

Billy KAHORA
Extract from a novel

The Conversations

After Giant Rat was transferred by his father to Aga Khan he started hearing the conversations. Senseless to the outside world but sensible to the moorings of subconscious pasts and half dreams, he realised that his world, his Buru Buru, his Nairobi, his idea of Kenya was sustained by nothing but a series of conversations. Those spittle-flecked refrains, frown-wearing lectures, despairing recriminations, stony instructions threats from the past, his childhood and teenage years had kept him and other middle-class kids like him safe, and places like Kiambiu and its dangers away. The latter had caught up with him because the conversations had washed meaninglessly over him year after year as he grew up. The English said spare the rod spoil the child. The Swahili got it much better, with their stupid methalis. *Asifefunzwa na mamaye Atafunzwa na dunia*. He who does not listen to his mother will listen to the world. Giant Rat could now relate.

Not much listener before the Kiambiu incident, he realised from the faraway delirious place he was in, that he had no otherwise now. Left with one eye, a broken leg, broken ribs, broken left jaw and bruises all over - a victim of mob justice, the conversations started coming back to him. Even in his unconsciousness, part of him could taste and smell the Super petrol that had been poured inside him, sloshing in his innards, his sweat soaking the hospital sheets reeked of it. He had almost become a statistic in the City's new mode of justice, Internal Combustion. As he slipped in and out of unconsciousness, he felt like all the old cars he had tried to coax a start from, sucking the fuel out of many a problematic carburettor; remembered the dust of fear, the blood of hate that night in Kiambiu. But beyond that he could not recount much, at least not over the first few days in Aga Khan when he remained delirious and so he let the conversations from the past and present, voices of various visitors who he did not wish to see, seep into him. They were of many kinds and when they left, he kept it all running by opening his eyes and listening to the sterile-white clinical hubbub of the hospital staff, the buzz of machines, the fans that stilled and reassured him that he had come back home. To the conversations.

One God, the Kiambiu experience had been painful. *Mungu Moja* it was more than a hot piece of charcoal that had slipped into his shoe when he was a child; more piercing than the first injection when he was cut and became a man. One God, he remembered, the first punch he had received in his life on the bridge of the nose and the smell of blood, fear, hate and time that came with it and it was nothing; that kick

in the balls when he was eight, fighting in the school playground and was old enough to feel pain down there. But that was all kindergarten bullshit.

Because he had long ago decided to become the nose-puncher, the balls-kicker, the red-hot charcoal in many a shoe, the numbing injection in many a penis, he had not felt pain for a long time. Those acts had made him falsely believe that he could do anything, head to Kiambiu with the boys thinking they could drink, take women there as they pleased and rescue his mother without hell coming down on them; discovering that there were people out there who were the Mother of all nose-punchers, bone-breakers, balls kickers.

Of course, some of the conversations in his past had been more key than others, and had he listened they would have stemmed his becoming a violent scourge of all that appeared before him. For instance, there was the lecture from Mum when he was six, when he thought he was indestructible because everyone told him how he had faced down a lion when he was three. Mum, who long ago had been a slammer of doors, a bustling presence, the shrieking voice in the restaurant with a penchant for spotting the slightest smear of grease on a fork, with super-hearing for the patter of cockroach's feet; but whose eyes would soften when she looked at him, shaking her head, telling him that he needed to be more careful with himself, probably sensing his father's arrogant wilfulness in him. That was one conversation that would have saved him from Kiambiu. Not like all the talkers who came and went. In Hospital, Tata Hannah, Tata Tabiza, Tata Grace, Tata Beth, Mrs Kiarie in Std 1, Mrs Oluoch in Std 5, mad Mrs Gakeni in Std 7.

He had not cried since he was a small boy and now he wept silent tears over and over again over the first few days. Just as he tried to get rid of the blows, the sticks, the fear, the memories, he got rid of his uncles and other negative values. He had always been their favourite nephew - those proud, chauvinistic men who had encouraged his pouty aggression. They nicknamed Kandle, Kanyuajohi, drinker-of-beer, but him Muruthi, Simba, Little Big Man, giving him sips of traditional honey beer, money and slipping him choice bits when the goats were slaughtered. To make him 'strong' they gave him parts of the animal that had long been the province of men when Mum and his tatas weren't looking. They would half beam at him with their perpetual Kikuyu Lip Curls, better than any smile; it was an acceptance into the manly world. Also in the hospital bed he also started to reject Dad, his their buffalo hunts up at the farm near the Aberdares and those other many things he couldn't really remember but were responsible for Kiambiu.

The other conversation that might have saved him were those of a neighbour, old Major, who had been like his second father but who he had betrayed all those years ago. Major had been his sponsor in the President's award scheme, and recommended him to be part of the sponsor programme for Helpage Kenya. He had collected the most money of all the boys in his group but never turned it in to the Major who was the patron. He had spent the four thousand and eleven shillings and

seventy cents meant for the disabled and the elderly on chocolates, crisps, donuts, sweets, cakes, meat pies and sausage rolls and jumpstarted the process of becoming Giant Rat. Money had brought a new understanding in his eyes. He had experienced for four weeks what it meant to be the most popular kind in school. The sweets had made him balloon. Money. Mbeca. Cash. Moolah. Chapa. And Giant Rat had been born. Cute Jerry Mouse had died.

Major had appeared at the door and cursed him when he told him that he had spent the money. Standing at the door spewing hell and damnation, Mr Karoki had appeared reached for his wallet and counted out 5000 Kenya Shillings, throwing it in the old man's face. Giant Rat had never forgotten his father's scornful words. 'Keep change you old bastard. Buy another dog and hope the lions stay away. What are you talking about? Honesty? Humility? Hard Work? You've been listening to our new beloved President too much. Peace Love and Unity. Right?' Old Major had walked back to his house shaking leaving the notes lying on the ground. The old man never spoke to him again and a year later suffered from a heart attack.

And of course it was Old Major who had saved his life all those years ago. One late Saturday night in mid- March 1984, an old, but magnificent, lion called Big Tooth Marcel Simba slipped through a hole underneath the chain link fence of his Nairobi Orphanage cage in the dead of the night - strolled through the drill-exercise fields of the Langata Army Barracks, down into the Industrial Area, empty over the weekend; got onto Jogoo Road and somehow made it into Buru Buru Phase One by early Sunday, six o'clock in the morning. His strolling presence along Buru Buru's backbone, Rabai Road, went largely undetected in the early morning. The estate was still relatively new and un-crowded, – Kiambiu still a mangrove swamp. Visitors considered Nairobi, 'quaint and charming' - 'Hasn't changed at all from the good all days' was a constant refrain; the place that would come to be referred to as 'Nairobbery' was at least another ten years in the making. It was also that hour in Nairobi when late night revellers are already home and the die-hards are still in the pub. The estate lanes were empty, all watchmen asleep.

At the Nairobi Orphanage, old Big Tooth Marcel Simba's absence would not be noticed till late in the day because he lived alone in his old cage and rarely came out. He had been moved there in his old age because he was always being bullied by the younger males who now occupied an adjoining cage. His warders would think that he was asleep as usual in the large stone enclosing with the tin roof built to let stay away from the sun. His strange name came from a series of confusions by subsequent Orphanage administrations. As a young lion he'd always been Marcel, and when he reached full maturity visiting kids started calling him Big Tooth and the name stuck. When he was moved to his own cage where he lost all distinction he became just, Simba. The administration changed, renovations were done, cages cleaned and rebuilt, and when a new placard was placed before his cage, all his names were revived and he became Big Tooth Marcel Simba.

As the sun rose behind his old back, he sauntered on Rabai Road taking on all kinds of new smells. There he happened on two night revellers from the previous night, a drunken couple whose car had broken down. They still had some wine and song in them and the woman was shouting at the man to get her home. His head and shoulders were inside the smoking engine of the car below the bonnet. When the woman spotted the large slinking cat she started laughing hysterically, and the man ignored her till he noticed a small puddle appearing around her pink pumps. Popping his head above the car's bonnet, he saw the animal and quickly dragged the woman into the car.

Big Tooth Marcel stalked past them with a wide yawn, their fear misting up the car's windows, as he ambled to the Rabai roundabout where he made a left and entered Buru Buru Phase 1. Had it been a weekday, early morning matatus with blaring horns and deafening speakers would be going up and down, jobless young men jogging, wannabe boxers stabbing the air with their fists, their forms surrounded by condensation. Bands of schoolchildren would be everywhere marching with a joyful stoicism. But it was Sunday and it would only be in another two hours that the estate's church-going faithful would be up and about.

It was March and the long rains threatened, the sun was still down South, climbing to the Equator from the Tropic of Capricorn, and would only hit the estate's early bedroom windows well after eight in the morning. A light fog still covered the orange-brick rooftops of the houses. The streetlamps were still on and in the haze Big Tooth Marcel Simba sleepily slouched, blinking, wraith-like down an alley not far from the Karokis house. He had gone down the alley attracted by the familiar smell of blood and meat. The alley emerged out into a large field right in the middle of the estate and was overgrown blackjack brush and wild maize.

It was walled-in by the backyards of at least forty houses, surrounded by short black picket stakes covered in oil. Big Tooth Marcel could smell old blood everywhere but a fresher smell of meet was evident and it drew him. It came from a house three doors away from the Karokis. Though Buru Buru was stirring on its front side the large field would remain undisturbed till people came to empty their trash later on that evening. So nobody noticed Old Big Tooth Marcel Simba skim one fence with an easy leap where the good smell was coming from.

Unlike most of the homes around occupied by families, this particular house, a three-bedroom bungalow was occupied by two brothers, young men who had just moved in and had held a house-warming party the previous night. They had been too drunk to clear up after roasting a goat they had slaughtered that afternoon and were in bed after drinking till the early hours of the morning. Lying on a large charcoal grill was a boiled goat's head, roasted hooves, a bloody hide, parts of the animal's back and chest still uncooked in a sufuria. The last had been kept aside for normal cooking

during the week. Big Tooth Marcel Simba quickly made short work of the goat's remains. His large paws left footprints in the cold ash from yesterday's fire. Not entirely satisfied from the goat's remains, and looking through the wooden fence stakes into the neighbouring compound, only one house away from the Karokis, he saw a large black dog.

Two years ago, during the 1982 August coup, five members of the administrative police had been chased into this same field by an army unit of superior numbers and mercilessly gunned down. The blood still soaked in the ground made Marcel hungry. The house he was looking into, belonged to an old bachelor known to all as Old Major who lived alone apart from a small slip of a girl who cooked and cleaned for him and Roger the dog, a German shepherd the size of a small calf. Roger had never been heard to bark and was quiet and surly as his Master. Both were familiar figures in the estate, Old Major with his gouty limp and long twirly moustache.

That morning, the girl who cooked and cleaned for him had woken up early and gone to the shops to buy milk, bread, eggs, and the Sunday Nation. Her master did not read The Sunday New Republic. She came back and made breakfast unhurriedly, even if the fog had almost cleared, Major only got up at ten on Sunday mornings. She could tell by the sky's lighting that it was only still about 7.00 a.m and she was looking forward to going back to bed. Still partially asleep, her eyes swept over her Master's carefully tended tomato vines, at sleeping Roger who shared his Master's sleeping patterns. And that is when a lightning streak of tawny brown, the largest teeth and claws she had ever seen descended on Roger. In a second the creature had dragged Roger away without sound. There were no lions where she came from in the Kisii highlands but her grandmother had told her about *Irrogi*, beasts with the long hair of white people and big teeth. She started crying till the tea boiled over, the familiar smell calming her and she poured it into a Made in China plastic flask. She trimmed the crusts off the slices of bread, spread butter on them, sliced the tomatoes the way Major liked them and placed two hard-boiled eggs on the side. She took them into the sitting room where Major would find them when he woke up. Staring at a photo of Major and Roger on a large cabinet in the sitting room she became afraid. There was also a rifle hung on the wall above the cabinet. The Major did not mind her sleeping on Sundays as long as all his meals were ready at 0800 HRS and 1300 HRS so she went back to bed.

On the other side of the black picket fence Big Tooth Marcel hauled Roger into the brush. He ate his heart and his sides till he was full and then lay down idly, enjoying a sun that was now emerging. He started slowly dozing off. It was a bit cold and he crept further into the brush and fell asleep tired from the long trek.

As the lion slept, the third house, the last on the corner, buzzed with activity. Mr Humphrey Karoki, the 10-year Kandle and a 7-year Fiona got into a white 504 Peugeot and headed to Muranga for the day. The maid locked up the gate, cleared the

breakfast things, washed up and headed off for the day. Mrs Karoki sighed with the gratitude of a young mother left alone, checked on Jerry 'Kabugua' Mouse, only two and a half years old, and as he was still asleep, climbed back to bed herself and dozed off. At noon she woke up and took him outside while she prepared mashed bananas, pumpkin leaves and soft beans for him. She strapped him on a baby chair, let him have his favourite toy, a rubber duck and kept on checking on him every two minutes or so through the window. He was full of giggly life and was rocking the chair trying his best to topple it.

Not faraway Marcel Big Tooth Simba woke up, stood up and stretched with an awkward wobble. He ate more of Roger the dog and then lay down swatting at the flies around him. He heard a whistle and a human voice calling out, 'Roger. Roger.' He got up deciding to investigate and at the fence where he had taken the dog his crouching eyes met those of Old Major. The old man scrambled back into the house as Big Tooth Marcel easily clambered over the Karoki wall and walked along it for a few steps looking around. A few people spotted him and took to their heels raising the alarm.

The lion then lightly jumped down into the Karoki's compound and walked all the way around the house where he came upon Jerry 'Kabugua' Mouse who goo-gooed at him. He lay down watching the little boy's fat arms thrashing the air with excitement. Mrs Karoki looked up suddenly and saw the animal, not ten feet away from her baby. She crumpled silently to the ground. Jerry Mouse continued laughing with delight as the lion yawned and lay on the grass watching him with a lazy curiosity.

Major came out into his backyard holding his gun, there was no sign the lion. He then saw its footprints in the clean lawn on the Karokis side. He went through his house and came out of the front door in a crouch. Through the black picket fence he saw the animal watching the Karoki baby. He aimed at the place the neck met its shoulder and discharged. The animal let out a roar and slumped, lying still. The loud gun roused Mrs Karoki and she groggily went and fetched her baby. Jerry was trying to imitate the roaring sound he had just heard as his mother cried.

Outside a crowd of people gathered after hearing the resounding roar and the loud replying gunshot. A photo of Major and the lion would appear in the newspaper the next day.

Now, Giant Rat lay in a bed at Aga Khan hospital. The Buru Buru, the Nairobi, the Kenya he came from, he now realised, was a world whose parameters were kept safe by those conversations from his mum and old Major that he had refused to listen to. As he lay there and thought about losing an eye, realising that Small pa was dead he wallowed in self-pity remembering the good things from another world, now lost. Fantastic Four Cartoons, Transformers, Chopper bikes, Ball gums, Famous Five,

Nintendo, Toys Bazaar, Cornflakes, House of Manji, Milo, Ribena, Cod Liver Oil, Shortcake, Digestive, Sarit Centre, Mario Bros, Donkey Kong. What had happened to those things? His favourite, Tom and Jerry. When had he lost these things? Watching with Dad, *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*, *The One Armed Boxer*, Jackie Chan, Bruce Lee, *The Game of Death* on Sunday nights. *The A-Team*, *Knight-Rider*. Of course when he had turned eleven they had moved to Garden Estate. Maybe that's when things had really changed.

On the fifth day he was feeling less woozy, more pain and anxiety and unable to deal with the cacophony of conversations on the inside. And so he focused on those who came to visit and all they had to say. He however pretended to be sleep. His mum's sisters, his tatas entered as he lay there in his bandages, no teeth in his mouth and an eye patch for his left eye.

Tata Beth on seeing him started weeping: 'Jesu, Jesu, Jesu ...'

Tata Grace whispered: 'Just like all good things come in threes, so do the bad things.'

Tata Tabiza agreed: 'The Lion, The Major's Curse and now The Eye.'

Tata Hannah spoke: 'I could slap all of you.' Then in Kikuyu: 'Are you people mad like your sister?'

Tata Tabiza: 'Fi killed a Ja-luo two weeks ago. Kandle tried to kill himself last week. Those Korogocho Kiambiu people tried to kill this one this week.' The triple tragedy had allowed a temporary truce between the two but both were already regretting it.

Tata Grace crowed in her best church tones: 'It is a curse.'

Tata Hannah shouted: 'Stupid woman. A curse on your own daughter.'

Tata Beth asked: 'Yes. What about their mother.'

Tata Hannah smiled: 'Three misfortunes a curse. Four misfortunes a sign. Let us pray for the boy.' While their heads were bowed and Tata Hannah led the sisters in prayer, the whole exchange reminded Giant Rat how irritating the conversations could be. Most of them he now realised were in Kikuyu and guttural. No wonder he had ignored them for so long. Mwathani Agocwo ... God Be Praised they all chorused and it all ended.

Dad came in and Tata Hannah ushered the three other sisters out, saying that she needed a private prayer. Giant Rat heard her tell Dad that they should call in a traditional healer after the events of the last three weeks. It would add a little practicality to their prayers she explained. Mr Karoki respectfully listened without a word and thanked her.

'Mother of Sunny, I'd like to than you for everything you've done. I plan to take the three of them away to the Aberdares for two weeks,' he said. 'The place of our forefathers.' Giant Rat quickly opened his eyes and saw Tata Hannah nod with understanding.

'Then this stupid boy goes to the U.K where he was supposed to be in the first place. An Engineering school in Manchester.' Giant Rat smiled to himself. For two years he had kept his father's wishes at bay but he now realised that life in Nairobi with one eye would be unbearable. Fat big and ugly had been bad enough. But with one eye

even the police would stop him at every opportunity. He would become a born suspect.

'I see the hand of our enemies in this. Kiambiu is catching up with us but I'll deal with it,' Dad said.

'Yes. If you are going to take Embakasi in December you must react with immediate force. You have ignored things for too long. You know what I mean. The boy's mother is embarrassing you over there,' she said and left. Giant Rat could not believe his ears.

'I know you are awake,' he heard his father say. 'I want you to think carefully about what happened and whose idea it was for you to go there.' Outside, passing nurses and doctors, the sisters who were leaving, watched the hulking figure talking to himself, in front of the prostrate form lying in the bed. Apart from Mrs Hannah Macharia, all the sisters happily thought Humphrey Karoki was praying.

And so it started, his vengeful father pressing him on day by day by the hospital bed, asking him who amongst his friends had come up with the idea of going into Kiambiu to rescue his mother. After two days of the same questioning he forced himself to think about the conversations of childhood when his Dad came in so that he could pass out. It was hard to explain to his father that there had been no plan; they had just gone there out of boredom. What was wrong with his father? Couldn't he simply understand that they were just looking for some cheap slum girls and some changaa? That sojourns to Kiambiu were frequent, at least every two months. It was something that came up now and then when he was drinking with his friends in the house over those nice and lazy months when he had the house to himself and his Dad didn't care where he was. He wasn't going to tell Dad that things seemed to have changed in Kiambiu this last time. It also hadn't helped that he had beaten a member of the dreaded Mungiki.

Of course, the idea of fetching his mum back had been playing around in his head for awhile, especially when he was bored of all the partying and the liquid courage built up in him. But it had never been a fully planned idea like Dad thought. If only his toothless mouth and his broken leg would let him, Giant Rat would shout at the man that there had not been any protracted planned rescue expedition. All his friends were losers with nothing on their minds but beer, bhang, miraa and Mandrax and did not think like the officials from the Ministry of Saving Mad Mothers. They were not the planning type. Sheeit they weren't even really grown up. They had no plans, did nothing, had no idea what they were going to do next week apart come to the rich boy's house, drink and eat off him till he chased them away till the following week. But since his body wouldn't respond when his father brought the matter up again and again, he would simply feel the bandage over his eye and turn over. On the days when the 'internal' conversations failed to keep away his father's insistent interrogation, he listened for the sounds of birds faraway on his father's farm on the

slopes of the Aberdares, the bellow of buffaloes that his father loved to hunt, the bay of dogs and the chill in the morning air when they set out, and he fell asleep again.

But the following day it would start again. Maybe Dad was crazy. The man would take on a new tack every other day like a dog with a bone. Most recent was talk about his political enemies and how they had been sent. The man had asked about Muscles, Small Pa, Pimples and Njoro who was dead, the others in the same terrible shape he was in, if not worse. His Dad sounded so stupid using words like plan, idea, and even using the word apply? Jesus. Like going to Kiambiu was a course in Accounts, an education. Fuck that.

One day the conversations disappeared and he started feeling like his old self. He wished he was back in Buru with his friends drinking and getting women. Fuck the conversations. He felt much better. Who had come up with the idea? He decided he would fuck them up when he left hospital and when he remembered. He realised that he had probably come up with the mpango, and he laughed inside at the idea of fucking himself up. He hoped to get an eye transplant. Maybe if he thought up a story that his Dad liked, the man would pay for the eye transplant. Giant Rat had heard of people getting a goat's eye. He laughed, feeling his mouth with his tongue at the gap where four teeth were now missing. At least he was alive. It was not surprising that Njoro had died. Always messing with women. Even married ones. Dumb and always getting caught out. He missed Njoro though. At least he could walk. Muscles' leg had been slashed with a machete. He would have problems with that especially being in Kenyatta. None of his friends' parents could afford top flight treatment at Aga Khan. Giant Rat thought of his eye and broken leg and remembered a pirate's movie or was it a book from childhood. A man with an eye-patch and one half leg. Long Dong Silver. No, that didn't sound right. And he felt like crying and laughing at the same time remembering that they had been watching a porn movie with the actor of the same name before they had decided to go to Kiambiu. Things were coming back. A dreadlocked man. A woman in a white dress. Their gang of five. Pimples Paradise, Small Pa, Muscles and the now dead Njoro.

One day Kandle, Fiona, and his cousin, Sunny walked in. The two girls were dressed alike in tennis-looking outfits, short cotton skirts, white sneakers and tight T-shirts. They walked arm in arm, hitched at the hip looking like sisters. Only that Sunny was light and Fiona dark.

'Poor baby,' Sunny said stroking his cheek. He liked that.

'More like rich spoilt big fat baby,' Fiona laughed in her new D.C. lilting tone. Sunny laughed right on cue. Giant Rat tried to grin at them but his jaw hurt. He was now bigger after spending a week in bed. He sat up. Kandle smiled quietly at him. Well, even a near-death experience hadn't changed the brooding motherfucker's disposition Giant Rat thought. Same ole. Same ole.

'Ohh. Poor baby. My baby brother. You will sooo get tired of us. We'll be here everyday, taking care of you,' Fiona said in an apologetic tone. Giant Rat couldn't

keep his eyes of his cousin, giving her several once-overs but turning away when the girls caught him at it.

‘Whasup man. How you feeling,’ Kandle managed. His voice sounding hoarse, lacking the usual self-confident gravitas.

‘Look what we brought you,’ Fiona said reaching into a bag and bringing out a black XXXL Black T-shirt. ‘We went shopping. Ta – da. Hakuna Matara.’ When she spread it out it went up to her knees, tall as she was. When both girls started singing the theme song from The Lion King, Giant Rat realised that none of his friends had come to see him.

‘Hakuna Matara Hakuna Matara,’ they went as he turned to Kandle.

‘Dude, have you seen any of my boys.’

‘Daddee said he would shoot anyone of them that showed up. Pimples is still in Kenyatta. Your best friend,’ Fiona said, wrinkling her nose. ‘You should talk to Dad to put him in here with you. By the way, somebody tell me what’s wrong with Daddee nowadays.’ She wrinkled her bottom lip over the top one and Sunny broke out into uncontrollable laughter. Even Kandle grinned.

‘We are all going to the Aberdares when you get well. Sunny too. It will be so much fun,’ she continued.

‘What about your case up in Kisumu? Kandle asked.

‘What case. Suicidal drunk motherfucker ...’ she paused looking worriedly at Kandle who grinned, ‘... motherfucker with nothing to live for, steps in front of my boyfriend’s ride and gets run over and I’m supposed to stop living. Jesus.’ She suddenly looked like she wanted to burst into tears. Sunny came over to her and gave her a hug.

‘I need a coffee,’ Fiona said looking up at the ceiling.

‘Vehicular manslaughter could get you at least 8 in Langata Women’s,’ Kandle said, his grin even wider.

‘You’ll be fine. Your dad and my mum can take care of it,’ Sunny said.

‘I don’t want to be fine. I want to be in D.C. And I need a coffee right now.’ She stalked out followed by Sunny. ‘Toodles little brother. Gotta gym. No pain No gain. See ya tomorrow.’ ‘Yeah right,’ the invalid muttered. Only his father had come every day.

‘I’ll catch you guys in the car. Give me five minutes.’ Kandle said.

‘You need anything,’ he asked turning to his brother.

Giant Rat hesitated. Fiona popped back in.

‘I almost forgot. Dad asked what he should bring you to eat. When he comes in later. That’s if your appetite’s up. We thought about bringing about bringing some homemade sandwiches ...’

‘Kenchic. Whole chicken. Two chips ... and some goat ribs. A whole side. I feel like I haven’t eaten for a week,’ Giant Rat said.

‘See you haven’t lost your appetite little brother. Toodles.’ The two brothers were quiet for awhile.

‘You know something. It was Mum who saved my life,’ Giant Rat said.

Kandle stopped for a moment and looked at him. They never ever spoke about their mother since she had stopped applying herself.

'Dad wanted me to talk to you. I thought it could wait. But you seem fine. A couple of things. His idea is that you should go to the K. England. The U.K. Then, because he is running for M.P in Embakasi, wants to know whether the attack could have been political. Planned. So that he can do something about it. Kiambiu holds quite a vote for him and his rivals. He doesn't mind you going there. You know that. He just doesn't expect you to have been the victim. He hates that. If you'd killed someone there he would have been proud even if he wouldn't say it. He thinks your beating there is an embarrassment and will lose him votes. Someone's gotta pay.' Kandle had walked to the curtain and was watching the girls in the parking lot smoking furiously. Giant Rat wheezed in laughter. His ribs ached.

'Is he nuts? Dude, all we wanted was some slum action. Some weak-in-the knees cham. Some ouweeee bhangi. Some ghetto play. Eastlands finest. Not like your ass all the time hanging out in the West. We do this every once in a while.'

'Hey, don't shoot the messenger. I don't give a fuck what you do. As long as it is not outright stupid. It's your life, big boy.'

Giant Rat was quiet.

Kandle smiled. 'Hey, forget that shit. Let's talk later. Man, when is the last time we had a drink. We need to get fucked when you get out of bed. Show you the possibilities in this town. Forget all that sheng mtaa bullshit we grew up with. Buru is bad enough. Kiambiu Jesus. Are you kidding me? Dad's selling the Buru house anyway. Your fun pad is gone,' Kandle said with a grin.

'I am not doing your stuck up shit in the West. Anyway, we lost count of time. Night found us there and me drunk fool decided to look for mum. Then Muscles gets steroid angry as usual when drunk. Started causing shit. The bastards at the place we were at waited for the sun to go down and attacked us, thinking we were soft, forgetting unlike them we eat meat every day. We fucked them up. The Njoro hooked up with these two chicks we met outside and instead of us taking them back to Buru we went to their place. A few metres away from where we were drinking. Stupid. Bitches asked for Kshs 4000 and when we laughed they started screaming rape ... That's as much as I remember. It will all come back. Wait. A crowd gathered. There was this Rasta motherfucker leading them. Looked familiar. I was drunk, man. You know what time we had started? 11 a.m. Then, I remembered Mum had once brought him home. Back then he was a hawker, one of those guys who walk around in Buru selling shit. I smacked him and chased him away back then. Didn't know the cat was from Kiambiu. Think the guy is Mungiki. He is God over there. When the rape thing came up, he appeared with the crowd that had gathered and recognising my ass all set the crowd on us. All hell broke loose. Simple as that. Nothing to do with Dad and his politics. Is the man crazy?'

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