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The smell of chaos - Judy Kibinge

The day before the elections results were announced, the smell of impending chaos filled our nostrils with an acrid scent, just hours before spreading with an dreamlike speed across my country, Kenya.

It was the same day my brother had chosen to get married in a tiny, intimate ceremony, by a placid lake at the Windsor Hotel, a bastion of Kikuyu elitism owned by Kibakis unswervingly fiery, Minister of Security, the only man, runour had it, that Kibaki ever listened to . The green grass and 18-hole golf course did little to ease the minds of the troubled guests. One could not help but feel that the beauty we were sitting, and the eyes with which we viewed them would never be the same again. And echoing every twitter of every bird, the insistent beeps from the cell phones of the 30 or so guests, threatening to immerse this fragrant celebration of love in the acrid smell of fear:

I Michael Warui – tensions mount across the country with race still too close to call - take this – Diani shopping center set ablaze – woman – unrest in Kibera – to be my lawfully – opposition alleges irregularities at polls – restless mobs begin to stone motorists citing irregularities at ECK – wedded wife.

It was always going to be a close call but in the past 8 months, Mwai Kibaki had not led his rival in any independent poll. And overnight, as inexplicably late results streamed in from Central Kenya, Kibakis stronghold – he was to be gaining in bewilderingly huge, frog leaps. There was nationwide panic as ODM supporters reacted with rage to what appeared to be blatant rigging and vote stealing.

That morning, before the winner was announced, I had caught my first whiff of the impending chaos. The bride had forgotten her veil at the bridal shop and I stopped off to pick it, hours before the wedding. A clusters of Luo shopping mall guards stood about listening to pocket radios as results streamed in. And what they were hearing had them bristling. I found myself averting their gaze, wondering if they could recognize my Kikuyu features and wondering if they hated me, if they were blaming me. And I found myself praying that PNU, Mwai Kibaki's party would loose. In the car parked next to mine, a driver listened keenly to a blaring radio broadcast announcing Kibakis rapidly ascending poll count. Through the glass, our eyes met. And as our eyes met in a flash of suspicion, recognition and then what felt like loathing, I smelt the chaos, heard its hooves beat up the smell of as it stormed closer from a once distant horizon.

The next day, the elections were announced, and the country burst into flames. A friend and I drove to a supermarket to stock up on food. Uchumi Hyper, a massive 15-till supermarket was so full of shoppers, queues were averaging four hours. We looked about us and walked out shell shocked without so much as a tomato. The next Uchumi was just as full. The lines mirrored the polling stations we had so peacefully queued hours in just two days before. Only this time, you could see noses quivering with fear as the smell of chaos driften closer: Almost three hours later, we walked out, laden with groceries. But just a day later, we realized we weren't armed with the instincts to shop for survival. And the supplies looked stupid, as though an imbecile had been sent shopping for a refugee camp and returned with a handful of important salamis. And as I stood in my kitchen and unpeeled a Chinese cabbage that I had shoved in the fridge, still covered in ants feeling too drained of energy to bother

washing them off. As I pulled the cabbage out, I wondered where all the ants had gone. But as I pulled the leaves off, I found them. Frozen, layers in, where they had buried themselves in an attempt flee the certain death they had so unexpectedly found themselves locked in to. I stood above the kitchen sink, cabbage in hand, brushing off the lifeless insects and inhaling the smell of chaos now arrived.