who were surging backwards, avoiding flying broken bottles. There was a fight just outside the door.

'I would like to show you my flat,' Nkhata suggested to Mwila as they parted with their friends.

Mwila hesitated before saying, 'I'll go on one condition.'

'And what condition is that?' he asked.

'That you take me back to my flat by midnight.'

'Let's see,' Nkhata said, looking at his watch. 'That gives me minus thirty minutes.' He smiled.

'I didn't know that it was that late already,' Mwila replied. 'How about another time?'

'No, it's not late,' Nkhata joked, 'it's very early.'

'You know it is late,' she answered. 'Please try to understand. After all, this is only our second date,' she reminded him.

'I promise you,' Nkhata said. 'You won't stay long.'

'Okay,' Mwila agreed reluctantly. Nkhata hailed a taxi and instructed the driver where to go.

His flat was in Kamwala, one of the high-density suburbs of Lusaka. The sitting room was small and contained some old pieces of furniture.

They played records and danced to soft music. Although they talked about themselves, Mwila did not mention anything about Kangwa. She did not know how he would react. On the other hand, Nkhata refrained from asking her about Kangwa. 'I should take it easy until I have gained her confidence,' he said to himself. But he could not help saying what he felt about her. 'Mwila,' Nkhata whispered as they danced closely, 'you are the most beautiful girl I have met.'

'Really?' she asked.

'I'm positively certain about that.' 'Yours is not the only heart I have taken.' Then she teased him loudly, 'Do you want it back?'

'Want what back?' he asked, slightly puzzled.

'Your heart,' she replied teasingly.

'Oh let's see,' he paused, amused. 'No, I certainly can trust you with it.' They both burst out laughing.

Nkhata tried all the school boys' tricks, but as soon as Mwila realised what he was up to, she said no in very certain terms and insisted on going back to her flat. Nkhata did not argue much longer. As they parted, Nkhata repeated that he fancied her terribly. Mwila reminded him that they hardly knew each other.

That Sunday morning, Mwila felt torn between two powerful forces. She was confused to the point of not knowing the direction of her future. She thought about both men while lying down on Kangwa's comfortable double bed. But she braved herself and went to church.

She felt that Nkhata could be a suitable man for her. She realised he had no influence and was not too well off, but the fact that he was young, intelligent, handsome, and single overweighed this. However, she did not need any reminders, as she thought of the flat and virtually all that was in it; everything belonged to Kangwa, and she knew that misbehaviour would leave her out in the cold. Although Mwila's fears were real, she became less frightened, the more she thought about it. She was convinced that her happiness with Kangwa and his property was temporary and that she had to be brave and think more positively about her future, which mattered most. She resolved to disentangle herself from the old man's grip and avoid becoming his permanent mistress.

After work on Friday, Mwila and Nkhata played a few sets of tennis at the N.I.P.A Club. Although Mwila had played social tennis before, she admitted it was her first competitive game and that his services were too strong for her feeble forehand.

She remarked, 'You really gave me a good beating. How long have you been playing?'

'You shouldn't worry a bit. I'll give you some coaching. After all, I have noticed that your reflexes are very sharp.' He had played tennis for about six years but didn't want to discourage her.

'Flattering again?' she asked. 'You seem to be quite good at it.'

'I mean it,' he replied. 'You can catch up very easily. All you need is to return the ball slightly harder and improve on your service by throwing the balls higher than you are doing, which is basic in any case. But your return of service is naturally good.'

'Really?' she acknowledged. 'Thank you.'

'And your main weapon could be your backhand,' he continued. 'It looked so natural. Of course, it has to be developed.'

They went to Mwila's flat after the game, and then Nkhata went for a shower at his place. He returned later to Mwila's flat for dinner. They prepared the meal together.

'I was really exhausted after the game,' she replied. 'You wore me out.'

'It is just because you haven't been playing any games,' he replied. 'I mean real games!'

'Naughty! Naughty!' she said, smiling.

'I'm not being naughty,' he replied defensively.

'Are there some unreal games?' she asked suspiciously.

'Well, some people think that any activity by which a body is slightly moved is a game,' he replied. 'But I don't agree with them.'

Mwila thought she suspected what he was referring to. 'You don't have to be modest about it!' she challenged, staring at him.

'I'm glad you know what I'm talking about,' he replied.

'I still think that you are naughty,' she said.

They were eating and chatting when there was a soft knock at the door.

'I'll get it,' Mwila announced, as Nkhata was about to stand up. Her heart skipped a beat as she went to open the door. If it were Kangwa, he would use his key. 'He is still away,' she thought, and her hopes of him not being the one lifted, but when she opened the door, it was Kangwa, standing there and grinning happily. He didn't use his key as he had seen a light in the sitting room.

'Come in please,' she invited breathlessly, hoping that he would not sweep her into his big arms in front of Nkhata. 'How was your trip?' Mwila asked, walking faster.

'Oh! Refreshing,' he replied.

'And how was life in the capital?' he asked. 'Did you miss me?'

'Ah, it wasn't too bad,' she replied, avoiding his second question. When Kangwa saw Nkhata, he put on his genial smile and his best manners.

'Oh! This is Nkhata,' Mwila introduced breathlessly. 'He works in the same department with me.' She turned, 'And Nkhata, this is Kangwa. He is the . . .'

'I know you, sir,' Nkhata interrupted. 'The Under Secretary in the Ministry of Science and Technology.' Nkhata smiled uneasily.

Kangwa smiled back. He realised that he was famous in the capital and many people were bound to know him through the media.

'Excuse me,' Mwila announced uneasily. She stood up. 'I'll make some tea for all of us.'

She quickly walked into the kitchen. 'What shall I do now?' She asked herself. She had never been in such a tight spot before and she was trying to think fast. She decided not to do anything just yet; after all, the situation might resolve itself. But her apparent courageous attitude did not conceal her true nervous state. She was about to lift the tray when one cup crashed on to the floor, making a terrible noise.

'Are you all right?' Kangwa shouted from the sitting room.

'I'm okay, thank you,' she replied. 'But I have broken one tea cup.'

'Do you need any help?' Nkhata shouted back.

'I shall manage, thank you,' she replied.

Left to themselves, Kangwa and Nkhata talked openly. Their discussion, which continued over tea, covered politics and the city in general. But it was evident that each was sizing the other up very carefully. Even if Kangwa did not feel threatened by Nkhata, he could see that the handsome young man was intelligent, well-mannered and, above all, ambitious. On the other hand, Nkhata knew that the old man was rich and famous in the city, experienced and sophisticated; in all fairness, they could not stand on the same platform. They talked and sometimes laughed, though uneasily.

Later that evening, it was Kangwa who announced his departure first. 'Well, I have to leave you young people.' But he had hardly finished speaking when Nkhata also announced, 'I have to be leaving too, sir.' They all stood up to go at once. Mwila was walking them to the door when Kangwa asked Nkhata if he wanted a lift home. Nkhata politely replied that he would love a lift, but that he was passing through another friend's home nearby. Nkhata was not passing through any other house, but he did not want Kangwa to know his house; it would be embarrassing to him, to say the least.

They said their goodbyes, and Mwila saw them off. She knew she had to think fast. She felt the thought of explaining to both was honourable, but she would not dare tell the truth, as she was not certain whether she could trust Nkhata. Would Nkhata still like her if she told him the truth? But she also had another fear that she might end up losing both men at once. She felt she could easily give up Nkhata and remain happy, as she had no obligation to him. Somehow deep down in her own fast-throbbing heart she knew that in the long run, she would not gain anything from Kangwa. He would not marry her. These thoughts plagued her until she fell asleep.

The following day was Saturday, and Mwila decided to go and see her mentor early in the morning. They talked about her awkward situation, and she spent the whole weekend at Musonda's place. That way she avoided seeing either man.

Although Kangwa tried to ignore Nkhata, he inevitably found himself regarding the young man as a potential threat.

If Nkhata had to be serious, the fact that he was single could be an added advantage. But on second thoughts, he discounted any possibility of a clash. He thought of his investment in Mwila, but decided to play it cool. If the worst came to pass, his marriage and his high position in government would not allow him to come to an open confrontation with anyone over a

girl. But he also knew that he held the trump card; Mwila had to think twice before doing anything stupid!

The weeks that followed were full of dramatic events, completely unexpected by both Mwila and Kangwa, who had continued to see each as usual. Kangwa was now promoted to permanent secretary in his Ministry. Instead of taking his wife to celebrate, he was accompanied by Mwila, a move which surprised many of his friends at the club. As the rift widened again between Chongo and Kangwa, he decided to tell her the truth. His wife pleaded with him to stop seeing Mwila and keep the pledge which he had made when they went to the village. But he was no longer in a compromising mood. He insisted that as long as he adequately maintained the family, he would not tolerate any more nonsense from his wife. As her husband continued coming home late, Chongo took to the bottle again, constantly seeking company and entertainment from brandy and coke. Inevitably, she realised that her temporary shelter from alcohol would not help in solving their marital problem. Their children observed the change of atmosphere in the house, but they were helpless; there was nothing they could do as their mother continued to look at her problems through the bottom of the glass!

Mwila was picked up from work by Kangwa one day, and they drove to her flat. Later, they went out for dinner, listened to some soft music, and talked as they ate. As he looked at her sitting across the table, he reassured himself that she still looked young and very beautiful. She looked back at him and beamed a smile. They talked happily as they finished their meal.

'Shall we go home, honey?' he asked. Mwila nodded.

They were at home, sitting close to each other and chatting when Kangwa suddenly called her name, 'Mwila, you are beautiful and loveable.' He sighed. 'You are the best thing—that has ever happened to me.' He looked worried even though he tried to conceal it.

'Thank you,' she replied, smiling broadly.

'Do you know that I still love you very much?' he asked.

'You have said that before,' she replied. 'But I don't think that one man can truly love two women at the same time.'

They talked and argued, coming to no understanding. Kangwa left shortly afterwards. Mwila went to bed and pondered over her dilemma and her future again.

15

Life had been rather boring for Kasongo in the village. He felt out of touch with any intellectual stimulation and discussion. When he could, he gave a hand to his old father in his wide variety of duties, most of which Kasongo regarded as rather basic.

Kasongo, for instance, loudly detested the chitemene system, perpetually practiced by his people and their ancestors. Even though he appreciated the motive behind the cutting and burning of tree branches to provide some nutrients to the soil, he argued that the practice was destructive to the trees and forests and created arid lands. But his arguments were met with undeserved contempt. The critics who cared to answer called him a misguided young man who had lost his balance and direction. 'How can we condemn the practice without which there would have been starvation among our people?' they would ask. 'Don't listen to Kasongo. He is still unbalanced upstairs!' some argued.

After almost two and a half years in the village, most of his clothes were worn, and it was not uncommon to see him wearing trousers with patches, which has nothing to do with the fashion of the day. Kasongo's social standing in the area was at its lowest ebb, and he himself was aware of this. To many villagers, Kasongo was a classic example of men who spent all their most productive times reading countless books and yet ended up with nothing, a fact which they didn't hide from him.

While in the village, Kasongo had a few bouts of depression. But even during these dark moments, Mumbi's light was the only noticeable candle that shone for him at the end of the dark tunnel. In the company of her

brothers and sisters, Mumbi visited Kasongo as often as their tradition permitted. She encouraged him that he was sane and that everything would be all right. Their friendship had developed to a mature and understanding one. Although he really fancied the girl, Kasongo was in no position to propose to her. She also realised that he had lost confidence in himself and therefore sympathised with him.

As he gradually regained his self-esteem, it dawned on him that remaining in the village for another year was ill-advised. The chances of him going really crazy were pretty high. After a long and careful reflection, he resolved that the only solution was to leave the boring village for the bright lights. In fact, Kasongo felt that he would be more at ease in the city where he would be inconspicuous.

When he arrived in Lusaka, no one had been expecting him, but he knew Mwila's address from her letters; he headed for her flat.

When Mwila opened the door, she was surprised but thrilled all the same to see him. She hugged him. 'Oh! Kasongo,' she whispered. 'You look your old self again! I'm overjoyed to see you, my brother.'

'I'm also happy to see you too, my sister,' he replied. 'Allow me. Let me inspect you.' He slowly circled around her, inspecting her from head to feet.

'Come off that,' Mwila protested. 'Don't you start? You should tell me about serious things first, father, mother, yourself and the people at home.'

'Sis, you have changed. You look so healthy. You are so polished! What happened to you?' He surveyed her further. 'The city has really agreed with you.'

'You think so?' Mwila asked, smiling broadly.

'You look well and healthy too, Brother.' She hugged him again. 'Oh, Brother, I just can't express how happy I am. God answered our prayers. I'm really delighted. I knew it would work out well.'

'Things will be all right now, my dear,' he assured her. 'What we have gone through is no longer important, but historic. Of course, we have to build on it. What is crucial, however, is the taste of things to come.' He sounded calm, confident and prophetic.

They talked at length that night. Mwila was anxious to know about her brother's future plans and how the people she knew were doing in the village. Kasongo, on the other hand, learnt about the gossip in the capital city. He

was surprised that his younger sister was so well informed even on important and somewhat confidential matters.

They agreed that Kasongo should seek for employment.

After a few weeks of job-hunting, Kasongo took the first job that was offered to him, as an administrative manager of an international company based in Zambia. The company, Maxwell Brothers Ltd., was specialised in making detergents and toothpaste.

Kasongo's appointment made him the most senior Zambian executive in the company. He learnt later that the company was under tremendous pressure from the government to zambianise its management staff. The company was willing to indigenise and would have easily obliged by simply moving its junior Zambian staff into high posts even though they were not suitably qualified—the so-called 'window dressing Zambianation', which a number of foreign companies had done, but without truly transferring effective authority to the elevated Zambians. Maxwell Brothers, however, was determined for the future of the company in the country to find suitably qualified and highly educated Zambians. Kasongo had therefore approached them at the most opportune moment. His job carried a comfortable salary which included perks such as entertainment allowance, free accommodation, one domestic servant, and a company car. Kasongo was accommodated in a spacious well-furnished house in Rhodes Park. In his new job, Kasongo was very hard working and proved to be a dedicated administrator. It wasn't long before he established himself in the company.

Kasongo's group of admirers was mostly composed of young men and women. Although he socialised in Lusaka, he never took his conquests seriously. His sweetheart, Mumbi, still retained his deepest affection, and they kept correspondence burning like a non-melting candle. Mumbi was now teaching at Chisembe Secondary School near Chipoma's village.

Kasongo had now worked for nine months. He wrote and invited his sweetheart to visit him in Lusaka which she gladly accepted.

Kasongo and Mwila were at the bus station when Mumbi arrived. He held her in his arms as they hugged and kissed to the amazement of the onlookers. Although not many couples hugged and kissed in public in

Zambia, at that time, a few educated ones left no stone unturned, in the number of habits that they imitated from the Western civilization! It was quite a reunion for the three of them that evening. Mumbi was the first to observe. 'Oh, you've already put on weight!'

Mwila smiled.

'If you say so, it must be true,' Kasongo replied, smiling broadly.

'What do you expect?' Mwila retorted. 'With a change of luck, anything and everything is possible.'

'You can only gain weight if you eat well,' Mumbi challenged. 'I hope no woman other than Mwila has been cooking for you and feeding you discreetly,' she concluded beaming. They all laughed.

Mumbi was on holiday at the time, and she stayed in Lusaka for one and a half weeks. She had stayed in Lusaka for two days before with her late uncle, but this time was special. Kasongo, with a little help from his sister, went all out to impress their special visitor. They showed her places in and around the capital and took her to many functions where she met several interesting people. She found her vacation in the capital really fascinating.

Kasongo and Mumbi also talked generally about many things and in particular about themselves and the future. They seemed to have understood each other rather well. So, when he popped the question at the end of her visit, she immediately said 'yes'. They agreed to inform her parents, but both of them realised that this was a mere formality. Kasongo was once more popular and even famous in his home village and the surrounding area. Mumbi in particular knew that her parents were quite fond of him and that they would readily welcome him into the family. Kasongo's family was once again held in high esteem in the village. They agreed to make concrete plans about an engagement and a white wedding at the end of the year.

Mumbi was particularly impressed with the rapid progress her friend Mwila had made. For a girl who hadn't completed her secondary education and had no formal training, Mwila's swift social advancement was phenomenal. Her wardrobe was filled with modern and fashionable clothes from Europe; she had more than ten pairs of shoes, and much more, she occupied a fully furnished luxurious flat in a very decent area of the capital.

Little did Mumbi know at the time that the real property belonged to Mwila's sugar daddy.

Towards the end of Mumbi's holiday, Kasongo obtained a few days off work. He decided to drive her back to the village in his Fiat 132.

They left early in the morning and travelled all day to the village. They had a warm welcome in Chipoma's village. Many people, friends, relatives, admirers, and some curious villagers crowded his father's courtyard to greet him and of course look at his machine, the car. Kasongo had broken another record in his area—he was the first son of the village to own a car. He reflected that despite the previous health setback, he was not doing badly after all.

Kasongo broke the news of his intention to marry Mumbi to his uncle, who in turn informed his parents and grandparents. His grandfather, Lwaba, a witty old man, rather too active for his age, volunteered to become the official matchmaker. There was no doubt as to his suitability, and therefore, he was asked to go ahead and approach Mumbi's parents in the usual traditional manner.

The following day, Mumbi's family met, and as expected, the proposal was accepted, with no hesitation. His father was happy for him. He had told his son several times that a man only attained his full place and respect in society after getting married. In fact, he had tried to persuade his son to get married many times before, but Kasongo had always replied that he was not ready. Mulenga was delighted with the prospect of a local and respected girl for her future daughter-in-law. Many parents of highly educated sons shared the possibility of their boys marrying foreign women who could not understand their tongue. In this group, a white woman in particular would be least welcome. Racism really did not come into the reckoning as much as the practical realities. A local girl knew their culture and would be accessible to her in-laws. She would render necessary help from time to time. His matchmaker, Lwaba, was the first to boast. 'I knew all along that Kasongo was a very sensible young man. He would not marry a foreigner from Lusaka.' He scratched his bare stomach and his uncombed grey hair.

'What would stop him if he so wished?' Chansa asked. 'In fact, I always thought that he would go for a white woman, the way he ignored all the local girls!'

'What? A white woman, did you say?' Mulenga asked contemptuously. 'No! He wouldn't dare. At least, she couldn't have entered my house.'

'When did it become your house alone?' Chansa teased. 'I thought it belonged to the family, of which I'm the boss.'

'Quiet, both of you,' Lwaba commanded. 'Instead of praising your son for arriving at a sensible decision and making a wonderful choice, there you are quarrelling like children about what he hasn't done! When will you grow up?' he teased.

'Oh, yes,' Lwaba's wife echoed.

'Listen, you too,' Lwaba said to his wife very authoritatively. He lectured to them and went to tell them a story about a woman he knew in another village who went to visit her well-educated son in Lusaka. Her son had just come back from Russia and was married to a white woman. A day after she arrived in the capital city, her son was sent away on an official trip to another province. The visiting woman remained in the house with her daughter-in-law. For one week, the women did not talk to each other, for they couldn't understand each other's tongue. The visiting woman was also starving for she had no taste for the white man's food her daughter-in-law prepared. 'A mess of food suitable only for children still breastfeeding'—incidentally, rice or mashed potatoes. As she didn't know anyone to run to in Lusaka, the poor woman packed her bags and left before her son returned. They all burst into laughter. 'That is true,' Lwaba's wife confirmed. 'You know the woman Mulenga. She is the grandmother of Chipulu!' They all agreed that Kasongo had made a sensible choice and showered him with praises and congratulations.

Back in Lusaka, Kasongo was at Mwila's flat. They talked generally for a while, but Kangwa was the main subject. Kasongo made it clear to his sister that he didn't like her relationship with Kangwa. He explained, 'I don't dislike him personally. After all, he even helped me find my job. But I honestly think that he is too old for you.'

There was silence before Mwila answered. 'I don't dream about a young man anymore,' she replied emphatically. 'In fact, now I agree with what my grandmother used to say that elderly men are better. They look after their women well.' She paused. 'Haven't you seen how well the old man looks after me and treats me? I can't see any young man who can be as loving and caring as Kangwa.' She suddenly remembered her ill-fated relationship with Bwanga. She thought that her feelings towards young men were justified.

'Can you bet on that?' Kasongo asked teasingly. Mwila was still thinking when he went on, 'Look at the way he is cheating his wife. How would you feel if you were in her shoes?'

Mwila looked her brother firmly in the face. She was obviously annoyed with his allegation. She felt he had no right to make any decisions on her behalf.

'It is my choice,' Mwila retorted, avoiding his specific questions, 'and I shall disregard your sensible opinion.' On the other hand, Kasongo realised that Kangwa was educated, rich, and very influential in Lusaka. He was by far better than Chisunka in Chipoma's village.

'I have no intention of making any decisions for you,' Kasongo explained. 'I'm sorry if I gave you that impression.'

'You certainly did,' Mwila replied firmly

'I appreciate that any decision on this matter should come from you alone,' he stressed, 'but I would be failing in my duty if I didn't give you my opinion on a very important issue which concerns your future.'

Mwila listened.

'You know how I felt when they almost forced you to marry Chisunka at home?' he asked. 'I still have your interest at heart and no other motives.'

Mwila nodded.

'I shall always show interest in your future, my sister,' Kasongo continued, 'or shouldn't I?'

'I see what you mean,' Mwila replied meekly. 'I think we just had a little misunderstanding, my brother.'

They hugged and made up. They continued their discussion with no show of emotions. They agreed that Mwila had to be more cautious and observe further, before making a definite commitment.

16

Easter was two weeks away, and Kangwa had hatched definite plans. He told Mwila that he was taking her on a holiday to Kenya. He would make all arrangements and pay all expenses. Mwila was thrilled, not only because it would be her first time she had visited another country, but she had always wished to visit Nairobi. Since she had come to Lusaka, she had heard so much about the beauty and the enjoyable social life of that flourishing East African City. In fact, some of her friends had lived in Nairobi while attending Kianda College for Secretarial Studies.

Kangwa had told his wife that he would be going on an official trip to East Africa. Although poor Chongo knew that there was another woman, she never doubted him when it came to aspects of his official work. He was a very efficient civil servant who was admired and respected by many in the Ministry, who knew how hard working he was. His wife had only admiration for his total dedication to his work. She could therefore not have linked this trip with a carefully planned romantic retreat.

It was a Friday morning when Kangwa was driven to the Lusaka International Airport's VIP lounge by his devoted wife. After checking in, he kissed her goodbye and waved as he walked away towards the VIP Lounge. When he finally entered the Zambia Airways Boeing 737, Mwila saw him and smiled broadly. He walked along the aisle and sat beside her, in the first class.

'Hello there, stranger,' he whispered.

'Welcome aboard,' she replied. 'How did Chongo feel about your trip?'

'She didn't suspect a thing,' he answered. 'I'm glad it worked out so beautifully. I expected that you would arrive later though.'

'I was the first person to check in and board the plane,' she told him. 'I had to avoid meeting your wife. Otherwise, my presence would have made her suspicious.'

'Good girl,' he whispered. 'I'm sure if she had added one to one, her answer was going to be one and that would have meant serious trouble!' They laughed together.

After the routine announcements, the plane took off. After some time, Mwila looked at the plane window and was amazed by the sight. 'Is that the sea?' she whispered to Kangwa as she gazed at the undulating outlines of land merging into endless bluish water marshes.

'I think it is a lake,' Kangwa replied, 'we're still far from the sea.'

'What lake is it?' she asked.

'I think it is Lake Nyasa,' he answered, rather uncertain. 'No, let's ask the crew.'

Kangwa asked one light-skinned air hostess. She smiled gently and then confessed that she didn't know. 'Wait, I'll go and ask the captain,' she said.

Within two minutes, the hostess returned and was smiling even broadly. 'It is Lake Malawi,' she told him confidently.

'Thank you,' Kangwa appreciated. He looked back at Mwila. She smiled gently and nodded.

Their only stop on the way was Dar-es-Salaam, the Tanzanian capital. A few passengers disembarked and more boarded the plane. The majority of the passengers from Dar-es-Salaam were Asians. They conversed heartily in Swahili. Mwila could not understand what they were saying, but Kangwa had a basic understanding of this popular and widely spoken East African language. They had their lunch shortly after leaving Dar-es-Salaam Airport, and Mwila remarked, 'My very first meal away from Zambia!'

'By the way,' Kangwa echoed, 'how do you feel?'

'Great!' she replied.

They continued drinking champagne after their meal. And it was a merry couple that arrived at Nairobi International Airport.

'Oh look, the airport is superb,' Mwila announced as they walked down the gangway.

'You'll see,' Kangwa replied, 'that it is superior to our own Lusaka Airport.'

for Nairobi that morning, and they knew that they would enjoy being alone together in the beautiful Kenyan countryside.

They returned to Nairobi feeling refreshed and spent a couple of days there looking up Kangwa's friends before heading for Mombasa. There was a terrible noise as the car sped along, and Kangwa brought the car gradually to a halt.

'What was that?' Mwila asked anxiously.

'I think we have a puncture,' he replied, opening his door. He was quite right. The left back tyre of their hired Ford Cortina had burst.

'How can they give us a car with rotten tyres?' Mwila complained.

'They are only in the business to fatten their long pockets,' he said, 'and not to satisfy customers.' He quickly replaced the punctured tyre with a spare one, and they were back on the road. 'We shall be in Mombasa soon,' he encouraged. 'It is only thirty-one kilometres away.'

In Mombasa, they booked into the beautiful and expensive Eden Roc Hotel on the island. That night, they went to the casino in their hotel, where they mingled with many tourists, the majority of whom were rich Germans in the company of young Kenyan beauties. It was however the contrary that attracted Mwila's attention. Many elderly white ladies were escorted by young black men, and Mwila quickly commented, 'It looks like many couples have swapped!'

'No,' Kangwa reassured. 'Just like the young black girls, the black boys are in it for the money,' he explained.

'You mean to say that the old women pay their young male escorts?' asked a bewildered Mwila.

'And they pay them well,' he answered.

The three days that they spent in Mombasa passed like minutes to Mwila. She was thrilled to have seen the sea at last, as they sped away in a hired sailing boat. They visited many attractive areas on the island and on the Mainland Malindi. They had such a terrific and enjoyable high life, visiting many nightclubs, dancing, and eating lavishly. However, Mwila had one complaint about Mombasa, the scorching heat. 'I had never been to a place so hot.' She was sweating profusely in spite of her light clothing.

'It encourages people to go half-naked,' Kangwa replied. 'And the tourists enjoy that.'

'Apart from that,' Mwila assured him, 'Mombasa is the most beautiful holiday resort I have ever seen. It's great.'

They returned to Nairobi and eventually to Lusaka. They had had a lovely holiday, and it had brought them closer to each other than ever before.

From the airport, they took a cab to the flat on Church Road. Kangwa left two big suitcases full of new clothes and other presents for Mwila but took a small case of clothes and presents to his family.

* * *

One evening, after Mwila had finished clearing the table after their supper, she came from the kitchen and sat beside Kangwa. They were sitting, chatting and laughing when he suddenly lowered his voice and whispered, 'Do you know how I feel about you, my angel?'

'I turn you on,' she replied.

'No,' he protested. 'Many women can easily turn me on.'

'Can they?' she asked.

'Oh, yes,' he replied, 'but can we leave jokes aside for a change?'

Mwila stared at Kangwa searchingly, but uttered no word.

'Well, do you know how I feel about you?' he asked again.

'I don't know for sure, to be frank,' she replied.

He moved closer and looked at her in the eyes. 'I don't know how you'll take this, but I have fallen in love with you. I want you to marry me.'

She was not only surprised; she was temporarily confused. Kangwa's sudden change of tactics from defensive to direct attack was completely unexpected. She no longer had any ground left on which to floor him! She tried to put on a brave face.

'I'll think about it,' she replied. 'But how about Chongo?'

'I'm positive she'll divorce me when she realises that I want to marry you,' he said confidently.

'I'm overjoyed,' she replied, completely overtaken by emotion.

'I'm glad that you feel as happy as I do about us,' he announced, 'because I'm convinced beyond doubt that I want you more than anything else in this world and that you and I were meant for each other.' He held her close and kissed her passionately.

'Do you realise that I shall have to ask my parents?' she asked.

'Of course, I do, my love,' he assured her. 'Tradition, my sweetheart, is the cornerstone of our society.'

They went over to the club that evening, and although unknown to their friends, they had a celebration drink. Kangwa further suggested that they go and see her parents together, and she readily agreed. He also promised her a big wedding as soon as possible after she had agreed to marry him.

Mwila had a date previously with Nkhata for Thursday, but she brought it forward to Tuesday so that she could clear the air with him. She told him about Kangwa's proposal and about her life with him. Nkhata was disappointed, but he managed not to show it. He told her that if they loved each other and everyone was agreeable, she would eventually be a very rich woman.

When Mwila and Kangwa arrived in Chipoma's village, many villagers were very excited to see her and her companion in his big car. Crowds gathered to greet them.

Mwila's parents were happy to hear that their daughter was to marry a rich man. During the two days they stayed in the village, Kangwa and Mwila slept in separate huts as it was unthinkable for unmarried couples to openly sleep together in the villages. Before they left, Kangwa's matchmaker announced their plans for a big wedding and paid the dowry. In the village, no one had any idea that Kangwa was legally married to another woman.

Mwila, confident that Kangwa's divorce would come through quickly and easily, never mentioned this to her parents either. Even Chiluba, who had privately cautioned Mwila about Kangwa's marital status, was assured that there was no other woman.

Back in the capital city, Kangwa, now positive of his next step, deliberately took issue with almost everything his wife did, right or wrong! It wasn't long, however, before he made it known to Chongo that their marriage was a very unhappy union and that it was doomed to failure. He concluded that the only solution was a divorce and that he could make a fair out-of-court settlement for her if she agreed to a divorce by mutual consent. He did not hide the fact that he wanted to marry another woman. Kangwa was totally surprised by his wife's reaction. She didn't crack or panic as he had anticipated; instead she told him patiently, 'As far as I'm concerned, you are still my lawful husband. If you want to run around with little loose girls, you can please yourself, since it is your own reputation that is at stake.'

'You must give me a divorce, as I'm no longer in love with you,' he demanded angrily.

'I'm sorry, darling,' she replied. 'I still love you as much as before and I have no grounds for divorcing you.' Kangwa was obviously disappointed to see that his wife was totally composed in this major crisis. What he didn't know, however, was the fact that Chongo was just acting. Only a week before, she had talked at length with her lawyer brother about the deterioration of her marriage. In fact, she would have loved a divorce in order to be free. Her brother advised her that as long as she didn't give her husband any grounds for divorce, he was going to find it very difficult, if not impossible, to divorce her. She therefore played her rehearsed role very well and was aware of the consequences. A few days later, Kangwa tried further to entice his wife into accepting a divorce with offers of a substantially increased amount of money in settlement, but again, he drew another blank. Chongo admitted that they had some differences sometimes, but that this was normal in many marriages and did not justify a divorce.

Against all the odds, Kangwa decided to go and live with Mwila at the flat. His actions received a blind eye from his wife, who decided to concentrate her attention on running her business. Under the circumstances, Mwila didn't know what to do. She did not only have fears about the possibility of losing Kangwa, the flat, and possibly her job, she was worried about her reputation. Her friends advised her to keep cool and give Kangwa a chance, since they thought that he truly loved her, to have left his wife for her sake. 'He had more to lose,' they argued.

Kangwa therefore could not go through with a formal wedding for fears of bigamy.

Kangwa, however, bought an elegant and expensive six-bedroom house in a fashionable area of Roma Township. It was a splendid house with a swimming pool in the huge yard. Kangwa and Mwila held a lavish celebration, which they disguised as a house-warming party.

Relatives and friends flocked to Lusaka to attend Kasongo's wedding; some of them neither invited nor expected. They created extra problems for him. A few friends who had generously offered to help with temporary accommodation regretted it afterwards. They found that their rooms were not only crowded, but they had also stretched their funds in order to cater for the unexpected number of visitors.

That week before the wedding, Kasongo looked weak and tired, as he went from one engagement to another. Now his party of friends, including his chosen best men, had just returned from St Ignatius Church, the largest Roman Catholic Church in the capital then. There, they had a church rehearsal for the wedding. Mumbi, her bridesmaids, and Mwila were also present at the mock ceremony organised by the Rev. Fr. Kosmafu, a grey-haired Jesuit priest who had worked in Zambia for many years. The Reverend was a University of Zambia Roman Catholic Chaplain, who had known Kasongo personally during his days at the campus. Father Kosmafu asked him why he rarely attended his masses. Kasongo thought for a while and then, his head low, replied honestly that although he was a baptised Catholic, he was not a regular church goer. He promised, however, that he would improve in view of his new status. The priest smiled gently but instructed Mumbi to encourage her husband to attend mass. He then said to both of them, 'I hope that God will bless you to lead a happy and truly Christian life.'

'Thank you, Father,' Kasongo replied.

'Thank you very much, Father,' Mumbi joined in.

Mumbi, on the other hand, was a truly practicing Catholic. In her family, everyone regularly attended mass, and her father, a retired primary school headmaster, ensured that his family stayed that way. At sixty-eight, he still looked strong and regularly conducted the village church choir.

After church, the party went back to Kasongo's house, where they held their last dancing rehearsal. The best men and the bridesmaids practiced seriously in order to ensure the success of the real thing. When they eventually ended their dancing practice, it was as they had done in the previous two weeks, with the song they now termed 'the national anthem!'

The preparations had gone very well so far. In fact, Kasongo felt that he had been quite lucky; he received help even from many unexpected quarters. Kangwa had also joined in, and his knowledge of capital events and his influence were great assets. It was he who managed to hire the most popular band in Lusaka then, the Mosi-O-Tunya Band, to play at the wedding reception, at short notice. The band had a reputation of being quite heavily booked, but their manager who knew Kangwa well quickly assured him that they would play on the day of the wedding.

That Friday was his last day as a bachelor, but Kasongo's tempo of activities never seemed to slow down. He moved from one place to another to make a last check on wedding arrangements; by evening, he was exhausted, anxious, and had lost his appetite. He decided to go to sleep early.

Kasongo had been lying on the bed for quite a while. He had wanted to sleep early that night, but failed; his mind was rather too anxious for the time of night. He found himself still thinking about the wedding. His mind drifted to some of the people who were not invited, but who had confronted him on the streets for invitation cards. He didn't know some of them well and wondered why they insisted on coming to the wedding. At this point, he realised how much money he had spent on the wedding so far; it had already made him broke. On what would they live after the wedding? He wondered. He had paid for everything except for a small contribution from Mumbi towards her very expensive wedding dress. Now he realised why some newly married couples in the capital almost starved after spending huge sums of money on their weddings. He wished they had forgotten about the party and ceremony altogether.

He remembered the noticeable expense was were free as they were that nothing would make the educated and enlightened the start of a good marriage affluence.

Kasongo looked at realised that he had been felt tensed and nervous. number. He spoke to his sleeping tablets.

The big day finally arrived not only been insomnia, him up after waiting for 1 at 09.30 hours to decorate official bridal car. Kangwa when he went to Kasongo that Kasongo had been he afterwards. 'You gave me wedding scared you and you

'No way,' Kasongo replied in my humble and simple smiled gently.

'Now you are talking like a child!'

'You know,' Kasongo replied, 'I'm warning Thomases that I'm not marry early, maybe you would in.'

'If you intend to die wedding,' Kangwa advised him.

'You sound as if I have some intention of enjoying my life without laughing.'

He remembered the small village marriage ceremonies, where the only noticeable expense was the bride price. The food and locally brewed beer were free as they were donated by the couple's families. But he also realised that nothing would make Mumbi happier than a church wedding. Among the educated and enlightened girls, a white wedding was the only sign of the start of a good marriage; it was a symbol of progress and a yardstick of affluence.

Kasongo looked at his watch, and the time was past midnight. He realised that he had been lying there wide awake for about three hours. He felt tensed and nervous. He picked up the phone and dialled the hospital number. He spoke to his old friend, Dr Kunda, who later brought him some sleeping tablets.

The big day finally arrived, and Kasongo found out that his problem had not only been insomnia, but waking up as well. It was Kangwa who woke him up after waiting for half an hour. They had previously arranged to meet at 09.30 hours to decorate Kangwa's Mercedes, which was to be used as the official bridal car. Kangwa had in fact successfully finished decorating the car when he went to Kasongo's house, only to find him fast asleep. Not knowing that Kasongo had been heavily sedated, Kangwa couldn't help but scold him afterwards. 'You gave me quite a fright,' he laughed at him. 'I thought the wedding scared you and you had died of cold feet!'

'No way,' Kasongo replied cheerfully. 'If there is anything I have prayed for in my humble and single life, it is for death to come after this day!' he smiled gently.

'Now you are talking like a man,' Kangwa said teasingly, 'but why after today?'

'You know,' Kasongo replied patiently, 'after today I shall show all the doubting Thomases that I'm my father's son. Many of them think that if you don't marry early, maybe you are impotent!' Kangwa laughed and Kasongo smiled in.

'If you intend to die so early, you'd better write a will before the wedding,' Kangwa advised mockingly.

'You sound as if I have premonition of death,' Kasongo replied. 'I have every intention of enjoying my beautiful wife and married life.' They both burst out laughing.

The ceremony was due to start at 14.00 hours sharp, and the bridegroom and his party had arrived at the church twenty minutes earlier. At the stroke of two, there was no sign of the bride and her party. Kasongo's nervousness increased, and he started sweating, but fifteen minutes later, he heard the persistent sound of hooters and horns and was certain that his bride was finally about to arrive. He cheered up instantly and smiled.

Holding her father's hand, immaculately dressed, Mumbi really looked her most beautiful that day.

The marriage ceremony and nuptial mass were very well attended and the big church was full, with many people standing outside. Some VIPs, including MMCs and cabinet ministers, graced the occasion with their presence. There were also a noticeable number of University of Zambia graduates, who came to give moral support to their former mate. In front of the altar, it was a calm and well-composed Kasongo who answered the priest and loudly proclaimed, 'I do.' When it was her turn to do, Mumbi spoke so quietly that she was hardly heard even by people seated in the front rows of the church. In the sacristy, the couple exchanged their freedoms by signing the register together with their witnesses.

As the newly-wed couple emerged from the church, led by Mwila, the Matron of Honour, they were showered with confetti to the delight of the cheering audience. Kasongo smiled broadly; Mumbi smiled gently. The best men and bridesmaids radiated supportive smiles. Bulbs flashed as they walked down the aisle. The cameramen were kept busy taking photographs of the newly-weds with different groups of relatives and friends outside the church. Kasongo, therefore, proved wrong all those village gossips that his relationship with Mumbi was a mere paranoid fantasy; he never forgot his village sweetheart at the first sight of his sanity, as they had wrongly predicted.

A long motorcade slowly drifted away from St. Ignatius Church in a deafening sound of horns. They were heading for the Nakatindi Hall, where the reception was to be held. Many more people had just walked to the hall, a distance of about one and half kilometres. The huge hall was packed beyond capacity, and the music was pulsating; the Mosi-O-Tunya Band was playing their best. It was clear that all the invited guests, who couldn't be distinguished from a number of enthusiastic 'gatecrashers', had plenty of food to eat and alcoholic and soft drinks.

After the Master of Ceremonies announced that the newly-wed couple would now officially open the dance floor, there were loud cheers and laughter. The band didn't have to be reminded of the number to play; they had known it for weeks in advance, and it was the 'national anthem' with which they started.

Kasongo and Mumbi stood up to the cheering and applause of a very auspicious audience. They walked slowly towards the centre of the now empty dance floor. They stood there facing each other. Kasongo held his new wife tightly but delicately as he pulled her towards himself. The audience was obviously delighted, and they applauded further. Then in a file, like disciples, the other guests and their partners quickly walked onto the floor, to support what was obviously at that time, a very successful one-couple dance. At this point Mulenga, Kasongo's mother, raced through the crowds, dancing and singing a Bemba song in tune with the English one she couldn't understand, to the amusement of the lively audience.

For Kasongo and Mumbi, the noise of the cheering audience didn't disturb their concentration on the biggest dance of their lives. As they foxtrotted around the floor, only these words from Perry Como's old but famous song constantly rang in their ears:

*Kiss me for a million years;
Love me for a million years;
Then if it doesn't work out;
Then you can tell me goodbye.*

Kasongo looked at his new wife admiringly and held her possessively. Mumbi smiled at him radiantly as camera bulbs flashed repeatedly.

Mwila and her partner later joined the floor, and they waltzed elegantly to their satisfaction. What Kangwa didn't realise, however, was that at this moment, Mwila was reminded of their failed wedding plans, which made her feel somewhat cheated and sad.

It was time for the giving of presents, and they were heaped on a large table placed in direct view of the new couple. Some of the wrapped presents looked quite bulky. Although Mumbi smiled as she shook hands with the guests, her concentration was somewhere else; she was wondering about

the contents of those presents. She hoped that there wouldn't be a lot of duplication. She also hoped that none of those parcels was empty! She had recently heard that a few guests at such city receptions would very nicely wrap anything even an empty box, just to show that they were giving a present. Such guests claimed they had no intention of cheating, but that they were ashamed of sitting with their arms folded when everyone else was giving something.

It was time to raise the toast, and the talkative Master of Ceremonies instead of calling upon the best man, took it upon himself. He bored the audience for several minutes as he showered praise on the obviously embarrassed groom, for his academic, social, and professional achievements. He spoke in a typical black American accent, even though he had been to the United States only for six months.

Mumbi was represented by her father Mukasa, for whom this was a great triumph over his elder brother-in-law, who could have insisted on making the speech had the wedding taken place in the village, where uncles were still more authoritative than fathers over the fate of their children. He advised his daughter to be a good wife. He asked her to be obedient to her husband, whom he presented with a whip, saying, 'Brook no nonsense from your woman. Correct her when she goes out of line.' He told the newly-weds to love each other and also to be ready to keep and entertain their relatives whenever they visited them.

For the groom, Bwalya stood up. Holding his walking stick, he spoke in a mixture of English and Bemba, to the satisfaction of many guests who couldn't understand English very well. Bwalya told Mumbi in no uncertain terms that she was not married to Kasongo alone, but to the whole extended family. Kasongo was told to love and cherish his wife. 'Respect her as you have always respected your mother. She is your new mother,' Bwalya advised. Kasongo was congratulated for reaching full maturity in his society by getting married.

After the speeches, the champagne flowed like water at the high table, covered in a beautiful and obviously expensive white cotton material. Everyone stood up and toasted to the health of the newly-wed couple. The audience burst into thunderous applause after the bride assisted by the groom cut the first slice off an exquisite three-tier wedding cake. Mumbi knew that the impressive cake attracted the attention of many young girls.

who would be eager not only to follow their example, but to beat their magnificent performance.

It was Mumbi's mother this time that amused the audience with what they had never seen at a wedding in Lusaka before. Just after Mumbi and Kasongo had exchanged slices of the cake, the old woman, dancing and ululating all the way to the cake, picked two slices and briskly walked back to her seat at the end of the high table. She pushed one big slice into her husband's mouth, which was reluctantly opened. Giving him the other slice, she commanded that he reciprocates until he obliged. The audience clapped loudly giving them a long standing ovation.

It was now 22.30 hours, and the couple and their party left for an undisclosed rendezvous.

The drinking and dancing continued. But it wasn't long before a fight broke out in one corner of the hall. Two boys were quarrelling over a double-crossing girl. It was the fat short boy who was on the receiving end, and he was hammered with fast flying uppercuts. Hit by a devastating right hook, a looping left uppercut sent him flying. As if to finish his game, the tall stronger boy bent over the victim to show off his prowess. Some female guests screamed as some called out to the men in the audience to stop the fight. There was a bang, and suddenly the tall boy fell to the ground himself, groaning in pain while the disgraced combatant stood up and ran away.

When the spectators moved in, they found the conquering victim lying in a pool of his own blood. Unnoticed by the audience, the fat boy had picked an empty beer bottle, lying next to him when he was on the floor. He smashed the bottle into the tall boy's face, shattering it into small pieces. It all happened so quickly that no one had seen the short boy pick up and use the once useful container turned into a lethal weapon. The now partially blinded victim had lost a lot of blood and was rushed to the nearest hospital, the City Central Hospital, where he received fifteen stitches for multiple cuts on his face.

The M. C. apologised to the guests for the unexpected nasty incident and revealed that the combatants were both gatecrashers. He also announced that the reception was over, to the displeasure of other gatecrashers, who were obviously having a good time. The gatecrashers were always like that in the capital city; they were the first to arrive and the last to leave. In fact, they only left after ensuring that booze would no longer flow.

Back in Milima's village, Chamunda, Kangwa's father, was miserable. His ailing wife, Mutati, had returned from Kasama Hospital the previous week. No sooner had she arrived than there was a further deterioration in her poor health. Many friends had advised Chamunda to consult a traditional healer since the white man's medicine had failed. They suspected that Mutati was possessed by demons or evil spirits, for which a white man had no cure. They told him that should anything happen to his wife, he would only have himself to blame for neglecting to consult well-established witch doctors.

It was now believed that a number of diseases that did not respond to Western therapeutic treatment could still be cured by traditional therapy, which many missionaries and early settlers had openly condemned as dangerous and primitive. Whether such miraculous cures were due to coincidence with natural recuperation or the potency of the leaves and roots used by local healers, no one knew for sure. But they argued, rightly or wrongly, that orthodox treatment too does sometimes coincide with natural healing.

Like many educated Zambians in the country, Kangwa had no faith in traditional healers. He had earlier hinted to his father and brothers that they should not waste time and money on traditional healers. 'My mother deserves reliable modern hospital treatment,' he had emphasised.

Chamunda was now concerned that he would be denying his wife a life-saving chance. He thought of his own childhood when there were no modern hospitals or clinics in the area and remembered that many lives were

saved by the witch doctors. He coughed uneasily and spat carelessly. He scratched his scanty uncombed hair as he made up his mind. He reached his decision; he had to consult a traditional healer at all costs. He thought this would be in the interests of his frail wife.

Chamunda's change of heart was also partly to do with a strong rumour that had circulated in Milima's village. People believed that his poor wife was bewitched locally because of jealousy as his family was the most well-to-do in the area. In the village, Chamunda's house was the biggest and the only one with a corrugated-iron roof. To this, he had added the shops and now a popular bakery in Kasama belonging to his sons. Chamunda remembered vividly what the village headman had once said to him when he heard that his sons were planning to expand their grocery business two years earlier. 'It is all very well to be ambitious and successful, but success should be held in moderation,' he had warned. 'When you expose it extravagantly, you are only digging your own grave!' He now thought that his ambitious sons had finally dug the grave for his poor wife. He decided that they would seriously consider moving to Kasama permanently after his wife recovered. Many people believed that in Kasama, like in the urban towns where populations were cosmopolitan, people lived more peaceful and carefree lives, without constantly bothering about the jealousies and gossip that plagued the villagers in rural areas.

Chamunda chose a very trusted traditional healer, who came from another village some fifteen kilometres away. This woman was so successful and trusted that it was generally believed that a patient had no chance to live if *Mama* Chanza's treatment failed. Chamunda sent for the medicine woman. He sent two white cocks to facilitate her coming. On arrival, Chanza was paid a token fee of K2.00, which signified a contract for the treatment. She would be paid part of the fee later and certainly the remainder after the patient had fully recovered. This emphasised the confidence of the healer in her charms. However, she didn't hide the seriousness of Mutati's illness. Looking in her tiny shining mirror, one of her diagnostic devices, *Mama* Chanza proclaimed, 'This woman is lucky that you brought her to me today. Her case is grave and complicated by many opposing forces. If you came two days later, it was going to be too late!'

'Hmm! Hmm! Hmm!' Mutati's camp agreed in chorus.

Mama Chanza's treatment for demons, like that of several other healers, was a public ceremony. Such public performances gave tremendous publicity to successful healers.

The arena was prepared and two large bonfires started. The spectators had assembled, and all were seated on the floor when Mutati was led from a small house into the centre of the arena by two of Chanza's assistants, disciples as they were called in the village. The patient sat down on a big-reed mat. Just then, the drums started beating. One of the disciples commenced a familiar song which was echoed by the spectators. It took a while before *Mama Chanza* herself emerged from the same house and was greeted by total silence! In her right hand, she carried a lion whisk, familiar symbol of mystical powers and authority. When *Mama Chanza* entered the big arena, the beating of the drums started again, but slowly. She walked briskly towards the patient who was sitting quietly. At this point, the drums beat faster. Chanza held out her hand, slowly swung the whisk in the air and then dipped it into a small gourd held by a disciple. She sprinkled droplets of the fluid contained in it onto the miserable patient, and then she ceremoniously walked around, sprinkling on the two bonfires.

Chanza started a song and the audience joined in; she danced around the bonfires and then around the still patient. Eventually, the healer was in a trance, seized by and communicating with her ancestors. She fell to the ground and rolled around, speaking in strange tongues which no one could understand. Suddenly, the patient was also seized. She rolled on the mat and on to the ground shouting and yelling words unfamiliar to the audience. In her ecstasy, she was also communicating with the spirits and the healer. The frail Mutati stood up suddenly looking strong and lively. She danced and danced on her emaciated legs to the uproar of a sympathetic and supportive audience. The audience was delighted, because going into a trance and participating in the ceremony were the first visible signs of the patient's response to the therapy. In cases where patients failed to respond, it was concluded that they were not possessed by demons but were suffering from something else.

Chanza then quickly ran away into the nearby bush, only to come back moments later with a collection of leaves and roots, the herbs for Mutati's requirements. It was believed that once in a trance, the healer was directed by the spirits to fetch specific herbs for a particular patient.

The herbs were boiled in a big clay pot. Mutati, who was now seated on the mat hissing and yelling, was directed towards the pot. She sat down beside it. A big blanket was brought and used to cover her and the pot. Then Chanza lifted one end of the blanket and removed the lid from the steaming pot. She withdrew her hand swiftly so that the steam could not escape. At this stage, the audience was totally silent again; only Chanza's commanding voice could be heard. 'Open your eyes,' she instructed, 'open them wide. Open your mouth. Open your nose and your ears too. Open everything wide and let the devils go out.'

'Hmm! Hmm!' the crowd roared back in approval.

'And to you devils I say,' Chanza continued, shouting at the top of her voice, 'leave this harmless child alone. She has done nothing wrong. From today, her body is cleansed and purified, and devils trying to disobey my orders do so at their own risk.' Healers, it was believed, had the mysterious powers to exorcise demons.

The audience clapped. No one knew exactly what was happening underneath the blanket; except that Mutati was exposed to steam from the boiling roots and herbs. At the end of the therapy session, Mutati walked away towards the same house from which she had earlier emerged. That was a very good sign, but nonetheless, not the end. The following day, Mutati's chest had a row of cuts made with a sharp razor blade. A powdery medicine was then rubbed on the out flowing blood by one of Chanza's assistants. A prepared medication was also given to her in a bottle to drink as prescribed.

For three days after the ceremony, Mutati looked active and seemingly on the road to full recovery. A week later, however, the optimism of the village over her health turned to despair. Her health deteriorated, and she became weaker and weaker. She died shortly afterwards.

Strong young men were sent on bicycles in different directions to spread the sad news to neighbouring villages. Telegrams were sent to close relatives who lived long distances away including Kangwa, Mutati's most precious son. This was quite a contrast to the past, when drums were the major instruments of communication. In those days, a typical beat could have sent the message of the funeral to longer distances across the highlands and valleys in this part of the district. But drums were no longer used for this purpose.

During Mutati's last minutes of agony, many women and all the children were removed from the house, leaving only a few selected elderly women to attend to her. Mutati slowly gasped her last life, and as soon as she passed away, the old women worked quickly in unison, but in total silence. The body was washed, anointed with oils, and dressed in her favourite frock. 'You only go once, and you should go in style!' Everything in the room was put in place; Mutati's body was laid on a locally made long arm chair, so that the body would be leaning backwards and everyone could see it. Suddenly, as if the women realised that they were finished, they burst out into cries, all of them standing up and moving around the body. It was chaotic crying to begin with. Each person was enumerating the loss in their own way, each one crying out what a generous and wonderful person Mutati had been. The older women in particular were regretting that the unpredictable death had yet again missed them and picked the wrong victim! In the first few minutes, the house was in pandemonium with no one understanding anyone else. One thing was clear though, the house was full of nothing but total grief.

Then, one old woman asked for the attention of the house; she had to shout to be heard. 'We all know what a terrible loss this is and how grieved we all are. But you all should quieten down and let us mourn our loved one in peace. This is what she herself would have wished.'

Instantly, everyone in the house sat down on mats or the bare floor. Although the shedding of tears continued, it was now a more orderly affair. Women took turns to lead the mourning, praising the lost one and sending messages through her to their long-departed dear ones. Some old women had a good reputation for leading funeral songs.

Meanwhile, men had assembled outside the house and organised young men to go and fetch firewood from the nearby forest. They also put out a small plate on a chair for donations of money, for buying food to feed the large number of mourners. The majority of villagers donated cooked food or simply flour, meat, fish, or vegetables, instead of paying cash.

Kangwa and his party, which included Mwila, Kasongo, and Mumbi, arrived by air from Lusaka that evening. As they entered the funeral house, it was Mwila who cried out loudest for everyone to hear. She was wearing very simple clothes and a pair of old flat shoes. That was what was expected of her, as in the village, she was now known as Kangwa's new wife. Then Mumbi and Mwila joined other women in singing funeral songs. Kangwa and Kasongo sat near the door, with their heads bent low for a few minutes

and then joined the women in their different. They were from Lusaka and their job was relating old tales as they sat while the men were busy caring. He remembered the funeral while men

For two consecutive days, the house, around bonfire, was full of whom they were mourning.

On the burial day, under the guidance of the village head, all a communal affair. The people worked shoulder to shoulder, a social community spirit of happiness, and help. The villagers were sharing their grief.

Kangwa had heard that the man who had rejected him had come from Kasama. He wanted to not bring back his dream.

'But this is my dream, the coffin is the least of my concerns.'

'So what?' Chibaye asked.

'I'm responsible for my dream with the whole idea of my contempt.'

'This is not Lusaka, you need for you to show your ambitions and dreams.' Chibaye fumed.

Only then did Kangwa referring to. Kangwa murmured, 'Primitive and primitive.'

They took the body to the prayers had just finished with the help of four men who climbed out, close from

and then joined their men folk outside, where the mood was completely different. They were greeted enthusiastically and asked questions about Lusaka and their journey that day. The men were casually cracking jokes and relating old tales as if nothing had happened. It crossed Kasongo's mind that while the men were brave and responsible, the women were emotional and caring. He remembered the old saying, 'Women will break down at your funeral while men crack jokes outside.' Now, it did make sense.

For two consecutive nights before the burial, the men slept outside the house, around bonfires. The women took turns to sleep and mourn Mutati, of whom they were constantly reminded by the corpse in their midst!

On the burial day, a number of selected men made the coffin with the guidance of the village carpenter. Others helped to dig the grave. It was all a communal affair, free of charge, and the willingness with which the people worked showed that Milima's village was not only a location, it was a social community where people interacted, celebrated together in times of happiness, and helped each other in times of need or grief. This time, the villagers were sharing their grief.

Kangwa had had an exchange of bitter words with his uncle, Chibaye, who had rejected his intention to purchase an expensive, ready-made coffin from Kasama. He was warned to keep his money in his pocket, as it would not bring back his dead mother!

'But this is my own mother, Uncle,' Kangwa explained, 'and purchasing the coffin is the least I can do.'

'So what?' Chibaye blurted out. 'What difference will it make?'

'I'm responsible, and I can afford it,' Kangwa replied. 'What is wrong with the whole idea anyway?' He stared at his conservative uncle with contempt.

'This is not Lusaka,' Chibaye answered emotionally. 'And there is no need for you to show off. Haven't you caused enough problems already by your ambitions and showing off behaviour? Do you want all of us to die?' Chibaye fumed.

Only then did Kangwa get the idea of what his traditionalist uncle was referring to. Kangwa was sorry and terribly disappointed. He walked away murmuring, 'Primitive! Very primitive!'

They took the body to the graveyard. Reverend Kangalu who led the prayers had just finished the sermon when the coffin was lowered slowly with the help of four people in the corners of the freshly dug pit. When they climbed out, close friends and relatives threw soil into the grave, the last

farewell. Faced with the brutal reality that Mutati would never be seen again, almost all the women burst out crying, shedding tears and some falling to the ground crawling and fainting uncontrollably.

When they came back to the village, a distance of about three kilometres, everyone who handled soil from the grave washed their hands and feet in water, thus washing away Mutati's spirit. But that village had not heard the last of Mutati; it still had her widower, who would one day require a replacement. Until that time, poor Chamunda had to lead a very lonely and unsociable life, in order to justify his sorrow for his great loss.

In Lusaka, Chongo had learnt of Mutati's death from Kangwa's friends. The same evening, Chongo and her lawyer brother arrived in Milima's village to attend the funeral, of which they were not officially informed. This caused great embarrassment to the bereaved family and Kangwa in particular. Chongo was inevitably treated as if she was still Kangwa's favourite wife! She came from a neighbouring village and was not short of old friends and sympathisers. To avoid further disruption, Kangwa and his party left for Lusaka early the following day, leaving Chongo and her brother in the village. Chongo and her brother later visited their own village before heading back for Lusaka.

For almost a week, friends and relatives in and around Lusaka visited Kangwa to express their sympathy on his unfortunate loss. Even though they were unexpected, Chongo's friends in Lusaka came too. Kangwa was somewhat confounded. He put on a brave face and the embarrassment did not show.

One day after work, Kangwa handed a sealed envelope to Mwila saying, 'I have a letter for you, but I have no idea where it came from.'

Mwila took the blue envelope and glanced at it. She couldn't guess the name of the sender, as her name and address were typed.

'But who gave this letter to you?' Mwila asked, sounding suspicious.

'No one gave it to me,' he replied. 'I found it on my table! Why don't you go ahead and open it?' he suggested.

'Here we go!' Mwila said, sighing. She quickly opened the envelope and was surprised by the contents. A note from Kangwa read: 'Baby, you can drive my car at the end of these lessons!' Attached to the note was a receipt headed Changwa Driving School for fifty driving lessons. First, Mwila was speechless as Kangwa stood there staring at her. She then burst out, 'Darling

Thank you very much for being so considerate.' She moved closer to him and kissed him gently.

'You are welcome,' he encouraged. 'I thought that it would be more convenient if you could drive yourself at times.'

'Thank you, love,' she said, holding his arm, 'but did you have to pay for so many lessons? Fifty lessons are too many and too expensive, don't you think?'

'Don't worry your pretty head, love,' Kangwa assured her.

'We can afford it, and I want to make sure that you are a good driver after these lessons.' They looked at each other and smiled.

19

Mwila had been collected from work by Kangwa's driver that Friday afternoon. She noticed that he was using their Mercedes Benz; he always used Kangwa's official car. She didn't ask any questions. Two hours later, Kangwa entered the house and asked, 'had a good day at the office, darling?'

'Yes, darling,' she answered auspiciously. 'In fact, I have some good news for you.'

'Good news,' he replied cheerfully. 'It must be your special day!'

'My special day!' she exclaimed. 'Why?'

'First your good news,' he replied, 'let's hear it.'

She walked to the table and picked up a letter from a file and handed it to him. He read the letter quietly, and then he complimented her. 'Congratulations honey. I knew that you deserved it.' The letter was signed by the general manager of the Zambia Coffee Company and part of it read: 'I am pleased to inform you that you have been promoted to personal secretary, at a salary of K3,540 per annum on the salary scale K3,540-K4,260 with effect from 1 July 1978. Your incremental date now changes to the first of July each year, but your other conditions of service remain as indicated in the Company's Terms and Conditions of Service. I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate you heartily on your well-deserved promotion . . .'

Mwila was hard working; besides, she was attending evening classes at Evelyn Hone College. She had passed Pitman's shorthand and typing with good speeds.

'Let's go out, darling,' Kangwa invited, 'for I have good news for you too.'

'For me!' she exclaimed. 'But why can't you tell me in here? I want to do my cooking.'

'You won't cook tonight,' he said, 'and that's an order.'

'That's dictatorship!' she protested. 'You know, I was set to cook something really nice for you tonight.'

'Save it for another day,' he commanded. 'We are going out for a change.'

'Please, Kangwa!' she pleaded. 'I don't want us to go out tonight.' She looked at him, expecting that he would change his mind.

Kangwa stared back at her and smiled gently, but his words were firm. 'The boss says we are going out!' he instructed, pointing to the door.

'Yes, boss!' she finally gave in.

They slowly walked round to the car park behind the house. Behind the Mercedes, Mwila saw a new Fiat 128. She wondered who the owner was. Kangwa took a bunch of keys from his pocket and handed it to her, saying, 'Happy birthday darling.' He kissed her lightly on the lips and looked into her large brown eyes, and he kissed her again, but more passionately this time.

'Oh, darling,' she shouted joyfully. 'What should I say? What should I do?'

'Don't say anything,' he replied quickly, 'and don't do anything.'

'Thank you ever so much,' she told him. 'You are my precious angel.'

She touched the car but still she couldn't believe it. 'You can't do all this for me, James. This is too much for me.' She rarely called him James, his Christian name. She looked down as she blinked her eyelids several times. He saw tears coming out of her big eyes, but he knew that they were tears of happiness. He simply reassured her, 'Darling, you mean everything to me, and you deserve more than this small gift.' He took her in his broad arms and kissed away her tears of joy.

'I am sorry if I embarrassed you,' she apologised. 'I'm so happy I don't even know how to take this.' She smiled broadly. Mwila came from a very poor family, and they gave each other no presents on such occasions. In her family, the only thing they knew was to share the little they had and that they learnt to share readily and judiciously. She thought that her life had now reached a completely new and higher horizon. She wondered why

she so often worried about her future; Kangwa was there to provide the assurance.

The car keys dropped from her hand as they embraced and kissed passionately again.

'Come on, open it,' he commanded, 'and give me a lift if you don't mind.' He picked up the keys and handed them back to her. Mwila quickly opened the door, sat in the driver's seat, and admiringly held the steering wheel for a long minute before opening the other door for him.

Mwila had passed her driving test on the second attempt; in fact, she had driven the Mercedes a few times, when they were away from the traffic congested city.

Kangwa was in the passenger's seat, and Mwila was at the wheel. 'Where shall we go?' she asked, turning the ignition key.

'Just a minute,' he reminded her. 'We should lock the house in case we don't return early.' She sat there waiting for him.

Once they left the city, Mwila stepped on the accelerator and drove very well indeed, and he didn't hesitate to compliment her. They had gone past Chilanga when Kangwa cautioned her, 'It will be getting dark soon. Don't you think we should be returning home?'

'But I can drive at night,' she protested. 'At least I need the experience,' she added thoughtfully.

'I know you do,' he replied. 'But don't you think you need more experience driving during the day first?'

She nodded and said, 'Yes, sir. You are the boss.'

'You don't have to agree,' he teased her. 'It is your car after all!'

Back at the house, they had a bath, changed their clothes, and then went to the Ridgeway Hotel for a dinner dance.

Mwila's twenty-sixth birthday party was on Saturday night, and it was a lavish affair. The party was very well attended, mostly by the well-to-do in Lusaka, many of whom were personally known to Kangwa. For Mwila, this birthday was the first to be celebrated with a party of such splendour and gaiety. She was also, for the first time, playing a full role as hostess to some of the most privileged residents of Lusaka. In spite of her inexperience, Mwila carried out her role as hostess very well and knew that she owed her dramatic elevation in social status to none other than Kangwa. She resolved to do everything to please him.

Mwila had driven to Sunday afternoon. Their started working. Afterwa her friend sewing.

'Nice to see you,' M really enjoyed ourselves.

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'You know you are a friends are for.'

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Mwila had driven to Chilenje South to visit Bwalya and his family one Sunday afternoon. Their relationship had now normalised since Mwila had started working. Afterwards, she drove to Musonda's flat, where she found her friend sewing.

'Nice to see you,' Musonda greeted her. 'That was a fabulous party. We really enjoyed ourselves.'

'Thank you for coming and for helping,' Mwila said. 'You should also thank Ngoma for me for tolerating my constant interference that night.'

'You know you are always welcome,' Musonda assured her. 'That's what friends are for.'

The girls decided to go for a drive. 'Let's go out on our own,' Mwila said. 'Just like the old days.'

'How about Kangwa?' Musonda asked. 'Won't he be looking everywhere for you?'

'I had permission,' Mwila replied. 'Besides, he has also gone to visit his men folk. I'm sure they are talking shop right now.'

'Oh, really?' Musonda exclaimed. 'What are we waiting for then?'

'Let's go,' Mwila agreed, 'just the two of us. Like the old days.'

'This will certainly bring back some old memories,' Musonda concurred.

They drove southward to Mundawanga Botanical Gardens about eleven kilometres south of Lusaka on the Kafue Road. At the gardens, the girls sat by themselves after ordering soft drinks. That's when Mwila learnt of her friend's encounter at the office the day before the party.

'I was busy typing that Thursday morning when the door opened,' Musonda explained. 'Then I saw this tall bearded man close the door behind him.'

'Did he knock?' Mwila asked impatiently.

'He didn't,' Musonda replied. 'I asked what I could do for him. I continued typing as I had many letters to do.'

'What happened then?' Mwila asked, not sure where all this was leading to.

'This maniac said that his name was Sitali,' Musonda went on. 'He started boasting about his intelligence and talents. He sat down before I showed him the chair.'

Mwila listened attentively.

'He said that he was looking for a job as a lawyer,' Musonda continued. 'But I told him that my boss was away and that we had no vacancies in any case. But he said that he had heard about the job we had advertised the

previous month and he already had plans for the contribution he would make to the company. He sounded pompous. I told him that the post had already been filled and therefore I thought the company would not employ him,' Musonda explained. 'I asked him to come back later and see my boss if he wanted to.'

'And did he leave?' Mwila asked impatiently.

'No,' Musonda replied. 'He said that he wanted to take me out for lunch, but I refused and told him that I was expecting my boyfriend to come any time to take me to lunch. Then I asked him to see the administrative manager on the ground floor instead. He agreed on one condition that I take him to the office. I decided to escort him, just to get rid of him.'

'You are a good secretary,' Mwila teased. 'Even escorting the unemployed.'

'I didn't have much choice,' Musonda replied, 'did I?'

'I guess you were in a fix!' Mwila agreed.

'Now listen to this,' Musonda said. 'We were in the lift when this lunatic swiftly grabbed me from behind. He tried to hold me close and commanded that I give him a kiss for a start!'

'Oh, no!' Mwila exclaimed. 'It must have been awful!'

'I was completely taken unawares,' Musonda continued. 'I tried to free myself from his hold, but his grip was so firm it hurt to struggle. He was so strong.' She sighed. 'I turned to face him, in order to keep his body away from mine by holding his shoulders and straightening my arms.'

'Couldn't you scream or shout for help instead?' Mwila asked.

'He had warned me not to scream, and God, I was so scared,' Musonda replied. 'I asked him whether he was after the job or after me. He said both and smiled in a crazy manner. He scared me to death.'

'You should have cheated him and told him that there was a vacancy,' Mwila suggested. 'Maybe then he would have behaved himself.'

'I doubt it,' Musonda answered. 'Anyway, I didn't, and he pulled me towards himself. When our bodies were touching, he tried to kiss me. Then thank God, the door of the lift opened. In the confusion, I didn't even realise that we had reached the ground floor.'

'So, did the messengers save you?' Mwila asked.

'No,' Musonda protested. 'It wasn't them.'

'Who was it then?' Mwila asked.

'Standing there waiting my boyfriend,' Musonda said that way, as if I was dirt itself.'

'It couldn't have been v

'That madman Sitali s her Fanta. 'Although I wa in my life. I introduced N left, without saying a word.

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'Standing there waiting for the lift and maybe justifiably annoyed was my boyfriend,' Musonda said, sighing. 'I have never seen him look at me that way, as if I was dirt itself.'

'It couldn't have been worse,' Mwila suggested. 'What did Ngoma do?'

'That madman Sitali suddenly left hold of me,' Musonda said, sipping her Fanta. 'Although I was terribly embarrassed, I had never felt so relieved in my life. I introduced Ngoma as my boyfriend, after which Sitali quickly left, without saying a word.'

'You mean Ngoma didn't talk to him or something?' Mwila asked.

'Not a word to him,' Musonda answered. 'But when I explained how it had happened, he wouldn't believe a word I said. He insisted that we had been romancing and that I was a willing partner!'

'Oh, Lord!' Mwila exclaimed. 'It was bad.'

'Bad!' Musonda exclaimed, sighing. 'It was atrocious!'

'I'm sorry for you. It was such a nasty experience,' Mwila sympathised. 'And for Ngoma too. After what he had seen, what on earth could he believe?'

'I think you are right,' Musonda replied. 'But at the time I was in no mood to think. I expected sympathy and protection from him, but all he could do was blaming me as if I was a prostitute! So, I told him off.'

'You told him off?' Mwila ejaculated. 'That was certainly harsh. Tell me, what happened then?'

'We were in a restaurant discussing it over lunch,' Musonda explained. 'When I realised that he wouldn't believe me, I lost my temper. I suddenly stood up and told him that he was in no position to be possessive after all.'

'I think both of you were being childish and selfish,' Mwila replied.

'I don't think so,' Musonda protested, 'because, suddenly, the expression on Ngoma's face changed. It became soft, and I knew that he finally believed me. He said to me, "Please, honey, sit down and let's forget about this trivial event."

'That was a good thing,' Mwila agreed. 'I'm sure you did comply.'

'Oh, yes,' Musonda sighed with a smile. 'You should have been there to appreciate the feeling I had. We looked into each other's eyes and smiled simultaneously. There was only love and forgiveness in his eyes.'

Kasongo and his wife dropped in at Kangwa's house. He left Mumbi with Mwila and went out with Kangwa for a drink. They were now close friends, and they had mutual respect for each other's grit and integrity. At the Ridgeway Hotel Lounge, they were joined by Phiri. They exchanged greetings.

'I heard the good news,' Kasongo said to Phiri. 'Congratulations mate.'

'Thank you,' Phiri replied heartily.

'Oh, yes, Mr Governor,' Kangwa joined in. 'Well done. We are proud of you.'

Phiri had just been promoted to Lusaka's District Governor, a very influential post. Other friends joined them and were buying rounds to celebrate Phiri's promotion. They drank and cracked jokes. They had fun for a couple of hours before returning home.

One afternoon, Ngoma met Mwila in a supermarket. She asked about Musonda, whom she had not seen for the past week. Ngoma explained that their relationship had been over for exactly one week.

'What happened?' asked puzzled Mwila. 'I thought you believed her about the incidence in the lift.' It was now two months after the incident.

'Oh! So you know about that small incident,' Ngoma said, smiling. 'Much as I couldn't believe what I saw taking place in the lift, I later accepted her explanation.'

'You mean it had nothing to do with your break up?' Mwila asked anxiously.

'No!' he answered. 'Absolutely none.'

Ngoma then explained that Musonda came up with the excuse that her old boyfriend had returned from India, where he had been studying for four years. He proposed to her, and she claimed she had agreed to marry him. Ngoma was really disappointed, but he admitted that he would be happy for Musonda if she settled down with one man. He had, however, double-checked and knew for a fact that the old boyfriend was engaged to another girl and had no intention of marrying Musonda, whom he regarded as a double-crosser.

He was informed that Musonda was actually going about with a married Nigerian accountant, who drove a big American car. Ngoma complained that Musonda had simply been lured by the Nigerian's sweet talk and the way he spent money lavishly on the young Zambian ladies. A number of

Nigerians, mostly those who sympathised with the Biafran cause, had come to work in Zambia during the Nigerian civil war. In spite of their small numbers, they were known to be one of the most vocal and socially active foreign groups in the Zambian capital.

Without a wedding, Mwila occasionally had mixed feelings about her relationship with Kangwa. She was sometimes tortured by the apparent insecurity of her future. Merely cohabiting with him had no guarantees. 'What if the whole affair failed and Kangwa made peace with his legal wife?' she used to ask herself many times over.

Kangwa, as if he read her mind, made her very happy indeed; he loved and doted on her. Mwila in turn loved him and pleased him without ever showing her concerns over her security. However, her apprehension continued to brew inside her.

Mwila was now enjoying the taste of the high society in which Kangwa mingled. However, even though they mixed well among well-to-do families in Lusaka, a few of them despised their kind of relationship. This led to some amount of gossip in the capital. A few of Kangwa's critics used to argue that Kangwa was a bigamist bastard and that he only got away with it because he was a top government official. 'Rubbish,' his supporters would protest. 'He is no bigamist since he is only legally married to one woman. Even if he is, it is no business of the government to interfere in the domestic affairs of its citizens. It is up to the offended woman to sue if she so wished.' The critics would often be silenced.

In Chipoma's Village, Mwila's parents were not only surprised but were puzzled to learn that it was impossible for their 'well-educated' daughter to have a wedding. Not that they preferred a white church wedding to the quiet little village ceremony, to which they were well accustomed. Mwila had written a long letter to them in which she explained why the wedding could not take place. The whole thought of a husband begging for a

divorce from his wife was divorce or leave his wife with divorces in traditional marriage paper protection! The compulsion for a husband to inform his second wife. Although the second, the latter, almost always favours from the husband.

Kangwa was very happy about pregnancy. This would mean his new in-laws, it would also mean the urban areas like Lusaka where a man had full authority and control together. They went to the capital.

Weeks later, they had a baby. Mwila was asked to give up her job and leave after her pregnancy because to which she could go back to her village for security for her and the baby. She thought that she didn't need her salary. She would not swallow that.

She told him quite frankly that she couldn't predict what would happen. This was the first time that she had said since they had started living together.

Kangwa sat still. He was trying to put her mind at ease but she had doubts. It took all his patience to explain with some secret information on uncertain terms that he did not want a personal secretary to anyone.

Mwila played her role as a good partner. She was a good partner, with her husband's relatives, friends and family. Her respect and admiration for their respect and admiration of a good mother; they admired her where hospitality came naturally.

One Saturday afternoon, she was in the sitting room. 'Knock, knock, knock.'

divorce from his wife was unheard of in the villages, where a man would divorce or leave his wife whenever he wanted. There were, however, fewer divorces in traditional marriages than in the modern ones in spite of their paper protection! The common alternative under traditional marriages was for a husband to inform his wife that he would be getting her an assistant, a second wife. Although the first wife would inevitably be senior to the second, the latter, almost always a younger woman would receive more favours from the husband.

Kangwa was very happy and proud when Mwila broke the news of her pregnancy. This would not only bring him more respect and freedom with his new in-laws, it would also strengthen his hold on his young wife! Even in the urban areas like Lusaka and the Copperbelt, it was common belief that a man had full authority and firm grip on his woman after they had children together. They went to the club for a discreet celebration drink.

Weeks later, they had a frank discussion which lasted several hours. Mwila was asked to give up her job. But she only wanted to go on maternity leave after her pregnancy had advanced. In this way, she would keep her job to which she could go back afterwards. This was the only guaranteed future security for her and the baby. Kangwa insisted that she needed more rest and that she didn't need her salary and he would always provide. At first, Mwila would not swallow that.

She told him quite frankly that although she had total faith in him, she couldn't predict what would happen to her and the baby in case of his death. This was the first time that she had mentioned the possibility of his death since they had started living together.

Kangwa sat still. He scratched his bald head uneasily. He talked to her trying to put her mind at ease. Mwila listened attentively but still had her doubts. It took all his patience and tact to convince her, but he had parted with some secret information from his new will. He also told her in no uncertain terms that he didn't like the idea of his own wife working as a personal secretary to anyone else!

Mwila played her role as a full-time mistress to Kangwa's satisfaction. She was a good partner, with a respectable sense of humour. She entertained her husband's relatives, friends, and their children happily, and this earned her their respect and admiration. They thought she possessed the qualities of a good mother; they attributed this to her being brought up in the village, where hospitality came naturally.

One Saturday afternoon, Kangwa opened the door and walked into the sitting room. 'Knock, knock,' he said. 'Anybody home?'

There was no reply, and then he heard her voice coming from the kitchen. She was singing and could not hear him.

'Is that you honey?' he shouted.

'No, it is not me, Jimmy!' she teased him. 'It must be my double!'

'All right then. Since you are in the mood, I'll sing for you if you promise to dance,' he said, entering the kitchen. 'Is that a deal?'

'Are you trying to serenade me?' she challenged him, still continuing with her plate-washing. 'You sing, you know I can dance.'

Their conversation was interrupted by a knock at the door. It was Margaret. She came to plait Mwila's hair. The two women frequently plaited each other's hair, and they were as good as the Zairean women who charged exorbitant prices in their hastily erected hair salons. Such saloons were now a common feature at the markets in the capital.

'Incidentally, did you hear the sad news?' Margaret asked as she sat down.

'What sad news?' Mwila replied.

'That Mr Chishala is dead!'

'No, you don't mean it,' exclaimed a terrified Mwila. 'But we saw him in the canteen yesterday.'

'Which Chishala is that?' Kangwa asked.

'He is our marketing manager,' Mwila answered. 'But when did he die?'

'Last night,' Margaret replied.

'Was it a car accident?' Kangwa asked.

'Yes,' Margaret answered. 'And he wasn't alone. He was travelling with his girlfriend when it happened.'

'What a shame!' Mwila pitied.

'Did she survive?' Kangwa asked.

'No, both of them died on the spot. I hear their bodies are beyond recognition and the car is a write-off!'

Kangwa lit his cigarette before announcing his departure from the house. 'I should leave you girls to mind your hair and of course the inevitable gossip!'

'You are certainly right,' Mwila echoed. 'Is it scaring you?'

'I see no reason why he can't stay and listen to it,' Margaret protested. 'It will amuse him.'

'I wish I could,' he said jokingly. 'But I'm sure I'll be happier with my men folk at the club.' He left them immediately.

The girls moved on to the veranda.

'Doesn't your house servant work on Saturdays?' Margaret observed, as she was oiling and combing Mwila's hair.

'He used to,' Mwila replied. 'But I fired him yesterday.'

'Fired him?' Margaret asked. 'Why?'

'Our houseboy had a woman friend, a wife of another houseboy in the neighbourhood,' Mwila explained.

'But you couldn't have sacked him for that?' Margaret protested. 'That is purely his own domestic problem.'

'It went beyond his domestic boundaries,' Mwila replied. 'The woman used to come into our house during working hours without our knowledge. Then she could collect foodstuffs, you know, mealie-meal, meat, salt, sugar, and things like that.'

'How could he dare!' exclaimed a surprised Margaret. 'Some people have the guts,' Mwila replied. 'After all we have done for him. He was like a relative to us. We bought him clothes and gave him foodstuffs regularly. Now see how he had repaid us!'

'And how did you find out?' asked Margaret. 'Did you catch the woman red-handed in the house?'

'No, we didn't catch her,' Mwila replied. 'The woman's husband found food in the house which his money could not buy. They quarrelled over it, and then the wife confessed.'

'Oh no!' Margaret sighed. 'Did your servant then confess in turn?'

'He didn't,' Mwila replied. 'It was the offended husband who came here last Thursday and lodged a complaint. It was quite embarrassing.'

'And when he was stealing all those things, did you miss them?' asked Margaret inquisitively.

'I had a feeling that flour and meat were finishing much faster,' Mwila replied. 'But honestly, I wasn't certain, so I didn't bother to ask him.'

Kangwa returned later and had dinner with them, after which they drove Margaret back to her flat.

Mwila had just parked her car in front of the maternity wing at the hospital. She had come to the hospital to attend the antenatal clinic, which she did fortnightly. She was walking towards the front entrance when she saw Nkhata coming out of the building. He smiled after recognising her and said, 'Good morning, Mum. You look so happy. I think married life has agreed with you.'

'Hello, Nkhata,' she smiled back. 'I'm sure you can still call me Mwila.' She often felt embarrassed when she was addressed as Kangwa's wife; she couldn't tell whether it was ridicule or a compliment.

'How is life in the city?' he asked, his eyes firmly fixed on her bulging tummy.

'Things are okay,' she assured him. 'At least I have no complaints so far.'

'The company is already missing your dedicated services,' he said. 'Did you have to resign?'

'Originally I had mixed feelings about it,' she accepted. 'But in the end, I was convinced I could do with a long holiday.' She smiled broadly as he grinned.

'Congratulations,' Mwila complimented him. 'I heard about your promotion.'

'Thank you,' he said. 'I shouldn't call it an important promotion.'

'Really!' she exclaimed. 'Some people are too modest.'

Nkhata had been promoted from personnel officer to assistant personnel manager. His new position entitled him to a better company house in the low-density area. For his age, he had made good progress since he had not worked for the company for a long time.

There was silence as they stared at each other. Suddenly, Mwila gave an excuse that she was late for the clinic, although she knew that she still had another fifteen minutes. She had felt uneasy because of their past relationship.

* * *

Mwila's mother, Mulenga, had just arrived at Kamwala Bus Station. Her daughter and Kangwa were there to meet her. The main purpose of her visit was to be at hand when Mwila gave birth. That way, she could teach her daughter the dos and don'ts of looking after babies. As she came out of the bus, Mulenga kept her distance and made a curtsy to greet her son-in-law, and with great respect, Kangwa reciprocated.

There was a small problem at the bus station. Mulenga refused to enter Kangwa's car. The message was understood; this was out of respect for her

son-in-law. By Bemba tradition, it was regarded as disrespectful for in-laws to mingle! It was therefore common for in-laws to speak to each other with a good distance between them and uncommon for them to enter each other's houses. Such practices, however, were now often ignored in the rigours of modern urban life. Kangwa employed all his tact and power of persuasion, but the old woman was adamant. 'I'd rather walk than enter my father's car!'

'You can't walk, Mother,' Mwila protested. 'It would take you hours to reach home.'

'It doesn't matter how long it takes me,' Mulenga replied. 'In the village, I walk long distances every day. Have you forgotten how we used to walk to and from the fields daily?'

Kangwa suggested that he would go by taxi and leave the car for Mwila to drive her mother home. Mulenga would not take that either. She argued that entering the car alone was as bad as entering her in-law's bedroom! Mwila and her mother had no choice but to take a taxi home, while Kangwa followed behind them in his empty Mercedes.

It was a Sunday afternoon when it became clear that the onset of Mwila's labour was approaching. Mulenga told her daughter to be brave and take it easy and that everything was going to be all right. Kangwa had just returned from Chainama Golf Club. Although he had a lower handicap and had played well that day, his team had been routed by a visiting Copperbelt select team. As soon as he was informed of Mwila's condition, he decided to take her to the hospital. Mulenga, speaking in a low trembling voice, told Kangwa that there was no need to go to the hospital. Back in the village, Mulenga was one of the many untrained but experienced village midwives, who were often called upon to assist young girls during childbirth. She felt that this was her main reason for coming to Lusaka. This was a delicate situation for Kangwa. He had to be very diplomatic to avoid offending and disappointing his mother-in-law.

That day, Mulenga's fears stretched further than Kangwa could imagine. In her tradition, a man whose wife is pregnant should not sleep with another woman; otherwise, his wife would die during childbirth. Apparently, if the woman died immediately after labour, it was concluded that she herself had been unfaithful during her pregnancy. In the village, the practice was that the parents of the husband and wife asked their children to confess so that appropriate medicine could be administered before the onset of labour. Mulenga had already confronted Mwila for a confession and was assured that there hadn't been another man since she had conceived. As a result, all

the portions Mulenga had brought from the village remained unused in her suitcase.

No one had cross-examined Kangwa, and this plus the dubious nature of Mwila's marriage made Mulenga even more suspicious. She made it clear to Kangwa when she conceded after a long argument saying, 'You'll be responsible if anything happens to my daughter in the white man's hospital!' This situation was not exclusive to Mwila and Kangwa; it was analogous to many Lusaka marriages, which were torn between the old culture and the new Western practices. But Mulenga also regretted having talked to the son-in law directly, instead of through a matchmaker, as they did back in the village. However, due to lack of time, she had to do what town dwellers do. At this point, the old lady now accepted that things and times were really changing; she blamed this on foreign influence.

Mwila was eventually admitted to the maternity wing of the city hospital, and it didn't take long before an enthusiastic Zambian doctor broke her bag of waters! The poor girl was having a drip to speed up the natural process. Mulenga thought that her daughter had been in labour too long without progressing. It was already two days since she had been admitted, and a decision was made that she should be operated upon.

Mrs Kabongo, a friend of Mwenya, was in charge of the maternity wing. She suspected complications and confessed to the doctors. Who should be consulted for consent? Mulenga who will obviously say 'no' or Kangwa who will agree but has no legal authority! Kasongo was away on a business trip at the time.

But time was not on their side as Mwila's agony was getting worse. Kangwa became restless, whereas Mulenga became bitter to the point of going crazy. After she was approached, she said no to the operation as she strongly suspected that the doctors had connived with Kangwa to kill her daughter. 'I told him,' she reminded herself, 'that if anything happened to my daughter in the hospital, he would be held personally responsible!'

It was now three days since Mwila had been admitted, and a professor came around the ward. He decided that Mwila must be operated on even without consent from the parents. Because of the dispute, the professor took the responsibility, and the baby was born: a strong baby boy, who very much resembled Mwila's father. Mulenga was very happy, but she knew that many things had to be settled when they got back home.

A week after delivery, Mwila and the baby were discharged, and they returned home. In the meantime, Chongo heard the good news, which was

obviously bad news to her. She entrenched her position and told her friends about it. Some of them were sure that Kangwa's reputation

Kasongo returned to Kangwa's home in Roma. He was a mother and he held her hand. He told her that his mother looked worried with her, and she revealed that she was worried that Mwila might have an operation. She thought that she had heard about sterilisations and she wanted to distinguish between a man and a woman to her. Kasongo reassured her that the operation of bearing him more children would become less uneasy.

Traditionally, the father of the child, Kanyanta, after his great sorrow, became a fishmonger in Kasama district.

Kangwa was now ready to go home. He had already invited many people for the ritual of burying the baby's cord. It was in the afternoon. Normally, this ritual is performed by an elderly woman, respectable and respected, to bury the cord. According to tradition, this is the burial place of the cord. It is a custom for other people to crowd the house during the ritual.

A last minute complication arose. Kangwa and his mother-in-law were sure that the party would be a success. The ritual would be over.

The party itself was a great success. They themselves. Kangwa also did not think that he was pleased. He thought that he was pleased. He thought that those who knew what he had done were only drowning his sorrows.

obviously bad news to her. She thought that with the baby Mwila had now entrenched her position. Chongo went round and complained to Kangwa's friends about it. Some reacted indifferently, but most of them assured her that Kangwa's reputation would suffer.

Kasongo returned to Lusaka. The first thing he did was to drive to Kangwa's home in Roma Township. He was delighted to see his sister now a mother and he held his newborn nephew with joy and pride. He realised that his mother looked more subdued than ever before. He had a word with her, and she revealed to him the main source of her concern. She was worried that Mwila might not be able to bear any more children after that operation. She thought that her daughter had been sterilised! She had often heard about sterilisations in town hospitals, and in any event, she was unable to distinguish between a caesarean and sterilisation; both were operations to her. Kasongo reassured his mother that Mwila had a very good chance of bearing him more nephews and nieces, at which point the old woman became less uneasy.

Traditionally, the father had to name the first child. He named him Kanyanta, after his great-great-grandfather, who used to be a reputable fishmonger in Kasama district.

Kangwa was now ready to hold a lavish party in honour of the baby, and he had already invited many guests. But this event coincided with Mulenga's ritual of burying the baby's umbilical cord, which had dropped late that afternoon. Normally, this ritual had to be performed in utmost secrecy. An elderly woman, respectable and very close to the baby, was always chosen to bury the cord. According to Bemba tradition, no one else should know the burial place of the cord. It was because of this that Mulenga did not want other people to crowd the house.

A last minute compromise averted another confrontation between Kangwa and his mother-in-law. Kangwa sent urgent messages to his guests that the party would be delayed for two hours, by which time Mulenga's ritual would be over.

The party itself was a great success, as many people thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Kangwa also drank very heavily that night. Some of his friends thought that he was pleased that his first baby with Mwila was a boy, but those who knew what he had been through over the past few weeks said that he was only drowning his sorrows.

* * *

It was now a year since Kanyanta was born, and Kangwa had to go on an official trip abroad. He decided to take Mwila with him. He suggested that they leave their son with Kasongo and his wife. Although Mwila was naturally overjoyed with the idea of going overseas for the first time, she was reluctant to leave the baby behind.

'I shall pay his fares,' she announced. 'After all it is not much for an infant.'

'Don't be silly,' he replied. 'You should know it has nothing to do with money. I was thinking about you. You will be able to see many places more easily if we are by ourselves.' 'That may be so,' she agreed. 'But I don't want to leave our problems behind with someone else.' She was determined. 'It will be only for two weeks,' he emphasised. 'And Kasongo and Mumbi are willing to help.'

'How do you know?' she demanded. 'Did you ask them?' He nodded.

She further argued that if they left the boy behind, they would constantly be worried about him in spite of the attention and care he may be given. She offered to remain behind with their son instead. They discussed the subject further, until Kangwa succumbed to reason.

On Sunday night, they flew to London via Rome. Mwila enjoyed the flight, the longest of her life. In London, they took a taxi from Heathrow Airport to the heart of the city. Mwila was impressed by the city and the numerous multi-storeyed buildings. They had been in the taxi for over an hour and had not reached the city centre.

'What a city!' she exclaimed. 'It is like a world on its own!'

'It is the world's third largest city,' Kangwa reminded her.

Whenever they came to or passed familiar places, Kangwa would show them to her.

Mwila had not seen the big houses and yards she had expected. 'The houses here look jammed together, with rather tiny yards. Here they don't have as much land as we do back home,' he explained.

'Oh, I'm freezing,' she protested.

'It is not so bad, love,' he assured her. 'Don't forget we left the real sun back home in Zambia.'

It was about 15.30 hours when they finally arrived at the Grosvenor Hotel. By Tuesday morning, Kangwa had overcome his jet lag and was ready to tackle his busy schedule. He had several interviews to conduct. The majority of his interviewees were young men and women who were seeking contract appointments in Zambia. There were also a few middle-aged men among them. It was his duty to assure his shortlisted candidates of the financial rewards, a beautiful sub-tropical climate, and Zambia's good reputation as a multiracial and peaceful country. Later that week, at a recruitment reception hosted by Kangwa, he ably answered many questions from the eager candidates and the inquisitive press. He assured the audience that 'Zambia in the sun' would provide them with a very exciting experience.

Whenever he found time, Kangwa took Mwila and his son sightseeing around London. They went to all the important historical places he could remember, and they also did a lot of shopping in London's modern fashion shops, especially in the expensive Oxford Street. He just never stopped buying her and Kanyanta expensive and surprising gifts.

They decided to leave their son at Kangwa's old friends, the Mundias. Mr Mundia worked for the Zambian High Commission in the United Kingdom at the time. That cold Friday night would be their last night in London before they left the country.

'We must have a last night to remember in London,' Kangwa suggested.

'I agree,' Mwila murmured.

'Since I have shown you most of the places that I know,' Kangwa announced, 'is there any place where you would like to go?'

'Yes,' she replied quickly. 'And I'm glad you asked.'

'Where?' he asked, his eyes firmly fixed on her face.

'Soho!' she said calmly.

'Don't be silly, love,' he said.

'I'm not being silly,' she retorted. 'I'm just curious.'

'Soho of all places,' he protested. 'Why on earth shall we go there for?'

'I don't know,' she replied. 'But that is what we shall find out!'

'If you insist,' he gave in quickly, 'I shall take you there.'

Mwila was wearing her most formal gown with a shawl over her shoulders. She had bought the clothes recently in London. Kangwa, on the other hand, was in his favourite old dinner suit.

The club they entered in Soho was rather exotic. They saw many couples in really exquisite clothing. Most women wore apparently expensive

jewellery; they ate and drank copiously, with no appreciation of cost. Mwila's eyes wandered from one table to another as she took in the atmosphere. As a live band started playing, lights were dimmed. The band played throughout the meal, and a few couples danced. Then at about 22.30 hours, the lights went off and a spotlight revealed a tall, smartly dressed figure holding a microphone. He was apparently the host, and he wished all the guests a good time. He then introduced the acts for the night.

After having eaten a delicious meal and mellowed by the smooth red wine, Mwila became very excited in anticipation of the unexpected entertainment. She clapped easily as a beautiful brunette appeared on the stage, but gasped at the sight of her nakedness, for the singer was wearing a rather revealing dress. It was very tight and emphasised her good figure. The voice of the singer was quite low and rather husky, which in itself was very sexy. Her hair was dark and long, and a few strands fell suggestively across her bosom. Her shoulders were bare, and her dress was held up by the mere trace of a strap over them. The singer's movements were graceful and sexually suggestive. At this sight, Mwila became transfixed; absorbed in the performance and unable to believe her eyes or ears. As the song gradually ended, the singer bowed low and revealed even more of her bosom. The crowd clapped wildly, and startled Mwila began to clap too. She looked around her at all of the faces with beaming smiles and glowing looks and realised that the singer was completely accepted as an entertainer. Looking across at Kangwa, Mwila relaxed and smiled uneasily. He saw her awkwardness and warned her that there was something worse to come.

The entertainers came and went, and Mwila was a bit lost with the accents of the comedians, especially the Irish and Scottish entertainers. Later, however, she relaxed more and began to enjoy the singing at least. She showed her appreciation to Kangwa by clapping politely with the crowd. Kangwa meanwhile was thoroughly enjoying himself but felt somewhat restrained because of Mwila's presence.

The last actress was a stripper and that was what Kangwa feared most in the presence of Mwila who had never seen a striptease before. As the crowd, especially the males, roared encouragingly, 'Take it off! Take it off,' Mwila became totally uneasy and uncomfortable. She whispered to Kangwa, 'Do you mean she'll even take off her panties?'

'That's what all these people here are waiting for,' he replied, 'I guess, and us too!'

Showing no discomfort, the woman slowly undressed on the stage, throwing her panties into the crowd, a sight which sickened Mwila even further, as she realised that the audience, males and females, were equally enjoying the climax! She sat it through and put on a false smile but was so glad when it was over.

Mwila was quite pleased to leave the club at about 02.30 hours, even though the majority of people were still drinking and joking merrily. Although glad for the experience, Mwila had no intention of revisiting a Soho nightclub. However, upon their return to Zambia, she didn't forget to tell her friends including Musonda about her night out in Soho.

21

It was a clear, warm Sunday afternoon, and Kangwa was seated on the lawn outside the house reading the Sunday newspaper and drinking a beer. He noticed a familiar car slowly approaching. He recognised the driver; it was none other than his wife, Chongo. She parked her car directly behind his Mercedes. He put the paper down, stood up, and smiled as she came out. He was delighted to see her, and he showed it. 'Welcome. I'm happy to see you.' He smiled broadly.

'Are you?' she answered him.

'And how do we deserve the honour of your visit?' he asked, ignoring her unnecessary question.

'From your guardian angel!' she replied in a harsh voice.

'Would you like to come in?' he invited, pointing to the door.

'No,' she replied, 'I'm okay right here.' Her face was blank. Kangwa gave her his chair and walked into the house to bring out another. When he emerged from the house, he was followed by Mwila, carrying Kanyanta.

Mwila smiled uneasily and then greeted Chongo with respect as she had always done whenever they met. This time, however, Chongo didn't reciprocate and instead glared at Mwila with contempt. At this point, she felt repelled and was about to return to the house when she was stopped by Chongo. 'Don't go just yet,' she commanded. 'It is important that you listen to what I am going to say.'

'What do you have to say?' Kangwa asked, slightly puzzled.

'Don't irritate me any further,' Chongo warned him angrily. 'I have been quiet and patient for too long. Now, I want you to tell me in her presence

what she has got that I haven't!' She pointed her finger at Kangwa and Mwila in turn.

Kangwa was stunned and did not know what to do. He felt irritated and wished to put her off.

'Don't worry about what she has,' Kangwa finally replied. 'What is important is that I love her very much.'

'You love what? *Sha!*' (Dog!) Chongo swore. 'You men are blind.' She shook her head and spat on the lawn in a show of sheer contempt.

Mwila looked at Kangwa, expecting a firm reaction. 'I'm not going to sit here and be insulted by you,' Kangwa said, standing up. Chongo stood up too and was shouting and yelling at both of them, which attracted neighbours and passersby.

'Today, I came to show this bitch you call your wife that she is nothing,' Chongo shouted at the top of her voice.

'Shut up and get the hell out of here before I call the police,' Mwila threatened. She felt that her integrity was at stake; she had to defend herself.

'Police! You must be joking,' Chongo replied. 'Let them come now, and I shall tell them that you are a loose woman, the whore who has stolen my husband.' Many people had gathered outside the house now, and it was becoming increasingly embarrassing for Kangwa and Mwila.

'And who is to blame?' Mwila scolded her publicly. 'Maybe you are not woman enough. You couldn't satisfy him as much as I do. That's why he left you for me.' Without uttering another word, Chongo moved as swift as a flash and was on Mwila, slapping her fiercely on the face before Mwila hit her back. Kanyanta started crying, and Kangwa moved quickly between the two adversaries. Chongo started hitting Kangwa instead and was swearing at him to the amazement of some people in the crowd.

'How can she treat me like this in my own home?' Mwila demanded. 'I'll call the police.'

'Please ignore her,' Kangwa pleaded with Mwila. 'She is finished; hers are just the kicks of a dying horse!'

'Men are devils,' shouted one feminine voice from the crowd. 'How could you just walk out on a wife with whom you have seven children, for a younger girl?'

'But that's no reason why she should be insulting a respected man like Kangwa publicly,' replied one man. 'The woman is really arrogant.'

'If I were her husband, I would teach her a lesson she would never forget,' another man echoed.

Chongo, unperturbed by the loud hostile reaction from the crowd, was still shouting at the top of her voice, enumerating all her husband's wrongs. She emphasised that Kangwa had abdicated his responsibility over their children. She challenged him crying that he had stopped being 'a responsible father' ever since he met his bitching mistress. What apparently infuriated Chongo more was that she had done everything possible to shore up their crumbling marriage, but Kangwa reacted negatively.

Amid shouts and laughter from many onlookers, Mwila and the baby went into the house. Chongo was calmed down by an elderly man from the crowd after which she entered her car and drove off at a high speed.

The crowd dispersed slowly.

Kangwa was still trying to catch up on his work. He had found several things pending when he returned from Britain. He worked hard and also passed on some of the papers to his deputy and the senior assistant secretary at the Ministry. It was at this point that Kangwa felt ill. He was complaining of chest pains but didn't take them seriously.

One bright Wednesday morning, Kangwa had just had his breakfast. His briefcase in his hand, he stood beside the car, blinking for a moment in the bright sunlight. He slid into the passenger seat of his official car. Mwila came into the doorway. 'Bye-bye, honey,' she shouted to him waving.

'Goodbye darling,' he replied, 'and remember we're going out tonight.'

'You bet I won't forget,' she replied.

As the car inched through Great East Road rush-hour traffic, Kangwa's mind was occupied by nothing other than his work. He was already working on his official papers in the back seat, as he had quite often done.

That same bright morning, Kangwa's bright life was dimmed. He collapsed in his office and was later rushed to the big hospital in Lusaka. He died in hospital a week later before diagnostic tests were completed, although Dr Muyanga who admitted him did suspect that in view of his long history of smoking, there was a possibility of lung cancer.

The news of Kangwa's death caused sorrow and consternation in Lusaka, and his was the most advertised funeral ever. He was a very popular Civil Servant, and he was one of the few permanent secretaries who were very close to their cabinet ministers. Consequently, the hospital superintendent had to answer personally to the Minister, concerning events leading to

Kangwa's death. The minister emphasised that the hospital had to investigate and make sure that negligence and foul play were totally excluded.

The hospital's only consultant pathologist was asked to perform a thorough post-mortem, which in fact confirmed Dr Muyanga's initial impression; Kangwa had died from cancer of the lungs.

The official mourning took place at Chongo's house and so the women in Kangwa's life were there. Mwila was shattered. 'How could it happen to me? How could it happen now?' she asked herself several times as she rolled on the ground, covered in dust. She cried out loud that death had robbed her of her breadwinner and wished that their baby had not been born. She feared that the boy's future would be uncertain. Tears trickled from her large flashing eyes like water from a fountain which has lost its valves. It was really pathetic for Mwila, who was left at the crossroads of life. She was totally confused and did not know what the future held for her and the baby. She now felt that her education was inadequate to enable her support herself, let alone two people. Mwila also realised that her taste of the good life in well-to-do circles was a very short-lived experiment; she resolved that it was time she came down to earth.

Chongo also showed her grief, and like Mwila, she was wearing dirty old clothes. In her crying, apart from expressing her sorrow for losing a husband, the father of her seven children, she emphasised that she was the offended party. She made it clear that she felt that if Kangwa had been staying with her, he could still have been alive!

In spite of their differences, Mwila and Chongo had one thing in common. They realised that they had both lost only one thing, their husband, and they sat down together to mourn him.

One woman mourner who had been watching them for several minutes shouted, 'We women are petty! Why didn't they learn to share him in life?'

Mourners converged on Lusaka from many places and all directions. The majority of these came from Kasama and the Copperbelt. A large sum of money was collected through donations to help feed and house the people who had no homes in the capital. It was later learnt that about eighty per cent of this money was spent on buying beer for male mourners. Some of the men at such funerals are not genuine mourners. They are known to flock from one funeral to another, since they are assured of free beers. Consequently, the deaths of big shots or their relatives attracted the biggest crowds; dying had become really expensive in the big cities.

Everyone in the Ministry of Science and Technology was given the day off to go and pay their last respects to their respected and dedicated Head of their Ministry.

The procession of Kangwa's burial, which had been widely publicised in the local press, radio, and television, started from the Ambassador Funeral Parlour in Chachacha Road. From there, multitudes of people on foot, bicycles, and buses and in several hundred cars followed the hearse to the spacious Anglican Cathedral on Church Road. After a lengthy Requiem Mass, the mourners proceeded in total silence to the Leopard's Hill Cemetery on the outskirts of the city.

A member of the Main Committee had been asked by the Head of State to represent the party and its government. Many ministers and almost all the permanent secretaries of other ministries were present. Although in Kangwa's place it was the custom of elders to give a farewell speech on such an occasion, the wind of change now placed the MMC in this position. The Main Committee Member gave a comprehensive account of Kangwa's brilliant record of performance from his school days and his important services and contributions to the nation up to the time of his death. He announced that Kangwa would be honoured posthumously by being declared 'Champion of the People in the Struggle against Poverty—CPSP.'

It was then that Father O'Conner of St. Ignatius Catholic Church took over to deliver his short but moving sermon. The priest, who had personally known Kangwa described his devotion in parish activities. For people who had come all the way from Kangwa's village and who had never witnessed a city burial before, the whole thing was strange. It was a big show which lacked close personal involvement. Unlike their village funerals where the villagers donate food, make the coffin, dig the grave, and bury the dead, they saw that all these were highly commercialised in Lusaka. They couldn't understand why, for instance, instead of women washing Kangwa's body, this was done at the funeral parlour at great expense; instead of using Kangwa's van to take his body, an expensive hearse was hired from the funeral service; instead of making a simple coffin which would quickly rot away in any case, a very expensive coffin was bought; and so forth. They were puzzled, and even though they demanded no explanation, there and then, these were things they pondered and would seriously discuss when they returned to their respective villages.

Mwila and Chongo had to be restrained to prevent them from hurting themselves, as they threw themselves to the ground violently in total grief.

was as if they were competing against each other to show who was suffering more! One tribal traditional cousin, a *ngoni* woman from the Eastern Province jokingly summed up their behaviour, 'They are now competing for Kangwa's property and favours from his family!' Despite the sombre mood, some mourners could not help bursting into laughter.

It was now a week since his death, and Kangwa's big extended family had a noisy, heated meeting, at which the main topic was the sharing of the property he had left behind. They had also intended to discuss the future of Kangwa's children and their mothers. However, this meeting resolved nothing, and they all agreed that the presence of the two widows was essential.

At the quickly reconvened second meeting, Mwila and Chongo sat next to each other in the centre of the room. Both were dressed in black cotton dresses and wore black head ties. In their distress, they looked like two school girls in their school uniforms! The only evident difference between them was the appearance of their hair. Chongo's hair looked curly and uncombed for weeks, whereas Mwila's looked stretched, clean, and combed. According to Bemba tradition, a widow was expected to look ordinary in every sense of the word, and she was not expected to clean and comb her hair. But this was in Lusaka, at a time when many traditional practices were being quickly taken over by the Western way of life. Even the old women from Kangwa's village who would have naturally criticised her there and then for combing her hair controlled their anger; they only betrayed their feelings by looking at Mwila with contempt.

Kangwa's uncle asked for order and then specifically addressed the two widows. He told them to reveal all the money and properties left by his nephew. He warned the women not to hide anything. 'A wise person cannot hide anything from the dead, let alone tell lies about them,' he emphasised. 'After all, the dead see us in our pettiness every time and can take revenge when necessary.'

Chongo spoke slowly but effectively. She outlined her financial and social hardships since as she put it, 'My husband had been stolen by daylight from me.' She emphasised that it was because of the suffering of her seven children that she was forced to concentrate on a small business, from which she made no profit. She talked at length, emphasising the seriousness of the debts. In fact, she revealed nothing except her poverty and kept all the money she had earlier saved jointly with Kangwa. Chongo even suggested that the huge house in Roma Township where Mwila was now living alone should be sold to raise money to feed and educate the eight orphans

her husband had left behind. Mwila's faction protested against Chongo's allegations. The meeting became disorderly as the two factions shouted at each other. Kangwa's uncle stood up and shouted for order; otherwise, he threatened that he would close the meeting.

It was now Mwila's turn, but she did not utter a single word as she had lost her voice two days earlier due to her continued emotional crying. Instead, a short statement was made by Bwalya on her behalf. Her uncle said that his family was too grief-stricken at the loss of the deceased. They were still mourning him and could not concern themselves with his worldly property or money. He emphasised that they had nothing to hide, at which point he produced the joint savings account book, which Kangwa had with Mwila, and handed it over to Kangwa's uncle. Inwardly, Mwila would have liked to keep that book and therefore the money secret, but she gave it away in consternation.

Kangwa's father, Chamunda, sat there in total silence. The old man, apart from feeling unwell since he lost his wife, had neither guts nor authority to argue with his brothers-in-law. When he was asked for his comments, the old man said that he agreed with Kangwa's uncle that if there was money hidden in a bank or in a tin, buried in a house somewhere, it should be revealed. He suggested that such money should be used to buy goats for the family, which could serve as a further reminder of his lost son. He emphasised that he was not at all interested in the property but in his son and the grandchildren he had left behind. He suggested that he could take all the eight children left by Kangwa back to Milima's village and feed them personally. However, his son Bwembya reminded him that he himself was old and had to be looked after.

At the end of the meeting, Kangwa's uncle, a retired miner, collected all the clothes which Kangwa had left behind. He was a respected old man with a high sense of fairness and was therefore trusted to distribute the clothes fairly among the family members.

The following day, a protocol officer delivered a message to Kangwa's families from the Secretary of State, in which he confirmed that the government would quickly sort out Kangwa's terminal benefits. The statement also disclosed that the government would further honour Kangwa by setting up a fund to be known as 'Kangwa Fellowships.' This fund would give awards to promising civil servants to study administration up to University level.

For Mwila, the most shocking news since Kangwa's death came when his will was revealed. Although he left a large sum of money, Mwila, who wept

loudest at his graveside, didn't get a mention in the will. But the will was good news to the woman who wept beside her, Chongo, to whom Kangwa had bequeathed a large sum of money. Most of Kangwa's money went to his first seven children. Mwila, confounded and confused, couldn't comprehend what had happened. She had believed that Kangwa had changed the will, making her his main beneficiary. She could therefore, not believe that Kangwa had taken her for a ride. Later, Kangwa's lawyer whispered that his client had in fact intended to change the will but hadn't completed the process when he died. His new will, the contents of which he had whispered to his young wife, had been typed the same week he was admitted to hospital. The only thing lacking in the document was Kangwa's precious signature. Mwila wept further that fate had robbed her of her future and fortune. She even pitied herself for her pride than for the money. She feared that once the details of the will were heard by many people in Lusaka, she would become a laughing stock in the capital city.

Mwila also reflected that she would become a lesson to all the young girls who risked their future and the chance of a decent marriage by flirting around with married sugar daddies, expecting large financial rewards. 'I have learnt my lesson well,' she shouted in agony, lying on her bed. 'The only solution is for me to leave this city and its unfairness behind.' She resolved.

For Chongo, the news of the will made her cry with happiness as if she was no widow who had just lost a husband; she behaved like a young girl who had just won the jackpot in the National State Lottery. She even invited her close friends for a private party to celebrate.

At that small party, one of the friends cautioned her quietly that as a widow she was supposed to be mourning her dead husband and not be rejoicing like a young girl who'd just become engaged. But Chongo disagreed and shouted for everyone to hear. 'You are saying that I lost my husband. Don't you know that I lost him a long time ago?' she asked in anger, her long eyelids flapping like the wings of a pigeon just disturbed from its perch. 'Do you know how many times I sat in a puddle and felt totally stupid?' she continued. 'Don't you know that I had cried and cried for him all that time? Now my eyes are dried of their tears. Can't you see that this will is the best thing that has happened to me since then? Can't you appreciate that it brought back all my pride?' She gulped a mouthful of brandy and coke and sat down as everyone in the room watched quietly.

Chongo didn't give a damn what her friends said or felt. What was important to her was the fact that she had taught Mwila and Kangwa a

lesson, that is, if the dead ever learn lessons! She wished Kangwa would come back just for a short while and see her in her moment of triumph!

Kangwa's family conclave was again in session. The meeting was highly secretive to avoid publication of their deliberations and conclusions. Their biggest problem was the distribution of the money from the will, most of which would come from the sale of Kangwa's shares in an international company.

They were generally annoyed to learn that the big family would only share 15 per cent of the money left, whereas the remainder went to Kangwa's children and the first wife. The women in the meeting were accusing the men of being blind cowards. 'Why can't you share out the money evenly?' they argued. 'How can you be bound by an old piece of paper written by your dead relative?' There was pandemonium in the house as the disagreements grew bigger and louder. The few enlightened members of the family warned that they would have nothing to do with such a move. 'Long gone are the days when greedy families disinherited widows,' they emphasised. 'The will was legal and binding and anyone who tried to contravene it would be locked up by the long arm of the law.' There was total silence.

Mwila's embarrassment never ended at the disappointing will. She was ordered, and not requested, to surrender half of the money she had saved with Kangwa. The money was only K3, 000 and didn't bother her much. What pained her most was the fact that Kangwa's people knew that she had received nothing from the will. To add insult to injury, she was also informed by a messenger from the conclave that she should switch houses with Chongo, in view of their differences in size, contrary to the number of children. Mwila was reminded that the money used to buy her present house came from Kangwa's labour together with his legal wife. Situated in Woodlands, Chongo's house was an old but respectable four-bedroom bungalow. Mwila's on the other hand, was a posh, modern, and attractive six-bedroom villa with a swimming pool and a borehole. Her first reaction was not to bow down to this further humiliation, an attitude she changed soon after consulting Kasongo and her friends. She now agreed that half a loaf was better than nothing. She was willing to comply.

Chongo was happier than she had been for many months. This she did not hide from her friends. 'I'm completely overwhelmed by what has happened since Kangwa's death. Everything has gone my way,' she boasted. 'In fact, what has happened was completely beyond my expectations. Surely some men are better off dead than alive!' she concluded, beaming.

22

With the house as the only asset of value, Mwila's apparent insecurity created tremendous anxiety. Her living standards were already diminishing, as she had started to employ stringent spending measures, which meant an end to lavish dinners and entertaining. Although she pondered her future for a week, she came to no obvious conclusion. She visited her brother one night and put all her problems before him. He suggested that she should go back to Zambia Coffee Company. She told him that she had already considered the idea, but she felt she could only return to her old company as a last resort. She knew that Nkhata was now the deputy boss of personnel and for purely personal reasons, she would be reluctant to work there again. She didn't want him or others in the company to pity her. Above all, even though she didn't tell him, some instinct told her that she was not really meant to be a secretary and typist for the rest of her life. She told him, however, that she would prefer something more challenging. Kasongo without any further questions promised to help his sister in her job hunting. He also reminded his sister that her house was too big for her to maintain, especially without a job. He invited Mwila to stay at his house and assured her that Mumbi had actually suggested the idea.

'It is very nice of you to make the offer,' she told him calmly.

'Are you taking it up then?' he asked gently.

'Well, I agree it will be hard to maintain the house,' she conceded. 'But what would happen to it if I vacated the place? Don't you think that there is need for someone to look after it?'

'The whole idea is to use your house to bring you a good income,' he suggested. 'You can rent the place in no time.' 'Yes!' she exclaimed. 'That's quite an idea. I never thought about it.'

'A house like yours would earn you about eight times your annual income,' he stressed. 'In fact, companies and foreign missions are always after that type of house. It is in a very decent part of Lusaka.'

They discussed further, and Mwila agreed that his suggestion was a brilliant one. She was however apprehensive about losing her hard-earned freedom and independence. Kasongo advised her to think it over in her good time.

It was during this time that one of Kangwa's friends, Banda, visited her at her home. Banda was Mwila's former boss at Zambia Coffee Company. She gave him a beer to drink while they talked. He told her that he was personally disappointed by his late friend's failure to leave her in a sound financial position. He offered to help her if she had any urgent problems. He sounded rather generous. He also asked Mwila about her future. 'What are your plans?' Banda asked. 'Won't you be looking for a job?'

'I'm already looking for one,' she replied. 'But jobs are not easy to come by these days.'

There was a short silence before Banda replied. 'I don't agree,' he protested. 'You surely have the right connections. Your brother for instance can easily find you a good job in many companies.'

'My brother is not entrenched enough to be influential in this city,' Mwila replied, sighing. She sat back and looked at Banda. He smiled back at her. She remembered her heydays with Kangwa and his well-to-do circle of friends. Many such groups comprised wealthy citizens, who had somehow mushroomed their riches overnight, since independence. They belonged to a highly selective code of association and had little or no regard for the common man, at whose expense their businesses thrived. 'Is this fair?' she asked herself. 'My head is not made of stone!' she surrendered in consternation.

'But that's no problem,' Banda said, as if he was reading her thoughts.

'What do you mean, it's no problem?' she asked curiously.

'I can find you a job,' he offered. 'In fact, there's a job already.' She was becoming intensely interested, and she couldn't help but smile. Mwila also remembered that Banda was the same man who easily found her the first job after receiving a phone call from the late Kangwa. Finding her another job would certainly not be beyond his capabilities.

'A job?' she asked with concern. 'What type of job is it?'

Banda explained that they had a vacancy in one of the departments for a sales lady. Banda was now a personnel manager for a manufacturing company based in Kafue.

Mwila would have liked the job. She felt it was challenging enough, and she thought it would keep her away from Lusaka most of the time. Then she asked about accommodation and was told that she would be given a housing allowance instead. She also expressed her fears about transport difficulties. Banda quickly assured her that he would always give her a lift and that if she obliged, her promotion would be rapid.

'Oblige with what?' she asked blantly.

'You know what I mean. You are a very attractive young woman, and I'm a man,' he said, pausing for a while. 'I like you very much, Mwila.'

'You know, I used to think that you and Kangwa were good friends,' Mwila said, sighing. 'At least I thought that you had great respect for each other. Now I'm totally baffled.'

'There is no need for you to be unduly worried,' Banda assured. 'You are very attractive. I used to admire you even when you worked for Zambia Coffee Company. What is important now is that Kangwa is dead!'

'You snake!' she yelled emotionally. 'You bastard, you know that I'm still in mourning for your dead friend. And here you are patronising me in order to lay me!' She swallowed air and quickly let it out. She suddenly remembered her bitter experience with Bwanga.

'Please don't get me wrong,' he pleaded. 'I was just joking. I really came here to offer you a job without any strings.' 'Don't you lie to me!' She cried, her chest heaving and her body trembling. 'Do you think I'm so cheap I can be bought by your silly tricks?'

'I beg you,' he implored. 'Take the job without any . . .'

'Shut up and get out of here,' she interrupted him. Banda stood up and only then realised that his big frame was trembling. He quickly made for the door but with difficulty.

'Take your job and stuff it. I don't want to see your face again,' she shouted. 'When will it stop in this city? When will old men put an end to trading favours with sex? Is sex all that there is in life?' She banged the door behind him.

Mwila was terribly upset that day. She realised that she was in no mood to see anyone. She decided to lock up the gate and the house doors and went to sleep. When she woke up, she remembered Banda. 'He was just like Simuchimba,' she recalled. 'Both were sick upstairs,' she concluded.

When Kasongo and his wife visited Mwila one evening, they informed her that there was a vacancy for a trainee announcer with a local television company. Kasongo had had a long chat with the director, who was an old friend of the late Kangwa and knew Mwila quite well. Kasongo emphasised

that the chances of her getting the job were good, but that the final say was hers. Mwila was prepared to attend the interviews in four days time.

When the day for the interviews came, Mwila discovered that she was just one of the many girls after the post. It was only then that it dawned on her that the offer would not be automatic. Her fears of not getting the job were heightened when she talked to two of the candidates. Both girls had their full GCE 'O' level certificates, which she lacked. Although her interview was relatively easy, she felt she had made a mockery of herself by coming and she returned home not only pessimistic, but rather annoyed with herself; she did not expect any favourable reply.

The offer of the job two weeks later came as a great surprise to Mwila. She was however delighted that she had been chosen. Inwardly, she consoled herself that it was not the certificates which counted more in her new job, but her personality.

'I owe it to Kangwa,' she said to herself. 'May His Soul Rest in Eternal Peace.' In effect, Kangwa's company and his circles had helped her image a great deal; she was now very well seasoned, dressed exquisitely, and she expressed herself so eloquently that she was the envy of many girls who were more educated than her.

In her contract of employment, it was clearly spelt out that after a short familiarization with the local studios, she would be sent abroad for a nine months TV announcer's course. It was decided that she would be sent to Britain. This added incentive made her accept the offer immediately.

Mwila had thoroughly enjoyed her short stay in London with Kangwa, and secondly, she knew that many Zambians trained abroad were still being preferred to their Zambian trained counterparts for jobs and promotions by many employers. Even though she condemned such employers inwardly and felt that their minds should be decolonised, she didn't mind enhancing her own opportunities. Lastly, and more importantly, her unfortunate story had been highly exaggerated and became the talk of the city. She therefore liked the idea of leaving Lusaka for a while—Britain would become her temporary sanctuary. She was anxious to go.

Mwila, six months a 'widow' had two important issues to settle, without which her trip would be in the balance. The first one was found to be easily and quickly resolved. It involved Kanyanta. It was agreed that it was in the boy's interest to remain in Lusaka with Kasongo and his wife. Mwila was relieved since she had fears about leaving the boy in Chipoma's village with his grandparents.

The second one was the more difficult. It concerned her own clearance from Kangwa's family. As a widow, among other things, she could not go on such a long trip, she could not sleep with another man, and she could not lead a sociable life, except after she had been cleansed. The clearance was almost invariably in the form of a marriage ceremony, by which a relative of the deceased would sleep with the widow at least for one night. A brother, cousin, or even nephews in the case of the men were the most favourable candidates. In this way, the spirit of the deceased would forever be removed from the widow. It was by such practices that many Bemba men found themselves with more than one wife. If the man liked the woman, he might keep her as his wife, and as such, replace the dead relative.

Mwila and Kasongo left for Chipoma's village, in Kasongo's car. After spending a night in the village, they left accompanied by Chansa, Lwaba, and Chibale. At the first cockcrow, they headed north for Milima's village. They arrived in the evening, and Lwaba, head of their delegation, presented their case in the traditional way.

It was the right and duty of Kangwa's family to decide on when Mwila and Chongo could be cleansed; six months was too soon by their standards. It was in this uncertainty that Mwila's family made a rather unprecedented move. They requested that their daughter be cleansed quickly as she had to go abroad. First, the message was received with laughter and was obviously regarded as a joke, but their persistence showed that it was a very serious matter indeed. Kangwa's family argued that they had no man ready to replace their dead relative yet, as he had not been long gone. A man who appeared too anxious to replace a dead relative would generally be suspected of having caused the death in order to take over his wife and property.

'Is there no way out of this mess?' Mwila asked herself. 'It is a mammoth task,' she concluded.

Many people, including Mwila's relatives, conceded that they were asking for the impossible. Even Lwaba confessed that there was no chance that their outrageous demands could be granted. Mwila, in spite of the discouragement, vowed never to give up.

Then came an unexpected twist and turn of events. Mwila, strongly supported by Kasongo, had forced her family to demand that because she was Christian, she didn't want a ritual marriage ceremony, but just a simple blessing ceremony to clear her. However, this news was regarded as scandalous in Milima's village, but it was by no means the first in the country. A few young widows and widowers in Kasama and Mansa had already created a storm by refusing these ritual ceremonies in which the

partners chosen were very often old and unattractive. But this was the first case in Milima's village in which the demands were received with dismay and rebuke. The feelings of the village, of whom the majority were from Kangwa's extended family, were fully expressed by one old man. 'What has this Christianity got to do with our culture?' he asked, clapping his hands in a show of total disbelief. 'Does it want to completely erode our traditions and turn us into a different kind of people?' Those who agreed with the old man clapped in approval, and the majority present in the audience did.

Although they were dumbfounded, their general feelings were that since a widow was traditionally cleansed to protect her from being haunted by the spirit of her dead husband, it was Mwila's own funeral if she refused this protection. In the end, they reluctantly agreed to let her go and swore to have nothing to do with the ghastly consequences of her arrogance. Many felt personally hurt and were angered by Mwila's contempt of their traditional values.

'Maybe she is possessed by the devil!' shouted one old woman.

'She is the devil itself!' echoed another feminine voice. 'She is evil!' chorused yet another.

Mwila turned in the direction of the women and looked at them helplessly as their venomous tongues unleashed more vicious attacks on her. But her unexpected salvation came at last.

A week before her departure date, Mwila was cleansed in a new and untraditional way. She slept alone in a small village hut that night. The next morning, her face, hands and feet were washed, using a solution in which herbs were soaked the previous day. She was given a string of white beads to wear on her left arm before Kangwa's uncle declared, 'As far as my family is concerned, you are now a free woman. You may go in peace and may God bless you!' The same morning, Mwila and her triumphant delegation left for Chipoma's village. Two days later, they returned to Lusaka. On arrival, they headed for Bwalya's house and informed him of their triumph. Their uncle found it difficult to believe them; it was as if the old traditional ways were giving way to the new western values.

23

Back in Lusaka, Mwila re-examined her position. She wasn't certain whether going abroad at that time was right or not. She needed more time to think it over. But time was not on her side. She therefore decided to take the gamble. She got together the few items she had to take with her and left most of her personal belongings at her brother's house.

There was a small send-off party in her honour at Kasongo's house. It was a small party and only close friends and relatives attended. Everyone at the party showed their sympathy for what had happened to her, which annoyed her even further. Mwila disliked being pitied; such commiserations would only prolong her agony and vision of the tragedy. She wanted to put all the misery behind her.

On the evening of 15 September, Mwila was driven to Lusaka International Airport. A few friends were there to bid her farewell. After all the farewells had been said, Mwila looked closely at her son's happy face. She reflected briefly on the whole idea of leaving the boy behind, a knot in her stomach tightened further. With tears in her eyes, she handed over Kanyanta to Mumbi, but her little son, now comfortable in Mumbi's arms, even smiled as he waved back to his mother. The poor boy was probably thinking that it was one of Mwila's short absences, when he always remained in Mumbi's good care.

For Mwila, the flight was long and eventless. After passing through the somewhat annoying immigration checks at Heathrow Airport, she was welcomed by Sichilongo, Kasongo's old friend. Sichilongo was now working

in London. He drove her through heavy traffic to his home in Crawford Avenue, at Wembley, where she met his beautiful wife, Susan, and their two children.

Mwila was given a warm welcome; Susan was entertaining and chatty. It was as if the two women had known each other before. Although it was at the end of the British summer, Mwila thought that it was rather cold. Even though the house was centrally heated, she felt a cold chill in her solid bones.

The following day, Mwila and Susan visited parts of the city and also managed to buy herself some warm clothing, a few fashionable dresses and some cosmetics.

Mwila's first preoccupation before registration was to look for accommodation. Her flat hunting turned out to be much harder than she had expected. Even with Sichilongo's assistance, they searched for two weeks without coming up with a decent bed-sitter. Whenever they phoned for places advertised in the press, they were told that they were late as soon as their African accent betrayed them. She later realised that this applied to all coloureds. At that time, many landlords had vowed to keep blacks out of certain areas, the so-called decent residences. This they claimed was to keep their areas clean and their property safer. It was during this time that Mwila realised that living in London was not as rosy and pleasant as she had thought when she had briefly stayed at the hotel with Kangwa, where the majority of the residents were tourists and behaved in a friendly way.

Now she came across a type of racial discrimination no one had ever told her about at home, where going to London even for a short time was regarded as a special achievement. She concluded that she would not find a flat in a decent area where she would have liked to stay. She now extended her search to areas dominated by blacks after reminding herself that she had come to study and not to seek luxury. Here too, she was greeted by dilapidated houses and flats, but even a slum was hard to secure.

Apart from looking for a flat, Mwila's other major preoccupation was watching television. Whenever she was not helping Susan with housework, she was glued to their twenty-four-inch colour television. She was particularly excited by the fact that unlike in Zambia, where there was only one channel, she had a choice of many channels. Apart from the many good

films, she also appreciated the high frequency of sports and comedies—they were very comical and entertaining.

It was 2 October, and Mwila's registration day at Thomson College for TV announcers and technicians. She had become quite anxious about her chances of finding her own place to live in. At the college, she met other students, mostly from overseas, before they were addressed by the College Principal, Mr Brian Woodbine. He was a tall, well-built balding Englishman, wearing a dark three-piece suit. During his address, Mr Woodbine impressed the African students with his up-to-date knowledge of African current affairs. They later learnt that their new principal had taught geography in a few African countries before taking up his television career.

After the registration, one girl approached Mwila. 'My name is Nomsa,' she cheerfully introduced herself to Mwila. 'I come from Zimbabwe.'

'Mine is Mwila,' she reciprocated. 'I'm glad to meet you.'

'And where do you come from?' asked Nomsa.

'I'm from Zambia,' Mwila answered.

'Oh Zambia!' Nomsa exclaimed. 'We are a family, aren't we?'

'Oh, yes,' Mwila agreed. The two girls discovered that they would be attending the same course, and they talked at length. It was then that Mwila mentioned her accommodation problems to Nomsa.

'Are you seriously looking for a place then?' Nomsa asked.

'I'm desperate,' Mwila replied affirmatively. Nomsa thought for a moment and then stared at Mwila who stared back at her.

'I actually stay in a three-bedroom flat with another girl,' Nomsa revealed. 'And we are looking for a third girl to stay with us.' Mwila asked many questions about the flat, and they agreed that it would be better if she viewed it. They decided to go to the flat right away.

The girls arrived at the flat, and in spite of her desperation, Mwila was determined to view the place critically and ensure that it was habitable.

'This is the small kitchen,' Nomsa said frankly. It was so small that there was just enough bench space for one cook, and consequently some of the pots and pans were hanging on hooks above the bench. The cooker was gas and looked quite old, but the small fridge was new. Stuck in a corner, one had to squat to put items into it. The lounge was large, and the dining

table and chairs occupied about one-third of the space. The three-piece suite looked old but was clean and comfortable. There was a twenty-three-inch colour TV set and a large thick red rug in the centre of the room. Nomsa showed Mwila the rest of the rooms.

'This is the bathroom,' Nomsa explained. It was roomy, but Mwila looked more critically at the large, old-fashioned bath. She then reminded herself, 'I'm not seeking luxury, but knowledge.' Mwila then looked at the shower above the bath. It looked newer than the bath. 'Was this fitted recently?' she asked.

Not recently, but it was fitted much later,' Nomsa explained. 'In London, there used to be only baths and no showers. In fact, some houses didn't even have baths.'

'What did the people use then?' Mwila asked.

'They depended on public baths,' Nomsa answered. Mwila pressed the handle of the seemingly old toilet. It flushed well, much to her surprise. The bathroom was painted green, except for one wall which was wallpapered with a spring garden design.

'How about the room?' Mwila asked anxiously.

'Oh, yes!' Nomsa replied. 'That's where we are going next.' It was medium-sized, with a large window revealing a small and overgrown front garden. The rear fence was quite high so that no one could see into her room from the footpath. A lot of natural light entered the room, and this encouraged her to accept it. She felt that this basement flat in the West End of London was far superior to the many she had seen during her flat-hunting episodes.

Mwila moved into the flat the following day, and both her new flatmates were there. 'This is Carol,' Nomsa introduced. 'And Carol, meet Mwila.' The girls exchanged formal greetings. Carol, an Australian girl, was almost the same height as Mwila. She had long brown hair which was too dark to be fair, and the ends had been permed so that it was a bit curly. Mwila, smiling partially, looked Carol closely in the face. Carol smiled back. Her eyes were blue, and she had thin eyebrows. Although Carol's nose was rather prominent and pointed for a girl, Mwila thought that she was not ugly. In fact, her thin and well-shaped lips made her particularly attractive. As they

talked, Mwila found her new friends charming, and it was then she learnt that Carol had originally rented the flat alone and then decided to sublet it. The flat belonged to an Australian landlord, a Mr Colin Hancock, who was no longer living in Britain. Mwila was now happy that at last she had a roof above her head.

She quickly settled into her course and worked hard. She had for the first two months effectively ignored the beckoning social life of London, which had drowned many foreign students. Even though she attracted the attention of most of the male students in her class, she frequently spurned all their advances. In her class, the only young man who was very free to speak with Mwila was Mimis Popodurous from Athens. Although Mimis liked Mwila, he could only chat her up for fun and warned the other boys to keep off his African Queen. Mwila often referred to him as 'My guardian Greek!' Besides Mimis, Mwila was also friendly with a South African student, Zulu. A more mature student, Zulu had invited Mwila to his flat, where she met his wife and children.

Several times, Mwila declined to go to discos with her flatmates. 'How can girls go for a disco and dance on their own?' she one day asked Nomsa. 'I think it is unsafe.'

'It is safe, I can assure you,' Nomsa declared. 'That is why girls here move in twos or groups.'

'And when you get to the disco, who is going to be your partner?' Mwila asked sceptically.

'That's no problem at all,' Nomsa replied. 'We girls can dance on our own if we like. But there are always boys looking for girls!'

'I shall only come with you when you go to a movie,' Mwila declared.

'I understand your fears,' Nomsa replied. 'I felt the same way when I first came to London.'

'I'm glad you did,' Mwila said.

'Why are you glad?' Nomsa asked reproachfully.

'Well, it means that I'm not abnormal,' Mwila answered.

'For me that was three years ago,' Nomsa explained. 'And now I think that I was naive. Just imagine when you return to Zambia and people ask you about the social life in London. Will you tell them that you never went

out? Or will you tell them about what you read in the papers? Wouldn't you be ashamed of that? Or what will you really say?' she fired Mwila with her volley of searching questions.

Mwila thought for a few seconds before she replied. 'I don't think it is necessary for me to change my habits in order to learn about the social life of this place. In such a case, I would like to find out in the least damaging way.'

They talked further, each girl defending her stand. Nomsa, however, strongly advised Mwila to come out of her shell and then said, 'It will be only a matter of time before you follow my advice,' she predicted.

'You sound so sure,' Mwila replied, 'I wouldn't bet on it if I were you.'
'I am positive,' Nomsa answered. 'Do you want to bet?' she challenged.
'To bet! No,' Mwila declined, 'let's just wait and see.' Nomsa nodded.

There were other things with which Mwila had to come to terms with regarding the social life of her flatmates. While Carol had a steady boyfriend who often spent the weekends at the flat, Nomsa had a couple of boyfriends and a large group of admirers. She often spent weekends out or brought a boy home. Mwila knew that it was none of her business to pry and get concerned. She cared more about having a good relationship with her friends.

One Saturday afternoon, Mwila jumped on to a bus and sat down on the last empty seat. By the time they had passed through a couple of stops, a number of passengers were standing as more were joining the bus than alighting. As she turned, Mwila saw three elderly women standing next to her, all of them heavily laden with shopping. Mwila quickly stood up and said to the oldest of them, 'You can take my seat.'

'Thank you,' she replied in a Cockney accent. 'But don't bother I'm all right.'

'Do sit down,' Mwila insisted. 'I can stand without any problem.'

As the bus swerved up and down the slopes, Mwila could see many young boys and some girls in their early twenties seated comfortably, as they watched the other two women struggle. She realised that she had seen it everywhere, on the tubes, on the buses, and even on the trains. This

reminded her of her childhood days at home, when young boys or girls willingly surrendered their seats as they saw adults getting on the buses. She realised that even in Zambia things were changing, especially in the urban areas, but still, she thought she had never seen anything as bad as that. As her mind drifted back and forth, she began thinking about the society in which she found herself a total stranger. She remembered how they were told several times by Sister Theresa that civilised societies had tremendous respect for ladies. 'Are these standing women not ladies?' she asked herself. 'Or is one only a lady in the eyes of the gentleman one is with? It is none of my business,' she admitted although she felt strongly that the young boys and girls who did not give up their seats were ill mannered.

Minding her own business, Mwila asked the bus conductor, 'Are we near Crawford Avenue?'

'We are getting further away from it, miss!' he replied. 'We have already passed it.' Mwila jumped out of the bus at the next stop and then walked back to Crawford Avenue. She was happy to find Sichilongo and his family at home. She spent the afternoon with them. In the evening, they went together for dinner at a busy Chinese restaurant. Sichilongo and his family quickly ordered Chinese dishes all too strange to Mwila. Even Susan's humorous persuasion could not move her; there was no way she could indulge in feasting on the likes of bamboo shoots and fried shrimp balls. In fact, she tried to use the unfamiliar chopsticks, until she gave-up. For the meal, Mwila had to settle for chicken cantoong, which she pretended to enjoy, avoiding disappointing her hosts.

Mwila found Sundays very quiet, except for the few shops which remained open. Most Sundays, she passed the time by playing scrabble with Carol and her boyfriend.

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It was a cold Thursday night in mid-December, and Mwila was busy reading when she heard a tap on her door, 'Come in,' she invited, standing up. Carol entered.

'I'm not staying,' Carol announced. 'You have visitors outside.'

'Outside?' Mwila asked. 'Who is it? Why can't they come in?'

'You'd better find out for yourself,' Carol suggested.

Coming out of the flat, Mwila was completely startled by what she saw; the air and sky were filled with pure white floating substances, falling onto rooftops and the ground, forming a white coating. 'Take that,' one familiar voice shouted. 'And that,' echoed another voice as two cold white missiles landed, one on her forehead and another on her chest. They felt wet. Still bewildered Mwila shouted, 'What the hell do you think you are . . . ?'

'Come on, Mwila, join us and have some fun,' Nomsa challenged.

'Oh! Snow!' Mwila suddenly realised. She had never seen it before, although she had heard the girls talk so much about it. The girls were later joined by Carol, and they had great fun throwing snowballs at each other. As other students joined them from the neighbourhood, they made a big snowman in front of their block. Mwila thought that snow was fantastic and not as cold as she had been made to believe. In her letter to her parents that night, she gave a detailed description of her first experience in the snow. The following Friday was cold and snow continued falling most of the day. By

Saturday morning, the snow had stopped falling, but the temperature was still sub-zero. Mwila decided to go and visit Sichilongo and his family.

For one and a half hours, Mwila had been standing in the abnormally long queue. She had seen only two buses going to Wembley, which didn't stop because they were jammed with passengers. She thought that this was unusual. 'Is there another bus strike today?' she asked a middle-aged lady in front of her.

'I have no idea, love,' the blonde replied cautiously. 'But whatever is happening is terrible, isn't it?'

'It is awful,' Mwila agreed. She had now come to accept that the British people liked strikes. There were strikes almost every three weeks during her short stay, and she thought that the Trade Unions were responsible; they seemed to have more power than the government of the day.

In spite of her heavy warm clothing, which included two pairs of socks, gloves, and a top coat, Mwila felt extremely cold. Her fingers and toes became painful and felt strange, as if they were being pricked by sharp needles. She thrust her hands in her coat pockets, but her fingers were almost numb. Like many others that day, she walked away from the bus stop, disappointed, and ran towards her flat. She phoned the house and apologised to Susan that she wouldn't make it. She quickly ran a hot bath and jumped in.

The rest of the day remained extremely cold, with intermittent snowfalls, and the girls, like many other London residents, were trapped indoors. They were virtually prisoners of the unfriendly weather.

On Sunday, the girls learnt of the devastating effects of the sub-zero temperatures which had affected the rest of Britain. Many motorists were feared dead. They were missing after being trapped and buried by the heavy snowfalls. This had also affected thousands of farm animals, especially sheep and goats. Rescue efforts were being hampered by the bad weather as many vehicles had their water or fuel frozen in the tanks! There was nothing that the panicky authorities could do about the coldest weekend that the country had experienced in several decades. Mwila then realised that it was for the same reason that the buses were virtually off the roads the previous day.

Since coming to London, Mwila had developed great admiration for the public transport, which she thought was very efficient. In spite of its fair share of strikes, it enabled millions of workers to go to and from work and coped well with the large numbers of commuters. That weekend was, however, different as transport, private or public, was practically paralysed. As Mwila felt like a prisoner in her flat, she wondered how it was possible that a factor such as weather could completely disable the sophisticated inventions of modern technology. How she missed home in sunny Zambia, and the abundant sunshine.

The following Monday, Mwila was unwell. Carol found her sitting miserably upright, clutching a box of tissue papers. She had a cold, a running nose, and was looking sheer misery. Although she missed two days at college, her friends comforted her and looked after her well.

As the terribly cold weather persisted during that week, Mwila's chilled body had its heart warmed up by her third letter from Kasongo. It was lengthy and very informative. Mwila learnt that her son was in good health and had put on weight and that their parents were well in the village. Her car had been sold by Kasongo and the money deposited in her savings account. The news about her house was equally pleasing. A private company had rented her house at a very good rate and delighted Mwila sighed happily; she realised that somehow her future and that of Kanyanta would be secure. The good news didn't end there; Mwila was also happy to learn that her brother had been promoted to the post of general manager of Maxwell Brothers Ltd. She reflected on how things were working in her favour much faster than she had expected.

It was a relatively warm night, and the wind was blowing lightly. Carol was washing up the plates and dishes, and Mwila was drying them.

'Do you think Nomsa is coming back?' asked Carol.

'Coming back where?' Mwila asked, placing a plate on the drying rack.

'I mean here,' Carol said, 'to join us for coffee.'

'I'm sure she won't,' Mwila replied confidently. That evening Nomsa had cooked a very delicious Zimbabwean dish and had invited both Mwila and Carol besides two other girlfriends. As usual, Nomsa provided most of the entertainment with her never-ending jokes. While it lasted, the girls

lapped it up and enjoyed every morsel of the tasty meal, but as had already happened on two previous occasions, Mwila and Carol were left to take care of the dirty dishes. On the other hand, when Mwila or Carol made a treat for the group, they saw the feasting to the very bitter end of cleaning up dirty dishes with little or no help from their ever-amusing friend. However, both Mwila and Carol liked Nomsa for her frankness and extremely cheerful character; she kept her flatmates entertained come rain, sun or snow.

On a chilly Friday night in March, the three girls went to see a ballet dance at a theatre in the Westend. 'It was wonderful,' Mwila exclaimed as they left the show.

'They really know how to dance,' Nomsa echoed. 'It was marvellous!'

'Thank you, Carol, for suggesting it,' Mwila appreciated.

'We would love to come again,' Nomsa cut in.

'You are welcome,' said Carol cheerfully. Although this was the first time Mwila has seen a live performance by a ballet troupe, she managed to interpret some of the movements. She had also been to two concerts and seen the opera, all thanks to Carol.

As the girls were happily relating to themselves the parts of the dance they found most exciting, Nomsa suggested that they go to a pub for a change. Being a Friday, the pub was fully packed, and the girls had difficulty finding a place to sit. They took their drinks standing as they chatted. Mwila noticed that there were more girls than boys. The girls were happily chatting away on their own in twos, threes, fours, or more. However, this picture changed later on as more boys were now chatting up the girls, and more girls who initially had no male escorts were now leaving in the company of boys. As her friends were chatting away with boys, Mwila was approached by a tall, slim man with a heavy Cockney accent.

'Good evening, love,' he greeted her. 'My name is Richard.'

'Pardon,' Mwila said, wishing to catch his name.

'My name is Richard,' he said much more slowly. 'What is yours?'

'I'm Mwila,' she replied.

'Are you enjoying yourself, honey?' he asked, downing his brandy.

'I'm all right,' she answered calmly.

'And where do you come from?' Richard asked. 'No, maybe I can make a guess.'

Kondala HENRY M. MUSENGE
19 March 2018

'As you like,' Mwila encouraged him.

'You are from Nigeria,' he sounded confident.

'I have never been to Nigeria,' Mwila replied. 'Africa has over fifty countries you know.'

'Where do you come from then?'

'I come from Zambia in Central Africa,' she said. In the past, the majority of whites who tried to guess Mwila's nationality thought that she was Nigerian, reflecting the higher proportion of Nigerians among blacks in London.

'Can I buy you and your friends a round?' Richard offered, 'What are you taking?'

'No, thank you,' Mwila discouraged him.

Richard walked to the bar and bought himself another double brandy. He walked back unsteadily and said, 'I'll be honest with you. You are the most attractive woman I have ever seen.' He stared at her blank face.

'Here we go again,' Mwila teased him.

'I'm serious. I mean it,' he declared.

'Yes, my grandfather used that line too, when he was a wee lad. 'She felt she had to put him off by all means.

He ignored her statement 'But listen to me. You are a black killer. You have instantly taken my heart!' He stated.

'Me, taken your heart?' she asked. 'How come you are still breathing?'

'Don't treat me like I'm one of those National Front Hooligans,' he snapped. 'I'm a gentleman you know and I happen to be colour-blind!'

'I thought so too,' Mwila replied. 'Otherwise I wouldn't be talking to you. But I also think that it is unbecoming of an English gentleman to be giving such intimate compliments to a total stranger!'

'Get stuffed!' Richard shouted, walking away with his half-empty glass of brandy. He was struggling to walk straight.

Later that night, a number of boys approached Mwila and her friends, had a chat, or offered to buy them drinks. Many of them already knew

Nomsa and she duly introduced her girlfriends. The girls enjoyed the outing that night.

Mwila was awakened from her Sunday afternoon siesta by the phone which rang repeatedly. She went into the lounge and picked up the receiver.

'Hello,' she answered. 'Can I help you?'

'Hello,' a voice said at the other end. 'Can I speak to Mwila?'

'This is Mwila,' she said. 'Who is . . . ?'

'Sorry,' interrupted the unfamiliar voice. 'Maybe I should reintroduce myself. My name is Haamaundu. We met at Sichilongos' party last weekend.'

'I see,' Mwila said. 'How are you?'

'I'm strong as a rock,' Haamaundu replied.

After talking about the weather and the party, Haamaundu came to the point. 'I want to take you out. When are you free?'

'Isn't that too presumptuous?' Mwila retorted. 'Why didn't you ask me if I was willing to come out with you or not in the first place?'

'Come on, don't be difficult,' he replied. 'I think you should have guessed at the party that I liked you instantly.'

'But you didn't have any cause to dislike me,' she replied cleverly.

'Are you trying to give me one?' he asked.

'Depends on what you want,' she said bluntly. 'I like girls, who speak with that degree of confidence,' he complimented her. 'What a pity I didn't have the chance to speak to you for a long time that night.'

'Thank you for your compliment, or is it bluff?' Mwila said. 'Now in response to your question,' she paused, sighing.

'I'm listening,' he assured her.

'Thank you for asking,' Mwila said calmly. 'But sorry I can't make it. I'm working on a project and until I submit it, I can't go out.'

'When are you submitting your project?' he asked patiently.

'In a month's time,' Mwila replied hesitantly.

'I wouldn't like to interfere with your studies,' he gave in tactfully. 'But I would be honoured to share a meal with you any time you are free. Even hard working girls have to eat at some point.' He stated.

'I wish I could come,' she said politely. 'But at the moment, I just can't.' Mwila had no project to submit, but hoped that she could discourage him that way.

'You know what?' he asked her. 'I'm naturally impatient. But my feeling right now is that I can sweep the remnants of my pride under the carpet. I'll wait for one month. Then I'll give you a ring.'

'May I ask you how you got my phone number?' she inquired.

'A very reliable source,' he explained. 'And I promised not to tell you.'

'Please tell me,' she urged him.

'Why?' he asked. 'Are you offended that I called you?'

'Don't be silly,' she snapped. 'I'm not annoyed. I just want to know for the record.'

'I'll tell you later,' he said. 'And if you are annoyed, just direct your anger at me.'

'Just tell me, will you?' she demanded.

'Okay, I'll break my promise because you have insisted. It was Nomsa. But don't tell her. You hear?'

'I guessed as much!' she sighed. 'It couldn't have been anyone else.'

'Why did you ask me then?' he taunted.

'I just wanted to confirm,' Mwila answered. 'The others who could have told you in the party were Susan or Carol, but I wouldn't suspect them to betray me to a total stranger.'

'Expect my call in a month's time,' Haamaundu reminded her, 'and don't suspect anything.'

Mwila hesitated before she answered.

'One month is a long time. There is no point for you waiting for me. Just invite someone else.'

'I don't want someone else,' Haamaundu replied. 'It's you I want, and I'm willing to wait, all at my cost,' he ended.

'All right,' Mwila replied. 'Thanks for ringing.'

'Bye-bye, pretty one,' he ended.

'Bye *Bwana*,' she hung up.

25

Mwila entered the lounge. There was a telegram addressed to her on the small table. Her hands were trembling as she picked it up. She held the unopened envelope, her mind racing through unpleasant possibilities. Her heart beat faster, but she tried to calm down, somehow preparing herself for the worst. But she couldn't help wondering whether it was death. 'If the death is in Lusaka, who could it be?' she asked herself. 'Kanyanta?' she reflected. 'God! No! It couldn't happen. Mumbi?' 'No, it would be a tragedy!' She then thought it could be anyone from Bwalya's family; it could even be someone from the village. Most likely a distant relative she postulated. She closed her eyes for a few seconds, as if praying for special strength, and then she went ahead and opened the telegram. It read:

'Chongo dead stop Overdose. Police investigating. Kasongo.'

'Oh no!' Mwila said. 'What a shame! What will happen to the children now?' Even though Chongo disliked Mwila even after Kangwa's death, Mwila didn't reciprocate the negative feelings; she pitied and sympathised with Chongo and considered her as the offended party. Mwila felt lonely and needed someone to talk things over with. 'Are you there, Carol?' she called out.

'I'm in,' Carol replied. 'Why don't you come for a cup of tea?'

'I have received some sad news!' Mwila answered, slowly entering Carol's room.

'Sad news!' Carol echoed. 'What is it? Please do sit down.'

'It is Chongo,' Mwila said, looking at Carol's blank face. The name probably didn't ring a bell.

'Remember Kangwa's legal wife?' Mwila asked. 'The one I told you about?'

'Oh, yes. Now I remember,' Carol agreed. 'But what has happened to her?'

'She's dead!' Mwila whispered.

'What a pity!' Carol sympathised with her. 'But you are not related, are you?' she probed.

'Oh no,' Mwila protested. 'But we had someone in common and eventually we experienced similar problems. Somehow I just feel responsible.'

'I agree it is a good thought,' Carol accepted. 'But frankly you shouldn't go on blaming yourself. You had nothing to do with her death.'

'I feel so sorry for her,' Mwila sighed. 'And who will look after the children as their father would have wanted?'

'How did she die?' Carol asked. Mwila gave her the telegram to read for herself. It was only two weeks earlier that Mwila had had a serious discussion with Carol and Nomsa. She had told them about her involvement with Kangwa and the problems that followed afterwards. That was the day she had received a letter from Kasongo, in which he informed her that Chongo had now been cleansed traditionally. After the ceremony, she became second wife to Bwembya, the late Kangwa's brother. The couple had an immediate problem, regarding where to settle. Bwembya asked Chongo to sell the house and her business in Lusaka in order to go and settle down in Kasama, where he was still running the grocery shop and the bakery. But Chongo refused to return to Kasama and that's when Bwembya agreed to come and stay with her in Lusaka for a while.

'I'm not too sure,' Mwila told Carol. 'But I think my puzzle is beginning to unfold.'

'What puzzle?' Carol asked anxiously.

'I told you how they treated me and how much better she was handled, didn't I?' Mwila asked.

'You did,' Carol answered, not really getting the point.

'That's it!' Mwila said, raising her hand in the air. 'I think it was a trap.'

'What trap?' asked Carol.

'They knew she had a business, and they also suspected that she had hidden Kangwa's early savings but couldn't prove it. On top of this, they gave her my house which was worth a lot more money and they didn't touch her big share of the money from the will. Now it makes sense,' she argued intelligently.

'Are you suggesting that the new husband was responsible?'

'Most likely,' Mwila answered sharply. 'All they did was to lure her and she fell for it. I don't believe it was suicide.'

* * *

It was a cold Wednesday afternoon, and the snow had just stopped falling. Mwila and Nomsa were walking from college to the tube station. Mwila's class had visited the BBC studios that day, and she was remarking on the British weather. 'Why on earth should snow be falling now? I thought that we were in spring.'

'We are in spring all right,' Nomsa replied. 'But the truth is that the weather here is unpredictable. Anything at all is possible at any time of the year.' This reminded her of what the late Kangwa had told her about the British weather on her first trip to London.

'Now I know why the people of this country talk so much about the weather. Everywhere you go it is, "Good morning, love. How are you managing with the weather? What a cold day? What a lovely day, even when the weather is pathetic."' The two girls laughed.

'Oh yes,' Nomsa agreed. 'The weather is the real conqueror of these islands, and there is very little that they can do about it.'

'Thus, whenever they see a single ray of their cold sun, they think it is wonderful,' Mwila cut in. 'But dare to go out there and you'll freeze to death in spite of the apparent brightness.'

'Don't mind them,' Nomsa said. 'By the way, what are you doing this Saturday evening?' she asked, changing the topic.

'I have no particular plans,' Mwila replied. 'Anything on?'

'Yes indeed,' Nomsa answered. 'There's a do and I have been invited and specially asked to bring a friend. Would you like to come?'

'Well, let me see . . .'

'It would be nice if you come with me, dear,' Nomsa urged. 'I'm sure you'll enjoy it.'

'Who is throwing the party?' Mwila asked.

'A Zimbabwean couple I know very well,' Nomsa replied confidently.

'In that case, I'll come,' Mwila accepted heartily. 'I have never been to a Zimbabwean party.'

'I'm glad you'll come,' Nomsa said. 'We shall have fun.'

'How about Carol?' Mwila asked. 'Is she coming too?'

'I haven't asked her,' Nomsa replied. 'I'm not sure whether I should.'

'I think it would be nice if she came too,' Mwila reasoned diplomatically.

'I think you are right,' Nomsa saw reason. 'In that case, I will ask her tonight.'

'Thank you,' Mwila said. 'It is very nice of you.' Over the months, Mwila had realised that there were certain things she could learn from both her flatmates, but in addition, Carol's personality and quiet temperament gave her a sense of security.

Saturday came and with it the party at Nomsa's friends. The girls arrived just after 21.00 hours, and they found many guests in the house. The music was playing, and a few couples were already on the dance floor.

'Dance?' one middle-aged man asked Mwila. She nodded.

They walked onto the floor. They danced well together. Mwila found out that the man was a Zimbabwean studying in London. From the corner of her eyes, Mwila saw that Carol was also dancing. Mwila turned and her glance met Carol's. They smiled at each other gently. The party warmed up and more and more people arrived. The music played on. There were a lot of drinks and a variety of snacks.

Mwila asked Carol as they went to refill their glasses, 'Are you enjoying yourself, love?'

'Oh, the party is terrific,' Carol replied, smiling broadly. 'How about you?'

'The music is infectious,' Mwila answered cheerfully. 'I'm having a ball.'

'With anyone special?' Carol joked.

'Yes. Roger Moore!' Mwila joked back. They laughed.

At about 02.00 hours, the party was still lively even though a few people had left. Mwila and Carol excused themselves after thanking the hosts like other people had done before them. Nomsa said with a naughty smile that she would leave later.

'Very nice party, wasn't it?' Carol remarked as they entered a cab.

'It was lovely,' Mwila replied. 'I thoroughly enjoyed myself.'

In her bed that night, Mwila thought about the party. 'It had been fabulous. Would Nomsa really come back, or would she go away with the boy who was in her company for most of the time?' As she turned, she wondered just why she was thinking about such things. 'May be I'm just envious of Nomsa's vitality and freedom,' she accepted in self-criticism. 'But I am also free. Or am I not?' At the party, Mwila had spurned two definite proposals for dates as quickly as they were uttered. Now she wondered just why she never gave any man a chance.

As she continued her self-examination, her memory flashed back. She knew that at home, she was still regarded as a heroine, in the forefront of change from an old and brutal Bemba culture. 'Now in London, what am I?' she asked herself. 'A conservative? A traditionalist conservative? A progressive conservative? A hypocrite?' She wondered silently. In the darkness, she touched and felt the white beads on her left arm. 'What did they symbolise?' she asked herself. 'Freedom,' she answered her own question. Then she rebuked herself. 'I'm free, but here I am still in my shell like a widow, or am I still a widow?' She was suddenly trembling as her degree of uncertainty magnified. She felt like a freed prisoner who couldn't tell whether she was still inside or outside jail. 'I must go all the hog and show the world that my cleansing was as good, if not better, than the traditional one!' she resolved, without knowing how she could achieve this.

The next morning, Mwila woke up at about 11.30 hours. This was not because of the party the previous night. The girls generally had the habit of lying in on Sunday mornings. Mwila quickly had a bath and made herself presentable. She was going to have lunch with Sichilongo and his wife. The phone rang, and Nomsa answered, 'It is for you,' she said, holding the receiver over to Mwila.

'Hello,' Mwila answered in a low tone.

'Is that Mwila?' said the voice.

'Speaking,' Mwila replied.

'This is Haamaundu,' he said. 'How are you?'

'Very well. Thank you,' Mwila replied.

'I want to take you out tonight,' he said confidently.

'It is exactly a month since I last spoke to you. Didn't you remember?'

'Oh! I'll tell you what, I forgot completely,' she paused. 'I didn't think it was important in any case.'

'It was very important to me,' he answered. 'And I always keep my promises.'

'I see,' she said, cutting in.

'I will be thrilled if you come out with me. You know I have been counting the days since I asked you. It has been a very very long wait. Shall I come and pick you up?'

'All right,' she gave in. 'Where are we going?'

'I would like us to go to a movie,' he suggested, after reflection. 'Then we can go for dinner.'

'It sounds a full programme,' she said. 'But we shouldn't stay till late. I dislike struggling for buses or taxis late at night.'

'That is no problem,' he answered. 'I'll bring you back.'

When he picked her up that night, Haamaundu drove his car very confidently. It was evident from the way he drove, that he knew his way around London very well. They saw a movie, which both of them enjoyed, and they were now about halfway through their dinner at a restaurant in Tottenham Court Road. As they talked, ate, and wined, Mwila remembered her nights out with the late Kangwa. She complimented Haamaundu. 'This is a lovely place, and the service is excellent.'

'I think it is not bad,' Haamaundu answered. During their conversation, Haamaundu told her more about himself. He was a divorcee with one daughter. He had come to London for studies two years earlier. He was now working in London for a firm of chartered accountants. Mwila also gave a brief account of herself.

At about 23.30 hours, Haamaundu paid the bill and tipped the waiter generously. They were leaving the restaurant when he suggested that they go to his flat for coffee. Mwila at first declined, saying that she would visit

him some other time, but Haamaundu's persistence and persuasion made her give in.

Haamaundu parked his Ford Capri on the road next to his flat. He quickly opened his door and rushed to the other side of the car. But before he reached for the door, it opened and Mwila came out. He reminded her, 'I came to open the door for you. A lady shouldn't open her door in the presence of a man.'

'Thank you for the thought,' she encouraged him. 'I'm not used to it. No one opened the door for me before. Did you do it for your wife in Zambia?' She sighed. 'I mean when you were still married?'

'Frankly, I didn't,' he confessed. 'But as you grow old and travel around the world, you are bound to pick up many new habits.'

'I have observed it here,' she said. 'I definitely like the idea. It is nice to know that even our own men are changing with the times.'

'It is a good idea to change with the times,' he agreed. 'But we should be selective.'

'How selective?' she asked, as they climbed the stairs to the second floor where he lived.

'To only adopt new ideas and practices which are good and progressive,' he cautioned. 'But we must keep our identity and preserve all the good elements in our culture.'

'Are you a progressive conservative?' Mwila asked mockingly.

'I'm a progressive traditionalist!' Haamaundu replied. They looked at each other and smiled simultaneously.

Mwila was impressed by his flat on Culmington Road in South London. It was neat and very well furnished. Instead of coffee, Mwila was drinking Drambuie, and he was drinking a lager chased by a whisky. The soft music played as they talked more freely about themselves. When she observed that it was getting late, Mwila insisted on being taken back to her flat, and Haamaundu complied.

Two weeks later, they were returning from watching a film. This was their third night out together since their first date. Haamaundu parked his car in its usual place and they walked up the stairs to his flat. As had happened at the previous occasions, soft music was playing, and they were

drinking and chatting happily when he asked, 'Tell me what is your love life like here in London?' There was silence. 'Did you hear me?' Haamaundu persisted.

'Yes,' Mwila replied. 'Ah!' She sighed. 'Why do you want to know?'

'I just told you about mine, didn't I?' he asked.

'I didn't coerce you into it,' she murmured. 'It was of your own free will.'

'But why shouldn't I know about it?' he insisted. 'I'm an interested party.'

'Well,' she paused. 'It is strictly my private life!' she smiled.

'Come on. It isn't a crime,' he scolded. 'And it is nothing to be ashamed of.'

'Okay,' she muttered hesitantly, 'it is nothing—zero!'

'Liar!' he challenged.

'I mean it,' she affirmed. 'I don't tell lies.'

'Is it possible?' he asked mockingly. 'And why is that?'

'I have told you what I have gone through,' she replied calmly. 'I resolved to be extremely cautious now and so I couldn't be bothered.'

'Gee!' he smiled gently. 'You must be starving!'

'Rubbish,' she protested. 'I have managed very well. After all, we women are not like you men!'

'Do you like music?' Haamaundu asked, changing the subject.

'Oh yes,' she answered instantly. 'Music indeed is the food of life.'

'Oh no! It's the food of love,' he protested. They laughed.

The atmosphere was intimate, and suddenly, he took her hand. 'Can I have the pleasure of a dance?'

'Why can't we just talk as we are?' she asked. 'Come on!' he challenged her. 'Don't be shy!'

They stood up and danced. They talked as they moved slowly on the floor. He bent to try and kiss her, but she reacted sharply. 'Ha ha, not so fast,' she cautioned him. 'Let me tell you. I have had a wonderful night with you, but please don't spoil it by doing something inappropriate.'

'Don't be primitive,' he urged. 'You are a wonderful woman, more beautiful than Cleopatra; more beautiful than the Queen of Sheba!'

'Thank you for the compliments,' she acknowledged. 'You are also a very handsome man.'

'You are so attractive and desirable, Mwila,' he continued praising her. 'I'll do anything to have you. Anything in this world.'

They were in each other's arms again. He held her so close this time that he could feel the pounding of her excited heart against himself. He kissed her lightly, and she didn't resist. He kissed her passionately, and he kissed her again. Her warm lips were like burning flames. They were trembling and vibrating. He kissed her further. It was terrific!

Haamaundu dated Mwila during the weeks that followed. They went to parties and movies and saw many interesting places around London together. On most of these occasions, they were with Carol and her steady Kenyan boyfriend Joe. Haamaundu bought her many presents, which reminded her of Kangwa's generosity. At times, Mwila couldn't help comparing the two men. She concluded that in spite of differences in their age, they had a lot in common. Haamaundu made it clear that he was madly in love with her. 'I love you so much, honey. I want to marry you, and I'm sure I'll adore you forever!'

'I love you too,' Mwila replied. 'But it is not easy.'

'What is not easy?' he asked hastily.

'First we need time. Only time will tell whether this love at first sight is real or just an infatuation and . . .'

'Of course, it is real,' he interrupted. 'I'm so sure I want you more than anything else in this world. You are the best thing that ever happened to me since my divorce.'

'Secondly,' Mwila continued, 'I have a mission to accomplish.'

'What is that?' he asked, slightly puzzled.

'I have to finish my course and have a profession!' she sounded determined. Mwila knew deep in her fast-throbbing heart that she was deeply in love with Haamaundu. He was well off, tall, handsome, and very generous. Even though he was only two years her senior, she found his mature attitude very assuring. He had a very good sense of humour and made good company for Mwila and her friends. Mwila felt like she had been resurrected by Haamaundu. This was the only time since Kangwa's death that she felt like an attractive woman again. She accepted that she was needed and loved and was very happy. But Mwila knew that what they needed was time, which was not on her side. She had only three weeks to go before her final examinations. She also needed some time to do the necessary shopping. She had to buy several clothes for herself and her son and some presents to take home to her relatives and friends.

Mwila managed to keep her new love life in low gear. 'I'll burn my candle sparingly,' she would say. Through the advice and stabilising influence of Carol, Mwila managed to sit down and prepare for her final examinations, and in the company of Haamaundu and her two flatmates, she sampled and enjoyed the social life of London. Thus, Nomsa's prophecy came true. On second thoughts, she remembered Musonda's prophecy back home, which was also realised, when Mwila was hooked by the late Kangwa, despite her earlier fears against sugar daddies.

Mwila passed her examinations, and her friends congratulated her on her success. Haamaundu hosted a lavish party to mark the occasion.

'You know, I can't believe it,' Haamaundu whispered.

'Can't believe what?' Mwila asked impatiently.

'That, today is your last Saturday in London,' Haamaundu replied. 'Time has passed incredibly fast since I met you.'

Mwila smiled. 'Would you like to turn the clock back?' she asked him.

'If it were possible, I would,' he sighed. 'In any case, today is our last Saturday together for some time, and I would love to take you out for dinner and a disco,' he paused. 'How does that grab you?'

'That would have been exciting!' Mwila replied. 'But I was going to ask you if we can go to a concert together. I would really appreciate that, darling.'

'Concert!' he exclaimed. 'What a way to part! Are you serious?'

'Why? Don't you like concerts?' Mwila asked.

'I haven't attended any,' he confessed. 'But from what I hear, they are dull and boring; suitable only for the old-age pensioners.'

'I haven't seen very many myself,' Mwila admitted. 'But I have enjoyed the few I have attended immensely. I'm sure you'll find it great fun.' Haamaundu didn't need any more persuasion. They agreed to make a foursome with Carol and Joe.

At the concert, they took medium-priced seats, which apart from suiting their pockets, were just as good. The stage was clearly in good sight. They found themselves amongst businessmen with their posh wives and upper-class mothers with their daughters fresh from finishing school. The best seats, directly in front of the stage, were slowly being occupied by stiff, polished, and cultured gentlemen, many with cigars in their mouths.

Most of their smiling plum wives were overdressed and overdecorated with glittering jewels.

Although adequately dressed for the occasion, Haamaundu felt unsurprisingly out of place in this large velvet room inundated by a wide cross-section of the populace, suddenly talking in hushed whispers and trying to put on airs. The atmosphere was infectious for all four. Mwila, Haamaundu, Carol, and Joe fell silent and were engrossed in the spectacle. Haamaundu noticed how polite everyone seemed as they sometimes readily squeezed between the seats and the excited patrons.

'Isn't it a lovely theatre, Haamaundu?' breathed Mwila, breaking the obvious silence. Only now did Haamaundu look up at the ceiling and across the tremendous warmth that was created by the rich red colours.

'Yes indeed,' Haamaundu agreed.

'Oh! This is one of my favourite pieces by Mozart, Mwila, and look at all these Chopin minuets!' exclaimed Carol quietly. 'Here, have a look at the programme.' Noiselessly, Mwila turned the pages of the black and white programme and showed Haamaundu the list of performances. This was all foreign to Haamaundu, and he gazed unbelievably at the long meaningless words. Before Mwila had the time to comment, there was a general disturbance as everyone rose to their feet and awaited the arrival of the top musicians and conductor. Quietly, all resumed their seats, and from the stage, there issued sounds and high-pitched wails.

'This is horrible,' thought Haamaundu, but Mwila relieved his agony by leaning over and whispering, 'They're tuning the instruments.' Suddenly there was a deathly hush. Haamaundu froze. The tall conductor rose to his full height and slowly raised his hands above his head. It seemed like a lifetime before the conductor's arm started to wave and a faint but clear note penetrated the silence. Soon, a melodious sound filled the atmosphere and the audience could relax. Haamaundu and Mwila, like all the other couples in the theatre, soon lost the rapport they had each for the other and became independently lured by the music into their own different worlds.

During this brief introduction to a live orchestral performance, Haamaundu learnt to appreciate the intense beauty of music. Now there was a break, and just as Haamaundu automatically raised his hands to clap,

he felt Mwila's gentle hand resisting him. He quickly turned to look at Mwila who was shaking her head as if to say, 'Not now.' At the next break, Haamaundu looked again at Mwila who, again, shook her head. 'Why didn't people clap after such a terrific performance?' wondered Haamaundu. However, at the third break, the audience exploded and showed their appreciation wholeheartedly. Only now did the audience react verbally to their companions, and Carol leant towards Haamaundu and explained to him that there are three movements in a symphony. This still didn't make much sense to Haamaundu, and he felt that to impress Mwila, he must quickly learn more about these symphonies.

By the end of the evening, the spirits of Joe, Carol, Mwila, and Haamaundu were independently uplifted by the romance of orchestral music. As they rose to leave the theatre, they felt relieved by the immense tension in the air throughout the concert and could only smile at each other to express the inner enjoyment that each felt.

The remaining three days passed too quickly for Mwila. She, however, managed to do her last shopping and bid farewell to her friends. She had thoroughly enjoyed her stay in London.

'Goodbye, Mwila, darling,' Carol said in the departure lounge at Heathrow Airport. 'I'll miss you, but you'll always be a good friend. Don't forget to write.' They hugged and kissed each other on the cheeks.

'Bye-bye, love,' Nomsa said. 'You'll always be a valued friend. Will see you in Zambia soon.' The girls hugged.

'Don't you ever forget that you are treasured, loved, and wanted,' Haamaundu reminded her, holding Mwila in his arms. 'I'll come to you soon. Do you hear that?'

'I do,' Mwila replied, smiling broadly.

'Now promise me again,' Haamaundu said. 'Will you marry me? That is your last departure call!' he reminded her as the message came through the public address system. 'Will you marry me?' he repeated.

'You know I will,' Mwila answered, smiling gently. 'But remember what I told you last night. If in five months time you feel the same way about us as you do now, then you bet I'll marry you.' She winked at him. They embraced and kissed as others looked on.

'Do I have your assurance that you'll marry me?' he asked, leaning forward and kissing her again.

'You do,' she answered. 'Absolutely!' 'You will be late, Mwila,' Nomsa shouted.

'She'll be late,' Carol told Haamaundu.

'Bye-bye, loves,' Mwila shouted. 'Be good all of you until we meet again. Thank you for your wonderful company. It's been great fun being with all of you.' She waved and disappeared behind one of the departure gates.

26

Kasongo and his wife together with Kanyanta arrived at Lusaka International Airport about 06.45 hours. They went straight to the public viewing galleries.

'I hope that her plane arrives on schedule,' Kasongo murmured.

'I hope so too,' Mumbi said. 'I hope so too,' Kanyanta, echoed.

At exactly 07.00 hours, they could see the big Zambia Airways DC 10 plane flying low to touch down.

'Here they come!' Mumbi pointed to the approaching plane.

'Oh yes!' Kasongo said, looking at his watch. 'And they are pretty punctual.'

The plane landed and was gradually but skilfully brought to a halt. A few minutes elapsed before passengers started to disembark. Kasongo was watching the front door and could not see anyone resembling his sister among the crowded alighting passengers. It was Mumbi, who had been watching the rear door, who shouted, 'There she is. She has come!'

Kasongo turned quickly and looked at the rear door. 'Is that my sister?' he asked rather uncertain.

'Yes, she's the one,' Mumbi assured him confidently. They walked down and waited near the immigration and customs checking counters, from which they could have a clear view of all passengers collecting their baggage. Mwila saw them and waved enthusiastically. They waved back to her.

'Oh! How nice to see you,' Mwila exclaimed as she approached them after passing through the customs check counter.

'Welcome,' Mumbi replied. 'You are looking much younger!' they hugged. Mwila immediately extended her arms to Kanyanta who reluctantly walked towards her.

'Hello, sweetheart!' Kasongo greeted her.

'Hello, darling!' Mwila replied, as they hugged.

'Had a nice flight?' Kasongo asked.

'It was comfortable although eventless, thank you,' Mwila replied, in a rather pleasant voice. Kanyanta was about to go back into Mumbi's arms when Mwila said, 'Now for you, my angel. What is your name?'

'My name is Kanyanta,' he answered slowly.

'Very good,' Mwila complimented him. 'And do you know who I am?'

Kanyanta looked at Mumbi as if expecting help from her, but she only encouraged him, 'Come on, just tell us who the stranger is.'

'She is my aunt,' Kanyanta replied slowly. There was laughter. Kanyanta was puzzled. He looked at Mumbi who said nothing and smiled gently instead. Mwila lifted her son in her arms, and the two of them were quite inseparable that day, in spite of Kanyanta's frequent requests that he wanted to go to his mother—Mumbi.

Mwila, Kasongo, and Mumbi talked at length that day. They talked mostly about London and Lusaka. It was then that Kasongo was curiously and critically surveying his sister's left fingers. There were three beautiful rings on them. He coughed uneasily and couldn't help asking. 'What are all these rings on your fingers for?'

'Well, nothing special,' Mwila answered. 'Don't you like them, darling?'

'You know I am hardly the arch traditionalist!' Kasongo answered. 'I thought you didn't like them yourself,' he paused. 'Or have you changed that much?'

'First, I thought that they were childish!' Mwila agreed. 'But now I think that I was ignorant about rings and a couple of other things.' She looked at her ringed fingers and smiled. Somehow, she had expected that kind of reaction from her brother; she thought peoples' reactions on her cultural transformation would even be more negative in her own village.

'They look nice,' Mumbi joined in. 'I wouldn't mind two more rings like that myself.'

'Are you serious?' Kasongo asked his wife. 'Why do you want some more?' Mumbi smiled, and then looked at her sister-in-law.

'They are decorative!' Mwila defended herself. 'They really make your fingers attractive. They are in fashion you know.'

They talked for some time about fashions and culture. Kasongo thought that his sister had changed a lot in one year. He was amazed at how confidently she talked about her new interests in ballet, opera, and classical music. Her command of English too had improved greatly. Kasongo was inwardly proud of his sister's new image. As if reading her brother's mind, Mwila inwardly thought that Kasongo had become more conservative.

'Incidentally, what is the latest about Chongo's death?' Mwila asked, changing the subject after the obvious silence.

'It seems worse than we thought,' Mumbi said, looking at her husband.

'The developments are tragic,' Kasongo replied, sighing.

'Bwembya was arrested last week on a murder charge. We were all puzzled.'

'Just what I had suspected!' Mwila exclaimed.

'How can they do such a thing?' Mwila thought that it was not beyond the realm of possibility that Kangwa's family had carefully and maliciously plotted the Chongo murder.

'If Bwembya was responsible, it was a senseless thing to do,' Mumbi suggested.

'I don't think he could have been in it alone,' Mwila argued. 'It looks like a plot involving his family.'

'Whatever happened, the law will take its course,' Kasongo assured them. 'Justice will prevail in the end.'

It was now a week since Mwila had returned from London. Her brother, as Managing Director of Maxwell Brothers, was now a big fish in Lusaka. His new post came with a lot of influence, and consequently, he had acquired a new well-to-do circle of friends. He gave a big welcoming reception to show off his newly cultured sister.

Mwila was wearing the latest London fashions. As guest of honour, she was the deserving centre of attraction at the party. Many middle-aged

and young females made it clear that she was their heroine; they showered her with hearty congratulations and compliments. A number of men, the majority of whom were the 'have beens,' never left her sight. They were eager to attract her attention or chat her up. However, she handled them perfectly, putting them off diplomatically, hence casting aside any doubts regarding her position.

Musonda, followed by Ngoma, pushed through the crowded guests and approached Mwila. 'Hah! How immaculate you look,' Musonda said, sighing. 'Now I can see that London really agreed with you. How are you, my dear?'

'I'm very well indeed,' Mwila answered pleasantly. They hugged. 'And I'm delighted to see you again.'

'Welcome home,' Ngoma said, extending his arm. 'How exquisite you look.'

'Thank you,' Mwila answered, smiling heartily as they shook hands repeatedly. 'I should congratulate you two for getting married. I thought all along that you two were made for each other!' Mwila had heard while in London that Musonda and Ngoma had reconciled and immediately got married.

'You shouldn't be philosophical about it,' Ngoma challenged. 'I should inform you that I fought hard to get her back.'

'Hmm!' Musonda cut in. 'Don't listen to him. I struggled my way back to him, and his girlfriends gave me very hard competition.' Ngoma and Musonda looked at each other. They held hands and smiled simultaneously. Mwila smiled too.

'Both of you should know that you're worth fighting for,' Mwila said. 'I'm glad it worked out so well for you.' They all laughed.

'Hello there!' Nkhata said, offering his arm to Mwila, who was surprised to see him. Mwila took his arm and smiled gently saying, 'Hi, Nkhata!'

'You have put on a lot of weight!' she exclaimed. 'You must be doing well.'

'Please meet my wife Ceswa,' Nkhata interrupted, 'and Ceswa, this is the very deserving guest of honour Mwila. This is Ngoma, and this is Musonda. They are all my old friends.' Mwila shook hands with Ceswa and congratulated Nkhata for marrying a very attractive wife.

'These two look the perfect couple,' Musonda cut in.

Mwila also congratulated Nkhata on his promotion. Nkhata was now the personnel manager at Zambia Coffee Company.

'Thank you. This time the promotion was real,' Nkhata boasted. 'Excuse us please. It was a great pleasure meeting you again.' Nkhata and his pretty young wife moved on and mingled with other guests.

A good pop number was playing, and Ngoma and Musonda excused themselves and walked on to the dance floor. Mwila saw Kasongo chatting with two girls. She walked up to him.

'Excuse me, dance!' Mwila asked. 'And girls, forgive me for interrupting.'

'Oh, why not!' Kasongo replied. 'I'm sure the girls won't mind.' They moved on to the now crowded dance floor. Many guests noticed them dance and responded by clapping enthusiastically. A slow number started playing, and Mwila and her brother continued dancing. As they danced and turned, Mwila noticed a familiar figure in a crowded corner. She looked at him again and was now certain that it was none other than Bwanga. 'How could he be here?' she asked herself. She wondered if her brother had invited him. She remembered her agony as Bwanga's girlfriend after he was arrested and tried. She danced awkwardly as she reflected on her old relationship with the guy. She lost her concentration on the step of the dance. 'Are you all right?' Kasongo asked after stepping on his sister's feet a couple of times, to his embarrassment.

'I'm sorry, love!' Mwila apologised. 'I was a bit absent-minded.'

'Would you like to rest?' he asked.

'No!' she replied. 'I shall be all right now.' Mwila concentrated on the step of the slow number, and they danced well again. As the song ended, Mwila walked to the corner where Bwanga was drowning a pint of lager. 'Good evening!' she greeted him. 'Remember me?'

'Hellow, Mwila,' Bwanga answered cheerfully. 'You look so beautiful! You're gorgeous!'

'Forget about the compliments,' Mwila answered him firmly. 'Who invited you to this party anyway?'

'I'm very sorry to gatecrash at your party!' Bwanga confessed. 'It has been a long time, Mwila, and I have missed you. I just came to look at you.'

'What purpose will it serve?' she asked. 'We should let bygones be bygones. Otherwise, you will bring back bad memories!'

'Look at you!' Bwanga sighed. 'Long painted fingernails, sonsy rings, red lipstick, rose cheeks, flashing earrings, and the latest wet look! You have really changed, Mwila.'

'Have I?' she asked hastily. 'For better or for worse?'

'For better, of course,' he replied. 'I have heard so much of how attractive and sophisticated you have become. Now I can see it for myself. There was indeed no exaggeration. You must really be the most beautiful woman in this country!'

'I think it is in your interest that you leave at once,' she commanded him.

'Why?' Bwanga asked, 'what have I done wrong?' He looked puzzled.

'I don't even want to see you any more. Do you hear?' Mwila affirmed. 'You're spoiling my party.' 'But you are still my girl you know,' Bwanga shouted. 'That's why I am here. Remember our relationship didn't end?' Their argument attracted many puzzled guests. Kasongo quickly came forward.

'What's going on here?' he asked authoritatively. 'Sister, is anything the matter?'

'Yes!' Mwila answered. 'This man here is annoying me! He must leave the party at once.'

'She is lying!' Bwanga cut in. 'She is my old girlfriend, and we were just talking about the good old times. I know she still loves me,' Bwanga boasted.

'He's a liar! He's a cheat! He's a thief! Chase him from here.' Bwanga's red set of eyes widened. He slowly opened his mouth to say something, but before any sound came out, he was quickly shown to the door by a tall fat guy, apparently the bouncer. 'Let him go,' many guests shouted. Bwanga was unceremoniously escorted from the house, and he quickly disappeared under thick darkness.

'What was all that about?' Kasongo asked his sister. Mwila smiled and then said, 'I wanted to show that gatecrashing crook that I'm no longer the ignorant, naive, and too-forgiving little girl that he used to mess up. I'm glad that he was scared out of his wits!'

'Come on, Mwila, lets dance!' It was the Honourable Phiri.

Mwila nodded. They went dancing to near where the record player was. They chatted as they danced. Mwila learnt that Phiri had risen from

governor of Lusaka to Minister of State for Local Government and Accommodation.

The party ended in the early hours of the following day, and many guests had thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

Mwila started work at the TV Studios that week, and she was happy to learn that she was the first Zambian female TV presenter. Many viewers were very happy with her appearance and performance on the small box.

Mwila was accommodated in a decent two-bedroom flat near NIPA. The flat belonged to the TV company. Mwila's own house in Woodlands was still being rented by an international company. She was making a small fortune compared to the incomes of her contemporary women.

One Monday morning, Mwila received a letter from Haamaundu. It was the fifth letter from him since she had left him in London. Like the previous four letters, it was nice and romantic. She enjoyed reading it. Haamaundu expressed his feelings so vividly that he left nothing to Mwila's imagination. He also informed her that he would be coming home at the month end. Mwila was not too sure of his plans for the visit, as he did not elaborate. But Mwila was jubilant all the same that her love would be coming home to her for whatever duration.

The day before Haamaundu's arrival was a sad one for Mwila. They had just received a telegram from Chipoma's village, of the tragic news of her grandfather's death. Poor old Lwaba had hanged himself, after a bitter quarrel with the village Headman.

Kasongo, his wife, and Bwalya were leaving for the funeral at once. They had naturally expected Mwila to come with them. But Mwila's challenge was not easy, to go to the village and therefore miss Haamaundu's arrival. In fact, she had already cabled him, confirming that she would be receiving him at the airport. But she also knew that not going to the funeral immediately would upset her parents.

Mwila weighed the alternatives and possible consequences very carefully. She finally came to a decision. She had to show her love for Haamaundu. She had to meet him at the airport and would rush to her village after explaining everything to him. Her decision was ridiculed by Kasongo, who thought that his sister was being arrogant and unrealistic. But he also knew that it was pointless to argue with her. Kasongo had come to realise that once

Mwila felt very strongly about something and made a stand, it was difficult, if not impossible to make her change her mind. Kasongo and the others thus left by car for Chipoma's village.

Mwila knew that her decision would be met with laughter and scorn in her village. But she thought that she was doing the right thing all the same.

Mwila was very happy when Haamaundu arrived. They hugged and kissed publicly to the amazement of onlookers. Haamaundu was surprised to see her with a suitcase at which point she told him of her family bereavement. He was very sorry and offered to accompany her to the village, but she discouraged him against her better judgement. She feared that going with him to the village might prejudice her case. Haamaundu accepted her explanation. She left for Mansa that very morning.

She arrived in Chipoma's village late in the afternoon. She joined the women in mourning her respected grandfather. Mwila was surprised that she didn't meet any hostility for deciding to come to the funeral a day after her brother. Later, she learnt from Mumbi that Kasongo had covered up for her by telling a lie that she was ill and was recuperating at home. The doctors had advised her against taking a long trip by road and therefore Mwila had decided to come by air the following day.

The funeral itself was peaceful, except for Chibale's outbursts and violence. The arch traditionalist maintained that his late father, Lwaba, did not commit suicide. He postulated that Chipoma's medicine had driven his father to take the rope and hang himself. Chibale held the headman by the neck and told him publicly that he would also die. He punched the older man but was immediately restrained from dishing out further humiliating punishment.

After the burial, Mwila and Kasongo were concerned about Mulenga's health. Their ailing mother had already been hospitalised four times in the last six months. In spite of frequent medical tests in the hospital, her condition was still bad and her illness was still not fully diagnosed. She looked very weak and was highly subdued during the funeral. Kasongo and Mwila discussed their mother's condition with their father Chansa, Bwalya, and Chibale. Although Chansa was equally concerned about his wife's illness, he adopted a rational approach. He suggested that he would take his

frail wife to Mansa hospital for further tests and treatment. He also asked his children to be brave and pray for their mother's recovery.

Chibale, on the other hand, was already fed up with frequent trips to the hospital, which he described as totally ineffective. He recommended a well-known village medicine man to attend to his sister. Kasongo, Mwila, and Kabaso sided with their father, but they were overruled by their uncle, who told them to shut up. As silence dawned at their brief meeting, Kasongo stood up and walked away. Chibale frowned internally. Kasongo agreed with the rumours circulating in the village that Chibale had lost control of his mental faculties and was on his way to the notorious Chainama mental asylum. Bwalya somehow managed to calm Chibale down. After the meeting, Mwila visited her favourite aunt, Chiluba, as they hardly talked to each other at the crowded funeral.

'I noticed that you were very quiet,' Mwila said. 'It was unlike you even at a funeral. Is anything wrong?'

'No! I am all right,' Chiluba replied. 'I guess it is old age catching up with me.'

'Talk to me, aunt,' Mwila said. 'You know you can always confide in me.' She sighed. 'You know I have never hidden anything from you, however sensitive.' She concluded.

'Actually, I have been a bit disturbed of late,' Chiluba confessed. 'It is two months now since my husband married a second wife. This was completely outside our tradition as I didn't recommend the woman and she isn't one of us. We have been quarrelling about this ever since.' She took some air in slowly and let it out.

Mwila sympathised with her aunt, and they had a long discussion. In spite of her own problems, Chiluba asked Mwila in the traditional manner about her prospects for marriage. Mwila in turn confided in Chiluba and whispered to her about her relationship with Haamaundu. She revealed that he had proposed to her on arrival at the airport. Chiluba promised never to alarm anyone and that she would wait for the suitor to make the necessary move. Mwila, however, was given tips on how to conduct herself in such a situation.

The following day, Kasongo and his party left the village and headed for the bright lights. Four days after returning to Lusaka, Mwila started getting

concerned about Haamaundu. On arrival, Haamaundu had travelled to his home in Macha, near Choma in the Southern Province to see his relatives. Haamaundu had also promised to see Mwila at her flat a day after she returned from Chipoma's village. The fact that he always honoured his dates somewhat worried Mwila. He, however, showed up two days later.

'Hi, love!' he greeted her. 'I'm sorry I couldn't come when I promised.'

'Hello, darling,' she reciprocated charmingly as they hugged. 'I was worried stiff about you.'

'I felt so sad myself,' he explained, 'but my family insisted that I stay a few days longer with them.' He sighed. Mwila nodded. 'It has been a long time since I last saw them you know,' he confirmed.

Haamaundu was cautious and diplomatic. He gently broke the sad news which explained the real reason why he had stayed longer in his village. Haamaundu had informed his family consortium that he had finally decided to get married once more. The news caused cheers and laughter at the small meeting. However, the mood of the meeting suddenly changed as soon as Haamaundu offered the name of Mwila as the future bride. The majority of the elders at the meeting were totally against Haamaundu's choice. They argued that although she was a Zambian, Mwila was still a foreigner from Bembaland, with a strange culture and tradition. 'How could she marry a Tonga?' they asked. The more Haamaundu tried to convince his folks that times had changed and that there was need for tribal outwardness and nationalism and that his choice was final, the more antagonistic his people became.

Haamaundu spent all the time in the village trying to win support of his parents, but they were unmoved. They in turn tried to persuade him to leave Mwila alone and choose a local girl instead, who would understand their tongue and culture. He left his village, totally disappointed, although he did not despair.

'Well, that's that then!' Mwila said, sighing. She looked sad, near to tears.

'What do you mean "that's that"?' he asked, 'I thought you loved me. Are you that eager to give up?'

'You know that I love you, darling,' Mwila assured him, 'but if your relatives don't accept me, there's nothing we can do. Is there?'

'Forget about them!' Haamaundu said firmly. 'They can't run our lives.'

'You are not suggesting that we ignore their feelings?' Mwila asked. 'We can't do it without their consent.' She shook her head. Haamaundu moved

closer to her and held her arm. He smiled at her, but she did not return the smile.

'Darling!' Haamaundu said, 'I love you more than anything else in this world. That's why I want to marry you. That's why I won't brook any nonsense from any quarters, even from my relatives.' He sounded very romantic and left no doubt that he cared a lot for her. Their discussion went on for several hours, but they still differed on what they had to do. Mwila was totally against Haamaundu's idea of getting married without the blessing of his parents. She feared antagonising him with his parents and that without consent from both families, the marriage could not succeed. She was ready to call off their relationship, as it seemed to have no future. They talked further and eventually agreed on a compromise. Haamaundu had to go back to his village and make peace and plead with his family.

The following day, Haamaundu hurriedly left for Macha. Two days later, he returned to Lusaka and went straight to Mwila's flat. Mwila was overwhelmed by the unexpected good news. Haamaundu had eventually won over his relatives. They had reluctantly but finally given him consent to marry the girl of his choice. 'We did it!' they said to each other as they hugged in a long and romantic embrace. They celebrated at the Intercontinental Hotel that night.

The weeks that followed were hectic for both of them. Mwila took leave from work and travelled to Chipoma's village with Haamaundu. As expected, Mwila's extended family accepted Haamaundu's proposal after lengthy deliberations. Even though they could have preferred a local suitor, they had come to accept that times had changed. Now, they had to place Mwila's feelings and happiness above anything else. They therefore agreed to place their ethnic inclinations aside.

Mwila and Haamaundu eventually got married by registration at the Civic Centre. Later that evening, they held a modest reception party at Kasongo's house in Kabulonga. The reception was very well organised although it was rather small by Lusaka standards; it was only attended by relatives and close friends.

In the national papers the following day, their wedding was hailed as a unifying bridge, cutting sharply across the otherwise conservative and rigid tribal barriers. Mwila and Haamaundu were jubilant that they had in a small

way contributed towards national unity. The newly married couple flew to Kasaba Bay for their honeymoon. They had a lovely time, and they could not have started their married life any better.

On their return from honeymoon, Mwila and her husband put up some money and bought a beautiful five-bedroom villa on Independence Avenue. Even though they had used up most of their savings to buy the house, they were happy that they didn't have to apply for a mortgage to do so.

Haamaundu joined a Lusaka Bank, in the lucrative post of deputy general manager. It offered good money and attractive perks.

On a Monday evening, Haamaundu drove to Kabulonga to visit Kasongo and collect Kanyanta. Earlier that day, Mwila had resumed work at the television studios. Kasongo and Haamaundu were drinking while chatting, and Mumbi was in the kitchen making dinner.

'Darling!' Kasongo shouted, 'come quickly. It's time for news.'

'Thank you,' Mumbi answered loudly. Then followed by Kanyanta, she returned to the lounge. She sat near her husband, while Kanyanta stood next to her.

After the National Anthem, Mwila's beautiful and radiant face filled the twenty-four-inch colour television screen.

'It's my wife!' Haamaundu shouted excitedly. It was the first time he was seeing her live on a TV screen. 'She looks beautiful.'

'Good evening viewers!' the newscaster's voice announced confidently. 'And here is the 19.00 hours news read by Mwila Chansa Haamaundu.' The house was pervaded with golden silence, everyone trying to catch every word the newscaster uttered:

'Thousands of placard-carrying women marched to the office of the Minister of Tradition and Culture, urging the government to ban all foreign cultures. The women, all wearing long traditional chitenge costumes, were particularly vocal about the wearing of miniskirts, which they considered as foreign. Some of the placards read:

1. We urge the government to ban miniskirts in Zambia.
2. Our culture has been swamped by imported foreign ideologies.
3. The masses are totally behind the Party and its government in its fight against foreign pollution.'

'The demonstration was peaceful,' Mwila continued, 'until, it met a counter demonstration staged by a group of seemingly young girls. The girls were all wearing miniskirts, hot-pants, wigs, and thick red lipstick. They demanded freedom of choice and chanted slogans such as "Taste in clothes is a personal affair;

Leave the mini alone;
Our bodies are beautiful;
We don't mind showing off;
Keep with fashion and remain beautiful."

'There were scuffles when the two groups of demonstrators confronted each other outside the Minister's office. About ten people were injured, and police made several arrests.' Mwila paused and then went on to read the rest of the news.

'To end the news,' Mwila announced, 'here are the main points again. Thousands of placard-carrying women demonstrated against the adoption of foreign cultures. They called on the government to ban all foreign . . .'

'Mummy!' Kanyanta said, pointing at the TV screen.

'She was fantastic,' Haamaundu shouted, jumping up.

'She was great!' Mumbi said, standing up.

'She was wonderful,' Kasongo agreed. They all clinched in a close family embrace and were obviously delighted with Mwila's magnificent presentation.

Kandala
19 March 2018

Changing Shadows is a story about cultural change. From a typical Zambian school environment, a few years before the country's independence, in a rural setting, the story swiftly unfolds to an urban and sophisticated setting, depicting social and cultural pressures and discords to human relations. As western-induced cultural change begins to take root, affected communities are polarized, revealing the dilemmas of people caught in the middle. Regarded as a heroine by progressives for spearheading change, Mwila clashes with out-dated and retrogressive traditions and practices, annoying several conservatives in the process. Although her humbling experiences leave indelible marks on her character, her stint in London strengthens her resolve. She returns home more confident, and culturally different; annoying the conservatives and traditionalists. The climax is the inevitable confrontation between the two opposing factions.



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