Orders From Above

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Published by Moses Atsulu, 2025.

This is a work of fiction. Similarities to real people, places, or events are entirely coincidental.

ORDERS FROM ABOVE

First edition. August 3, 2025.

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Written by Moses Atsulu.

To Nenvina Onyango,

Wife to the late Albert Ojwang, whose life was cruelly extinguished while in police custody.

Sometimes, we leave the dead to fend for themselves, grieving in quiet corners where no justice ever reaches. We carry our loss, tuck it away and learn to move on. But your pain speaks. And so does this story.

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CHAPTER ONE

Deputy Commissioner of Police, General Silvanus Mbeke, sat behind his wide mahogany desk at Vigilance House, the golden hue of Nairobi's sunset glazing his windows. His boots were polished to a mirror. His revolver lay clean and loaded at the corner of the desk.

His phone vibrated twice, then lit up with a notification from X.

The DCP unlocked it with a bored thumb, eyes dragging across a post that had gained momentum.

The government says "keep calm," but even hyenas are better dressed. The armed dogs call it the law when they bite you without warning. #UniformedBandits.

Mbeke's jaw twitched. He hated sarcasm, especially when it danced too close to the truth.

He scrolled down. Another one:

One day our nation will be free. And on that day, some people will finally remove their boots and remember they once had feet, not thrones.

Mbeke smiled, just a sliver. Not amusement. Something darker.

He placed the phone down gently, then reached for the black desk phone with the red light. He dialled a direct number.

A moment passed. A click. Then a voice.

"Hello? OCS Owino speaking."

Silvanus leaned forward. "Where are you?"

"In the station, sir. Siaya Road, Homa Bay."

"There's a man in your county. A teacher." He checked his screen. "Name is... John Obilo."

A pause.

"Yes, sir."

"Arrest him."

Silence. Then: "Sorry, sir? Charges?"

Mbeke stood and walked slowly toward the window, staring out at the traffic snarls below like a king surveying peasants.

"I did not say charge. I said Arrest."

"...Yes, sir."

"Take him off the street. Tonight. Have plainclothes men collect him and deliver him to Nairobi as soon as possible. Don't process it. Don't call it official. Just make him... disappear quietly from your county. I'll have him picked up at Central."

"Okay, sir," the voice replied, lower now.

Mbeke turned slightly, his lips curled. "The problem with this generation, OCS, is they think a smartphone makes them immortal."

"That is true, sir. I now understand."

"They forget who built this silence they're screaming in. They forget we have files, boots and bullets. Remind him. But don't kill him... Not yet."

"Yes, sir. Sir."

The line went dead.

Mbeke slid the phone down slowly, admiring its smooth plastic shell. For a moment, he stood in silence, soaking in the glow of power, how easy it was to pluck someone from the map with a single call.

Then, as if the day needed to reward him, the notification bell rang again.

Another post from @ObiloTheTeacher was now trending:

> When they finally come for me, I hope they wipe their shoes. I just mopped this classroom floor myself.

Mbeke chuckled once.

"Of course, we're coming. Let us see if you laugh in a cell," he muttered.

Then he sat back down, watching the sun sink behind the high-rises of Upper Hill, like a curtain slowly falling on civility.

"...AND THAT IS HOW THE heart contracts to pump oxygenated blood into the aorta and throughout the body. Thank you."

The class gave a soft round of applause as Linda, neat and confident, walked back to her seat. Her diagrams were clear, her tone assertive and even the back benchers, who rarely gave any girl credit, nodded approvingly.

From the front of the class, Mr. Obilo, the Biology teacher, didn't look up. He sat behind his desk in the front corner, marking a pile of assignment books with a red pen. The red marks bled across the pages like wounds. He was slow, deliberate, his glasses resting on the bridge of his nose and his cane, a thin, yellowish bamboo stick, leaned against the side of the desk, untouched but always present.

Without raising his head, he said, "Next."

The room fell quiet. Then, slowly, Kelvin Otieno, Linda's deskmate, stood. His shirt was half untucked. He carried a small, folded paper in one hand. His eyes scanned the class nervously as he walked to the front, avoiding eye contact.

He opened the paper and cleared his throat.

"Good... morning. My topic... is about the mitochondria. The mitochondria are the part of the body that helps in... uh... breathing. It also... helps the heart to... beat. And we... we need it because... it gives us energy... and..."

The class shifted in discomfort. Someone near the back coughed loudly. A few students chuckled. Kelvin's voice wavered and stopped altogether.

Mr. Obilo finally looked up. "Remain standing there," he said firmly.

Kelvin remained rooted in place, unsure.

The teacher picked up his notebook from the pile, flipped through the pages, then turned it around for the class to see.

"Of the fifty-two students in this class," he said slowly, "only forty-one submitted their biology assignment books. Eleven did not. Among the forty-one, a few thought it wise to hand in blank books." He paused, then tapped Kelvin's open notebook. "This one, for instance. Wrote nothing. Not a single line."

The class went silent.

Mr. Obilo dropped the book onto the desk with a flat smack. "Everyone who did not do the assignment, stand up."

Chairs shifted. Students hesitated. Then eleven students rose, seven boys and four girls. They walked slowly to the front of the class, joining Kelvin. Some looked embarrassed, others defiant.

Obilo stood from his seat and walked to the pile of books.

He turned to the cabinet in the corner, opened it and pulled out a larger bamboo cane, ignoring the one on his desk. It was long, straight and curved slightly at the end.

"Those who did not submit books, or submitted blank ones, five strokes each. That is how we learn responsibility. Form a line."

The students in front adjusted. Kelvin was first.

The biology teacher stepped forward, reached for Kelvin's waistband and gripped the back of his trousers tightly to keep him from dodging. He lifted the cane.

Before it landed, two heavy knocks hit the classroom door in rapid succession.

Then it burst open.

Three police officers stormed in, rifles slung across their chests, heavy boots echoing off the tiled floor. One wore a bulletproof vest, another held a walkie-talkie and the third had handcuffs clipped to his belt.

The class gasped. One girl screamed.

Obilo froze, cane raised, still holding onto the student's trousers.

The lead officer barked, "Hands away. Step back from the student."

The cane lowered slowly. Obilo looked at the officer in disbelief.

"Is something wrong?" he asked cautiously.

None of the officers answered. The one with the handcuffs stepped forward.

Without a word, he grabbed the teacher's arm and twisted it behind his back. Obilo resisted, confused. "Excuse me! What's going on?!"

Another officer shoved him forward as the cuffs clicked into place.

"Face the wall," one commanded.

Obilo stumbled forward as the class watched in stunned silence.

No name was asked. No explanation was given. The teachers on duty didn't intervene. The officers had come with precision and authority, as if they had done this dozens of times.

Obilo, still in his shirt and tie, was pushed toward the door. His glasses slipped halfway down his nose. He tried to speak but was silenced by the shove of a rifle barrel against his shoulder.

The students standing in line at the front scrambled back to their desks to make way for the armed men. Kelvin sank into his seat, face pale, heart pounding.

Some students stared with open mouths. Others looked away, shaken. A few whispered.

Outside the classroom, a dark green police pickup truck idled quietly. Obilo was led down the stairs and shoved into the back. His shoulders were hunched now, the cuffed hands shaking.

By the time he reached the vehicle, most students on the first and second floors were peering over the balconies. Some leaned on railings, others climbed onto windowsills for a better view.

There was confusion and speculation.

"Did he defile someone?"

"Maybe he was selling weed."

"Someone said he insulted the Deputy Commissioner of Police online."

"He's just strict. Not a criminal."

"They didn't even tell us what he did."

"Maybe he's a whistle-blower."

Inside Form 2B, the cane still lay on the floor where it had been dropped.

Some students stared at it.

Others stared at the space where their teacher stood moments ago.

A few pitied him. Whatever he had done, this felt too public, too violent. Mr. Obilo had never been a kind man, but he didn't deserve that.

Outside, the police pickup reversed slowly. Obilo didn't look up at the school building. His head was down, hands behind his back, sitting between two grim-faced officers.

As the vehicle pulled away from the gate, its tyres spitting dust, nobody in Form 2B could speak. The mood had shifted. The entire class sat stunned.

They did not know it then, but that was the last time they would ever see Mr. Obilo alive.

Later, his name would be whispered in staff rooms, debated at boda stages and scribbled onto social media.

But in that moment, he was just gone. Disappeared from the class. The cane, the books, the unfinished punishments, left behind like evidence of a man who had been erased.

John Obilo sat squeezed between two stony-faced officers in the back of the squad truck. He shifted uneasily on the narrow bench seat, cuffs biting into his wrists. The vehicle's engine hummed low as it pulled away from the school compound.

Obilo cleared his throat. The midday sun beat against the tinted windows as crowds milled on the sidewalks, unaware he was inside. He

leaned forward, voice calm but insistent: "Where are you taking me? Why am I being arrested?"

The two officers exchanged glances. Neither answered. Their silence was heavy, unyielding. One police officer sitting on his right quietly uncuffed their prisoner, seeing how uncomfortable he was bending over with his hands at the back. He handcuffed him from the front.

Obilo tried again: "Am I entitled to a phone call?"

Getting no answer, he slid his hand into his pocket and drew out his phone, but before he could tap the screen, the officer seated to his left snatched it with a swift, practised motion.

"We forgot to take his damn phone," he barked toward the front.

The officer behind the wheel gave a nonchalant shrug, eyes on the road. "Wasn't thinking about it."

The one holding the phone scoffed and pocketed it. Just before the screen went dark, a notification blinked across it, a post from the opposition leader, bold and defiant: "Let them dare arrest me."

Obilo attempted to protest, but the officer leaned in: "One more word and you'll regret it," his voice low enough that only the teacher could hear.

The truck turned off the main road, entering the compound of the Homa Bay Police Station. Obilo recognised the whitewashed walls and tired green gates flanked with barbed wire. His muscles tensed as the vehicle ground to a halt.

The doors opened and Obilo stepped out, still handcuffed. He walked between two officers, still in his shirt, tie askew, face pale, toward the station's administration wing. A few junior officers paused in the courtyard to stare. Mirth and confusion flickered briefly over their faces. They had rarely seen a well-dressed individual brought in like that.

He was marched through the station corridor, the click of his handcuffs echoing faintly off the worn concrete walls. The hallway

smelled of sweat, dust and something metallic, dried blood, perhaps. Officers loitered in doorways and glanced briefly at the new arrival, some curious, others indifferent.

The two police officers led him past a row of cells before turning sharply into a small, dimly lit office. A rusted nameplate above the door read OCS OWINO. Inside, the cramped room reeked of old paperwork and burnt coffee. The walls, once white, were now a sickly green, stained with years of smoke and damp. A single metal desk sat in the middle, cluttered with files, dog-eared manila folders and an old landline phone whose cord was tangled like a coiled snake.

The Officer Commanding Station sat behind the desk, back rigid. He did not rise when they entered. His dark, weathered face was unreadable, but his eyes followed Obilo as he was guided toward the corner of the room, flanked on both sides by the uniformed men who had brought him in. His hands remained cuffed, resting stiffly in front of him. He stood like a man caught in a storm he had not seen coming.

Owino finally spoke, his voice low but charged with restrained anger.

"Put him in Cell Three."

The order was obeyed without question. One officer unlocked the heavy metal door just beyond the office and the other pushed Obilo inside. The door groaned shut behind him, the bolt sliding with a sharp metallic finality.

Only once Obilo was locked away did the senior officer rise slowly from his seat. He walked to the middle of the office and stared hard at the two officers.

“Are you both out of your goddamn minds?” he asked flatly.

The room fell silent.

Sergeant Nyamburu cleared his throat. “Sir, the suspect was apprehended as instructed. We picked him from his school.”

"In full uniform," Owino cut in. His voice remained calm, but there was a tremor beneath it, barely contained fury. "You dragged him out during class hours. Surrounded by students."

Corporal Odera stepped forward, uncertain. "Sir, we were following the directive... You gave the order,"

"Did I now?" Owino shot him a glare. "And in that order, did I tell you to do it like that? In front of children? In full view of the public?"

Nyamburu blinked. "There was no mention of the method, sir. Just that the man needed to be taken."

Owino turned and stared at the iron bars of the cell through the window. "It was supposed to be clean," he muttered. "At night. No noise. No uniform. A knock on the door of his home, a whisper in the dark. That's what the man above wanted."

He turned back, voice rising for the first time. "Now it'll be in the papers. Social media. Teachers with their phones. Parents will ask questions. And for what? Because you lacked the presence of mind to think beyond the words 'arrest him'?"

Neither officer spoke.

Owino exhaled harshly and ran a hand down his face. "I should've been more specific," he muttered. "God knows we don't have time for this heat."

He turned toward the cells. Obilo sat on the bench inside, head in his hands. From that distance, Owino could see the man's suit was still tucked, shoes were dusty from the schoolyard. A teacher. Not a thug. Not a dealer. Not the kind who looked like they'd sleep in that cell.

The OCS rubbed his temples.

"He's headed to the capital city tomorrow," he said. "Orders from above are firm on that."

Nyamburu stiffened. "Should we begin transport tonight?"

Owino waved a hand. "It's late. And you're not exactly subtle. Go to quarters. Both of you. Get some sleep. You'll leave first thing in

the morning with the new squad car. No stops. You hand him over directly."

He stepped closer and added in a lower voice, "This criminal is sensitive. That teacher's face is already on someone's desk in the city. I don't want you two screwing up again."

The officers nodded quickly and offered curt salutes. As they turned to leave, the desk fan in the corner rattled in protest, slicing the stale air with a mechanical hum.

Owino watched them go. Then he looked once more at the closed cell door.

This would be the last time anyone in Homabay laid eyes on the teacher alive. The only problem was, everyone now knew who had him. But that was not something Owino was about to explain to his superior. Not if he valued his job...which he did. A job promotion was also hanging just within reach.

CHAPTER TWO

The hands on the wall clock dragged past 9:03 PM.

Linet's eyes lingered on it, her arms folded tightly across her chest. The sound of the ticking had never felt louder. She stared at the minute hand like it had betrayed her.

He had said it too many times to forget.

"No matter what, I'll always be home before eight."

But here she was. Waiting. Alone.

The chapatis had gone cold in the hotpot. Even without touching it, she could feel the warmth had long left. The chicken stew sat on the table untouched, the smell of cumin and browned onions no longer comforting, just accusing.

She glanced at the phone lying face down on the arm of the couch. Still on aeroplane mode.

She had put it that way earlier in the day, not to punish him or test him, but to escape the barrage of messages from KopaFast. She had defaulted on the small mobile loan three days ago and they had not stopped calling since.

They no longer even pretended to be polite.

She just wanted silence, just a day of peace.

In the living room, the TV flickered dimly, casting pale light over the faces of her two children as they sat at the dining table.

Achieng, six, was already too mature for her age. Her skinny arms held a folded chapati as she broke off pieces and slid them onto her brother's plate.

Brian, just three, sat perched on his usual green booster chair. He swayed his legs under the table, spoon in one hand, the other grabbing bits of chicken like treasure. His eyes flicked to the TV and back to his sister. His laughter came in soft, distracted bursts.

"Mum," Achieng called, "Brian poured juice on the floor."

Linet looked over. A small puddle was already forming by his cup. She exhaled slowly, got up with mechanical grace, wiped it with the edge of her old leso and went back to standing still.

"Eat up," she murmured. "No yoghurt if you don't finish."

"I'm eating," Achieng answered on behalf of both.

The front door stayed quiet. No rumbling of a motorbike. No stomping boots on the step.

Linet's jaw clenched.

Where was he?

Was it work? An accident? Or had he, God forbid, taken that new teacher's smile too seriously? She had seen how the girl lingered in the staffroom when Obilo passed. She wasn't stupid.

She rubbed her temple. She did not want to think that way. Not yet.

Just then, there was a knock at the door.

Three soft, deliberate taps.

She rushed toward it, more angry than relieved.

Let him try and explain this. She twisted the handle and pulled the door open, sharp and ready.

But it was not Obilo.

It was Maureen, the school secretary. She was panting lightly, her wig slightly tilted, face pale, her eyes already welling up. She stepped forward without asking.

"Linet... you've not heard?"

"What do you mean?" Linet asked, her voice flat, unblinking.

Maureen closed the door behind her. She glanced toward the children, who were now laughing at something on the TV, then leaned in and whispered.

"It's Obilo."

Linet didn't move. Didn't blink.

"He was taken. After school," Maureen continued in a low voice. "Some men came. Not police. No uniform. Just an unmarked car. They called him by name and... forced him inside."

Linet stared at her. Her breath caught. "Taken where?"

"No one knows. No one said anything. Just drove off. Some teachers saw it happen, but..."

She stopped, shaking her head. "We all thought you'd know by now."

Linet's knees gave way beneath her slowly. Not with drama, not with collapse, but just a slow, steady bend, as if her body had decided on its own.

She lowered herself onto the plastic chair by the wall. Her knees burned, the weight of the day pressing hard on her bones. There was a faint tremble in her left thigh. Her body had carried too much already: early morning prep, full day of lessons, chasing after Brian and now this.

The chair creaked under her. She leaned forward, placing her head in her hands. Her palms were cold.

The phone.

She turned and picked it up, switched off aeroplane mode. It lit up instantly, six missed calls. One from Maureen. The rest... all from his mother-in-law.

Without thinking, she tapped her name and pressed call.

The phone rang. Linet stared at the wall, listening to the hollow sound.

She said nothing as it connected.

And that was when her hands started to shake.

"Hello? Linet?"

She swallowed. "Mama... have you heard?"

There was a pause, too long. Then the older woman exhaled, as though she had been holding her breath for years.

"I have. A teacher from the school just called me. Is it true?"

Linet's voice cracked slightly. "It is."

Another pause.

"We will go together. First thing in the morning," her mother-in-law said firmly. "We meet at the gate by seven. He will need to see familiar faces."

Linet nodded slowly, though no one could see it. "Yes. Seven."

"Sleep if you can, my daughter. Rest your mind."

Linet said nothing. She ended the call.

Maureen had been standing by the door, clutching her handbag awkwardly like she wanted to disappear into it. She cleared her throat gently.

"I'll go now. I... I just thought you should hear it from someone close."

Linet gave a faint nod.

Maureen took a slow step back. "Let me know if anything changes. Or if you need help with the kids."

Her voice trembled near the end.

Then she opened the door gently, offered a ghost of a smile and walked away into the night.

Linet shut the door quietly behind her and turned the lock.

The house fell still again. Even the TV had gone silent.

She walked into the kitchen like she was floating, opened the fridge and pulled out a packet of milk. Its plastic felt cold in her palm, the condensation making it slippery.

She pulled the cap, took a sip straight from it. The cold hit her chest hard, like a warning. She took another sip. Then slowly turned her eyes toward the living room.

The TV light flickered blue over the small forms of her children.

Achieng had curled herself into a ball on the far end of the couch, knees tucked under her chin.

Brian had slid halfway off his seat, head resting on the throw pillow, mouth slightly open, breathing soft and rhythmic.

She stood there for a second longer.

Then she placed the milk on the counter, stepped over a toy truck and gently lifted Brian first. He stirred slightly, nestled into her shoulder. She laid him in bed, tucked him in.

Next was Achieng. She was heavier, but Linet managed. She kissed her daughter's cheek as she set her down. No reaction. Just deep, dreaming sleep.

She closed their bedroom door with care, as though too much noise could break something irreparable.

In her room, she lay flat on her back, eyes wide open.

The fan above creaked as it turned slowly.

She stared at the ceiling. The familiar crack that ran from one corner to the lightbulb now looked like it was splitting the house in half.

Minutes passed. Then many more.

She blinked. Turned. Stared again.

Sleep did not come easily. But eventually, it found her, quietly and reluctantly. It dragged her into it like deep water.

Morning.

The alarm buzzed softly at 6:00 AM. Linet opened her eyes before the second beep. She sat up slowly, the sheets tangled around her waist, her limbs stiff. Her head pounded faintly, as if her dreams had been pressing on her skull all night.

The house was still quiet. The soft breathing of her children drifted through the corridor, steady and innocent.

She rubbed her eyes, let her feet touch the cold floor tiles and stood. Today, she would go to the station. She might finally find out why her husband had been arrested.

Meanwhile, across town, at the edge of the police station compound, two officers stood by a nondescript grey Toyota Probox, the engine off, the windows misted by the morning dew.

They were plain clothed, dressed in brown jackets, matching khakis and leather boots, neither in a mood to talk. One adjusted his wristwatch. 5:07 AM. They were right on schedule.

The taller one, Sergeant Nyamburu, climbed into the driver's seat. The other, Corporal Odera, disappeared momentarily behind a weather-stained shed at the corner of the yard, returning with a blue jerry can and a long transparent plastic tube.

Beside the shed, a barrel-shaped tank of diesel stood locked behind a rusting gate, but the top flap had been left open from last night. The air around it was thick with petrol fumes.

With practised ease, Corporal Odera shoved one end of the tube into the diesel tank, tilted the jerry can low, then sucked hard on the other end until the fuel surged through. He quickly pushed the free end into the car's tank.

The fuel flowed in with a gurgling rush, forming bubbles in the transparent tube.

Physics in motion. No fancy pumps. Just gravity, suction and time.

When the tank filled, he jerked the tube out in one swift motion, wiped his hands with a rag from his back pocket and slammed the petrol flap shut.

The engine coughed, then roared to life.

Inside the station, a different set of steps echoed through the corridor.

Mr. John Obilo, dressed neatly in his usual blue shirt and brown trousers, was being escorted by two junior officers.

No handcuffs. No shouting. No visible bruises.

He looked exhausted, yet composed, the kind of tired that settles behind the eyes.

His shoes clicked gently on the tiled floor as they led him to the waiting vehicle. Outside, the sky was still black with a hint of grey, the dawn hesitant and slow to rise.

"Get in the back," Sergeant Nyamburu said quietly, holding the door open.

Obilo climbed in without a word.

Corporal Odera got in on the passenger side, tossed the plastic tube into the back seat beside Obilo and pulled the door shut.

The car reversed slowly, the tyres crunching over gravel, then slid onto the tarmac.

No sirens.

No escort.

Just the cold silence of early morning, as the Probox disappeared into the distant highway mist, ferrying a man whose only crime, as far as his family knew, was not coming home the night before.

AT EXACTLY 7:06 AM, Linet stepped out of the matatu and crossed the gravel path to the entrance of the Homabay Police Station, her mother-in-law beside her, clutching her handbag tightly against her chest.

The morning sun had begun to break through the haze, casting long shadows over the compound, but it did little to warm the coldness that met them inside.

The booking office smelled faintly of dust, sweat and floor polish. A yawning constable in a navy pullover sat behind a low glass counter, scribbling something into a large Occurrence Book with the kind of disinterest only a person used to bad news could manage.

Linet stepped forward, her voice low but firm.

"Excuse me... we're here to see John Obilo. He was arrested yesterday."

The officer barely looked up.

"Obilo?" he repeated, flipping through a logbook lazily. "Oh. That one. He was taken to Nairobi."

Linet blinked. "What do you mean taken to Nairobi?"

The constable shrugged, tapping his pen on the desk. Left an hour ago. Official transfer. Orders from above."

Her mother-in-law stepped forward, clearly rattled.

"Taken where and for what? What's he done?"

The officer exhaled sharply and leaned back. "Incitement... unpatriotic behaviour. Something like that. It's in the OB."

"Unpatriotic?" Linet repeated the words foreign and absurd in her mouth.

"He's a teacher, not a politician."

The constable raised a brow as if to say, So?

Just then, a female officer stepped into the reception from the corridor, her boots muddy and her face kinder than the others. She paused, glanced at the two women and read the situation immediately.

"Looking for the man who was brought in last night?" she asked.

They both nodded at once.

The lady officer approached the counter and gave the constable a hard look before turning to them.

"I understand your concern. But he's safe. He was escorted under official orders. No harm will come to him if he's innocent. Sometimes, transfers like this are for processing or higher-level review, nothing more."

Linet looked at her carefully, searching for any sign of deceit. Her mother-in-law's mouth opened and closed again, as if the words inside her were too heavy to spill.

The officer's tone softened.

"If what you're saying is true and he's clean, he'll be back. Let the law take its course."

There was nothing left to say.

No paper to sign.

No answers more satisfying than the silence they had left home with.

They stepped back, defeated.

The sun had fully risen by the time they walked down the gravel road. A matatu waited near the stage, engine idling.

As Linet climbed in, she gave one last glance at the police station, a squat concrete block with bars over every window and cold comfort behind its walls.

She sat by the window, her hands trembling in her lap and the matatu pulled away, leaving behind not just a building, but a growing void where answers should have been.

Linet stared out the matatu window, her thoughts tangled like the clouds that hovered low over Homa Bay's skyline.

She wondered if he was cold. If they gave him food.

If he missed her.

If he thought of their two children, one with his serious forehead, the other with her stubborn chin.

She hugged her sweater tighter around her.

"Does he... even know how much I miss him?" she whispered. Her mother-in-law remained silent, either asleep or lost in heavier thoughts.

Can he get through this?

Her fingers trembled as she reached into her bag and clasped a rosary she barely used. The beads were warm from being held too often that morning.

"God... protect him," she mumbled, head bowed, breath shaky.

"Please let him come back to us."

Across counties and kilometres, in a different world of silence and steel, John Obilo heard her, or something like her voice, in the quiet hum of the vehicle's engine.

A question, light as wind, touched the corners of his heart:

Do you miss them?

Yes.

He missed them more than breath.

He turned his head slowly, the stiff collar of his shirt digging into his neck. Outside the tinted window, the world passed by in soft colours, morning greys, dying fog, trees bending slightly from the breeze. He thought of his wife's sleepy voice in the mornings. The way his two kids fought over sugar on their porridge. The chipped mug he used daily for tea.

Now, flanked by two quiet officers, one on the wheel, the other pretending not to stare at him, John was being moved like a package. He had no phone, no explanation and no clue how deep this hole went.

The car, a nondescript navy-blue Toyota Probox sped past Rodi Kopany at around 6:55 a.m., then curved through the tight stretch leading into Oyugis by 7:20 a.m. He noted everything. Not because he cared about the time, but because his mind needed something to hold on to.

The officer on the passenger side whistled occasionally. tuneless and annoying. The driver said nothing but adjusted his rear-view mirror every ten minutes like he expected someone to follow.

They gassed up the vehicle in Sondu, the driver using a plastic tube to siphon fuel from a jerrycan hidden in the boot, sucking the air first, then holding the stream into the tank with the precision of someone who had done this a dozen times. No words passed between them.

Obilo's eyes fixed on the horizon.

He recognised Ahero Bridge by 8:15 a.m., its iron bars still rusted from years of rain. A moment later, they joined the Kisumu-Nairobi highway, his stomach tightening as they drove eastward.

Kisumu City, though a place he once studied in, flew by without ceremony.

No one waved.

No one knew he was inside.

As they passed Muhoroni around 9:30 a.m., Obilo let his forehead rest against the glass. The road narrowed, the buildings grew scarce. He found himself silently counting telephone poles.

"Will I ever teach again?" he wondered.

"Or will this be what they remember me for?"

At Kericho, they stopped briefly. No words. Just tea for the officers and a bathroom break he was not allowed to take alone.

By Naivasha, the sun was high, but cold. His eyes stung from staring. His back ached. He had not been told where exactly in Nairobi they were taking him. Just that "orders were orders."

They entered the city through Limuru Road, the morning haze still sitting heavy over the skyline.

Billboards welcomed them with messages about patriotism, clean water and banking offers.

At 11:43 a.m., the car dipped under a flyover and vanished into the veins of Nairobi, the city of power, silence and secrets.

And somewhere behind, in a dusty little town with two sleeping children and a restless wife, no one knew where exactly he had been taken.

CHAPTER THREE

It was one in the afternoon.

Inside the polished, glass-walled office of the Deputy Commissioner of Police, silence reigned, aside from the rhythmic hum of the air conditioner and the occasional honk of distant traffic from the city below. Mbeke, the man in charge, leaned back in his padded leather chair, flipping through a crime bulletin with one hand while the other lazily spun a pen across his fingers.

His phone rang once. He paused. It rang again.

He pressed the green button.

"Deputy Commissioner speaking."

The voice on the other end belonged to Allan Tendo, OCS Central Police Station. The tone was clipped and eager.

"Sir, the suspect from Homabay has arrived. The teacher."

Mbeke sat upright. "What time did he get there?"

"Just a few minutes ago. Escorted by two officers. Quiet man. No resistance. No fuss."

A pause followed.

The Deputy Commissioner's voice lowered. "How does he look?"

"Pardon, sir?"

"Any marks? Bruises? Did the boys from Homabay do what they were told?"

Tendo cleared his throat before replying slowly,

"He was delivered clean, sir. As clean as a surgeon's glove."

There was a sharp thud as Mbeke slammed the pen on his desk.

He stood and walked toward the window, eyes narrowing at the grey Nairobi skyline.

"That bastard of an OCS in Homabay is still eyeing promotion and he lets the suspect arrive looking like a bishop from the Vatican?" he muttered. "God, what softness..."

He paced a few steps away from the window, then glanced around the office. No one was there. Still, he dropped his voice to a near-whisper.

"This man... this blogger... he has not posted anything in the past ten hours. That means something. It means caging them or silencing them for good is the only way that works."

He walked back to the desk and placed both palms on the surface, leaning in like he was speaking through glass.

"We need him softened, Tendo. I want him to think long and hard before he opens his mouth again on social media. Can it be done?"

"Yes, sir," the OCS replied. "I have a few boys in the remand cells. They'll do it for the right price."

"How much?"

"Ten thousand, sir. They'll beat him proper, leave the mind intact. Just bruises and maybe a broken tooth if you want."

Mbeke breathed in slowly through his nose.

"Just make sure he doesn't leave in a body bag."

"I understand, sir."

"Good."

He ended the call and immediately opened his phone's mobile money app. The transaction was swift. KES 10,000, sent to a personal line, no record on official systems.

Once done, he slid the phone aside and sat back in his chair. From the scattered papers on his desk, he grasped a newspaper. Its headline is bold and unapologetic:

"Government Warns Opposition Against Tribal Politics."

He gazed at it, a sardonic twist pulling at his lips.

"Let order prevail," he whispered. "Even if we silence our souls to achieve it."

With that, the Deputy Commissioner reached beneath his desk drawer and slid it open with practised ease. From the shadows of outdated files and weapon permit reports, he retrieved a squat, dark bottle of Macallan Rare Cask, a single malt that reeked of old money and the silence of private clubs.

He pulled the cork free with a soft pop. No ceremony, no toasts. Just the sharp pour of amber liquid into a glass. He brought it to his lips, tilted his head and took a long, deliberate sip that flared through his chest like fire meeting kindling. His eyes closed, not in satisfaction, but in momentary retreat.

Then came the flask. Sleek, steel, engraved. A retirement gift from someone he could no longer remember.

He filled it halfway, his hand steady, the motion almost reverent. The splash of liquor against steel sounded like a ritual. A promise that the rest of the day would go down smoother.

THE MOMENT THE PHONE buzzed with the M-Pesa message, Allan Tendo glanced at the screen and grinned.

KES 10,000 received from MBK – 1:07pm.

He called it what it truly was, not a bribe, not just pocket change. No. This was "peacekeeping blood money." A fee to dirty hands and silence mouths. A payment that travelled faster than any court order. He rose from his plastic swivel chair, the springs groaning beneath him and stretched his back like a man who had just cleared a long day's work.

A slow whistle escaped his lips, a tune from some long-forgotten Rhumba song. He shoved the phone into his trouser pocket and stepped out of his cramped office.

The station buzzed with muted life. Flies buzzed around the cracked walls, officers loitered with cups of sugarless tea in stained mugs and the distant murmur of detainees came from the direction of the cells. A few constables lounged in the report office, leafing through outdated newspapers.

He walked with purpose toward the OB desk where Corporal Maina, a thick-necked man with weary eyes and a lopsided grin, was hunched over the Occurrence Book. His pen danced lazily over the pages as Tendo approached.

"Afternoon, boss," Maina greeted without looking up.

"Anything juicy?" Tendo asked, feigning casual interest.

Maina chuckled, shaking his head. "A few drunkards from last night. Eight, maybe nine. We released them earlier."

Tendo leaned on the counter. "They part with something?"

"Of course," Maina said in a hushed voice. "One thousand bob each. All paid cash. No receipts."

"Good, good." Tendo nodded approvingly, then leaned closer. "Cell Three. Who are the most aggressive fellows there right now?"

Maina paused. "You mean the one who knifed his own wife at Ngara Flats? Or the tall guy who robbed that old mzungu woman with a panga and left her for dead?"

Tendo smiled faintly. "Yes. Those ones."

Maina narrowed his eyes. "What about them, sir?"

Instead of replying immediately, Tendo held out his hand, palm facing up. Maina understood and dug into the drawer under the counter, pulling out three brown Ksh 1,000 notes, the newer series, with a more modern font, crisp watermark and that sharp coppery smell of freshly printed currency.

Tendo had already done the maths. Three notes. That was his rightful share. He was sure Maina and the others had stashed the remaining five thousand among themselves. Unless they were lying. Swindling him.

He looked Maina in the eye, testing for any twitch of guilt. Nothing.

Calmly, he handed back the money.

"Here's what we'll do," Tendo said softly. "Give one of those notes to each of the two hard-heads in Cell Three. Tell them there's a reward for a mission."

Maina raised an eyebrow.

"Tonight," Tendo continued, "they give one of their cellmates a proper beating. The teacher. Not to kill, just... enough to break the man's spirit. Bones too, if needed. He needs to feel it, remember it."

"Understood," Maina nodded.

"Tell them that besides the cash, the police will take care of special meals, chapati, meat, even soda, for a week. Not the usual watery porridge and dry maize they choke down every day, but real food. But only after the job is done."

Maina gave a low laugh. "They'll do it. Those two animals would eat a rat if you offered it with pilau."

Tendo smiled faintly. "Good. And the remaining note... keep it. For your silence."

"No need to remind me," Maina replied, tucking the cash into his vest pocket.

Tendo turned to leave, whistling once more. The sound of justice, corrupted, twisted and paid in full.

Behind him, the station carried on like always. Justice, here, wore no robe. It wore boots, barked orders and traded beatings for favours.

The sun stood high in the sky, turning the gravel at Central Police Station into glinting specks of heat and dust. OCS Allan Tendo stepped out of the building with a faint smile tugging at his lips. His polished black boots clacked confidently against the concrete. A brown envelope, discreet and well-folded, rested under his armpit.

He walked past the row of parked police motorcycles and over to a compact silver-grey Nissan Juke parked under a lone neem tree. The car

stood out like a sore thumb among the weathered station Land Cruisers and dented Proboxes. Tendo liked it that way. A man in his position should never blend in.

He unlocked the driver's door and slid in, careful not to wrinkle his crisp blue uniform. The smell of new upholstery and faint cologne clung to the air. His holstered Glock pressed into his side as he leaned back and sighed.

He could eat right there at the station canteen, sit on the long benches with the rank and file, share oily beef stew with watery ugali served on metallic trays. But what picture would that paint? Stooping so low? He would lose all respect. Let them whisper. Let them speculate. Power must always remain at a distance.

He started the engine and began reversing out. His eyes caught a memory in the rear-view mirror: a superior officer once chuckling and telling him, "Allan, you should just move into the houses near the perimeter. Free rent, close to work."

Tendo had laughed then too, tight and polite and then driven off in that same moment, just like now. A man with ambition does not sleep beside the weight of handcuffs and drunks.

He honked lightly at the gate. The constable on duty saluted and opened it, closing it again once the Juke disappeared onto the busy Nairobi Street, its tyres crunching over loose gravel.

Back inside, the corporal on OB duty watched the gate shut with a soft metallic clang. He exhaled, the casual air of a man who had done this more than a dozen times before. He stood up slowly, brushed imaginary dust off his sleeves and stretched.

The OCS had returned his cut of the day's kill. But it was not just money, there were instructions woven into the transaction, subtle and deadly, like venom stirred into a cup of tea.

He stepped out of the Occurrence Book desk, passing a wall with faded posters about ethics and citizen rights. The air grew heavier as he approached the holding cells.

The corridor to the cells narrowed like a gullet swallowing light. Fluorescent bulbs overhead buzzed faintly, one of them flickering with a soft, dying stutter. Corporal Maina's boots echoed off the concrete as he strode forward, the cold silence of the cell block wrapping around him like a second uniform.

A young officer guarding the section straightened as he saw him coming. His name tag was smudged, uniform crisp, but eyes were too tired for his age. He fell in step behind Maina without being asked.

They stopped in front of Cell Three.

From inside, bodies shifted. The air smelled of unwashed skin, old steel and stale desperation. Through the iron bars, shadows stirred as the inmates noticed who had come for them.

Maina did not speak. He just nodded.

The officer raised his voice, cool and commanding. "You two. Step forward. Now."

Two figures rose. Silent. One tall and wiry with a scar along his cheek. The other, shorter, thicker, his jaw set like someone always halfway to a fight.

They moved to the door, calm as coiled snakes and without instruction, thrust their wrists through the narrow rectangular opening.

Metal clicked as the handcuffs snapped shut.

The younger officer unlocked the door in a single motion, swift, rehearsed, dangerous. The hinges groaned as if protesting and then the two inmates were outside.

The door slammed shut behind them. One of the other inmates chuckled darkly from the shadows and it was instantly silenced by the sharp clang of the lock.

The hallway seemed to constrict.

Maina said nothing. He merely led the way to the small, windowless interview room just around the corner. Inside, the

fluorescent light hummed, the table was bare and the air was hotter, closer.

The two inmates stood facing Maina, hands still cuffed in front of them. The officer on OB duty glanced over his shoulder, ensuring the corridor remained clear, then turned to the two inmates.

"I have a proposition," he said quietly, his voice steady but charged. The men exchanged a quick look. One of them leaned slightly forward, his curiosity piqued. "Go on," he said. "We're listening." The air between them tightened, anticipation curling like smoke. Whatever followed was spoken in hushed tones, the kind of conversation meant to vanish with the echoes in the concrete hall.

Omari, the one who had butchered his wife with an unsettling calm, tilted his head back slightly, a half-smile curling his lips. It was not joy. It was something colder. Pride, maybe. Or the taste of usefulness. Mwana looked down briefly, then up with a tight nod, as if confirming something he had long suspected.

Maina reached into his coat pocket and pulled out two crisp notes.

He handed one to each of them. The rustle of the money was almost deafening.

Mwana looked at the note in his hand, then at Maina, then gave a slow shrug. His face twitched into something between a grin and a grimace. He looked... dissatisfied.

"You have a problem?" Maina asked without inflexion.

Mwana shook his head but gave a sideways glance, the kind that said he would've preferred something colder. Sweeter.

"I could give anything for a cold half a litre of yoghurt," the man said, his voice low, almost wistful. The hunger in his eyes spoke louder than the words, lingering on the crooked police officer with a silent plea that needed no translation.

Maina sighed, then turned to his colleague standing at the doorway.

"Can you get two yoghurts from the canteen?" he said flatly. "Put it on my tab."

The officer blinked once, nodded and left.

The room was quiet except for the ticking of a wall clock and the slow breaths of men who had already agreed to something unspeakable.

Seconds later, the officer returned with two small plastic packs of strawberry yoghurt. No spoons. Just tear and drink.

The inmates wasted no time.

They ripped off the foil and drank like they were swallowing promises.

Maina watched. Not with approval. Not with disdain. Just the cool calculation of someone sealing something final.

Once the last gulp was down, the two men handed over the empty containers and were escorted silently back to Cell Three.

Same routine.

The door creaked open just wide enough.

They stepped inside, wrists still bound.

As the heavy door shut behind them with a solid thud, they turned silently. Hands pushed through the hatch.

One click. Then the next.

Freedom was returned to their wrists, hands that would need reflexes, precision,

and dirty work before dawn.

And just like that, the job was alive inside the walls, crawling under the skin of concrete, breathing through barred windows.

That night, the walls would remember.

The lights would flicker not from faulty wiring but from the electricity of betrayal and of violence preordained. The floor, that cold stone floor, would drink whatever spilled first, blood or silence.

CHAPTER FOUR

The biology teacher shifted on the cold concrete floor, the dampness beneath him clinging to his trousers like second skin. The thin mat he had managed to grab the night before had already been claimed by someone older and more aggressive. He had spent his first night curled beside the cell's toilet hole, its pungent stench still clung to his nostrils, stronger than bleach or regret. He could still hear the rats skittering behind the wall cracks, the rhythmic drip of a leaking pipe above and the ceaseless rustle of uneasy bodies.

Sleep had not come. Only slivers of rest stolen between shifts of discomfort and the groans of inmates talking in their sleep.

He was rubbing his sore neck when the heavy clang of the steel door jarred him upright. The two inmates who had been taken out earlier were back.

The guards escorted them in, their wrists still cuffed. The door slammed shut with finality and the two uncuffed from the hatch. One of the older inmates, a wiry man with sunken eyes, lifted his chin toward them.

"What was that about?" he asked, voice low and wary.

One of the returned inmates shrugged, a smug smile curving his lips. "They said there was a phone call from outside. Wanted to ask something."

The other one said nothing. He only glanced at John as he moved toward his corner and for a moment, their eyes met. There was something in the man's gaze, not fear nor confusion but intent. The kind that prickled John's nerves.

He turned away.

That second night was coming fast and John dreaded it more than the first. His body still hadn't adjusted to the cold, to the crowded room with limbs everywhere, pressed together like logs in a pile. Last night he had barely managed to breathe without someone's elbow jabbing his ribs.

A quiet voice beside him broke the monotony. It belonged to a man who had barely spoken the entire day.

"What did you do to end up here?" the man asked.

John hesitated. He had already run through the justifications a hundred times in his head. The truth felt raw. Shameful.

"Something I shouldn't have," he replied finally, his voice little more than a whisper.

The man nodded, as if understanding required no details. "Same here. I am an innocent man."

John studied him. Thin, with a long scar stretching from his cheekbone to just past his ear. But his eyes were calm. Almost resigned. Their conversation ended as quickly as it began.

The two inmates who had returned from the brief exit sat quietly, but something had changed about them. One kept tapping his fingers on the concrete floor in a rhythm. The other leaned against the wall, legs stretched out, a faint smirk on his lips. It was a strange kind of peace. As if they knew something the rest didn't.

By evening, the sun had begun its lazy descent, streaking gold and amber through the narrow high window. The cells darkened in patches, swallowing the edges of faces and outlines.

Then came the clang of a bucket against the bars. Supper.

A slop of ugali and beans was served, hot enough to burn fingers, tasteless enough to strip the soul. The bucket was passed from one cell to another, each scoop dropped into battered plastic bowls or directly into waiting hands. The serving was just enough to hush stomachs, not enough to satisfy them.

John chewed slowly, not out of patience but fatigue. The heat in the food did little to drive the cold from his bones. He eyed the window again. The light was dying fast.

Night would return soon.

And with it, the whispers. The plotting. The silence that often meant something was about to happen.

He leaned back against the wall, clutching his knees to his chest and let the shadows take over the cell.

The second night in custody was almost beginning.

6:00 PM

The cell buzzed with restless energy, like static before a storm. The light above them, a single fluorescent bulb screwed into a caged socket. It burned mercilessly as always, never dimming, never dying. It hung so high up that it made shadows stretch long across the cracked walls, giving the illusion of space in a place designed to erase it.

The smell Inside was the same as it had been all day, a stew of sweat, damp clothes and human breath. The kind of air that sat heavy in the lungs.

Someone stirred in the corner.

From beneath his shirt, as if conjuring it from nothingness, an inmate pulled out a single cigarette, carefully preserved like treasure. A ripple ran through the room. Heads turned. Bodies shifted. Within seconds, a small circle had gathered around him, as if he were a priest about to offer salvation. No one questioned how he got it. No one dared to ask. In here, some things simply happened.

The cigarette made its rounds. Each man took a pull like it was a sip from a sacred cup. Lips touched it with reverence, cheeks hollowed with the drag, smoke curled into the stale air, momentarily masking the stink. For two minutes, he was their god.

Then it was gone.

Burnt down to the stub and ground underfoot, like everything else they once craved.

Silence reclaimed its hold. Not complete silence, but fractured. Whispers here, coughing there, the occasional mutter of a dream spoken aloud. A few had already drifted into uneasy sleep, curled against each other like boys hiding from the cold. Others remained awake, eyes fixed on the ceiling, lost in spirals of thought.

John Owilo sat hunched, back pressed to the wall, arms wrapped around his knees. Sleep would not come easily. Not tonight. His bones ached, his mind wandered and with every passing hour, his hatred for the government deepened.

He had taught for three years. Fought for classroom resources, defended children from poverty and built futures in chalk dust. And yet here he was, tossed into this concrete tomb, accused of crimes so absurd they sounded like satire. "Incitement." "Undermining state authority." Charges stitched together by faceless men in suits who had never stood in front of fifty hungry children.

They would try to drag him through the system, yes. But courts had rules. Evidence mattered. At least, he still believed that. Justice would prevail. It had to. Or so he thought.

The cell creaked with movement.

Then a whistle.

Soft, deliberate. It sliced through the background noise and landed squarely in John's direction.

"John," a voice called.

He blinked and turned his head, slow with caution. Mwana was staring at him from across the room, half-shadowed under the flickering light.

How did he know his name?

The question stuck on the roof of his mouth.

He stared back, tense. Watching. Waiting.

The room seemed to breathe around them, but the space between their eyes grew colder by the second.

John narrowed his eyes. "What's up?" he asked cautiously, voice low but steady.

Mwana gave a slow, knowing smile. "Don't you remember me?"

John blinked. "How could I?" he replied, a little firmer now.

Another inmate shifted nearby. He had a scar that ran across his forehead like an unfinished sentence. "Aren't you the teacher from Marindi High School?"

"Yes," John said warily. His chest tightened.

Mwana's smile didn't reach his eyes. "You don't remember beating my son Bilal? Left him crawling home from school like a dog one year ago?"

John scoffed and shook his head, a dry laugh escaping his lips. "Son? You don't even look old enough to have one in high school."

Mwana's jaw tightened. "You're right," he said flatly. "It was my younger brother."

The laughter drained from John's face.

"You put him in the hospital," Mwana went on, tone clipped, emotion buried beneath it. "All because he came late to class. Or maybe because he didn't have the right shoes. Whatever it was, you made him bleed."

John straightened, trying to mask the flicker of unease in his chest. "Are you serious?"

Mwana leaned forward, his voice cold and steady. "Dead serious."

For a moment, the cell felt smaller. The air grew thick. The other men around them stirred with interest, silent witnesses to something unravelling.

John didn't answer.

Mwana did not blink. "You're going to pay for what you did to him tonight."

Then he leaned back slowly, like a judge passing sentence.

The overhead bulb hummed louder than before. Or maybe it was just John's blood in his ears.

Outside, the sun had slipped behind the horizon. Inside, something darker had just taken its place.

The stench of sweat and unwashed bodies clung to the cell walls like mildew. The bulb high above burned into the night without mercy, casting harsh light on the cracked concrete below. Men lay sprawled across every corner, some were snoring while some whispered. Others simply stared up into the indifferent ceiling, waiting for the hours to pass.

John Owilo sat with his back to the cold wall, knees drawn to his chest, tie still awkwardly looped around his neck like a forgotten noose. Sleep had not visited him. The previous night had scraped something raw inside him, forcing him to curl near the rancid toilet hole, packed in with thirty-four others. He had taught history and biology for three years. A man who wore spectacles and marked papers with red ink. Now he was here, in this cage, where red meant blood.

He had only just closed his eyes when Mwana's voice sliced through the stale air.

"You thought I was done talking?"

John looked up.

Mwana stood, joined now by Omari, the broad-shouldered inmate who hadn't spoken much, but whose silence had always felt like waiting. Omari cracked his knuckles, his eyes flat.

John stood too. Slowly.

"What is this?" he asked, feigning calm, though every muscle in his body braced.

"This," Mwana said, stepping forward, "is justice."

John barely ducked the first punch. It grazed his cheek, searing the skin raw. The second came faster, Omari's fist slamming into his ribs, driving the breath from his lungs. He staggered backwards, colliding with a body behind him.

No one moved to help.

Instead, the watching crowd shifted, creating a loose ring around them. Some murmured. Some smirked. Others watched with dead, empty eyes. A few even leaned in, eager for blood.

John tried to retreat, his palms raised. "Wait...listen!"

Mwana drove a knee into his gut.

John collapsed onto all fours, coughing hard. A boot caught his side. Another followed. His body curled instinctively, shielding vital parts, but they were merciless. One held him down while the other unleashed fury. Fists rained like hail. His mouth filled with blood.

"You broke him!" Mwana shouted, voice cracking. "My brother couldn't eat solid food for a week!"

John twisted, rolling onto his back. Omari's fist cracked across his jaw. Blood was spattered across the floor. He gasped, a gurgle rising in his throat.

From the edge of the crowd, someone clapped. Another cheered.

"This isn't a school anymore, teacher," Mwana sneered. "No blackboard to hide behind."

John's vision blurred. But something inside him flared, something wild and dying but not yet dead. His right hand gripped Mwana's ankle and as the man leaned down, John surged forward and drove his thumb into the man's left eye with all the force left in him.

A wet, horrible squelch.

Mwana screamed, a blood-curdling, animal howl. He reeled back, clawing at his face. Fluids, thick and clear, poured from the ruined socket.

"Jesus!" someone shouted.

Omari froze in horror.

John staggered to his feet, one hand braced on the wall. Blood trickled down his face, but he smiled, just barely. "You wanted justice?" he rasped. "Here it is."

Mwana writhed on the ground, shrieking, one hand over his face, blood leaking between his fingers. A sickly trail followed him as he scrambled away.

But Omari's expression had changed.

Not anger now, cold, calculated rage.

He looked at the tie still loosely looped around John's neck. The kind a teacher wore. The kind that not many took off, even in jail.

"You should've taken that thing off," Omari muttered.

He stepped forward and swung. John tried to duck, but the fist caught the side of his skull. Stars exploded behind his eyes. He stumbled and Omari lunged, hooking the tie and yanking him down like prey. John's knees hit the concrete with a crack.

Then the tie tightened. Hands like steel clamped it behind his neck. John's fingers clawed at the cloth, scraping, fighting, but it only drew tighter. His legs kicked wildly. He smashed his elbow backwards, once, twice, desperation fuelling him, but Omari didn't flinch.

The air vanished. John's throat burned. His lungs heaved nothing. He stared at the small crowd, blurry shapeless figures ringed in flickering fluorescent light. No one moved. No one helped.

Some watched while some even smiled.

From the narrowing corners of his vision, John saw the red-stained floor and thought about his home. His wife. His son's graduation from nursery school. He saw the classroom, the rows of wooden desks and the chalk in his hand.

Then he saw himself.

A man gasping, mouth wide, eyes bulging, skin turning a colour no human should wear.

He saw Death walking in and this time, Death didn't knock.

John Owilo stopped struggling. His arms went limp. His legs twitched once, twice and then fell still. The last thing he heard was the blood in his ears roaring like the sea and a single, final gasp that never became breath.

Omari loosened his grip slowly. The body slumped forward.

He stepped back, panting and looked down. Blood from John's mouth pooled on the floor.

Mwana had gone silent in the corner, his good eye glassy, his hand still cradling the mess that had once been the other.

Omari turned to the inmates. "He paid," he said. "For what he did."

No one replied.

Silence reclaimed the cell.

The bulb above flickered once, then kept burning.

Out of nowhere, an old geezer standing by the cell door began hammering it with his fists.

"Help! Help!" he shouted, his voice raw with urgency.

But it was already too late.

A man was dead. Another would need an eye patch if he ever healed right.

Mwana crouched, his breath ragged, one eye a hollow, ruptured mess. With his good eye, he scanned the ground around John Owilo's limp body. The bloodied tie was still looped around the man's neck, his face frozen in the final, gasping moment of suffocation. Mwana groaned, holding the side of his head and slid his hand into his pocket.

He fished out something.

A thousand-shilling note, creased, damp with sweat and speckled with blood. He stared at it as if it were a cruel joke from the universe. That was all he had left of what had been promised. No bag, no clothes, nothing to carry, the eye that was now somewhere on the floor. He looked around, breathing heavily, jaw clenched. Truly, the man had not gone easily.

The corridor outside came alive as heavy boots slapped the floor. A key clanged against the lock.

The metallic groan of the door opening cut through the thick air.

Three police officers burst in, their faces hardened from routine, yet briefly startled by the mess laid out in front of them. The other inmates

shrank into the far corners of the cell, silent now, all the cheering and stomping gone like smoke in the wind.

One officer knelt beside John's motionless body. He pressed two fingers to the man's neck, holding his breath.

He found nothing. He stood slowly and slid two fingers across his neck, the universal sign: he's gone.

But he turned to his colleague and said loudly instead, "Hurry, he's still breathing."

The lie rang out like an old tune. It fooled no one in uniform, but it was enough for the audience inside the cell. No panic. No revolt. Just an unspoken understanding.

The officers hoisted John Owilo's body from the blood-slick cell floor. His limbs dangled, neck tilted at a grotesque angle, the broken tie still knotted tight like a curse around his throat. They carried him out quickly, their boots leaving faint red prints in their wake.

Mwana was next. He did not resist as they gripped his arms and helped him stagger toward the corridor. His legs were shaky, his face glistening with sweat and pain. A tissue-thin gauze had been slapped against the wreckage of his eye, already soaking red. His free hand was still clutching the thousand-shilling note like it meant something.

The old man who had knocked on the door backed away, staring at the trail of blood that smeared across the floor.

As the group moved down the hallway, they passed the OCS's office. The blinds were open, the lights on.

The boss saw it all.

He stood slowly from his desk, phone already in his hand. His eyes locked onto the body being carried out, once a teacher, now a fresh corpse.

Allan Tendo stepped outside the office, holding the phone to his ear. His voice was low, calm.

"This just became something else," he said and walked down the corridor behind them, shadow trailing the deceased.

CHAPTER FIVE

Silvanus Mbeke stood at the foot of the bed, eyes fixed on his wife's sleeping form. Her back was turned to him, blanket curled around her waist, breathing slow and steady. The phone pressed to his ear buzzed with a voice on the other end, urgent and shaken.

"Sir... Sir, can you hear me?"

"I heard you," Mbeke replied, voice flat.

He bent down and slid his feet into a pair of worn leather sandals, the kind he kept beside the bed for quiet trips downstairs. The light from the hallway seeped under the door. He pulled it open and stepped out carefully.

Each footstep down the mahogany staircase echoed softly in the pre-dawn silence. The house smelled of lemon polish and early morning stillness. At the bottom, he made his way to the open kitchen, flicked on a small lamp hanging above the sink. Its amber glow didn't reach the far corners of the room, but it was enough.

He leaned on the counter. "Repeat what you just said, Tembo."

OCS Allan Tembo cleared his throat on the other end, voice lowering.

"It's the teacher. He's dead, sir."

Silvanus closed his eyes briefly. "How?"

"He was strangled in the cell."

Silence.

"Is that all?" Silvanus asked, staring into the empty sink. "No visible injuries?"

"Many. Broken nose, cracked ribs, left eye bulging, cheekbones bruised. The boy looks like he fought in a minefield."

A deep sigh escaped the DCP. "Tembo, listen to me. His dying is not the issue. The issue is where he died. That man was arrested publicly. People saw. That makes him a person of interest. If he dies in custody... it becomes a circus. We'll be dragged into the mud. The press, the NGOs, the vultures. They'll all come screaming."

Tembo was silent again.

Mbeke's tone dropped lower, more deliberate. "So here's what you'll do. You'll take that corpse and bash the skull in."

"...Sir?"

"You heard me. Smash it. Against the wall, corner, sink, I don't care. It needs to look like he did it himself."

"That, "

"It's the only believable lie left, Tembo. A man with a broken face and a bruised ego? Who wouldn't believe he snapped? Hit his head over and over again in despair? Maybe he was suicidal. Maybe he was remorseful. It fits. It sells."

A strained breath came through the line.

"How many people know he's dead?"

"The officers on duty. And the cellmates."

"Forget the inmates. Their word doesn't matter. They're not human in the eyes of the law. Their screams echo in the concrete and die before they reach daylight. Focus on your boys. Talk to them. Make them understand the cost of forgetting loyalty."

"Yes, sir."

"Then," Mbeke continued, voice steadier now, "take the body to Ngong Hillview Medical Centre. Quiet place. They owe me a favour or two. I'll make a few calls. The records will say he was brought in alive... and died while receiving treatment."

Tembo swallowed hard. "That can be arranged."

"Do it before sunrise."

"Yes, sir."

There was a pause, the silence stretching like a noose between them.

"Tembo," Silvanus added, voice suddenly soft, "don't stress about this. We are the government. We make the rules."

He ended the call, his thumb lingering over the red button for a moment.

The phone screen faded to black as he stepped out onto the balcony. The Nairobi skyline blinked in sleepy fog, the roads still empty, still innocent.

Silvanus tapped his phone again and began dialling.

His expression didn't change. Not even as the call started to ring.

OCS ALLAN TEMBO ENDED the call with a tight, frustrated click. The screen went dark before the dial tone could even finish. He stared at it for a beat, jaw clenched, thumb hovering just above the redial icon, but he didn't press it.

From where he stood, he glanced up slowly at Corporal Maina, who had been watching silently from near the desk. Tembo's voice cut through the stale, fluorescent-lit air.

"Some things, if you want them done right... You've got to do them yourself."

Maina gave a slow nod, lips pursed. "Agreed, sir."

What followed was a sequence of choreographed silence. Three officers moved across the compound like shadows, no chatter, no questions, just the mechanical knowledge of what had to be done.

The body of John Obilo lay limp and uncovered on the cold corridor floor, a macabre display of what remained after unchecked violence behind locked bars. His lifeless form, dragged out from the cell like discarded waste, had not even been granted the dignity of a stretcher. Not far from where he was sprawled, the one-eyed inmate, Mwana, had already been rushed to the police dispensary, trailing dark

stains and holding a blood-soaked cloth to the hollow where his left eye had once been. There was no need for surgery, the officer had casually said, just a thorough cleaning of the socket and a patch. What mattered now was controlling the narrative. Not the blood. Not the pain. Not the dead man lying in silence.

His face, barely recognisable now, was smeared with dried blood. The second impact, delivered after death, had split the frontal bone of his skull. A broad, star-shaped fracture had caved in his forehead, like a cracked ceramic plate. A small piece of bone had punctured outward, nestled loosely against the skin.

"Lucky bastard didn't feel that one," Maina muttered, squatting to glance closer.

The OCS didn't respond. He simply motioned and the men heaved the body into a grey government Land Cruiser like it was no more than a sack of potatoes. Limbs flopped awkwardly, his left arm dangling at a grotesque angle, as if dislocated. From the skull wound, a thin line of blackened blood oozed down onto the blanket and metal floor of the vehicle. The air was thick with metallic rot.

At the front, the three men settled into their seats. Tembo drove. Maina took the shotgun, constantly glancing in the side mirror as if expecting to be followed. The third officer, Constable Murira, sat behind them, silent, stiff. His eyes betrayed that newness, the look of a man who hadn't seen enough to be numb, but had seen just enough to be haunted. He was maybe twenty-four, his uniform crisp, boots still shined.

They said little during the ride. The cruiser hummed steadily through Nairobi's sleeping streets, headlights slicing through puddles left by the early evening rain.

"You think the DCP called ahead?" Maina asked finally, not looking up from the window.

Tembo exhaled through his nose.

"Relax," he said coolly. "The man's not just in command. He is in command. You know what that means? That man doesn't take orders. He gives them. He's top brass even inside the government and not just the police."

Maina nodded, but said nothing more. Constable Murira kept his eyes on the side mirror, not speaking at all.

At Ngong Hillview Medical Centre, they rolled up to the emergency entrance, a plain, half-lit side door with a flickering fluorescent tube above it. The officers braced for a choreographed performance: nurses running to meet them, a gurney prepared, an IV line already spiked into a saline bag, maybe even a defibrillator ready for show.

But instead... nothing.

A single security guard, slumped over a stool with his jacket pulled over his knees, looked up, startled. Inside, two nurses stood yawning under a dim bulb. One of them scratched her scalp with the back of a pen. The other was tapping into her phone.

"Emergency," Maina barked. "We've got a patient! Bring your team!"

No rush. No one moved.

The younger nurse stepped out, stifled a yawn and approached the back of the cruiser. They pulled back the blanket just enough for her to see the blood-matted hair, the bruised lips, the wide, empty eyes.

She pressed two fingers to John Obilo's neck. Her own eyes barely shifted.

"This one's a corpse," she muttered flatly. "No need to hurry."

Murira stared at her, incredulous. "You don't see any urgency?"

She looked at him like he had asked what day it was.

Another nurse came out with a body bag, already half-unzipped. Right there, under the yellow glow of a lazy streetlamp, in full view, they zipped John Obilo up. No gurney. No CPR. Not even a clipboard.

The officers stood by, watching the last piece of their story being sealed shut.

Tembo was stone-faced, but his jaw twitched. The moment the nurses turned to take the body inside, he walked briskly back to the Land Cruiser, climbed in and slammed the door. The others followed. No one said a word as they drove off.

But inside the car, the atmosphere had shifted.

"That bastard DCP played us," Tembo said finally, teeth clenched. "We just signed in a dead man."

Maina didn't respond. Murira looked like he was trying to disappear into the seat.

Tembo reached into his coat pocket and took out his phone. He scrolled to the DCP's number, just saved as "Boss", and hit call.

One ring. Two. Voicemail. "The person you are trying to reach is currently unavailable, "

Tembo cursed and stabbed the red button.

Silence returned. He stared through the windscreen as the vehicle merged back onto the wet tarmac of Ngong Road.

"If we go down..." he murmured, almost to himself, "he'll let us burn."

The wipers scraped across the glass in rhythm. In the middle seat, Murira finally exhaled. Maina closed his eyes. Tembo drove into the night, his fingers clenched tight around the steering wheel, the government-issued phone silent on his lap.

It is a strange thing, how a breathing human being can turn into a dead one and how quickly the body begins to betray that change. Warmth seeps out. Muscles slacken. The smell, faint at first, begins its slow announcement of decay. And somewhere, not far, the men responsible sleep soundly, their uniforms folded neatly beside them, their consciences undisturbed. Injustice has always worn a badge when it needed to, always found shelter behind walls thick with silence and power. The real horror is not just in the violence, but it is in the ease.

In how effortlessly a man can be reduced to paperwork, to a line in a report, to a zipped-up bag that no one will question.

At 4 a.m., OCS Allan Tembo gripped the steering wheel with one hand, the other resting heavily on the window ledge. The wind outside the cruiser sliced through Nairobi's dawn like a blade, whistling past the glass and reminding him just how alive the city was, alive and indifferent. Even at this hour, the capital was already beginning to stir. Dim lights flickered on in iron-sheet kiosks and roadside stalls. Mothers wrapped in shawls moved with purpose, opening thermos flasks of tea and arranging mandazi on greasy trays. Boda riders revved their engines, ready to ferry dreams to factory gates and office blocks. Everyone was up early to chase the bag, to outrun hunger, to outpace poverty if only for one more day.

Tembo exhaled slowly, fogging up the windshield. He hoped the ordeal was over. The man was dead and soon, his people would come, some grieving brother, weary wife or a heartbroken father to collect the cold body of John Obilo and lay him in the ground. With time, they would be forced to accept the loss. The country did not leave room for endless mourning.

After all, if a police officer wrongs you, where do you report him? There is no higher desk. He is the law, the baton and the verdict, the cause and the cover-up. The illusion of accountability died long ago, somewhere in a cabinet stacked with unsigned forms and unanswered calls.

As the cruiser rolled into the Central Police Station compound, silence lingered heavy in the cabin. Tembo parked the vehicle under the pale security light, engine humming a tired goodbye. Officer Murira climbed out first, lifting the worn grey blankets that had swaddled the corpse like a crude shroud. He walked back into the station and returned them to one of the empty holding cells, folding them neatly as if the act could somehow erase what they had just done.

Dawn was just a breath away. The light would come and with it, questions. But they were ready. It was not the first time a man had slipped between the cracks in custody. And it would not be the last.

DCP Mbeke had returned to bed, but sleep refused him. He lay on his back, eyes open, staring at the faint silhouette of the ceiling fan rotating lazily above them. The room was cold. Not from the air, but from something heavier, something that had crept in with the hour. His mind played a thousand thoughts, each one louder than the last, though his lips only parted once in a while, muttering to himself like a mad priest in the shadows.

The phone lay beside him on the bedside drawer, its black screen finally still after flashing for the better part of an hour. He had seen the missed notification a while ago. Blocked call. From Allan Tembo. The idiot could not stop himself. Paranoia always ate the weak. Tembo had always seemed too proper, too clean for the work they did. Now look at him, calling over and over as if someone was going to pick up and tell him it would all be okay.

Mbeke turned his head slightly, frowning at the screen as if it had personally offended him. He had blocked Tembo minutes ago after their last phone call. That was the only way to keep things moving cleanly. There was no room for panic now. Tembo's mouth was too close to the flame. That kind of fear spread like rot and rot had to be cut before it reached the bone.

He whispered to the ceiling, just barely audible. "This cannot take me down... Not for a bloody teacher and some cheap-ass blogger..."

His voice faded as the silence swallowed it. He reached over, touched his phone and then drew back his hand. Nothing more to see. No one to call. No explanation to give. As far as he was concerned, the teacher was processed, disposed of and done with. In the end, a man who did not know how to keep his mouth shut had found the right silence.

Still, he could not shake the growing itch inside his chest. The feeling that something had not gone right. Something he didn't know. Perhaps it was the way the OCS had sounded earlier. His last words on the call before he blocked him, He was dead, boss. Stone dead. Not breathing, not flinching. Cold.

Mbeke clenched his jaw. He could not go down. Not like this. Not for a man who wrote noise on a keyboard and taught teenagers how to find x and y. That was not how powerful men ended.

Beside him, his wife stirred. She was turned away from him at first, but now her body shifted in the sheets and she rolled toward his side. Her hand came to rest across his chest gently, fingers warm, a sleepy murmur escaping her lips as she snuggled closer. Without thinking, Mbeke raised his arm and wrapped it around her. She sighed against him, content.

He looked down at her through the dark, only her profile visible in the faint sliver of city light leaking through the curtains. She had no idea what kind of world he lived in outside this room. What did it mean to hold rank? To silence enemies. To erase records. To pull triggers without bullets and deaths without fingerprints.

She was lucky to have him.

Some women slept in empty beds, nurses, market women, even wives of other officers, praying their husbands would make it home alive. Some never did. Some came back zipped in body bags from strange missions with no explanation, no closure, no justice. Somewhere in the country, a teacher's wife would wait too. She would wait until her hair turned grey and her hands trembled from age unless she remarried, which was the best she could do. Meanwhile, this woman beside him slept soundly, curled up against the most dangerous man in a blue uniform. She was safe. She was lucky.

The thought made him grin. Not kindly. The grin crept slowly across his face like something sinister, unseen in the dark.

He whispered again, quieter this time, "They never get to sleep this easily."

The fan spun lazily on. The city stirred beyond the walls. But in that room, wrapped in linen, with power coursing like venom in his blood, DCP Mbeke lay awake, unblinking, calculating and holding onto his throne with every thread of silence that remained.

CHAPTER SIX

Morning broke over Nairobi as it always did, lazy sunlight spilling over iron rooftops, the city rising in chaotic waves of engines, footsteps and street vendors calling out their prices. But this morning felt different. Heavier. As if the air itself was holding its breath.

At 7:12 a.m., the National Police Service published an official statement on all their social media channels. A navy-blue emblem of authority sat above the post. The words that followed were carefully chosen, designed to sound neutral, clinical.

PRESS STATEMENT

Subject: Incident at Central Police Station

> *"We regret to inform the public that a suspect in custody at Central Police Station, Mr. John Obilo, arrested on charges related to false publication under the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act, 2018, passed away after sustaining injuries in an attempted suicide.*

According to the duty officer, the suspect began repeatedly hitting his head against the wall of his holding cell around midnight. Despite efforts to restrain and assist him, he lost consciousness. Officers rushed him to the nearest facility, but he unfortunately succumbed while undergoing treatment.

We urge the public to remain calm and refrain from speculation as investigations are currently underway."

Attached beneath the post was an image: an empty corridor inside a police station. A barred cell door sat slightly ajar in the background. Everyone already knew who the statement referred to.

It took less than five minutes for the comments to spiral out of control.

"Why would he bang his head? From where to where? Was he panicking, or was he being tortured?"

"No belt, no rope, just his head? And no CCTV?"

"We saw him being arrested at school; he looked scared, not suicidal."

Screenshots began circulating again. That same image of John being led away from his classroom, handcuffed and with his tie slightly crooked. Behind him, confused students watched from open windows. The photo was taken in daylight. Less than 36 hours ago, nonetheless, at the moment, he was gone.

IN A SMALL COMPOUND in Homabay, where chickens scratched at the dry soil and children prepared for school, John's wife was making tea when her world split open.

The first knock came softly, then urgently. A neighbour burst in, phone shaking in hand, eyes wide with something between disbelief and fear.

"They've posted..." she whispered, then struggled to say it. "John is... he's dead."

The teacup slipped from her hands and shattered on the floor.

"No," she said. "He was arrested. That's all. Arrested. There's been a mistake."

Her voice rose, searching for logic, for breath, for air. "He was just arrested yesterday. What do you mean he's dead?"

Another neighbour showed her the post. The screen trembled as she stared at it. She read the words, but they made no sense. Attempted suicide. Banged his head. Died in custody.

A cry escaped her lips before her knees buckled.

She wailed.

Not the soft kind of weeping, the raw, loud, body-breaking kind. The kind that came from the centre of a soul being torn in half.

Her son ran into the room and stopped in his tracks, confused, frightened. "Mum?" he said, his voice shaking. "Why are you crying? Where is Dad?"

She could not speak. She held her stomach, then the wall, then nothing at all.

Neighbours began gathering quickly. Some rushed to hold her up, others ushered the children away. One elderly woman broke down in tears beside her. Another neighbour silently began moving chairs out into the yard.

Someone pointed to the far side of the compound. "We can pitch the first tent there," he said quietly. Another added, "And one here for visitors."

It had begun.

The home where John's laughter once filled the air now sat still. A house of mourning even before the body arrived. If it ever arrives.

The news blared from a muted TV. Images flashed on the screen, stock footage of police tape, a photo of the Central Police Station's entrance. Below it, scrolling text:

BREAKING: Blogger accused of false publication dies in police custody. Authorities claim suicide.

Outside, more neighbours trickled in. Women tied lesos around their waists, prepared to light fires and boil water. Men stood with folded arms, their faces tight with anger, their eyes unsure where to look.

Inside, the wails had not stopped. A man was arrested yesterday. A teacher. A father. A husband.

Now he was a hashtag. A headline. A statistic. The country was waking up.

By mid-morning, chaos reigned on social media.

Screenshots of the police statement that had been shared earlier were circulating rapidly. The post had claimed that the teacher arrested for false publication had attempted suicide by repeatedly hitting his head against the cell wall. According to the police, he died while receiving treatment at a hospital. But that statement did not survive long. At exactly 10:42 a.m., users noticed it had been deleted from all official police accounts.

No explanation was given. No apology followed. The silence left behind was louder than anything the police could have said.

Online outrage surged. People demanded accountability. Comment after comment reflected confusion, disbelief and fury. Citizens flooded X, Facebook, TikTok and Telegram with questions and accusations.

"What are they hiding?" asked one user.

"First the lies, then silence. What kind of state kills its citizens and deletes the proof?" another wrote.

The hashtags multiplied by the minute:

#JusticeForJohn

#StopPoliceMurders

#WhoKilledTheTeacher

#WeWillNotForget

The internet became a courtroom. Screenshots became exhibits. John's past tweets were reposted like testimony. People searched his account, reading his last public thoughts. He had criticised corruption, highlighted police brutality and urged fellow citizens to know their rights. He had even shared a photo with his students, captioned, "Planting truth where fear once lived."

None of it looked suicidal or dangerous.

One video from the day of his arrest showed him being led away from the school. He looked calm, almost confused, asking where they were taking him. That footage, once ignored, now spread like wildfire.

And then came the claims. That the arrest had come from above. That the order had not originated from the local police. That this had been a directive, not a routine arrest.

All eyes turned to one man, the Deputy Commissioner of Police.

He was trending across every platform. Commentators accused him directly. His silence only fuelled the anger. He had allegedly issued the order for the arrest and now people believed he was protecting the killers he hired behind the curtains of authority. If he thought the country would forget, he had misjudged it entirely.

This was not a case of neglect. This was murder. In full view of the law. A man had died in state custody, without a trial, without a chance to explain himself.

Whatever happened next, Kenyans were no longer begging for answers. They were demanding them.

Many swore that this would not end quietly. If power had been used to kill an innocent man, then the same power must answer. The DCP would not walk away unscathed. Not this time.

Far from Nairobi, in Homabay, John's family home was surrounded by neighbours. Men gathered in tense circles. Women prepared porridge in large pots. In the centre of the compound, plastic chairs were filled with quiet mourners. Children had been sent indoors.

John's wife had cried until her voice was gone. Her body trembled as she was helped into a seat. Some neighbours were already pointing at the edges of the compound, quietly agreeing on where the tents would go. The funeral planning had begun even before his body arrived.

No one believed the story of suicide. Not here. Not online. Not anywhere. The silence from the top only confirmed what most already

knew. This had been no accident. This had been an execution dressed in a uniform.

The sun hung high above the hills of Homabay, its heat bearing down on the mourners scattered across the family compound. Inside the modest home, the air was thick with grief. Neighbours streamed in quietly, heads low, offering their condolences in whispers and gestures. A few metres away from the main door, relatives had begun arranging the newly delivered white plastic chairs around the compound. A pickup truck had driven in not long before, dusty and rattling from the uneven road, carrying the stack of chairs meant for the gathering.

Pastor Joel's car came next, a modest grey saloon, easing in between the clusters of mourners. He stepped out with a Bible clutched in his right hand, removing his cap solemnly as he made his way into the house. A hush briefly passed over the room as he entered. The widow, still seated on a mat near the corner, turned her tear-stained face toward him. She had barely spoken in hours. Her eyes were red and puffy, her cheeks streaked with dried tears, her wrapper soaked from the many shoulders she had leaned against.

"My sister," Pastor Joel said gently, kneeling beside her and taking her hands. "May God give you strength. This wound, only He can soothe."

Her sobs rose again, this time from deeper inside. The neighbours who flanked her leaned closer, their own eyes brimming. Outside, the air was unusually still. Then it shifted.

A sharp sound tore through the quiet skies. Chug-chug-chug.

Everyone paused.

The children playing at the far end of the compound stopped mid-game, shielding their eyes and looking upward. Women adjusted their headscarves, peering from the doorway. Even the widow turned her head slightly, distracted by the unfamiliar thunder above.

A helicopter. A white and blue chopper flew low over the compound, its rotor blades slicing through the air and scattering dust

across the field beyond the church. People moved to the open space between the homestead and the church ground, squinting as the chopper began to descend.

"It's him," someone said. "The opposition leader."

Gasps and murmurs rippled through the crowd. Within minutes, the rotor blades slowed and the machine came to rest in the church's open field. A sleek, black SUV with tinted windows emerged from a nearby feeder road, flanked by two other similar vehicles, their engines humming with authority. The crowd parted instinctively as the convoy rolled through, cutting a slow path toward the grieving home.

Men, women, even schoolchildren on break stood by the roadside, watching. Some pulled out their phones. A few raised placards they had kept from a recent protest. Others simply stood in awe, whispering, watching. They all knew who had arrived. He had not sent an announcement. But this was his way, dramatic, intentional and timely.

A phalanx of police officers arrived not long after, sirens momentarily blaring as they took positions. Officers in full combat gear formed a tight perimeter around the compound's entrance. Only selected individuals were allowed past the barricade: close relatives, respected village elders, the pastor and one or two teachers from the local union branch who had arrived earlier.

The SUV came to a stop beside the house. The door opened. He stepped out.

Tall, grey-haired and commanding. The opposition leader. His white kaftan was crisp, fluttering lightly in the breeze. Behind him, aides and security personnel moved swiftly but with discipline. He walked toward the entrance, removing his sunglasses and tucking them into his pocket. The crowd outside the gate grew. Curious onlookers jostled for space. Anti-government supporters, already charged by the news of the teacher's death, began chanting his name softly.

Inside the house, the atmosphere shifted again.

The widow, who had withdrawn into herself since the chopper arrived, suddenly looked up. When the opposition leader entered the room, her eyes met his.

He moved slowly toward her, bending low. "Mama," he said softly. "I came to say pole. The whole country is with you."

His voice was calm, respectful. He placed a warm hand on her shoulder. She did not speak. Her lips quivered, then her body shook with fresh sobs. The opposition leader nodded quietly, handed a white envelope to one of the family elders and took a seat briefly among them.

"This is for the burial preparations," he said. "The government may have failed you, but we will not."

He rose after a few more minutes, whispered something to the pastor and made his way back outside. The mourners in the compound gave way, parting as he moved through. His face was stoic, but his eyes burned with fury.

When he reached the field, the crowd surged forward.

Phones were raised. Chants erupted.

"Justice for the teacher!"

"Stop police killings!"

The leader stepped onto a raised platform near his helicopter. His security surrounded him tightly, but the energy from the crowd pressed in.

He raised a hand. The chants died down.

"My fellow Kenyans," he began, voice rising over the field, "we are here because of injustice. A man, a teacher, a father, was taken from his family. Arrested. Humiliated. And now dead."

The crowd murmured. Whistles and groans.

"They say he killed himself in a police cell," he continued, tone sharp. "By banging his head against the wall. But we know. You know. I know. That this was murder."

Shouts of agreement.

"They think we are fools. They think they can kill and erase. But no! The truth is alive. This family deserves answers. This country deserves answers!"

He pointed to the home behind him.

"There are children there, eating chocolate, not understanding where their father has gone. A widow is weeping because the state decided her husband did not deserve to live. And what was his crime? Speaking the truth?"

More shouts. Some raised placards high. Others clenched their fists in the air.

"This is no longer just about one man. This is about all of us. About justice. I promise you, we will find it."

He stepped down from the platform. His aide held the door open as he climbed into the chopper. The rotor blades began to spin. Dust lifted into the air once again.

As the chopper rose slowly into the glowing afternoon sky, the sun caught its underbelly in gold. It rose higher, then banked gently to the west, vanishing beyond the trees.

The SUVs pulled out silently, tires crunching against gravel, engines low but determined. Then they were gone.

The crowd lingered for a while, slowly dispersing. The police escort left shortly after and quiet settled again over the homestead. Outside, the widow sat unmoved, lost in her grief. The children wandered between plastic chairs and empty soda bottles, unaware of how much had changed in just one day.

The sun dipped lower, casting long shadows across the homestead. Mourners sat in small groups beneath the mango trees, some speaking in hushed tones, others silent, lost in thought. The teacher's wife remained where she had been most of the day, on the low stool beneath the largest tree, her back resting lightly against its trunk, her hands clutching a handkerchief that had long lost its dryness. A few women

sat around her, whispering comfort, occasionally handing her a bottle of water she never touched.

Then he rose.

An old man. Wrinkled face, a wool cap tugged over his white hair, walking stick in hand. He stood slowly from his chair near the gate, swaying a little as he found his footing. No one stopped him as he began his slow walk toward the widow. His left foot dragged slightly, the gait of age and aching joints. People turned to watch. A few whispered, recognising him, while others frowned.

He reached the tree and paused behind the grieving woman.

Then, gently, he tapped her on the shoulder.

She turned slowly, confused, eyes heavy.

"Daughter," the old man said, voice gravelly but clear, "you have buried your husband before his time. It is not fair. But listen to me."

The women around her shifted uncomfortably.

He leaned closer. "Owilo's death has given people one more reason to hate this regime," he said. "A reason that might finally bring them down."

There was a pause. A chill ran through the group.

"If this government falls, if this crooked power finally crumbles," he continued, "then maybe, maybe his death was not in vain. Maybe it was... a good thing."

Gasps. Muted whispers.

One woman shook her head and turned away. Another clucked her tongue in disgust. Someone muttered, "Old fool."

But the old man was not done.

He raised his finger, as if delivering wisdom. "Sometimes, the ends justify the means," he said. "That is how change happens. Through sacrifice."

A man in his thirties stepped forward quickly. He was not family, but familiar with the old man's habits. He reached for his arm gently but firmly.

"Come, Mzee," the man said, guiding him away. "Not now."

But the old man protested mildly as he was led off. "They are not ready to hear it, but truth will stand. The ends justify the means..."

His voice faded as they disappeared beyond the mourners, leaving behind uneasy silence and sideways glances.

The widow had said nothing. Her eyes, empty before, were now quietly blinking back a new kind of confusion. Grief, once sharp, now mingled with the bitter sting of politics.

The mango leaves rustled softly above her. Someone cleared their throat and began a hymn under their breath. The voices of the women around her rose slowly to join in, pushing back the silence the old man had left behind.

CHAPTER SEVEN

It no longer began with chants that Monday morning. The slogans had dissolved into smoke, swallowed by rage and desperation.

By late afternoon, Tom Mboya Street was a warzone.

Protesters surged like a wave down the tarmac, coughing through the thick veil of tear gas. The canisters hissed and bounced, some still glowing red-hot. One landed near a young man in a tattered Arsenal jersey. Without hesitation, he bent to throw it back.

He never got the chance.

BOOM.

The explosion shredded his hand instantly. He collapsed, screaming, blood spurting in erratic pulses, face twisted in agony.

Malik Otieno saw it all. Just a few steps away, he froze, eyes wide, his breath caught between panic and disbelief. Around him, the crowd recoiled, some running, others dropping low. Shouts erupted. People screamed names, while others just screamed.

Malik staggered forward, stumbling over an overturned dustbin, catching himself against the side of a burned-out kiosk. Further ahead, a mob had forced open the shutter of a supermarket. Glass shattered as the front window gave in. In seconds, the building was stripped open like a carcass. People rushed in and emerged with sacks of flour, crates of milk, blenders and televisions. No one tried to stop them.

Then, something tugged at Malik's arm. He turned sharply. His phone was gone.

A big-bodied man, bare-chested and glistening with sweat, was already walking away, the phone clenched in his thick fingers. He did not bother to run. He turned back and smirked.

"Ni yangu sasa. Una shida?" he said.

Malik took a step forward, heart pounding.

"Give it back."

The man squared up, lifting a clenched fist. He wasn't here to steal and disappear. He wanted a fight.

Malik's eyes dropped to the ground and saw a stone, a jagged chunk of rubble, no bigger than a brick. Instinct took over.

He grabbed it.

One hard swing to the back of the head.

CRACK.

The man staggered, knees buckling, then collapsed face-first into the dust. Malik stood over him for a moment, chest heaving, eyes burning from more than just gas. He knelt quickly, reached into the man's pocket and retrieved his phone.

No one noticed. No one cared. Everyone was too busy running from the water cannon, whose deafening blast returned with force, sweeping through the street like a tsunami.

Then came a different sound, a high-pitched siren that didn't signal fear, but urgency.

An ambulance tore through the smoke and parked sideways across the street. Its back door slammed open. Three medics in fluorescent vests burst out like soldiers charging the front line.

"Injured civilian!" one of them shouted, raising a megaphone high.

They moved through the chaos untouched, the crowd somehow parting for them. Protesters barely noticed them. Police officers didn't stop them. For a brief moment, it was as if the medics didn't exist on the same plane of reality as the rest of the street.

They reached the boy with the ruined arm.

Blood was everywhere. The young man lay on his back, twitching, his eyes glassy, lips trembling. One medic dropped to their knees and tore open a dressing kit. Another wrapped a tourniquet around the bicep and twisted it tight, cutting off the bleeding. The third cleared space around them with open palms.

A nearby officer, baton raised, hesitated. Then stepped back.

The medics moved quickly. They loaded the boy onto a stretcher, stabilised him while whispering soft reassurances. Then they carried him back to the waiting ambulance as its doors shut.

And the vehicle disappeared into the smoke once more, sirens screaming against a sky already blackened with fury.

Malik watched, breath shallow. A part of him wanted to run after the van. A part of him wanted to collapse.

The protest hadn't stopped. The city was still on fire.

The people chanted it like a war cry.

"The president must go! The president must go!"

Their voices bounced off every glass pane and concrete wall, growing louder, more fevered, more unified. What began as scattered defiance had swelled into a tidal wave. The riot was no longer a protest. It was an uprising.

Thousands surged forward on Moi Avenue, faces painted, heads wrapped in bandanas, arms raised high. Banners flapped. Stones flew. Flags burned.

The anti-riot police had formed a human wall, shields locked, visors down, boots steady. But even steel wavered before such fury. The line began to bend.

Tear gas was useless now. They had grown immune. The people moved through smoke like it was mist, eyes streaming, lungs burning, but legs never slowing.

A single crack rang out.

A masked officer, perched just behind the front line, raised his rifle and fired.

A young woman staggered mid-run, clutched her stomach and dropped. The blood that spread beneath her was dark, thick, too much. Her eyes flickered for only a second.

The crowd stopped.

For a moment, silence fell like ash.

Then they charged.

They ran not with fear, but rage.

The police hesitated, pushed back, then began to retreat. Bottles crashed, shields cracked and one officer fell and was dragged by his comrade toward a retreating truck.

The masked officer panicked.

He raised his rifle again and fired a second shot, clean through a man's forehead.

The body snapped backwards like a puppet whose strings had been cut. Blood fanned the air like spray paint.

A third shot.

The muzzle flashed. The bullet struck an approaching man in a dirty white vest, arms spread wide, a golf club raised to the sky.

The projectile ripped through his chest, punching a dark hole just above the heart.

The man grunted once and fell flat on his back, arms sprawled wide, the golf club clanging beside him. His vest bloomed red.

The screams behind him rose to something unholy.

Police officers, overwhelmed and scattered, leapt into their waiting Land Cruisers. Doors slammed. Engines revved. The vehicles skidded over debris as they tried to flee.

But not all escaped.

The masked shooter, hand shaking, grabbed the tailgate of a departing pickup. His foot slipped. He dangled. The vehicle jerked as he fell on the ground. The crowd was on him before he could rise.

One man, his eyes burning with tears and smoke, lifted a metal bar above his head and brought it down hard on the police officer's skull. Crack. He did not scream. He did not move again.

But that was not enough.

The mob cursed him for dying too quickly. They wanted him to feel the weight of everybody he had dropped.

They poured petrol from a looted generator store nearby. They lit a match. And there, on the street, beneath the same billboard where government slogans once smiled down on them, they burned his body.

The flames rose high. The stench curled through the city like a dark omen.

All across the capital, the cry spread:

"The president must go!"

By dusk, no one was chanting anything less.

IT WAS STILL MONDAY. Exactly three days after the death of John Obilo. The country had not healed. It had rotted.

That evening, Dr. Nathaniel Oduor did not flinch when the bullet tore through the protester's skull on screen. He simply sipped his lukewarm coffee, eyes steady, gloved fingers tapping absently against the cold steel of the autopsy table.

He had worked as a forensic pathologist for years, long before the political storms of the present era. By the late 1990s, Dr Nathaniel was already a respected consultant in forensic medicine, dissecting both fresh and decomposing remains with the detached precision the profession demanded.

Whether it was a gunshot wound or a bloated corpse of a drowning victim recovered days later, he approached each case with the same quiet professionalism. His reputation had grown not just from the number of post-mortems he had performed but from the rare clarity

with which he explained the dead, often giving voice to those silenced by violence, neglect or state power.

"See that?" he said, pointing at the paused frame on his screen, where the man lay sprawled on Moi Avenue, blood pooling beneath his temple. "Midline entry. Probably 9mm. Full Metal Jacket. Clean pass-through."

Across the room, a young intern, Mercy, shuddered. "Doctor... he was alive just seconds before that."

Nathaniel tilted his head slightly, studying her.

"And now, he is not. Which makes him mine."

She looked away, disturbed. The smell of antiseptic couldn't mask the coppery undertone of fresh death in the room.

On the slab before them lay another body, young, male, limp. A bullet had chewed through his ribcage. Dried blood painted his side like smeared charcoal. Dr Oduor traced the wound carefully with a scalpel's tip.

"They bring them in still warm," he said. "Sometimes, if you're fast, you can feel the twitch beneath the skin. The final betrayal of the nervous system."

Another protester was gunned down in a clip playing in the background. The man crumpled beside a burning tyre. The crowd scattered.

Dr. Oduor paused mid-incision.

"Do you know what I see, Mercy?" he asked.

She didn't answer.

"I see tissue. Patterns. Truths. The lungs tell you if they choked on gas. The stomach tells you if they were hungry. The heart, if they were scared."

He returned to the body.

"This one... see his hands?" he lifted a palm, still dusted with soil and charcoal. "He died throwing stones. They'll say he was violent. But

look here." He turned the body gently. "No soot in the lungs. He never made it near the fires."

He chuckled softly.

"The body never lies. The living are noisy. The dead whisper."

Mercy swallowed hard. "How do you stay so cold?"

He looked at her, then back at the video, where yet another man fell. Blood spurting from his neck like a slit hose.

"They fall. They bleed. They come here. I open them."

A pause.

"I used to care a long time ago Mercy," he said. "Once. Now, I prefer the quiet. No lies. Just anatomy."

Then, quieter, as if to himself:

"What a wicked world. A man is breathing, walking, shouting... and ten seconds later I'm sketching the path of a bullet through his spinal column."

He picked up his scalpel again, the metal glinting under harsh fluorescent light.

"By morning," he added, "they'll send five more. Maybe seven. Doesn't matter what side they're on. They all bleed the same."

That evening, the digital war was on.

Across every social media platform, images, live videos, eyewitness reports and voice notes poured in. TikTok was flooded with shaky footage of clouds of tear gas rolling through the streets; young protesters clutching their faces as they ran blindly between buildings. On X, the hashtag *#JusticeForJohnOwilo* had already reached a million tweets. Some shared graphic photos of bodies sprawled on pavements, police trucks with dented metal and the desperate cries of mothers in Kisumu who had lost their sons. There were scenes of youths being beaten senseless, shoved into lorries and hurled like sacks of rice.

That day alone, media outlets reported forty-three dead across the country during the protests.

But nobody believed that figure. That was just an estimate, a sanitised number fed to the press. In reality, everyone knew far more had been killed. Morgues were overwhelmed. Phone calls went unanswered. Dozens of families spent the night combing hospitals and police stations looking for missing loved ones.

By dusk, it had become painfully clear: no one wanted anything more than for the president to resign.

But could he? Of course, he could not. It was like forcing a camel through a needle's eye. Power was too sweet. And who, in all honesty, would give it up simply because some mere commoners were dying?

The people's wrath, however, had sharpened. Rage was no longer contained in Nairobi. Nakuru, Mombasa, Kakamega, Kisii and Kisumu all stood up. Town by town, youth emerged from alleys and estates, their chants growing louder and more confident.

On social media and in backroom Telegram channels, it was unanimously agreed: if the Deputy Commissioner of Police had not resigned by Wednesday, another nationwide protest would be launched. This time, it would be bigger. More coordinated. Far more dangerous.

By 9 p.m., the government, feeling the heat, released a second statement. It was a pitiful attempt to do damage control.

They no longer referred to John's death as suicide. They claimed, instead, that the late teacher had been murdered inside the cell by fellow inmates. No explanation was given as to why it had taken three days to say so. No footage, no names of these so-called "inmates." Just a vague narrative.

But in a rare move that seemed to suggest real cracks inside the system, the government announced that a warrant of arrest had been issued for Officer Commanding Station, Allan Tendo, along with a few of the officers on night duty that evening.

It did little to calm the nation.

That night, the nation did not sleep.

In Eastleigh, a group of boda riders marched silently through the streets with candles taped to their handlebars. In Eldoret, university students lit bonfires at the main roundabout and sang old resistance hymns from the 90s. In Mathare, a mother held a photo of her teenage son, killed earlier in the day and sobbed under a flickering streetlamp.

Meanwhile, in Homabay, the mood was different.

John's home had quieted. The last visitors left late in the evening, some speaking in hushed tones, others staring at their phones. A solar lamp swayed slightly from the mango tree where the widow had sat most of the day. The air smelled faintly of dust and kerosene.

Inside the main house, the two children had finally slept. They had not fully understood the day's events. One clutched a sweet. The other had been asking where Daddy was.

In the back room, John's wife stared at the muted TV screen. A news anchor's mouth moved, but the volume was down. Someone had turned it off earlier, saying the news was too painful to hear.

She felt hollow.

Someone knocked gently on the door. A cousin entered with a cup of porridge, placed it on the stool and said nothing. They both knew she would not drink it.

Her phone vibrated softly beside her. It was another notification, a link to a video. She opened it.

It was a clip of John from two months ago. He was standing in class, chalk in hand, smiling as he wrote something on the blackboard. A student had secretly recorded it. In the background, his voice rang clear: "Think for yourself. A society dies when its people are afraid to speak the truth."

She dropped the phone onto the bed and covered her face.

Back in the capital, things were escalating again.

By midnight, graffiti had appeared on various government buildings. Bold red paint splashed the walls of the Judiciary building: "We Are Not Safe in Our Own Country." In the CBD, someone had

painted John's face on a corrugated gate, eyes bright, mouth slightly curved in that teacher's calm smile.

A young man in Dandora spoke directly to the camera on a livestream.

"This is not just about one man. It is about all of us. It is about what kind of country we want to live in. We have buried too many sons, too many daughters. We are not afraid anymore."

His voice cracked, but he did not stop.

That video alone was viewed over a million times in four hours.

Whispers began to circulate online, screenshots, cropped images, blurred headers of what was claimed to be an internal police registry. It was said to have been leaked by a disgruntled officer. Maybe it was real. Maybe not. But no one seemed to care.

The list was brief, damning. It claimed to show the names of those detained at Central Police Station on the night of John Owilo's death. One name stood out.

Only one. John Owilo.

There were no detainees listed to have been detained inside cell three that fateful night. No violent inmates. No drunks. No petty thieves. Just one man locked inside that cold, cement cell. Alone.

If he had truly been alone, then who had bashed his skull against the wall until he died?

The list spread like a plague. It hit timelines and newsfeeds with urgency. It filled WhatsApp groups, Telegram threads and burner X accounts. No one knew for sure where it came from, but it did not matter. Truth was no longer about evidence. It was about conviction.

People believed it because they needed to and because it made sense. It explained everything.

The official narrative crumbled. The edited statement about unruly inmates? A lie. The suicide claims? Fabricated. People said it was not just negligence, but cold, deliberate murder followed by a clumsy cover-up designed to calm the public before it erupted.

They were done believing in excuses or hoping for justice.

If anything, the so-called leak confirmed what most had already whispered in rage-filled circles and smoke-choked cafés across the country: John Owilo had not died by accident. He had not taken his own life. He had been silenced. Killed under police custody.

In the very hands that were meant to protect him.

The next morning, when the sun crawled into the grey sky over the major cities, something had changed. Kenya was still Kenya, yes. But its people were not the same.

The flags still danced above the ministries. The ministers still polished their accents and sat behind microphones issuing tight-lipped condolences. Suits were ironed. Protocol followed.

But across the nation, something had shifted beneath the surface. A hum. A burn. A storm was gathering fury.

People were furious and fuelled.

Whatever the truth, the one that made it into people's hearts was this: he died alone. Beaten. Silenced. And someone must pay.

The fire had been lit.

And this time, no number of polished statements or televised reassurances would be enough to douse it.

Who had killed him?

That list spread like wildfire. Screenshots were taken. Posts shared. Suddenly, the new police narrative collapsed. This was not just mishandling, it was calculated deception. A cover-up.

And it confirmed what most already knew.

This was murder in plain sight. Carried out under custody. In the full glare of the law.

Someone had to pay. Beneath it all, a storm brewed and it was gathering speed. They had lit a fire and it would not be easily extinguished.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The morning sun was pale and reluctant, casting long streaks of gold across the tiled floor of the station's upper offices. Allan Tendo sat alone behind his desk, the silence inside the room louder than the distant noise of the traffic outside. His eyes, bloodshot and weary, fixed themselves on the landline phone at the corner of his desk. He stared at it as though expecting it to ring first. When it did not, he reached forward and dialled a number he had memorised years ago.

The line clicked once, then a voice answered, crisp, professional and unfamiliar.

"This is the office of DCP Silvanus Mbeke. How may I help you?"

Tendo cleared his throat and steadied his voice. "Tell him it's Allan Tendo. He'll want to take this."

"One moment, sir. Please hold."

The line went quiet, interrupted only by a soft instrumental tune playing in the background. Tendo leaned back, jaw clenched, already imagining the kind of conversation that was coming. The humiliation tasted bitter in his mouth.

After nearly a minute, the music cut off abruptly and a second voice came through, older, slower and unmistakably authoritative.

"Allan," said Mbeke. "Give me five minutes. I'm transferring this line to a secure channel."

Then, without waiting for a reply, he hung up.

Tendo stared at the dead receiver, the hum of the disconnected line buzzing faintly in his ear. The air felt thick around him. He stood slowly and paced behind the desk, hands in his pockets, wondering if

those five minutes were meant to prepare him or just remind him who held the reins now.

When the phone rang again, he answered it in a single motion.

"I had to confirm the line was clean," Mbeke began without pleasantries. "I assume you've already heard what's coming."

There was a pause before Tendo responded, his voice low and bitter. "You're going to do this to me, sir? After everything I've done for the Service?"

"You know how this works, Allan," Mbeke replied coolly. "The public has seen the footage. The journalists are circling like vultures. Someone has to be held accountable."

"I am a senior officer, not some traffic constable who got careless with paperwork. You want to arrest me? In front of cameras?"

Mbeke sighed, though the sound held no sympathy. "You are a senior man. That is exactly why this matters. If we arrest someone of your stature, the message is clear: the government is listening. It calms the streets."

Tendo could feel his chest tightening.

"So, I'm the message now," he said. "What about loyalty? What about the structure we swore to protect?"

"Your loyalty is noted, Allan. But let us not pretend these protests are driven by reason. The youth in the streets, most of them are jobless and uneducated. They are angry and bored, with nothing meaningful to do with their lives. We cannot afford to look weak in front of that chaos. They are not our concern. The country is."

"And what am I supposed to tell my family? That I'm being thrown under the bus for national optics?"

"This will not last. You will be granted a bond before the next hearing. Two of the constables who handled the body have already been picked up this morning. You are not alone. We will control the narrative."

Tendo's voice cracked slightly. "The narrative? You are destroying my name."

"You are keeping the system alive," Mbeke said coldly. "There is nothing more honourable than that. Stay calm. We will handle the rest."

The line went dead.

Tendo slowly replaced the handset and turned to stare out of the window. The city had already started moving, unaware of how one man's life was beginning to crumble beneath its noise.

Just after 9 a.m., the sound of tyres crunching gravel reached his ears. He did not need to look to know what was happening. A white DCI Land Cruiser had pulled up at the entrance. Moments later, a branded media van parked beside it, cameras already being assembled on tripods.

Tendo inhaled deeply and stepped outside.

The arrest was carried out with calculated professionalism. Two plain-clothed detectives stepped forward, respectfully identifying themselves and reading him the charges. He said nothing, offered no resistance.

The reporters began shouting questions even before he reached the gate.

"Are you admitting guilt in the Owilo murder?"

"Why did you tamper with the crime scene?"

"Do you believe you are being scapegoated by the government?"

Tendo ignored them all. Their voices were just noise now. Cameras flashed in his face. Some of the reporters were broadcasting live. He could already imagine the breaking news banner on national television, Senior Officer Arrested in Connection with Owilo's Death.

As he was led to the waiting vehicle, a heavy shame settled on him like a coat of mud. He was embarrassed, not just by the scene itself, but by the expressions he saw in the faces around him. Some watched with smug satisfaction. Others were pitying. A few even seemed glad.

He tried to keep his chin up, but inside, something had begun to splinter.

He knew how the country would see him now. The name Allan Tendo, once spoken with authority and respect, would become a symbol of state brutality, of betrayal. He would become the face of a system people already hated. He would lose friends, respect, everything he had built over three decades of service.

And for what?

A performance to appease a restless crowd?

As the doors of the police cruiser closed behind him and the vehicle pulled away, he swallowed down the sour taste in his throat. He stared out through the tinted glass at the city rolling past.

He clenched his fists slowly.

Let them cheer today, he thought. Let them enjoy the drama, but the government would pay for this in cash. They would have to pay.

The interior of the police cruiser was silent, save for the faint humming of the engine and the occasional crackle from the radio on the dashboard. The air felt stiff, like it too was holding its breath.

OCS Allan Tendo sat in the back, his hands resting on his lap, cuffs hidden under the long sleeves of his uniform. He stared blankly at the passing blur of Nairobi's outer lanes, where buildings looked far too calm for the storm boiling inside him. Shame sat heavy on his shoulders, coiling like a snake around his spine. Cameras had captured everything. He could already hear the whispers behind closed doors, former allies washing their hands clean, the public sharpening their tongues.

From the driver's seat, a gruff voice broke through.

"Whatever happened back there..." the man began, keeping his eyes on the road, "that was a tough one, sir."

Tendo looked up slightly, meeting the reflection in the rear-view mirror. The man continued without waiting for a reply.

"But everything will be fine. Eventually. You know how this game works. Things rise, things fall. But you're not just anybody."

There was a short pause. Then the officer in the front passenger seat, a bulky man in a tight vest under his jacket, chuckled lightly. He tapped his round belly with a flat palm, then drew an invisible zip across his lips. The message was clear. They had been well fed.

Tendo exhaled slowly, leaning back against the seat. A strange comfort settled over him, not peace, but temporary shelter.

"I'm glad your bellies are full," he muttered, his voice low but edged with a smirk. "I am hoping to get my share soon, even before I'm out of this mess. An elephant one. It waits when this dust settles."

Nobody replied, but the mood shifted slightly. Less icy, more familiar. Like old dogs growling low under the same table.

The cruiser rolled on in silence for a while. Then, with a glance towards the rear seat, the co-passenger leaned forward and flicked on the radio.

A news bulletin was continuing.

"...the suspects in the murder of the young high school teacher, have finally been arrested. Sources confirm three uniformed officers are in custody, following massive public outrage and pressure from..."

Without missing a beat, the man turned the knob. Static hissed briefly before a pop song took over, something loud and bright that did not match the mood in the car.

"Why bother with something that'll just stress you?" he said with a lazy shrug. "That's what the young ones say."

Tendo did not argue. He closed his eyes and let the music wash over him. Beneath it, however, his thoughts raced. The country might see a villain, a face to blame. But inside that cruiser, among men who still zipped their mouths, he knew the real theatre had only just begun.

And far from the sirens and the chants on the streets, behind a thick pane of bulletproof glass and a wall of security clearances, the first act of that theatre was already in motion.

The room was quiet except for the soft hum of the air conditioner and the occasional rustle of papers being shuffled. At the centre stood a large rectangular boardroom table, polished dark wood that reflected the overhead fluorescent lights. Seated along it were the nation's senior-most law enforcement leaders: the Commissioner of Police, Deputy Commissioner Mbeke and his Deputy, plus a half dozen assistant commissioners. Along one side, Mbeke's secretary waited patiently with a laptop and notepad.

As the clock struck 10:15 a.m., the security briefing began. The door clicked shut, muffling the corridor beyond. Mbeke lifted his reading glasses and leaned forward. The intelligence officer, young, serious, alert, passed him a tablet.

The DCP tapped the screen, then glanced up at the Commissioner across the table, who sat motionless, his eyes distant but calculating.

"Sir," the intelligence officer began, voice clipped and precise while gesturing at his boss. "We have verified whispers of a coordinated protest planned for Wednesday morning in Nairobi CBD. Organisers demand your immediate resignation. They claim your refusal to resign is evidence of government oppression."

The commissioner frowned and gestured to the deputy seated beside him, a tight-lipped man with greying temples. The deputy nodded slowly.

The DCP spoke up, his voice low and rough. "How credible is the source?" His tone was cautious, his eyes flicking toward the intelligence officer.

The officer straightened in his seat. "It's all over social media, sir. You could pull out your phone right now and see it, plans for the protest written out in plain language, hour by hour. Hashtags trending, images shared, even instructions on which routes to take. It's open for anyone to see."

He paused briefly, then added with a touch of frustration, "What we still do not know is who's fuelling it. People do not just pour into

the streets like this without someone pulling strings. No doubt there's motivation, funding or an organisation. The financiers remain in the shadows."

The Commissioner spoke up. "We've already arrested the suspects in the Owilo case. Tendo is in custody. Two constables are under bond. Yet people refuse to see it. Their narratives are not swayed by arrests. It is anger and narrative they are purchasing."

Around the table, a few heads nodded. Mbeke's deputy shifted in his chair, offering a thin smile that didn't reach his eyes.

One of the general officers leaned forward. He had the sharp, hawkish gaze of someone who had spent more time in the field than behind a desk. "What's to say this time we don't use real bullets? Enough with tear gas. Enough with rubber rounds." He let the question hang.

The commissioner did not respond immediately. The room went silent. Mbeke looked at the officer. The general cleared his throat.

"If they refuse to disperse, do we escalate further?"

In that moment, the room lunged into debate. One assistant commissioner argued that Nairobi's reputation was at stake. Foreign investment, tourism and business stability, all would crumble if protests escalated unchecked. Another warned of a media backlash. A third reminded them that the OCS's arrest had not silenced the streets. Instead, it inflamed them.

Mbeke took a slow breath, his gaze fixed on the general's unblinking eyes. Outwardly, he remained composed, his pulse steady, but inside his mind, the thoughts churned like a gathering storm. They wanted blood. Tendo's fall might satisfy them for now, but if the rage in the streets demanded more, he knew he was next in line. The silence from the State House was not ignorance; it was restraint. The President had not called, not because he was unaware, but because he still held Mbeke in high regard. Yet if the worst came to pass... that silence could turn cold.

The deputy, quietly sipping a glass of water, cleared his throat. "We can deploy more plainclothes into protest hotspots. Make arrests of ringleaders before it even starts. Cut the head off the snake before it slithers."

The Commissioner leaned back and folded his arms. "That is surveillance, not a solution," he said. "We are no longer dealing with an isolated teacher. We are dealing with a wave. A narrative. They want the DCP himself to fall."

Mbeke raised a finger. "Sir, let us not forget what we are facing: a popular narrative. No number of arrests can kill a story that has already taken root. If we are perceived as a frightened regime, we lose not just this moment but our authority. It is about optics."

The intelligence officer handed the tablet to Mbeke. On the screen: a vector map of Nairobi, red dots pulsing around university campuses, stadium grounds and major shopping centres. Thin lines traced routes converging toward the central business district.

"These were the hotspots during the last wave of protests," the officer explained. "Same coordination, same timing, early morning gatherings that swell by midday. We've seen this pattern before, sir. If this intel is anything to go by, they might replicate it again on Wednesday."

The numbers on the map were not live updates, they were echoes of past chaos. But to Mbeke, the sight of those dots and lines was enough to feel the weight of what loomed ahead.

The commissioner looked at the map, then at Mbeke. He nodded with cold purpose.

"Use of real bullets is not the first option," he said, tone firm. "We will not be remembered for butchery. But neither will we be remembered for indecision."

Mbeke leaned forward, voice low and careful. "What about the international observers? Journalists will be filming every movement. The hashtag is already global. UN human rights watchers are listening."

The Deputy Commissioner's secretary quietly stood and moved to Mbeke's side, updating notes on her laptop. The deputy watched with renewed concern.

"This has become bigger than us," said one advisor. "This is not just Owilo. This is a turning point."

Another assistant commissioner suggested that they immediately call in riot-trained police from other regions. They also use the National Youth Service to restrict movement around the CBD perimeter.

The Commissioner sighed and looked at the clock. It was past its intended end time. He stood up, clearing his throat. Everyone settled their expressions, anticipating the verdict.

He placed both palms on the table, leaned forward with open fingers splayed across the smooth wood. His presence filled the room. The air thickened.

"So," he said, voice steely, "here is what we shall do..."

CHAPTER NINE

Leonard's polished shoes splashed softly in a shallow puddle as he walked down the damp alley, the cold morning air biting through his trench coat. The alley, tucked behind shuttered hardware stalls, smelled of rust and stale urine. Mist hung low, curling around his ankles as he spotted the two men up ahead, dark shapes in the dim morning grey.

One leaned against the graffitied wall, cigarette glowing at the tip. The other crouched by a crate, lacing his boots, eyes flicking up as Leonard approached.

"You came alone," said the standing man, voice low, gravelled from smoke and sleep. It was Wanga, the man people whispered about when tyres burned and shops bled stock during unrest. Leader of a street crew who sold destruction by the hour.

Leonard nodded once. "You said you had people."

Wanga chuckled, flicked ash to the ground. "I always do. As long as the money's good."

Leonard pulled an envelope from inside his coat, wrapped in last week's Standard. He passed it over. Wanga weighed it in his palm, unwrapped it slowly. Inside: fifty crisp notes, each a thousand shillings.

Wanga flipped through the stack with a finger, then looked up at him.

"That's for the supermarket on Tom Mboya," Leonard said. "By midday tomorrow, I want nothing left. Shelves, tills, fridges...everything must go."

Wanga grinned. "Consider it gone. We'll strip it bare, then light the bones on fire."

Leonard hesitated, then cleared his throat. "There's... another one. Downtown. Opposite the cathedral. Can you hit both?"

Wanga glanced at Chidi, then back at Leonard. "I can be in two places at once. Provided the money is right."

Leonard took a breath. "What if the second one... is on loan? You handle it tomorrow and I'll pay you after."

The alley fell still.

Wanga's grin faded.

"You're asking me to trust you?" he said, slowly, stepping closer. "You want me to move boys, risk blood and steel, for a handshake and your good word?"

Leonard met his stare, jaw set. "I'm not a politician. I keep my promises."

A tense silence. Then Wanga exhaled through his nose, half amused. He turned to Chidi, who gave a lazy nod. The goon boss finally grinned again, eyes glinting.

"You'll pay. I know your kind. Always do, one way or another."

He clapped Leonard lightly on the shoulder, turned him back toward the mouth of the alley.

"Go now," Wanga said. "Rest. Tomorrow you rise. The rest burns."

Leonard walked out without another word, his footsteps echoing behind him. Parked at the edge of the street, his black Toyota Crown waited like a loyal hound. He slid in behind the wheel, the leather cold, the city starting to stir around him.

As he pulled out into the road, a thin smile crept across his face, one that did not reach his eyes.

Behind him, the gun for hire lit another cigarette, the flame briefly illuminating his face, grinning, wicked, already thinking of the next day.

Tuesday bore the quiet before a storm.

In the heart of the city, traders moved with frantic urgency, barking orders to their workers, hiring welders to fasten steel plates over their shop entrances, reinforcing glass doors with makeshift grills, wrapping shelves in cling film as though that would somehow shield them from what was coming.

You could hear the hiss of gas torches at nearly every corner, sparks flying as steel met steel. Doors were being sealed shut, bolts added where locks had once sufficed. Supermarkets, phone shops, even the small corner cafés were being caged in like livestock preparing for a predator. It was a city boarding itself up but not against the weather.

The irony was lost on no one, though no one spoke of it aloud.

Some of the very same men being paid to weld those steel barriers shut would return the following day with crowbars and sledgehammers, not as tradesmen, but as looters. Not out of malice or vengeance, but because chaos had become currency and in the noise of the protest, all lines blurred. It was not personal. It was just business.

In the alleys, whispered deals were still being struck. Coordinators of the coming unrest collected their dues, promised their sponsors results, not in speeches or slogans, but in broken glass and burning signs. There were routes drawn on napkins, hand signals rehearsed and fallback plans buried in plain sight.

People were hyped up. Wired. Charged like live wires snapping in the dark. Social media had done its part with videos, posters and hashtags. Entire groups were sharing tips: how to block a road, how to blind a camera, how to keep your phone from being tracked. It was not something you could talk anyone out of. Not anymore.

Even those who would not protest the next day still knew better than to sleep easy that night.

And yet they welded. They sealed. They reinforced. Because to do nothing felt like surrender.

It was strange how a city could prepare for violence with the same precision it reserved for a parade. Nothing was official. No sirens yet.

No bullets. Not yet. But in the air, in that charged, metallic air, you could smell it. Death. Not overpowering. Not everywhere. But faint. Like the whiff of burning plastic before a blackout.

Everyone knew some would die. It was impossible not to.

But everyone also hoped, somehow, that it would not be them. That when the sun rose on Wednesday, it would not be their name among the trending hashtags. That their blood would not stain the streets, that their face would not end up on a flyer asking for identification outside a morgue freezer.

There was fear, yes. But fear had never been a good deterrent in this country.

Not when there was money to be made. Or a point to be proven. Or a rival's property to be reduced to ash.

By sundown, the city looked like a prison camp pretending to be a marketplace. But beneath those sealed shutters and steel plates, the heartbeat of Nairobi thudded faster, louder and more desperate.

It was the eve of madness.

And everyone, from the law enforcers in plainclothes to the street boys promised a few hundred shillings to start a fire, was playing their part.

In a country where protests were rituals, where betrayal was currency and where life itself was often negotiable, tomorrow was just another page in the ledger.

Only no one knew whose name would be written in red.

The calm before war was never quiet.

While shopkeepers welded their shutters and rumours buzzed through the estates like flies on blood, the State was stirring. Not in speeches or press briefings, those had run dry, but in barricades and steel gates drawn across the face of government buildings.

Wrought iron barriers were dragged across the entrances of key parastatals. Concrete blocks, brought in under the cover of midnight, now lined the perimeter of Parliament Road. State House had doubled

its inner ring patrol, their boots sinking deep into the manicured lawns as if even the grass could not be trusted anymore.

CCTV feeds were being monitored at a frantic pace not for crime, but for mood. Faces in crowds. The glint of mischief in a child's eye. The spark of rage in a pedestrian's gait. It was not safety they were preserving, it was control.

At Lang'ata Police Training College, the armoury line stretched out like a queue to judgment.

A young corporal in dusted fatigues took his place behind the desk, distributing rubber bullets and expired tear gas canisters with deadpan eyes.

Behind him, open crates held anti-riot helmets, shields with hairline cracks and batons still stained from protests past. One by one, officers stepped forward, gave their ID tags and received their assignments. They were not going to protect. They were going to contain.

An older officer, sweat tracing lines down his temple, loaded a cartridge of rubber rounds into his pump-action. He muttered under his breath without looking up:

"Same faces. Different bodies."

No one asked what he meant. No one had to.

Somewhere in a briefing room, a whiteboard had been marked with expected flashpoints. Red arrows fanned out from Kibera, Mathare, Huruma, aimed straight at the heart of the capital. Around Parliament and the Treasury Building, undercover operatives were already in place, posing as journalists, janitors, patriots.

Every corner of power was being insulated, not from foreign attack, but from its own people.

In a high-rise tower, the National Security Council watched the city through satellite feeds. One advisor leaned close to the Interior PS, whispering, "If it escalates like last time, give the nod. We switch to live rounds." The PS did not blink.

That did not stop a determined looter.

Security perimeters and riot gear could intimidate the faint-hearted, but for the man with nothing to lose, or nothing left to respect, they were merely decorations for a day he had already marked in his heart.

Such a man could walk into a grocery stall and pick a bunch of kales on credit. He would flash the old woman a sly grin, promising to clear the balance tomorrow. Not with a pay check. Not with savings. But with "a deal going through." And it surely would.

He could stroll into a second-hand shop and ask, "How much for a brand-new Samsung? Still in the box. I bring it to you tomorrow, how much?" The attendant, eyes narrowing but not refusing, would mutter a price. A price that meant they both knew where such an item would come from. Where it had to come from.

Because Wednesday was not a mystery. It was not a maybe.

It was a scheduled purge, a temporary collapse where the government would fold its arms and let the fire burn itself out. For a few hours, the rules would vanish and only impulse and speed would matter. The police would let the mob do what it came to do, so long as it did not go too far north, toward the buildings that really mattered.

And that man, that looter with a plan, was not a thief in the usual sense. He was a dreamer of warped justice, convinced that this was his season. This was his harvest.

He already knew which electronics shop to hit. Which alley to disappear through. Which boda guy to pay in advance to wait with the engine running.

The night air in Homa Bay carried a restless chill. Clouds hung low, thick like wet wool, yet the town was very much alive. Small crowds were huddled outside closed shops, some making last-minute calls, others sharpening ideas. But it was in a dimly lit bar near the bus stage, walls faded, jukebox long dead, tables stained with forgotten spills, where the true pulse of the people beat clearest.

They sat crowded around the wooden table, bottles of beer sweating, conversations rolling from laughter to lament to fury in the same breath.

"Ebu pass me that opener," one man grunted, reaching lazily across. He wore a torn Harambee Stars jersey and sat with the weight of someone who had seen too many Wednesdays like the one coming. "Have you heard what they're saying about the old man, the father to that teacher who was murdered by cops?"

Heads turned slightly.

"Yeah, yeah," another said, already mid-sip. "They say the government wants to build him a house. In Gem, imagine. A real stone house, not those mabati jokes. And the widow is being offered a job in Nairobi. Something in a parastatal. Government's trying to clean its face."

"Hiyo ni bahati," someone muttered.

"I would trade places with him any day. That son of his, alive, would never have built even a dog's kennel for the old man. With the kind of peanuts teachers earn, blood is thicker either way. I bleed for him."

The first man barked a laugh. "Let the dead fight for themselves now, bana. That's what I'm saying. If they offer you something, land, job, a motorcycle, you take it. Cry at night if you have to, but during the day you take it with a smile and a signature."

Another man leaned back, beer half-finished, his voice tinged with amused disbelief. "Me, I heard Kenyans already started contributing. You know how they get, Mpesa till number flying around on Twitter and TikTok, emotions everywhere. That mzee is probably a millionaire now. Irony of life. Something he would never have become if his son had just kept breathing."

The table broke into a few dark chuckles.

A younger man near the edge of the group, clearly more sober than the rest, shook his head. "So, what are you guys saying? That dying is better than living?"

"No," said the man in the Harambee Stars jersey. "We're saying dying loudly is better than living quietly."

"Especially if someone's filming it," added another and they all laughed again.

The conversation lulled for a moment as they listened to a drunk across the bar muttering violently to himself about petrol prices and betrayal. Someone changed the channel on the TV mounted high in the corner, though the signal kept glitching. Brief images of riot police, blocked highways and an announcer speaking rapid-fire Swahili cut in and out.

Then, as casually as someone talking about the weather, a man at the end of the table said, "You know my son? The one who failed all his KCSE attempts?"

The others nodded. He was well known. Had tried Form Four thrice and still came home with a D plain.

"He told me he's going to the protest tomorrow. First time he's shown interest in anything bigger than betting or girls."

"Good for him," someone mumbled, lifting his bottle.

The man shrugged. "Not really. If he comes back alive, I'll be disappointed."

That raised eyebrows. He stared at the foam sliding down his bottle's neck. "Maybe this is his purpose. Maybe God decided this boy was born to die dramatically, so that we, his family can finally make something out of this cursed bloodline. Maybe he dies, the videos trend and we get money to build mum a real house. Or a plot. Or something."

They laughed. Nervously, loudly.

Someone clinked his bottle against the man's. "To destiny."

"Cheers."

The lights flickered briefly as thunder groaned in the distance.

Outside, the town moved like a beast stretching in its sleep. Small groups roamed with nothing to do and everything to say. Someone lit a

fire in an alley. An old man at the corner kiosk looked up at the sky and whispered to no one, "There'll be blood."

Dogs barked and fell silent. Radios hissed with static. There was no wind, just a thick, motionless heat that pressed against buildings like a warning.

And then came the silence.

It was not the silence of peace.

It was the silence of a nation taking one long breath before the scream.

CHAPTER TEN

The sun had not even fully claimed the sky when Nairobi began to change its shape.

On normal weekdays, the capital's arteries, Mombasa Road, Thika Superhighway, Waiyaki Way, choked on metal and honking rage by sunrise. But that morning, they were ghostly. Lanes meant for speeding vehicles lay undisturbed. Buses sat idle in depots, matatus tucked deep into estates like animals waiting out a storm. It was as though the city had called in sick all at once, unspoken but understood. The people had granted themselves a public holiday.

But it was not peace that hung in the air. It was pressure.

In town, pavements welcomed strange feet. Not the usual polished shoes of city workers, or heels clicking their way to glass towers, but heavy boots, dusty sneakers, plastic slippers, worn by people who had no intention of returning home in the same condition. They arrived from every direction: Eastlands, Kibra, Mathare, Kayole, Dandora. Some walked in silence, jaws clenched. Others came in clusters, laughing too loud for a morning still this early, masking nerves with energy. Many had their faces half-covered; hoods, bandanas, cheap surgical masks still carrying the scent of hand sanitiser from a different crisis.

There were no chants yet, no placards held up high. Just numbers. But that alone was thunder.

The city noticed. Shopfronts had iron sheets welded across glass panels. Some buildings had their entire entrances barricaded from within. Pavement hawkers, often the earliest risers, were nowhere in

sight. Only the scent of burnt charcoal and old oil from their absent frying pans lingered. The banks, the supermarkets, the jewellery stores, the branded mobile shops, they all bore the look of bunkers under siege. The air was dense with the knowledge that what was coming could not be controlled, only endured.

Street signs had been taken down overnight in some places. CCTV cameras twisted to the side. It wasn't random. It was readiness. A kind of choreography had begun, planned not by a central brain, but by experience. This was not the first time and each protest had taught the street something new.

Somewhere on Tom Mboya Street, a young man passed by dragging a tyre, eyes scanning for the right intersection. Behind him, another carried a jerrycan, its slosh too light for water. Across the avenue, someone else carried a bag of onions and tomatoes, pretending not to see them. It was like watching strangers rehearse different plays for the same final act.

From balconies above, people watched with folded arms. Old women shook their heads. Children peered through railings with unblinking awe. The city was shifting under their feet, becoming something else. Something ancient. Something brutal.

And then there was silence. That kind that creeps in before something breaks.

Even the birds seemed fewer. Even the wind moved cautiously.

Somewhere, a matchstick was struck. Somewhere else, a police boot hit the ground with a thud. The smell of burning rubber would follow, the sharp sting of tear gas trailing close behind. But not yet. Not this second. This was the moment before the sky changed colour. The city was holding its breath.

It was the kind of morning that smelled like blood before a drop had even fallen.

By eight in the morning, the crowd had doubled. Like bees drawn to the scent of a disturbed hive, they kept arriving, buzzing with talk,

sweat glistening on brows, eyes darting left and right. There was no leader standing on a podium. No megaphone, no formal summons. But the streets were filling. Every step someone took seemed to summon another behind them and then another. From alleyways, from feeder roads, from dusty estate corners they poured into the city centre.

Even those who had only come to watch could no longer tell where spectators ended and protestors began.

Near the market section of the city, where a few traders had dared to open their stalls, the sea of bodies started to push through. One middle-aged woman had set up her fruit stand as if nothing was different, bananas carefully arranged in bunches, mangos stacked in a yellow pyramid, oranges in an old basin, gleaming under a cloth she kept lifting to chase the flies. Her face tightened when she saw them coming.

A young man in a red hoodie reached first. He grabbed two bananas, peeled one mid-step, tossed the skin back at her basin.

"Don't you know what day this is?" he shouted over his shoulder, half-laughing.

Another ripped the cloth off the mango pile, sending the fruits tumbling onto the tarmac. Someone else upturned the entire basin of oranges, the splash and roll drawing loud gasps from nearby. "Go home, mama!" another barked. "Or you want to be counted among the casualties?"

She stood stunned for a moment, holding onto the wooden edge of her stall as if it would anchor her to the earth. Then she started gathering her fruit into a bag, eyes darting back and forth between her stall and the boiling crowd. There was no space for mercy now.

Across the avenue, a line of police officers had already formed, shields out, visors down, some in blue fatigues, others in green. They stood shoulder to shoulder, silent and unmoved, like statues assigned to watch history unfold. Their eyes, barely visible behind smoked visors, scanned the crowd with mechanical patience. From a distance, one

could see an officer kneeling behind the line, opening a wooden crate to load cartridges into his rifle, rubber bullets, the kind that do not kill cleanly, but scatter pain like confetti.

Another officer adjusted his gas canister belt, muttering to himself as he clipped it tight. "*Tulisema tutalinda hii nchi mpaka mwisho*," he whispered, more to the universe than anyone else.

Still, no action. Not yet.

A childlike chant started in the crowd. Simple. Repetitive. The kind that could be passed from one mouth to another without losing its fire.

"*Hatupangwingwi*!"

Each time it was said, it grew louder. Firmer. And as it gained rhythm, feet started to stomp. Flags were raised, some real, others made from old bedsheets and blood-red paint. Placards emerged from armpits and backpacks, messages scrawled in rushed handwriting:

"No Jobs. No Peace."

"We cannot be killed like dogs."

"You Lied to Us!"

The first confrontation came fast and sloppy.

A man with a face wrapped in a black t-shirt broke through the front edge of the crowd and hurled a stone toward the police line. It landed metres short, bouncing uselessly on the tarmac.

Laughter. Then another stepped forward, this one shirtless, panting like a dog. He screamed something unintelligible, eyes bulging and threw a larger rock, this one clanged off a shield, drawing a hard thud and a quick twitch from the officer it struck.

The wall of riot police didn't move. Not yet.

But their bodies shifted slightly. Shields tightened. Batons were unsnapped.

It had begun.

The protestors roared at the sound of impact, like it had been a goal scored at a final match. It was the permission they had all been waiting for, that silent green light.

More rocks flew. More chants rose.

On both sides, hearts began to race for different reasons.

The people had come in floods. From estates and slums, from dorm rooms and street corners, barefoot and booted, all of them now moving as one mass. Their chants were no longer scattered; they rang like ancient drums of war. At the edge of the CBD, where the government had dared to draw a line with metal rails and armoured trucks, the barricade stood firm. But not for long.

Across from them, the riot police adjusted formation. Boots grounded. Visors lowered. Batons ready. One command away from chaos.

The crowd edged forward, a wave swelling, thick and breathing, pushing with the hunger of people who had waited too long. The police responded with the hiss of a canister tossed. Then another. Then five more, spinning mid-air like cursed dice before landing with loud pops and coughing out white fog.

Screams. Curses. A short panic.

But they had come ready.

A hand in the smoke grabbed a canister and flung it back like a grenade. It landed near the officers' boots, forcing a retreat and earning a roar of triumph from the crowd.

Then the barrier fell.

They stormed forward, swallowing the road like a flood. But as the front lines surged ahead in defiance, behind them, something else had begun, the fracture. The true shape of revolution was rarely pure.

Fifteen men peeled off from the back-left corner of the protest line. They moved quickly, not yelling, not raising fists, but ducking through alleys and side streets like a rehearsed unit. They had a different destination. Not parliament. Not the commissioner's office. But a sleek electronic shop four blocks up.

Rashid was among them.

Just the day before, he had stood outside the display window. Worn slippers. Dry lips. Staring in wonder at the MacBook with the glowing apple. He had asked a security guard, "How much for that one?" The answer had tasted bitter: Two hundred and thirty thousand.

He had smiled, nodded and walked away but not before looking at the hinges of the front grill.

Now he stood there again, same spot, different weather.

A black scarf covered his face. Hood tight over his head. His hands held a metal rod wrapped with tape. The shop was closed, the glass still intact, the metallic grill locked at the base. But everything else was different. The city was unguarded. Sirens were far. The law was busy elsewhere.

"Quick!" he hissed.

Two others joined him. One worked the crowbar into the padlock while the rest kept watch down the street. Time slowed. Every few seconds someone would glance back, expecting to see officers. Nothing yet.

The lock groaned.

"Funga vizuri... push!"

Then it gave way, a snap like a neck bone. The gate screeched as they lifted it halfway. The air inside was cool and silent, untouched by the noise outside. A sanctuary of luxury.

They poured into the tiny shop like rats into a granary. Rashid did not care for screens or specs, he yanked cords, grabbed machines and stacked them in his arms until nothing else could fit. Behind him, more bodies shoved through the narrow doorframe, scrambling, shouting, kicking over glass.

Someone near the front, barely able to breathe in the crush, shouted, "*Fungua jam nyuma bana*!" and began flinging laptops through the half-lifted grill. A boy outside caught one like a football, another dropped to the pavement with a crack but was still scooped and stuffed into a bag. It was chaos, but it moved with purpose.

Not everyone could fit inside. Fists flew. A scuffle broke out as one man tried to push past another holding a power bank in his mouth. But there was no time for quarrels. The sounds of looting weren't unique to this street.

Downtown, the supermarket had been broken open ten minutes earlier.

The joy there was different. Less desperate, more gleeful. Like a festival, if festivals came with panic and broken fridges. People dragged sacks of sugar, cartons of milk, bags of flour. Some threw tins like confetti. A shirtless boy danced while holding a giant tin of biscuits above his head.

One old man, grey-bearded, moving stiffly on a wooden walking stick, limped past the entrance carrying a ten-litre cooking oil drum. He grinned, sweaty, triumphant. Behind him, a woman in a faded apron balanced diapers on her back and packets of sanitary towels in her arms.

Soap, noodles, baby formula, toilet paper, crates of soda, it all moved like river water through bare hands.

And the police?

They watched from a distance.

No whistles. No batons. Some leaned on their shields, waiting. Others had retreated entirely. There were too many crowds, too few orders. The streets did not belong to them that morning.

No one looted just for greed. Or so they said. The ends justified the means. That was the chant. That was the prayer. The people were tired. This was a warning shot, a bare minimum. If things did not change, they could do worse.

All they wanted now, across the estates, markets and bloodied streets, was one name, one signature, one resignation.

The DCP had to go.

From behind their shields, they watched the crowd swell. It moved like a living thing, angry, defiant, fearless. The morning air, still thick

with dew and smoke, pulsed with chants and drums. Flags waved. Mouths moved. Fists clenched.

A rock flew.

It was small, insignificant. It bounced off a riot shield with a hollow clack. No one reacted.

But the second, larger, heavier, struck a helmet dead centre. The officer staggered a step back, stunned. He hissed through gritted teeth, yanked his weapon down from his shoulder and barked something dark under his breath.

"That's it. I'm putting live rounds in this thing."

The officer beside him scoffed, not turning his head. "Save your bullets," he muttered.

The frontline of riot shields held steady. Behind them, ranks of officers stood loaded with rubber bullets and smoke. More than fifty men in formation. Hundreds more lined the nearby streets.

Orders crackled through radios.

"Prepare dispersal," a commanding voice said.

No one had to be told twice.

An officer at the centre nodded. He stepped forward with the launcher slung over his chest and locked eyes with the swelling crowd. He dropped to one knee, aimed carefully above their heads.

His gloved hand reached for the canister.

It was routine.

Pull. Load. Fire. Watch the crowd scatter.

But the crowd did not scatter.

And he never got to fire.

A whistling sound tore the air. Then pain.

A hand-carved spear, crude but sharp, plunged into his hip with a sickening thud. The officer cried out, fell sideways, gripping the shaft with both hands. Blood seeped through the fabric of his uniform. His comrades reacted in half-beats, two rushing to drag him backwards, another stepping over him and firing a rubber round into the chaos.

But the crowd had surged now.

Like water bursting a dam.

Shields were rammed. Insults hurled. Another stone flew and smashed a visor. A boot slammed into a riot shield, throwing the officer holding it off balance. Orders blurred. Movements became instinct.

Smoke hissed into the air. The first tear gas canister arced, trailing white behind it before landing and spinning against the tarmac. Screams followed. People began coughing, shielding their eyes, scattering.

But some stood firm.

They returned the cannister, kicking it back like a child's ball.

Then came another spear.

A molotov.

A glass bottle.

A chair leg.

One protestor gripped a burning tyre and hurled it towards the line. Another struck a shield with a metal rod. It was no longer a protest. It was war.

Then the voice came. From deeper in the ranks.

Calm. Commanding.

"Use live ammunition."

For a second, silence.

Then a collective exhale.

Officers began unclipping ammunition pouches. Hands moved quickly, almost eagerly. Cartridges popped into weapons with smooth, trained motion. Some exchanged glances. Some grinned.

It was time for a hunt.

And they would not miss.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Inside the august chambers of Parliament, the air was thick with unease. The session was underway, but there was none of the usual bluster and performance. The walls themselves seemed to lean in, straining to catch the whispers bouncing across mahogany desks. For once, no one was checking their phones. No one was laughing.

At the far end, beneath the national emblem, the Speaker presided with a rigid stillness. Sweat glistened on his forehead under the steady lights. A bead trailed down his cheek as he adjusted the microphone.

"Order, honourable members. Order."

Someone coughed. Another leaned in and muttered to his seatmate. Then a voice rose clearly over the chamber.

"Mr. Speaker, with all due respect... are we safe in this House right now?"

The question struck like a hammer. A pause followed. Tense. Heavy. Real.

Another MP, seated a few rows down, swivelled in his chair and gestured toward the large digital display mounted high on the far wall. It was showing live footage from outside the building, shaky drone feeds of surging crowds, smoke drifting in waves down avenues, barricades overturned, uniformed officers forming lines like a failing dam.

“Is this feed public?” the MP asked, staring at the images.

“Is the nation seeing this right now?”

The Speaker did not hesitate. “Absolutely. This is the public broadcast channel. A government-mandated station.”

That answer unsettled the room more than any of the images on the screen.

"Switch them off now!" A member of parliament barked. The voice was neither calm nor polite.

"Yes, yes! This is madness!" another shouted from across the aisle.

"They're fuelling the fire. Letting the people feed on it. Turn it off!"

The Speaker raised his hand.

"Order. Honourable Members, if you would permit, I now formally pose the question: Should the media cease all live broadcasts of the current unrest?"

A hush fell over the chamber. Only the soft rustle of papers and the faint scratch of pens broke the silence.

"Those in favour, say Aye," the Speaker called.

A chorus of Ayes rang out, strong and immediate.

"Those against, say No."

Only a faint murmur followed, no more than five voices, uncertain and scattered.

"The Ayes have it, motion passed." the Speaker declared.

With that, he leaned forward and spoke into the panel mic: "Cut the feed."

The screen flickered. For a moment it stuttered, the image of a lone protester waving a flag from atop a traffic light, then vanished into black.

Silence. But only inside the chamber.

Outside, the screams and chants roared louder than ever. A low rumble, as if the very earth was shifting beneath the Parliament's marble floors.

Somewhere between the Speaker's final gavel and the strained sigh of an aide at the back of the room, a truth hung unspoken, not in the speeches or minutes, but in the fabric of the House itself.

It was important that democracy had appeared to happen.

There had to be a handful who disagreed. A few honourable members who shook their heads or failed to raise their hands. It gave the illusion of debate, of divergence.

Because theatre required tension.

Even a controlled theatre such as a parliament.

The Speaker knew it. The president knew it. The press certainly did, or at least, they had learned not to ask too many questions.

And though the cameras were now off, the masks still remained.

It was no secret, not really, that almost every man and woman seated in that chamber owed more than their seat to the man in State House. Well, not all, maybe two or three had resisted, clinging to ideals that had long since bled dry in this country. But they were forgettable. Footnotes.

As long as there was quorum, nothing else mattered.

Just beyond the iron barricades of Parliament, they stood. A mass. A force. A statement written in footsteps and sweat. Some wore red. Others waved hand-painted placards or carried torn flags, but what unified them were the T-shirts, faded white and screaming in bold black print:

#OCCUPYPARLIAMENT

It was not just a slogan. It was the only job they had to do that day.

They had marched from far corners of the city, some hitching rides on trucks, others walking since dawn. There was anger in the air, not the kind that fizzles out with speeches or police warnings, but the kind that simmers over years of betrayal. That day, it had boiled over.

"Those thieves sit in there fattening their bellies!" a woman shouted from the front. She had once sold vegetables by the roadside until the county council demolished her stall. "We fed them with our votes! And now we starve!"

"They came to Parliament with holes in their shoes," a man growled, walking beside her, "six months later, they drive German cars and send their kids to school abroad."

They all knew the story.

Members of Parliament, once community leaders and hopefuls with promises thick on their tongues, had become nothing more than scavengers in tailored suits. The electorate was merely a stepping stone, a ladder rung. Once inside, lawmakers played a single game: stash what you can while the door is still open.

Shell companies. Land grabs. Construction tenders. Government jobs for cousins, lovers, mistresses. Law was a cloak; power, a bank card.

The protesters had reached the outer gate. The police line stood firm, black armoured figures shoulder-to-shoulder, riot shields up. Gas masks. Batons. Semi-automatic rifles.

"Disperse!" came the shout.

But no one moved.

A stone flew first. Then another. A tear gas canister arced through the sky.

The crowd parted, but not backwards.

A young man picked it up and hurled it back.

That was the spark.

Suddenly, the street was fire and fury. Protesters surged. A barricade was pulled down. Gunshots cracked in the air like breaking bones.

One man fell with his chest caved in.

Another, a boy no older than sixteen, dropped with a scream, blood soaking through his #OCCUPYPARLIAMENT T-shirt.

Two others tried to run for cover but one was shot through the back and the fourth was crushed against a metal gate in the stampede.

Their bodies lay twisted in the dust, smoke curling around their limbs. The street was chaos now, cries of grief tangled with war chants and sirens.

And just a few metres away, behind bulletproof windows, the lawmakers watched.

Inside the Parliament chamber, the tension was unbearable. Gone were the jeers and bravado from earlier. Now only silence and wide eyes remained.

One MP stood. "Mr Speaker... the gates, are they secure? Are we... safe?"

Another whispered, "Can we use the tunnel? The emergency one?"

Heads turned. The Speaker adjusted his robe, visibly shaken.

"We, there's been work down there for weeks," he said. "You, Honourable members wanted proper ventilation. The whole shaft is blocked. Cables, debris, forklifts, construction material. Completely impassable as they work on the air conditioning."

A stunned pause. Then someone cursed under his breath.

There was nowhere to hide.

Not in their offices. Not in the chambers. Not in the hallways lined with portraits of dead patriots. The chants were louder now, echoing through the compound walls. The people were coming.

For the first time in years, the powerful felt exactly what it meant to be powerless.

Officer Baraza stood with his feet planted firmly behind the reinforced police barricade, rifle raised, finger already caressing the trigger. The helmet on his head pinched at the temple, sweat dripping down his neck despite the cooling mist behind him.

The crowd surged again.

His eyes locked onto a man, mid-thirties, tall, dreadlocked, raising a rusted spanner above his head like a weapon. Baraza squeezed.

The crack of the G3 rifle shattered the air.

A clean hit.

The man's skull burst like a ripe guava. A spray of brain matter splattered onto the once-clean pavement, mixing with the dust and footsteps. Pinkish-grey. Warm. Instant.

For a moment, the world stood still. Then someone screamed. Then another.

Then chaos surged again.

The air was thick. Not just with tear gas, gunfire and dust, but with something stranger.

Death.

And lavender.

The killer cop hated that smell. It poured from a monstrous silver tower affixed to the corner of the compound wall, a massive outdoor air-conditioning diffuser, imported from Dubai, its chrome grills humming softly as it misted fragrant perfume across the parliament buildings yard. Each day of the week had its own scent. A branding trick. PR nonsense.

Wednesdays was a mixture of lavender and jasmine.

The female MPs said it calmed their nerves before heated debates.

But out here, jasmine wrestled with cordite, blood and smoke.

Baraza adjusted his aim. The crowd had broken the first line of portable barriers. The mob pushed forward again, some crawling over their fallen. A man holding the national flag charged ahead, fearless with no shirt, blood streaming from a gash on his forehead.

Baraza fired again.

The bullet found the man's chest, just above the sternum. It punched clean through, a red flower blooming on his back. He staggered, dropped the flag and collapsed like a sack of wet grain.

Still, they did not stop.

The mob began to retreat slightly, but not out of fear. It was strategy. They reformed quickly, shouting louder, angrier. As if the more blood they saw, the less afraid they became.

One woman at the front dropped to her knees, scooped dust into her hands and smeared it across her face like war paint. Another banged on a steel rod against the Parliament fence.

Then the unthinkable happened.

The front doors of Parliament, those stately, mahogany pillars that once welcomed presidents, diplomats and lawmakers, shuddered under impact.

Bang!

Bang!

The angry mob had reached them.

Baraza glanced sideways.

More units were moving in. A superior barked orders into a radio. But not a single MP was in sight. They were probably still somewhere inside the compound buried in a bunker or curled up in some chamber they imagined was safe.

In the meantime, the grounds below were being swallowed by chaos. Baraza did not move.

He had a job. He had a uniform. He had rounds left. And the people at the gate did not look like they were going home.

Not that day. The sun beat down hard on the stone steps just outside Parliament. The noise of the crowd had dulled slightly, moved further down the boulevard. But here, it was quiet. The officer preferred it that way. Clean shots, clear orders.

He ran past the perimeter gate, rifle slung low, boots crunching over a fallen placard. That was when he saw him.

A big boy, hands high in the air, trembling, back against a granite pillar, a bulging clear bag of disposable face masks swinging in one hand.

The police officer stopped.

He stared for a long second, then took a step forward. Raised the barrel slightly.

"What are you doing here, young man?" he asked, his voice low and muffled under his gas mask and hoodie. "Chose a bad day to sell masks, didn't you?"

He gestured at the stash of masks with the tip of his gun. The boy flinched, raising his hands even higher.

"Please... spare me, officer," the young man stammered.

The man's name was Njoroge.

He was 22. The same age his older brother had been when he vanished in Mombasa during a police operation two years ago.

If Baraza had bothered to ask, he could already guess the boy's story. He would say he was just there to sell masks. That he was not part of any protest. That he did not care about politics. Just another hustler, wrong place, wrong time.

That was always the line.

He would claim the market was too full, that he tried Parliament Road because the crowds there moved fast. That he had not seen the placards and shouting until it was too late. That he ran when the first tear gas canister popped, like everyone else.

They always ran.

And now here he was, cornered, shaking, sweating in a faded Bob Marley t-shirt like it meant something. Baraza's eyes narrowed. The shirt alone told him enough. That was street thug energy. That fake rebel image. Always talking about peace while hiding blades in their socks.

He did not need to ask. He already knew.

Another small-time crook playing innocent.

A Mask seller? Maybe. Or maybe he used the masks to carry something else. Drugs. Blades. Flyers. Stones. Always hiding behind something. Always a story.

And always surprised when the gun points back.

Now here he was, cornered.

The rude-looking cop took another step closer, gun still raised.

The young man's heart pounded so loud it drowned out the chaos behind him. He had raised his hands so high his shoulders ached, the left one clutching the pack of masks like it could somehow prove his innocence.

Please spare me, sir, he had said once and again.

But the officer kept moving forward.

His boots thudded on the pavement, slow and heavy like a verdict being delivered. The barrel of the gun never wavered.

Surely... surely, he wouldn't shoot, the boy thought, blinking through the sweat in his eyes. Not over this. Not over masks.

He could feel it, his body already trembling from the shock before it even happened.

The air reeked of burnt rubber and smoke and something else beneath it, something floral. Lavender. Someone had turned on the massive outdoor air-conditioners again, trying to freshen the dying city.

His breath caught as he looked into the officer's face. Unreadable. Cold.

"I asked you a question," the cop growled through the hood wrapped around his face. "Bad day to sell masks, isn't it?"

"Please stop pointing that thing at me!" the boy shouted, louder than he meant to, his voice cracking. He regretted it instantly. He had said it without thinking. His voice too loud. A hint of defiance he did not intend.

The officer's eyes changed.

Baraza stiffened.

"What did you just say about my grandfather?"

"What?" Njoroge blinked. "No, I didn't, "

"How dare you insult my grandfather?" Baraza's voice quivered with rage. "That man sold his land so I could serve this goddamn country. I bled for this badge. And you, you spit on his grave?!"

Njoroge's mouth opened but no words came. He shook his head rapidly. This was insane.

He wasn't supposed to die here.

He thought about his grandfather.

That stubborn old man had sold an acre to send him through school. One acre. The last good piece of land they had, the one near the river, where the mango trees grew sweet and wild. He had insisted the

boy would not end up like him, hunched over dry soil, waiting on rain that never came.

And for what?

This?

All he was trying to do was sell masks. Just stay alive. Not even thrive, just scrape enough to eat, to send something small back home.

School had backfired. Not because he was not bright. He had done well, well enough to make his mother cry on prize-giving day. But fees were a wall, tall and greased and no matter how high he jumped, he slid right back down. Education in that country was a scam. A cruel game where the poor got to taste the dream but never hold it.

He had dropped out in his second year. Quietly. No farewell, no ceremony. Just faded from the class photo like a ghost.

And now, here he stood. Hands raised. A pack of masks in one, death staring from the other end of a barrel.

All he had wanted... was a chance.

"Sir... I didn't say anything... I swear..."

But the cop didn't listen.

Baraza stepped closer. Close enough for Njoroge to see his eyes behind the goggles. Red. Alive. Burning.

He heard the safety click.

No. Please.

The air thickened.

Everything became too quiet. Too still.

Then the shot. It felt like being hit by a truck made of ice.

The young man jerked back as the bullet tore through his skull. His body froze for a breathless second, then collapsed. The masks slipped from his hands, scattering across the marble like broken wings. A red mist lingered in the air. One mask landed upside down, catching the blood that flowed beneath him.

He dropped to one knee. Then the other.

The world blinked out, light first, then sound, then sense. A strange warmth pulsed through his head, then drained just as fast, like someone had unplugged him from life itself.

His mouth hung open, slack.

His limbs twitched once. Then stilled.

A thin stream of blood crept from the neat hole in his temple, tracing down his cheek like a tear.

And with it, life slipped quietly out of him, slow, final, unnoticed.

The body dropped without a sound, crumpling onto the pavement like a sack of wet clothes. Officer Baraza exhaled sharply through his nose, unfazed. Another one down. He did not even bother checking the name, just another face swallowed by the chaos.

He took one last glance at the lifeless form, eyes already turning glassy under the hard sun. A breeze rolled past, lifting the faint smell of lavender from the air diffusers mounted outside the buildings, Wednesday's scent. The floral calm clashed with the metallic sharpness of blood pooling on the stone tiles.

Without a second thought, Baraza turned and broke into a jog, boots thudding against the ground. His commander had just called him over from the squad truck across the street. The crowd had pushed through the outer barricades. Some were already pounding at Parliament's front doors.

If he stayed behind, he knew exactly what kind of justice they would offer. The kind with no questions and no mercy.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The ram thudded against the mahogany like a war drum, each strike deeper, more determined than the last. A team of protestors, faces masked in cloth and fury, heaved the steel battering ram again, backs arched, muscles taut, breathing in sync.

Crack.

The reinforced hinges groaned. Dust rained from the frame. The polished emblem carved into the centre of the door now bore spiderweb fractures, years of opulence giving way to sheer, unrelenting rage.

On the other side, panic brewed thick in the air. Inside the chamber, the powerful were shedding their skins. Designer watches vanished into inner jacket pockets. Phones were slipped into shoes. Gold chains were unclasped with shaking fingers. One honourable man pulled off his silk tie and used it to wrap a bundle of notes from his briefcase, stuffing it under the seat cushion.

No one gave orders. No one looked in charge.

Another slam.

The sound was thunder in a confined storm. One MP stood frozen, clutching a ceremonial mace like it might fend off a mob. Another whispered to no one, "This cannot be happening..." as though denial could hold the door better than bolts and brass.

BAM.

The upper panel split. A shaft of light pierced through, followed by a gloved hand prying at the crack.

Outside, the crowd surged. A deafening roar followed the break. They could smell victory. Blood had already been spilt on the streets, young, angry, betrayed blood. This was not looting. It was reckoning.

Inside, eyes turned to the high ceiling. Nowhere to run. Only chandeliers above and fury beyond the door.

One final strike.

The door collapsed inward with a crashing finality, splinters exploding as it landed. The weight of everything it symbolised came down with it.

And on its ruins, the people stepped in.

The grand chamber of Parliament, once reserved for pomp and long-winded speeches, had become a pen of panic. Red carpeting was soiled with boot prints and blood spatters. The colonial chandeliers above swung wildly, echoing the tremors of rage marching through the building.

The MPs were herded to the centre of the assembly floor like livestock, suited, trembling and mute. No leather seat to recline on. No honorific title to hide behind. No army to protect them. Only the people now and the people were angry.

All around, the ransacking had begun.

Foldable phones were snatched from shaking hands. Luxury watches yanked straight from wrists, some with flesh. Rings, earrings, cufflinks, designer belts, wallets heavy with foreign currency, all stripped clean. Shoes were pulled from the feet. Socks, too, because they might be designer. Some MPs still tried to look dignified, holding up torn coats, pleading, "This is imported, please..." only to have the coat torn from them and tossed into the greedy crowd.

They wore wealth. And now they were naked in all the ways that counted.

If someone stripped a Ksh 20,000 Italian leather coat off a Cabinet Secretary's back, no one stopped them. You earned your place at the trough. Now pay for it.

At the head of the chamber stood a group of young men and women, boots worn, jeans dusty, their faces streaked with sweat, smoke and the weight of the moment. After the chaos had ebbed, one of them raised a hand, calling for calm. The room fell into a tense silence. No titles. No leaders. Just one voice rising from the crowd. He stepped forward slowly, standing where the Speaker once ruled and spoke, not with volume, but with a firmness that echoed louder than any gavel.

He raised his voice, calm but lethal.

"Those who voted yes for the Suppression Bill," he said, using the name protestors had given to the new finance act, "step aside."

There was hesitation, then movement. One by one, ashamed and exposed, more than half the house shuffled to the left side of the floor. Their names were already known, and everyone's vote had been tracked and documented.

"These," the leader said, turning to the rest of the crowd, "were paid by the President to sell you out. They are going to refund every shilling. Starting now."

Silence.

Then chaos.

Phones were returned, just long enough. "Mpesa it. Bank transfer. I don't care how," a young woman barked, pressing a cracked iPhone into an honourable's palm. "One million shillings. Now. Or you're firewood."

The MP's trembling fingers worked fast. Sweat dripped into the phone. The screen was cracked, but he managed. A chime followed. "Done."

"You live to fight another day," she muttered, snatching the phone back.

"How are you going to refund the one million shillings bribe to the people?" someone demanded. That was the price set, separate from the watches, rings, foldable phones and designer coats already stripped

off them. After all, those were just symbols, and this was the people's money.

Some MPs were handed back their sleek, expensive phones only for a moment to make the transaction. Under the eyes of their captors, trembling fingers opened banking apps. For others, a firmer hand was taken. They were marched, no, herded down to the basement parking. Security scanners no longer beeped. No guards stood watch. The place had fallen.

At their vehicles, black SUVs gleaming under fluorescent lights, they retrieved their secrets. Glove compartments clicked open to reveal thick envelopes. Trunks unlatched, revealing duffel bags stuffed with cash. Beneath seats, behind panels, bundles bound tight in rubber bands, some still tagged from the Central Bank.

One MP, sweating through his linen shirt, was taken back up to his office. He hesitated at the wall panel, then pressed the hidden latch. The safe creaked open, revealing stacks of crisp notes, five million shillings at least. He said nothing. Just began to hand it over, eyes fixed on the floor. It was everything he had stashed. But it was a fair price for his life.

But it was not just the cash they were after.

The parliamentary offices were not spared either. Crowds tore through drawers, broke cabinets, kicked open locked safes and private lockers. What they found stunned them. Gold pens, platinum-embossed diaries, unopened MacBooks, whiskey bottles worth rent for a year, imported cigars, even bundles of cash wrapped in government files. Anything that could fit in a backpack was taken. Everything else was broken.

They lingered only a moment.

One man raised the stolen mace above his head, grinning like a fool. "State House next!" he bellowed, his voice echoing off the stripped walls.

A few around him laughed nervously, not in agreement. "You want to die?" someone muttered. "That's treason."

No one seconded the call.

But before anyone could make a move either way, a man at the shattered west window called out, not in panic, just warning.

Heads turned.

Through the iron gates and over the distant hill, they saw movement. Trucks. Armoured. Uniformed men perched inside, rifles strapped across chests. Not police. Military.

Real ones.

No sirens. No drama. Just a steady, purposeful approach.

Boots on steel. Doors unlatching.

They came to reclaim order.

And in that moment, instinct took over.

No chants or songs. Just a swift, strategic retreat.

They poured out of the chambers with everything. Foldable phones, rings still warm from fingers, diamond-studded watches, pens, seats, brass nameplates, the last shred of wall art. Nothing remained but marble and torn carpet. Even the Speaker's chair was gone.

The mace, mistaken for pure gold, was held tight. It came with them.

They left behind no chaos, only an eerie, hollow silence in a gutted shell. A parliament building stripped of its illusions. Its wealth. Its pride.

And the soldiers arrived too late.

By the time they reached the entrance, the protesters were gone, disappearing into alleys, cars, footpaths, dispersed across the capital like smoke in the wind.

It was barely 1 p.m.

In the northern lowlands, under the bleached sky of Napalek, a hired crowd of Maasai men and women sat in disciplined rows, sweat shining on their foreheads, bead necklaces dull under the harsh sun.

Children dozed under the elders' legs. A few looked to the side, towards the trees, towards the hills, anywhere but the tented podium where the Deputy President was raising his voice to stir cheer.

"Will you elect us again?" boomed Deputy President Musa Tandala, a lean man with rehearsed laughter and too-white teeth. "Shall we finish what we started?"

There was a pause. Then a few half-hearted cheers, quickly smothered by the heat.

Some clapped because they had been told to. Others, because they were tired and wanted the speech to end, wanted to be paid and go home. A woman under the third tent leaned to her neighbour.

"Did he ask something?" she whispered. Did he just ask if we will re-elect them?

"Like rats, they bite and then blow to soothe," the other muttered. They're eating, asking if we want more hunger.

Behind the crowd, men in dark suits scanned the horizon, earpieces crackling with static. The sky remained clear until it did not.

The deputy wrapped up with a cue. "Ladies and gentlemen... Let us welcome the President!"

President Mahoro Nshimba, a wide-chested man from the Rift Valley, rose to his feet beneath the shade of a flapping canvas. He adjusted his coat, stepped to the microphone and smiled.

The smile did not land.

"We are here today because we care," he began. "Soon, we shall renovate the school blocks in this area. A new cattle dip is also in our plans. Change is coming, my people."

From the crowd came a scoff. Audible. Then a louder one.

A youth at the back, tall and angry, flung his rubber-treaded sandal, sliced from an old tractor tyre. The projectile sailed clean through the air, grazing the President's ear with a startling whip before landing somewhere behind the podium.

The gasp was collective.

Mahoro flinched, his hand twitching toward his temple, then straightened.

Security moved fast. As others shielded the President, a second wave of armed officers rushed toward the media crew stationed on the raised platform. Cameras were snatched mid-roll, lenses pushed down with gloved hands. "Stop recording! Right now!" one barked, jabbing a finger at a journalist fumbling to pause the live feed. Tripods were kicked over. A drone operator was yanked from his perch. The order was clear: there would be no footage of the panic, no images of the president flinching, no proof of the shoe that had flown.

"Cover him!"

Suits surged forward as a canister arced from the security line into the crowd. Tsssht, pop! The gas spread with a vengeance, making eyes sting and throats close.

Mothers lifting babies, elders stumbling, young men shouting "We still need to get paid for the attendance!" as they scattered from under the choking white cloud.

The head of state was grabbed and dragged behind the tents. The speeches were over.

Within seconds, SUVs roared to life. The black convoy jerked forward, screeched 100 metres down to where two choppers throbbed in the sun. One of them bore the military crest.

The DP and junior ministers ducked into their aircraft. The President was loaded into his separately, under the swirling blades and curses from nearby officers.

From above, as they lifted off, the clearing resembled a battlefield. Plastic chairs overturned, tents sagging, the crowd in small fleeing knots, a government appearance turned exodus.

And in the capital, Parliament still smoked.

The headlines that night would try to balance it all. "President Nshimba continues development tour in Turkana despite unrest." But the shoe would trend. The photo. The outrage. The flight.

And it was still only the afternoon.

The rotor blades hammered overhead, thudding rhythmically as the presidential helicopter sliced through the afternoon sky, rising above the scorched plains and swirling dust. Inside the cabin, President Mahoro Nshimba sat motionless, his elbows pressed against the armrests, fingers clasped tightly. His eyes were fixed on the distant ground below, burning tyres, panicked civilians, plumes of smoke trailing like wounded banners into the sky.

He cursed under his breath.

Across from him sat Wendo Bala, his Senior Political Advisor, calm but wary. A man who had survived three regimes and two attempted coups, Wendo's expression was schooled, but he kept stealing glances at the President's clenched jaw.

"That was not just an insult," Mahoro said, eyes still on the earth beneath them. "That was hatred. The man took off his shoe and hurled it at my head."

"They always throw shoes when the world is collapsing around them," Wendo replied carefully. "Symbols, not weapons."

President Mahoro Nshimba shook his head slowly, still staring out the window at the smoke-stained horizon. "A bloody tyre shoe, Wendo," he muttered, his voice a bitter mix of disbelief and fury. "He threw a whole tyre shoe at me, as if I were the enemy. I flew to Northlands for optics. Commissioned a cattle dip, reopened that broken school, even pledged two more boreholes. And how does it end? A mob hurling shoes like it was a circus."

Wendo gave a slight nod, though his eyes betrayed no surprise. Before he could speak, Yami reappeared, this time with an apologetic tone.

"Sir, the media has been instructed not to air that part of the incident. The broadcast will only show the successes of the trip. Your speeches, the community's smiles and the new infrastructure."

Mahoro turned sharply toward her. “So, it’s being swept under the rug?”

“For stability,” she said carefully. “It will be painted as a fully successful launch.”

He leaned back, exhaling through his nose. “And the man, has he been arrested?”

“Yes, sir. Immediately. He is in custody.”

Mahoro’s lip curled with restrained disgust. “He better not see the light of day anytime soon. That was attempted murder. Make sure he gets nothing less than ten years.”

Yami nodded once, tight-lipped and disappeared to relay the message. Silence settled back in the chopper, thick and tense.

Before Wendo could respond, Yami, the President’s Personal Assistant, stepped in briskly from the cockpit area, her posture composed but her face telling of the gravity she carried. A tablet trembled faintly in her grip.

“Sir,” she said. “There’s an urgent update from Nairobi.”

Mahoro didn’t turn. “Go on.”

“Parliament has been overrun. Protesters broke through the gates at midday. Security was overwhelmed. By the time reinforcements arrived, the building had been cleaned out.”

The President slowly shifted his gaze toward her, brow lowering. “Cleaned out?”

“Yes, sir. Not a chair, not a portrait, not a single shred of paper left. Even the national flag... gone. It's just walls now. Seven people are dead. That includes two MPs, three guards and two Parliament staff. Several injured. Looting has spilt into the CBD. Shops, banks, petrol stations. Initial damage already estimated at over twenty-four billion shillings.”

A suffocating silence followed.

Mahoro leaned back slowly, like gravity was finally catching up with his body. “I was supposed to bring light today. Rift Valley. 300

families are getting electricity for the first time. That transformer was months of work. People were singing, waiting. And now..."

"No one is singing anymore," Wendo said softly.

Yami studied the President's face for a moment before asking, "Sir, do we continue with the launch programme of the transformer?"

He didn't reply immediately. The grey outline of Nairobi was beginning to materialise on the horizon, cloaked under smoke and sirens. His city. His capital. His name is attached to every brick and every decision and now every crack.

"No," he said at last. "Take us to the State House."

Yami nodded, turned to leave, then paused at the edge of the curtain.

"Radio the second chopper," Mahoro added firmly, his tone leaving no room for doubt. "Tell the Deputy President to meet me at State House. I want him there before we land. Emergency meeting."

"Yes, Your Excellency," she said and vanished into the front cabin.

President Mahoro Nshimba exhaled, long and slow, as if trying to rid himself of the weight settling in his chest. Down below, the smoke curled higher. The city was on fire, and now there was nowhere left to hide from it.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

At precisely 7:00 p.m., every television screen in the Republic flickered and froze. For twelve long seconds, silence stretched across cities, towns and valleys alike. Then, the signal stabilised, revealing a familiar face, President Mahoro Nshimba. Calm. Smiling. Terrifying in his composure.

"Good evening, fellow citizens," the broad-shouldered man began, his voice slow and deliberate. "Tonight, I come not just as your President, but as your protector... I am declaring a state of emergency."

He paused, allowing the weight of his words to settle like smoke over the nation.

"Earlier today, a dark cloud descended upon our democracy. Armed chaos gripped the floor of Parliament. Elected leaders were assaulted. Security was compromised. Several honourable members lie in hospital beds, while others... never made it out alive."

He swallowed, the muscles along his jaw tightening.

"I will not let the Republic descend into lawlessness."

His voice dropped an octave, laced with steel. "This was no protest. This was a hijacking of public will. A coordinated attempt to paralyse the heart of governance. And we know who orchestrated it."

The President's brow furrowed, his nostrils flared as anger carved shadows into his face. The usual statesmanlike calm was replaced by something colder, furious resolve simmering just beneath the surface.

"Enough is enough."

His eyes scanned the room briefly, cameras trained on him, lights casting long shadows behind the podium. Just off to the side, a group

of state-vetted journalists sat rigid in rows. A few stole glances at each other. One reporter shifted uncomfortably in her seat. Another gripped his pen so tightly that it snapped.

"I am issuing an executive order for the immediate arrest of Honourable Duma, leader of the opposition and instigator of this insurrection. As of this moment, he is a threat to national stability. He will be detained. Interrogated and prosecuted."

He leaned slightly forward into the microphone.

"This is not politics. This is preservation."

A collective gasp rippled through the press bench. One journalist mouthed something silently, "My God", while another slowly lowered her camera, as if the weight had suddenly doubled.

The President's voice turned cold.

"There will be no rallies. No gatherings. No defiance."

He straightened his back, the presidential seal looming large behind him.

"To those considering rebellion, let this be your final warning."

Then came the last words, more chilling than all before.

"By midnight, the Republic will be silent."

And with that, the screen faded to black.

Across the country, dinner tables fell quiet, televisions buzzed with static and in that fragile silence... the sirens began again.

The message echoed through pubs in Westlands, living rooms in Kisumu, makeshift army posts in the Northlands and dusty radios in remote Turkana villages. Power was absolute and, in that moment, so was his voice.

Inside the State House, minutes later.

"Viewership?" President Mahoro asked as he strode down the executive wing corridor, removing his earpiece with a tug.

"Eighty-three per cent of urban households tuned in, sir," said one of the intelligence officers beside him. "Over six million citizens. Rural relay ongoing via national radio."

The President gave a slight nod and continued towards the situation room. His pace was steady, but the air crackled with unease. Cabinet ministers, political advisors and aides lined the corridor like penitents outside a confessional.

Then, a voice broke the hush.

"Mr President!"

Mahoro paused.

It was the Minister of Internal Security, Pauline Kanja, heels clicking as she rushed forward, face tight with restrained panic.

"You cannot arrest the opposition leader, at least not tonight," she said in a low voice, glancing nervously at the nearby staff. "It could trigger retaliation. Sir, with what just happened in Parliament... we are not ready."

Mahoro turned to her, slowly.

His eyes bore into hers.

"I did not ask for your caution," he said coldly.

"But sir..."

"The people," he cut her off, "have had their say today. It is time they listened."

He turned to his senior advisor, Wendo, standing by the situation room doors. "Make sure that man is picked up before ten. No cameras. No interviews. No stunts."

"And make sure he is still breathing," added Mahoro after a beat. "But only just."

Then, facing Pauline again, he added without blinking, "If fear is clouding your judgment, say so now. I do not need frightened ministers. Only obedient ones."

He walked on.

Behind him, staff snapped into motion. Military aides fell into step. Outside, in the darkening Nairobi skyline, sirens rose and echoed, an unsettling lullaby to a republic that had, by sunset, lost far more than calm.

Across town, at a private residence-turned-command centre in Loresho, the atmosphere inside the expansive lounge was thick with adrenaline. Floodlights from parked media vans lit the compound in harsh white, illuminating a row of tinted SUVs and a garden now filled with armed men.

Inside, Honourable Duma stood before a row of microphones, his hands spread across the podium like a general before war. Behind him, two rows of heavily armed bodyguards flanked the mahogany-panelled wall, each dressed in full combat gear, Kevlar vests, earpieces, sidearms and assault rifles hanging from shoulder slings. Every entrance was covered. Near the windows stood four men in fitted suits, stone-faced, discreetly armed. They did not speak. They scanned.

Duma's eyes glimmered under the hot lights. His sleeves were rolled halfway up his forearms, revealing the sweat on his skin and the veins on his clenched fists.

"They said they would silence us," he began, his voice hoarse with conviction. "But what they forget is that we were born in silence. Raised in injustice. Forged in fire."

Flashes from cameras lit up the room as his tone rose.

"I have seen the footage. I know what they are saying. A state of emergency? Arrest warrants on live television? This is not leadership, it is cowardice wrapped in uniforms!"

He jabbed a finger toward the nearest camera.

"Let them come. Let them try. I am not hiding. I am right here."

Murmurs rippled through the press corps, but no one dared interrupt.

"They think power comes from the barrel of a gun. They forget that power begins in the heart of the people, and mine beats loud tonight."

His voice dropped, darker now.

"Yes, I am a man. Just like them. We are all men. We all walk on two legs and carry two testicles," he said with blunt force, pausing as gasps and nervous laughter scattered across the room.

"But the difference?" He leaned forward, face hardening. "They have uniforms. I have a purpose. They have tanks. I have people. They have fear. I have nothing to lose."

He glanced behind him. One of the bodyguards gave a curt nod. Every man in the room, whether in camouflage or a suit, was already on edge. None were smiling.

"I do not want war," Duma continued, "but if you come into my home with threats and handcuffs, expect to be met with resistance. I will defend myself. I will defend my people."

He slapped the podium once. A single, defiant thud.

"They know I have the means. If they want fire, then let them come ready to burn."

Duma had just paused, his last words echoing off the concrete walls and bouncing through the minds of everyone watching live, when a low, guttural rumble filled the air. It came from outside.

The cameras swerved. Journalists turned. In the silence that followed Duma's declaration, the unmistakable sound of an engine growling up the driveway struck tension like a hammer to glass.

A military truck, matte green, its doors marked with government insignia, rolled into the compound like a beast uninvited. It halted with a hydraulic hiss near the front steps. The cameras zoomed in.

From the passenger side, a single man stepped down. He wore a grey suit, crisp and clean, but the stiffness of his shoulders betrayed that he was no ordinary emissary. His walk was calm, measured. No visible weapon. But he carried the unmistakable scent of authority.

Two of Duma's bodyguards moved like shadows. Their rifles dropped to ready position, cutting off the suited man before he could make it halfway across the tiled courtyard.

"Stop right there!" one barked.

"Don't move!" the other echoed, already reaching out to pat him down.

The cameras captured every second. Not a word was muted. Not a frame was blurred. It was happening live.

Duma, still standing at the podium, raised his hand.

"Let him pass," he said, his voice calm but heavy with curiosity. "Search him first."

Obedient but wary, the guards moved in. One gripped the man's arm while the other quickly frisked him. A pistol was retrieved from the inner pocket of his blazer. Loaded.

They said nothing. Just held it up.

He nodded at them, then approached the podium, stopping just to the left of the microphone where Duma's towering figure waited.

The man leaned in slightly, his voice low but clear enough for every boom mic to catch.

"Honourable Duma," he said tightly, "I have orders from above. I am requesting your permission to arrest you... peacefully."

Duma turned his face slowly toward the man, then pivoted just slightly, addressing the cameras directly. His voice came out sharp, cold and deliberate.

"Under what charges?"

He did not ask the man. He asked the nation.

The hum of the idling military truck seemed to hang in the air, thick as the tension gripping the nation through live television. Its arrival had already shifted the mood in Honourable Duma's compound. Now, as the lone man in a suit stepped forward, permission to arrest the opposition leader spilling from his lips, the rest of the occupants began to disembark from the truck behind him.

First came boots, black, polished and uniform. The kind that hit the pavement with the thud of discipline. Then the rest of them emerged: a unit of eight soldiers, all clad in full military regalia. Olive-green fatigues fitted perfectly against their hardened frames, flak jackets strapped tightly across their chests, emblazoned with government insignia and serials. Each of them wore a matte black

tactical helmet with a flip-up visor, some left raised to reveal young, stern faces. Their eyes were cold, focused.

Each carried an automatic weapon, mostly G3 rifles and newer models of standard-issue carbines. Some held them slung across their torsos; others kept their fingers lightly near the trigger. A few had sidearms strapped to their thighs, and one soldier, bulkier than the rest, carried a riot control launcher over his back. They moved in formation, not hurried, not aggressive, just silent, trained and unwavering.

On Duma's end, his compound did not shake.

The bodyguards had already fanned out, all ten of them. The combat-trained inner circle wore civilian combat gear: tactical black, tight body armour, earpieces feeding them continuous updates from their lookouts perched on nearby rooftops. Their weapons were visible, semi-automatics, submachine guns and even an old but reliable M4A1. Behind them, more men in suits, his private security detail, kept their hands close to their coats, eyes darting between the press, the soldiers and the lone man still standing before Duma.

Neither side flinched.

Duma's presence never wavered. He stood upright at the podium, the microphones still pointed at him. Cameras captured every glint of sweat on foreheads, every gun twitch, every finger tap on the rifle barrel. This was no longer a press conference. It was a standoff.

The suited officer before him adjusted his tie nervously.

"Please," he said again, a little louder now. "Let us not make this harder than it needs to be. We are only here to carry out our orders."

Duma smiled. It was not warm. It was not welcoming. It was pure defiance.

"This is how far your government is willing to go?" he asked, addressing not the officer, but the cameras. "Sending men with guns to silence citizens speaking the truth?"

At that, the soldiers behind the officer moved forward, spreading into the compound's open courtyard. Their boots echoed on the tiles.

The press, who until now had maintained brave faces, began to visibly tense. Several journalists exchanged nervous glances. Some slowly stepped back, dragging their cameras and gear with them.

Duma adjusted the mic with measured calm and turned slightly toward the advancing officers, his voice carrying a steadiness that belied the rising tension. "I kindly request any government employee here on an unofficial capacity to respectfully leave my compound," he said, not as a plea but a reminder of boundaries. His eyes swept across the yard, but none moved. They stood rigid, pretending not to hear, eyes forward like programmed sentries. What unsettled him more was how a few, emboldened by silence, began pacing around the compound, peering into corners, past parked vehicles, even into the direction of the guest wing if it was state property and not a private residence. Their arrogance gnawed at him more than their guns.

The remaining press didn't need to be told. Tripods were abandoned. Mics fell. Cameras were slung back and hoisted as their bearers bolted for the exit gate. The broadcast was cut instantly. But by then the people had already seen enough.

With the journalists fleeing, the atmosphere soured further. The soldiers were now within metres of the podium, but Duma's bodyguards hadn't moved. Rifles aimed. Fingers tensed.

"You fire," one of Duma's men said coldly, "and you won't leave here."

The suited officer tried again.

"Stand down. All we need is the boss. We don't have to do this. No one needs to get hurt."

The honourable politician stepped away from the microphone, his voice harder than ever.

"Anyone laying a hand on me without a warrant will answer not just to me but to the people."

Suddenly, a bodyguard lunged.

The officer dodged, stepping back instinctively, but it was too late. That lunge, a signal of boiling frustration, triggered chaos.

It began with fists. One of the soldiers punched the bodyguard to the ground. Another bodyguard tackled him instantly, and within seconds, the courtyard became a battlefield of elbows, knees and boots. The clash of bodies echoed louder than gunfire. Men grunted, weapons clattered to the ground, helmets were ripped off and thrown.

Then came the crack of a warning shot.

A soldier, panicked, pushed and fired into the air. That single bang shattered the last thread of order.

Weapons were raised.

A flurry of shots rang out, sharp and fast. Bullets struck concrete, shattered tiles, and splintered a wooden bench. Glass from an overhead security light exploded into dust. But through all that violence, not a single bullet found flesh. Both sides knew this was posturing, each too trained to fire to kill unless pushed beyond the edge.

Duma was shielded by three bodyguards, their backs against his chest, returning fire into the air and toward the soldiers' boots. A soldier ducked behind a pillar, radioing for backup. The officer yelled for a ceasefire, waving his arms, his voice drowned beneath the cacophony.

And just like that, it stopped. The shooting died down to silence.

Smoke curled in the courtyard. A few rifles were on the floor, kicked away. One soldier's nose bled, another had his helmet missing and was crouched behind a flowerbed. Duma's men regrouped, guns still up, eyes burning with fury.

The officer stood back up, panting, his hands still raised. His suit was torn at the shoulder.

"This was not supposed to happen," he muttered.

Duma stepped out from behind his guards, brushing dust off his sleeve. His voice was almost calm.

Duma stepped forward, brushing the dust from his sleeve with slow precision. His voice remained composed, but carried the weight of authority.

"You came here armed," he said, his gaze sweeping over the intruders. "And now you're walking out, empty-handed."

He paused, then added, firmer this time, "I ask you again to leave my compound. Let us reason like men who still possess sense. Do not gamble with your lives to impress commanders hiding comfortably behind reinforced doors. This ground is not a battlefield, unless you make it one."

The officer opened his mouth but did not speak. His lips parted, perhaps to offer an excuse, perhaps to issue another order, but no words came. There was nothing left to say. With a slow, reluctant nod, he turned on his heel and began the long walk back toward the military truck. Behind him, the soldiers fell in line, moving in pairs, their heads slightly bowed, rifles slung across their chests like heavy reminders of a failed mission. Their boots thudded against the gravel, a rhythm of retreat that echoed with humiliation.

It was a quiet, deliberate walk, one not of discipline, but of defeat. A reminder that power without control was merely noise. One of Duma's men, standing near the edge of the path, nudged a discarded rifle with the tip of his boot, sending it sliding across the dust back to its owners. A soldier bent down, picked it up without looking up and moved on without a word.

There was no honour in the way they returned to their truck, no posture of victory, no pride in their steps. You could win a war only if you brought a gun to a knife fight. But when the other side was just as armed, just as prepared and just as willing to bleed, then the game changed. Then, you did not walk out a victor. You walked out uncertain. You either walked out lucky. Or worse, you walked out ashamed.

And as the truck roared to life and began to roll away, the compound behind them remained solid, intact, unshaken. The opposition had not only stood their ground. They had reminded the country and the government that balance did not always mean peace; it sometimes meant a standoff. And in such moments, nobody truly won.

Duma turned back toward the podium. Dust swirled faintly in the silence they left behind. A few shaken journalists lingered, casting hesitant glances between their equipment and the armed guards still standing sentinel.

He took one last look at them and said, with finality, "The day is done."

Then he turned and walked calmly back toward the main building. His footsteps echoed against the concrete as his security detail closed in behind him, rifles still firmly in hand. The compound, a sprawling estate tucked within high concrete walls, remained on high alert. Spotlights lit up the perimeter. Armed security guards paced quietly at the gates. Rooftop sentries scanned the surroundings from raised vantage points, their weapons silhouetted against the deepening sky.

Night descended like a heavy curtain, folding over the estate with the weight of anticipation. The tension did not remain confined within the walls of Duma's compound. Across the nation, the confrontation stirred waves of unrest. Duma was not just an individual, he was a symbol, a voice for millions who felt unheard, overlooked and pushed to the margins. His resistance ignited something deeper, more volatile. Protests flared in towns and settlements. Youths blocked roads, lit fires in marketplaces and chanted his name.

The government's failed attempt to arrest him was not seen as a show of strength; it was seen as fear. And in that fear, the people found a cause. To silence Duma, they would have to silence an entire generation.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The air carried a stillness that felt unnatural. Not the calm before a storm, this was the hush of a nation already in it.

By six in the morning, armed officers stood in rows outside nearly every government building and city roundabout. They wore dark riot gear and visors, their fingers never far from the triggers. The morning paper, what little was printed overnight before presses were halted, screamed *Attempted Coup Foiled: Government Responds with Emergency Powers.* A lie, but one that sounded official enough.

On the state-owned radio, the message was simple and on loop: "We acted decisively to prevent bloodshed. Let the people know: the Republic is safe." Yet, outside homes, families peered from behind curtains, unsure whether to step outside, unsure what counted as legal anymore.

Uniformed men patrolled the estates, stopping motorcycles, matatus and lone pedestrians. No questions asked, just orders barked: "Show your ID" "Where are you going?" "Do you want to be arrested?" Many shops remained shut, unsure whether the curfew had been lifted or if it ever would be.

A soldier in Kitisuru knocked down a vegetable kiosk after the vendor asked whether she could pack her remaining tomatoes. In downtown Nakuru, officers barged into hostels claiming to be looking for "radical students." In Kisumu, residents awoke to find the local FM station burned down overnight. Nobody claimed responsibility. No one would dare.

Meanwhile, the government spokesperson appeared briefly on national television, a stern face framed by the flag.

"There was an attempted coup," she said, each word deliberately slow. "It failed. Some among us chose rebellion. Now, the law will decide their fate."

Behind her, photos of the opposition leader flashed. A red banner read; Wanted For Treason.

But no one had seen tanks roll out the night before. No buildings had been seized. No generals had defected. Only a failed arrest, humiliating and public and now a narrative shaped around it to justify repression.

Citizens stopped talking in public. Taxi drivers avoided political talk. Market women who once shouted prices now whispered. Even at funerals, mourners looked over their shoulders. The word coup hung over the country like a curse, but nobody had seen it happen. They were only told an attempt had been made.

It was not peace. It was submission, and everyone felt it. The silence was not safety but control. The country had not breathed properly since the state of emergency was announced. The streets were half-alive, watched over by soldiers who treated every bystander like a threat. Supermarkets remained open but under curfew-hour schedules. News anchors read statements like they were hostages. The government insisted it had foiled an attempted coup, one that the people knew never existed.

In the middle of that forced calm, life still happened. It had to.

Bodies were being prepared for burial quietly. People whispered instead of crying. Families grieved with eyes, not voices.

In Kamageta village, the homestead of the late teacher John Obilo was a hive of restrained activity. Men carried planks, women arranged benches, and boys chased chickens out of the new construction. A modern three-bedroom house now stood proudly at the far end of

the family land, cream-painted and roofed with galvanised sheets that reflected the sun with vengeance.

It had taken five days to put it up—a record.

Inside, Obilo's father sat alone in the sitting room, his eyes not on the mourners outside but on the white ceiling above. It curved neatly along the corners. A small chandelier hung where a single naked bulb would have done the job. Its yellow light shimmered softly on the tiled floor, bouncing off the unoccupied sofas still covered in plastic.

He shook his head slowly.

If his son had been alive, this house would not exist.

The thought sat with him like an unwelcome guest. It was bitter, but true.

His phone buzzed quietly beside him. He picked it up without hurry and glanced at the screen, another bank alert. The message was short, the amount decent. His balance was well past the half-million mark now.

He opened the banking app and refreshed it.

Still the same figure.

But more was coming. He knew.

The president himself had pledged during the press conference. Said the government was mourning alongside him. That they stood with the family. It was not the fault of the officers. That investigations would be conducted.

He scoffed silently at the memory.

Even the governor had called and promised something. And the senator's aide had texted. All of them would speak at the funeral. And all of them, he thought, would leave something small after their speeches.

That is how it was done.

Outside, a cow bellowed in protest as it was dragged toward the slaughter corner. Women sat in rows peeling potatoes. The youth were

erecting a tent. The body was yet to arrive from the city, but the grave had been dug. Red earth lay in a mound beside it like a waiting tongue.

But in that quiet house, the father of John Obilo did not move. He watched the ceiling again, the chandelier slowly turning from the breeze of an open window.

No one asked if he would have preferred his son to live over a house.

They did not need to. He would have burned the chandelier with his own hands.

Linet sat beneath the wide mango tree, the shade stretching past her bare feet and swallowing the heat of the late morning sun. A half-full calabash rested gently in her palms, its curved mouth pressed to her lips as she sipped the thick porridge slowly. It was warm and earthy, made from millet and sorghum flour. The kind that held your stomach for hours.

In the capital, a full calabash like that would have cost fifty shillings or maybe more, depending on the street. Here, in the village, a whole thermos of it sat at her feet, still untouched. She could drink until she got tired. No one would ask.

Her two children were asleep inside the old house. Exhausted from the constant murmurs, the unfamiliar faces, the sudden attention. For them, grief still wore confusion. Their small minds could not yet understand the permanence of death.

Linet leaned back against the tree trunk and shut her eyes briefly.

Her thoughts, unwelcome as they were, kept returning to the city. To the promise the governor had made. A job. Two hundred and fifty thousand shillings a month. A quarter of a million. She could barely grasp the figure.

She was not sure if she had the qualifications. The governor never said what the job was. Perhaps he had not yet decided. But honestly, at that pay, she could do anything, anything noble, that is. Even cleaning

offices, making tea, and filing forms. Whatever it took. With the way the months flew by these days. Blink once, and it was payday again.

She bent forward, poured another measure of porridge into the calabash from the thermos and took a long sip. Her lips were sticky from the flour, but she did not wipe them.

The breeze shifted, and the smell of fresh paint wafted from the new house behind her. Her father-in-law was inside, most likely still staring at the ceiling. She had seen how his eyes had lingered on the small chandelier. Perhaps he had never imagined such a house would one day stand in this compound. Neither had she.

But it had come at a cost.

John.

Her husband.

Her breath hitched slightly, a quiet shudder passing through her chest, not quite a sob but close, the kind of ache that had visited her so many times over the past few days she no longer knew what to do with it. She did not cry, not anymore. The tears had dried up somewhere between the third and fourth day, when the house had started to empty and the mourning visitors had begun to speak of other things, weather, politics and the price of maize.

She had cried before, endlessly, until the sound of her weeping felt like a stranger's voice, until her ribs ached from the shaking and her throat was raw with silence and still, none of it had brought him back.

He was gone.

He would never sit under this mango tree again, laughing at her for using too much firewood to warm the porridge. He would never call out to the children from the gate, asking them to run and open the door for him like it was some grand homecoming. He would never argue politics with his father again, never lie beside her at night with one hand resting lightly on her belly, as if to remind her that she was not alone in the world.

That hand. That touch. That man. Gone.

They had first told her, in that measured, careful way people speak when they fear a woman might break, that John had simply collapsed while in custody. A cold, bloodless line delivered without emotion as though it were a matter of routine. She had listened, numb, even as her eyes fell to the bruising on his cheek, the dark swell behind his ear, the rib that jutted slightly out of place beneath the cloth. That was not a collapse. That was something else.

Later, the story shifted. The word murdered began to appear in whispers. Slipped into conversations between neighbours and relatives, spoken carefully at first, then louder, with anger and grief and that sense of betrayal that had grown like wildfire across the villages. He had not simply died. He had been taken. And with him, many others too.

His death had come during a storm of protest, when the streets had boiled over and the air tasted of tear gas and rage. She knew she was not alone. That many other mothers, wives, brothers and sons had wept into pillows and on sidewalks, staring at empty shoes, cold beds and unopened lunchboxes.

It was a massive cause, larger than her grief and yet shaped by it too. The mourning had become collective, the sorrow national. Linet was wise enough to understand what it meant when people started coming around, offering help, jobs, gestures that looked like kindness but smelled faintly of politics. She would take it. She would take something from it all.

Why should she be left with nothing?

They did not expect her to ask questions. They never do. For a time, she had not asked any questions but had only cried.

But even that had passed, what came after was worse. Emptiness. A stillness that settled in her bones, that sat with her beneath the mango tree, that followed her into bed each night.

He was gone. And nothing, no official statement, no apology, no coffin carved with care, nothing would ever bring him back.

She missed him so fiercely, she feared she might choke on the air he no longer breathed.

Now they were here. In the village. Waiting for the coffin. For the speeches. For the soil.

She wiped a drop of porridge from the corner of her mouth and stared at the horizon. How long should she wait before leaving? Two weeks after the burial, was that too soon? Would people talk? Would they say she had not mourned him enough?

Let them. Let them say whatever they wanted.

He was her husband. No one could have felt the pain deeper than she had. Not even his father, sitting in his new house, counting bank alerts like blessings.

If Obilo's mother had been alive, perhaps she would still be wailing. Perhaps she would have stood on that compound and torn her clothes and screamed into the earth. She was that kind of woman. Fire in her bones.

But she was long gone, and with her went any resistance.

Now they were left to mourn in silence, under mango trees, sipping porridge, dreaming of salaries and chandeliers.

Here, in this country, everyone knew the truth: everything had a price. Even death.

The sun hung low in the sky as the hearse, a gleaming black vehicle, slowly rolled through the gates of the compound. Its polished surface gleamed in the dying light, but the sight was an omen. The quiet hum of the engine was the only sound that punctuated the otherwise heavy stillness of the surroundings. The women standing by the gates, clad in traditional mourning attire, began to murmur among themselves. As the vehicle drew closer, their whispers intensified, and soon the hum was replaced by the collective sound of soft sobs.

It wasn't until the hearse halted before the main house, its doors opening with a slow groan, that the stillness shattered. Linet, seated under the mango tree, stood up at once, her heart thudding louder than

the rapid footsteps of those around her. The air felt thick, suffocating almost, as though the very earth beneath her was holding its breath, waiting.

Linet's eyes were fixed on the black casket being pulled out, a silent figure moving with purpose, steady hands moving with reverence. There was a tremor in her chest as she glanced back toward the newly built house, the home that had once held such promise but now seemed hollow in the face of loss. She hadn't thought much of the house until now, until the coffin was brought here; now the walls and doors felt like they were closing in. Her legs felt like jelly, but she stood firm, refusing to let herself collapse.

The wailing started as soon as the coffin was placed on the ground, the cries of the women rising in unison as they gathered around. Their voices filled the compound, a cacophony of sorrow that shook the air, thick with grief. The sound seemed to echo off the newly built walls, a reminder of what could have been, a life unfulfilled, a future snatched away.

The men carried the coffin, stepping carefully, their faces hard with grief, their movements precise. It was almost as if they were trying to do it without disturbing the air of sadness that hung heavy, like a weight on their shoulders.

Linet couldn't bring herself to look at the body yet. She watched as they placed the coffin beneath the designated tent, the canvas flapping lightly in the wind. The shade from the tent only made the scene more surreal. The air seemed colder under the canopy and Linet shivered, not from the chill, but from the emptiness she felt inside.

As the body was carefully laid to rest in the coffin, Linet could finally see him. The face that had once smiled and shared words with her, the man who had been her companion, the father of her children was no longer alive. John Obilo, her beloved husband, now appeared stiff and lifeless, his skin unnaturally pale, drawn tight over the skull. His eyes were closed, sealed in a permanent state of rest, but Linet

couldn't help but feel the weight of his gaze, like he was still watching her from behind the thin, lifeless veil of skin. The fractures on his skull were visible now, pale marks like scars on the face of death itself. His face, once full of life and laughter, now looked like it had been carved from stone, too rigid and dry for her to recognize him fully. The bruises from his last hours, the evidence of the violence he'd suffered, were no longer hidden beneath the cover of his shirt. It was all there for everyone to see. His body bore the marks of the brutality that had taken his life; he had been robbed of his breath, of his future.

Tears welled up in her eyes, but she wiped them away quickly, as though ashamed to let anyone see. This wasn't the time for her to break down; this was the time to honour him, even in death.

The murmurs of the crowd grew louder as they approached the coffin, and one by one, people started placing wreaths of flowers around the casket. Their hands trembled as they offered their condolences, but the wife couldn't hear their words. She couldn't even focus on what they were saying; her mind was numb, her thoughts swirling like a storm she couldn't quite escape. All she could hear was the beat of her own heart and the overwhelming weight of grief.

The wails reached a fever pitch as the women, deep in mourning, began to raise their voices higher. It was a ritual, one that marked the passage of a loved one, but for Linet, it felt suffocating. The air seemed to close in tighter with every sob, and the weight of reality crushed her chest. John was gone. There would be no more waking up beside him, no more shared laughter. There would be no more future to build together.

As the burial preparations began, a quietness fell over the crowd. The wailing had softened into sobs and whispers. But Linet could feel something else in the air, a palpable tension, like something was about to happen. It was as if the ground beneath her feet was quivering, as though the earth itself was waiting for a final sign. The distant hum of a

vehicle drew her attention briefly, but it was gone before she could turn to see what it was.

As the sun dipped lower and the final touches to the burial site continued, she caught a glimpse of movement beyond the trees, a figure passing quickly between shadows. Probably just one of the neighbours coming to help, she told herself, though a brief chill ran down her spine.

The strange heaviness in the air lingered, not of looming danger, but of grief that had settled too deep to shake. People moved about in hushed tones, tending to the last tasks before nightfall. The grave had been dug, the matting laid and the food preparations were well underway. Everything pointed to the reality that, by this time the next day, he would be underground.

She remained still beneath the mango tree, watching as someone adjusted the tent ropes flapping in the breeze. Her husband's body, silent and stiff beneath white fabric, lay just metres away.

Nothing else was coming. No twist, no miracle. Just the quiet descent toward burial.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

DCP Silvanus Mbeke sat at the head of the long mahogany breakfast table, a steaming mug of black tea in front of him. The early morning light slanted in through the tall glass windows, falling across the patterned marble floor of his sprawling residence on the outskirts of Nairobi. Outside, two uniformed guards paced the compound perimeter, their rifles slung across their chests. The flag on the main gate fluttered gently in the breeze.

His two-year-old grandson, perched on a booster seat to his left, noisily fished cereal bits from his bowl, lips smacking as milk dribbled down his chin. Mbeke glanced down at the child briefly, then back at his phone. It had just rung.

The name that flashed on the screen was not one to ignore.

He answered with a polite, "Your Excellency."

The voice on the other end was calm, even warm, but the message carried weight. After the usual pleasantries, compliments about calm handling, about restraint, about loyalty, the President's tone shifted.

"There's something I need you to do for me, Silvanus."

Mbeke straightened in his chair, already suspecting what was coming.

"I want to lift the state of emergency by evening," the President said. "And... I've been advised, strongly advised, to ask you to step aside. Temporarily. Just to give room for the so-called investigations."

The DCP did not answer right away. He blinked slowly, eyes fixed on the glossy surface of the table.

"Step aside, as in... I'm being fired?"

"No. No, not fired. You're not resigning either," the President assured him. "It's just for a while. A month or two at most. You'll remain on full pay. But for now... stay off the front lines."

There was a long silence.

"I see," Mbeke said finally, though his voice betrayed his displeasure. "So I'm to disappear for a while. Because it's upsetting people that I'm still on the job."

"It's not just people," the President said quietly. "The nation is restless. You sentenced a man to die out of impulse. That has consequences, my friend."

Mbeke reached for his coat on the chair behind him, then let it fall back again. He exhaled through his nose and rubbed the back of his neck. Across the table, Amina, his wife of twenty years, looked up from her newspaper and nodded once, her gaze firm.

"Maybe it is for the best, Silvanus," she said gently. "You're still the head of the police service. Listen to your friend, the head of state. Things are hot right now."

He looked at her, then at the child, now laughing at something only he found funny. Mbeke sighed.

"Very well," he said into the phone. "But allow me to finish the day's duties, sir. I'm scheduled to fly to Mandera to open a new police post. Heavy security is already in place. I'd rather not have it cancelled last minute."

A brief pause. "Fine," the President said. "Handle that. Quietly. Then let the statement come out in the evening."

"Yes, sir."

They hung up. Mbeke sat still for a moment, staring out the window at the guards beyond the hedge. Then he rose.

He walked to the corridor and summoned one of the guards in green beret uniform.

"Get the convoy ready. The armoured Land Cruisers. We leave for Wilson in thirty minutes."

He turned back, adjusting his cufflinks, while Amina called out behind him, "And be back before nightfall. This is your last day in the sun."

Mbeke said nothing. He simply kept walking.

The convoy rolled out of DCP Silvanus Mbeke's compound with mechanical precision, four armoured Land Cruisers flanked by two outriders, their sirens silent, red and blue lights blinking rhythmically. The roads had been cleared in advance, traffic momentarily held back as the powerful fleet tore through the early Nairobi traffic towards Wilson Airport.

Inside the lead vehicle, Mbeke sat still, his expression unreadable behind dark-tinted sunglasses. Beside him, a major in full combat gear held a secure tablet, scrolling through last-minute briefings. The mood in the car was silent, save for the occasional crackle of encrypted radio chatter.

At the airstrip, a section of the military wing stood ready. Three matte-grey aircraft and short-range tactical planes lined the tarmac. One of them already had its side door open, ramp down, engines purring in low, waiting hums.

As they disembarked from the vehicles, a colonel stepped forward and saluted.

"Sir. Aircraft is prepped. ETA to Mandera is seventy-five minutes. Team Bravo is already on the ground securing the area."

"Good," Mbeke replied. He adjusted the beret handed to him and climbed aboard without another word.

Six elite officers accompanied him, men drawn from the most classified ranks of national security, each one cleared at the highest level, each one trained to kill without hesitation. Their movements were sharp, silent, and calculated.

Moments later, the aircraft ascended with clinical ease, banking northeast toward the unforgiving terrain of the region that had been ravaged by lawlessness.

Far away, on the other side of the journey, nestled in the vast, dusty plains of north-eastern Kenya, a manyatta stood where no village should have existed.

It was not home to pastoralists.

Twelve men sat under the low, domed shelter made of mud and cow dung. But they were no nomads. Their faces were hard, angular, sun-burned but unreadable, bearing calluses of war. Crates of ammunition lay partially hidden beneath goat hides. Their weapons, FN SCARs, M4 carbines, and modified RPGs rested against the wall like walking sticks.

A small, ticking wristwatch passed between them. One man checked it, nodded once, then passed it back. Not a word was spoken.

They had not come for loot. They were not bandits nor rebels.

They had come for one man.

And they had sworn he would not return.

Silvanus Mbeke was a dead man walking.

BEHIND THE THICK, SOUNDPROOF doors of the presidential situation room, the air was cooler, stiller. The president sat at the far end of the polished mahogany table, staring at the glass of water in front of him. His deputy, Musa, leaned back in a leather chair, fingers drumming lightly on the table's edge.

The door opened with a muted knock. The PA stepped inside, composed, professional, and unreadable as always.

Yami walked in with her usual poise, a small leather notebook tucked under one arm, tablet in hand. Her heels clicked softly on the floor, hair pulled into a tidy bun, her navy-blue suit crisp and tailored to perfection. A sharp mind hid behind those almond-shaped eyes. She had earned her place not by favour, but through ruthless efficiency and unwavering discretion. The President glanced up and gave a faint

smile, one that never reached his eyes. Deputy President Musa offered a courteous nod. "Yami," he said. "Still keeping us on our toes."

She gave a polite smile in return. "Always, sir."

The formalities were brief, as always. She never lingered longer than necessary and never once crossed the line into familiarity, yet that did little to calm the quiet storm of resentment that brewed elsewhere.

The First Lady had never warmed up to her. She had made no effort to hide her distaste. A younger woman in power, attractive without trying and always close to her husband, too close for comfort. Women could smell competition before it took form, even if it was imagined. Jealousy did not need truth to blossom, and Yami's quiet presence was all the threat she needed. Women! Such jealous creatures.

"Sir," she began, addressing the Head of State directly. "The DCP has boarded the aircraft. He's on his way to the north."

Nshimba looked up slowly. "Everything in order?"

"Yes, Mr President. Operation is active. In a few hours, you'll receive confirmation."

There was a long pause. Only the low hum of the AC vent could be heard.

Then, Musa spoke.

"Do not feel guilty," he said, eyes fixed on the President. "We are doing what must be done."

The president did not answer.

Musa leaned forward, voice firmer now. "If we arrest him, parade him in cuffs, send him to trial, what are we telling the nation? That shouting loud enough makes us bend? That government policy is determined by mobs on the streets?"

Mahoro Nshimba exhaled sharply through his nose but still said nothing.

Musa continued, "Next, they'll demand you fire so-and-so, reduce prices, reshuffle the military, and apologise to people who voted against us. Where does it end?"

The PA stood silently, waiting.

"We give them this man who made his bed," Musa said, "but on our terms. Quietly. Controlled. He dies as an officer, not as a criminal."

Finally, the president nodded.

"Keep me updated," he said to his PA, voice level.

She gave a respectful bow and left the room.

The two men sat alone in the silence that followed. Somewhere far from them, a plane cut through the clouds, and on the ground, vengeance took its place behind a scope.

The sun in the North was merciless, hanging overhead like a curse cast by the gods. The air was dry, the earth cracked, and the acacia trees stood still, sentinels in a land too familiar with blood. Inside the loosely fenced manyatta, made of sticks and dry branches weaved with thorns, twelve men sat in silence. They were waiting.

The engine hum above drew their eyes to the sky, a bird in the distance. Low, broad, grey. Military. It sliced through the clouds like a slow predator stalking its prey. The men knew the sound. That was no cargo drop, no surveillance flyover. It was coming in to land. Their time had come.

One of the men rose slowly, brushing red dust off his makeshift robe. His eyes, small and sharp, scanned the other faces as he unclipped a short-wave radio from his belt. He held it to his mouth, his voice low but firm.

"Ruko kwa lango?"

Are you at the gate?

A crackled reply followed.

"Affirmative. The stage is set. Just waiting for the lion to walk in."

The man grunted in approval, eyes narrowing.

"Do not let him even spit if you get the chance," he said.

This was no regular militia. No ragtag group of cattle thieves or rebel fighters. These were trained men, mercenaries for hire, with scars under their robes and kills on their conscience. Their weapons were

clean. Their movements are calculated. Their code: silence, speed, finality.

The leader, whom they referred to as Sunkuli, sat cross-legged near the entrance of the manyatta. He looked no different from the rest, a loincloth wrapped around his lean frame, beaded wristbands, even a short knobkerry resting against his knee. But everything about him was a lie. His accent was not Maasai. His feet, though bare, had the calluses of a soldier, not a herder. And the way he cleaned the bolt of his scoped rifle told of a life far removed from the plains.

Sunkuli was once part of an elite reconnaissance unit in a neighbouring country's special forces. That was before politics had soured, before orders came that he could not stomach. He had gone rogue. And when the money was right, he did not care who the target was.

Next to him sat Oketch, the youngest of the squad but a cold-hearted tactician. His earlobes had been pierced crudely with a hot nail days ago, a bead tied to each to help him blend in with the locals. It still festered. He did not complain.

"The jet is almost down," Oketch muttered, eyes scanning the rough map drawn into the dirt with a stick. "The prey will be at the compound any moment. The speeches will start, the ribbon will be waiting, cameras flashing."

He looked up at the others. "You know the job. Drop him mid-sentence if you have to. Or wait and take the shot the moment it opens. The rest of us cover and scatter. Bikes are ready. No delays, no noise. Whoever lands the kill walks away with double."

Another figure leaned against a post behind him, Wamalwa, older, bulkier and more silent than the rest. He had been part of the foreign legion work in Central Africa. He was the type to shoot and then confirm the name later. They called him 'Baba Moto' behind his back. Fire father. Not because he was fast with a trigger, but because he never left anything to bury.

Wamalwa pulled down the scarf covering his face and spat on the dry, red earth. His eyes, small and sunken from years in the bush, flicked across the circle of crouching men.

"It's personal for them," he said finally, his voice low but sharp as broken glass. "They want the body on the dirt. No speeches. No pride. Humiliation through silence."

A few heads nodded, but no one spoke.

He reached for a stick beside him and drew a line on the ground between them and the far end of the horizon. The sun was bleeding through the thick clouds overhead, giving the thorned trees and termite mounds long, unsettling shadows.

"I know we have been paid," he continued, locking eyes with the youngest in the circle. "But this one, we do it with our whole hearts. This is not about money anymore. That man turned a breathing, innocent human being into a corpse with nothing but a few words. That is not justice. That was murder. And now... judgement has been passed."

He let the words settle into the stillness. A bird called in the distance. Someone clicked the safety off their rifle.

"He deserves nothing less."

Sunkuli nodded once. That was the order.

The DCP had stepped on too many toes. His sentence of death upon a young high school teacher had spiralled beyond control. The State House had needed someone to sacrifice. Someone close enough to show seriousness, but far enough not to burn the presidency. He had been perfect. And now he would die, not by court, not by angry mobs, but in the open savannah, by strangers in robes and dust.

Sunkuli stood. "Time."

Two men immediately crouched to the front of the manyatta, lifting long crimson shukas. Beneath them, rifles, shortened barrels, suppressors taped tight, polished and oiled. They stuffed the weapons into the folds of the robes, ropes tied around their waists to hold the

rifles firm. From afar, they looked like villagers. Closer, they looked dangerous.

Sunkuli approached the two with measured steps, his eyes scanning them like a commander before battle. Dust clung to his boots and the edge of his shuka, but his stance was sharp, all business.

"Walk slow," he instructed, voice low and steady. "Keep your radios close and your hands free. The second pair will be arriving shortly at the ceremony. Do not draw attention."

He took a breath, then added, "If anyone stops you, locals, police or anyone, point to the well. Say you are looking for water. Nod toward the grazing cattle down the plains. Keep your eyes low. No stories, no stares."

He paused to study their faces, then leaned in slightly.

"If you are cornered, abort and regroup," Sunkuli said firmly. "Do not reach for your weapon unless it is necessary. Gunfire will only scatter the real prize."

The men nodded, their silence echoing agreement.

The two crouched and moved out of the manyatta through the rear, taking a shallow path that cut through the brush. Their destination was the government compound about one kilometre away. There, under the guise of peace and law, the DCP was to commission a new police post. There would be a ribbon. Cameras. Uniforms. Dignitaries. All of it... theatre. What mattered was that the man never got to speak much.

Sunkuli and the rest remained behind. Each group would move in waves. Two by two. Always two. Never alone. That was the rule.

He checked his watch. The heat pressed down like a hand. The sky was quiet now. The bird had landed.

At the same time, the black convoy cut through the arid road like oil on dry skin. Dust rose in thick spirals behind the armoured trucks and tan-coloured jeeps. At the centre of the convoy was a matte-black SUV, windows tinted, tires large, bulletproof.

The DCP sat stiff in the back seat, hands folded, eyes distant. He had refused to remove the uniform. He was, until officially declared otherwise, the Deputy Commissioner of Police. He would not fade away quietly.

Beside him sat a young colonel, face alert, eyes scanning constantly. In the front seat were two high-level officers from the GSU, men with clearance and training rivalled only by the President's detail.

"Five minutes," the driver said.

Mbeke did not reply.

He looked out the window. The compound loomed ahead. Simple building. One flag. Guard posts on either side. A gathering crowd. Journalists. Local elders. Uniformed officers stood stiff under the sun. There would be a speech. A short one. Then the ribbon-cutting.

He sighed. "Is the northern unit already here?"

"Yes, sir," the colonel replied. "Your advance team radioed twenty minutes ago. Secured perimeter."

He nodded, even as something tightened in his gut.

Meanwhile, Sunkuli held his radio close. One ear to the wind, one to the voice on the line.

"Blackbird has arrived," came the whisper.

"Target en route to podium. Ten minutes max."

"Copy," he replied.

He turned to the second pair. "Your turn. Head to the site. Walk steadily. You know what to do."

The first two disguised men had arrived. They crouched behind a rusting drum, just outside the outer security perimeter. One of them shifted the heavy fabric of his robe, just enough to let the rifle's muzzle breathe. Sweat traced a slow path down his cheek, but he did not flinch.

From where he crouched, he could see it all.

A newly built one-storey police post stood proudly at the centre of the compound, painted in bold police colours, blue and white with yellow trim. The front door remained shut, a thick ribbon tied neatly

across it in preparation for the official ceremony. A large white tent had been erected in the yard, shielding rows of plastic chairs from the northern sun. At the far end of the compound, beyond the tent, hundreds of locals gathered, many on foot, some perched on rocks and raised earth. They had come out in numbers, faces glowing with gratitude, to witness the promise of added security finally becoming reality in their remote land.

The assassin had a job to do and nothing more. He felt no anger, no personal stake in the man about to die. If it had been his blood lying cold because of that politician's order, maybe then he would have felt something. Maybe. But this? This was just work. He was here for the payout. For a tenth of a million, there was very little he would not do. Anyone could become a target. Honour, justice, vengeance, those belonged to other men. He moved forward in silence, promising himself that he would never speak of this again.

The second pair emerged from a different direction, sliding beside a battered water tank closer to the fence. They gave a silent nod.

Everything was in place.

They waited.

The DCP stepped from his SUV, straightening his hat.

A journalist with a camera raised his lens.

The ribbon shimmered in the breeze.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"...You thought I would not notice?" Duma asked, mid-laugh. "You sent men to arrest me on live TV."

"Night before last," Nshimba replied, calm as ever. "And they failed."

"Did you know they would fail?"

"I hoped they would not."

Duma exhaled through his nose, amused more than angry. He stood on the shaded veranda of his Loresho home, one hand wrapped around a large mug of steaming tea, rich with undiluted milk. The drink was thick, comforting and hot against the cold morning breeze. Sprinklers hissed in the garden beyond, flicking drops onto hibiscus and marigolds as sunbeams cut through tree branches like slow-moving swords.

"You just wanted the performance. You wanted to appear strong on your little address," Duma said, walking barefoot toward the edge of the veranda. "To let the people know no one was above your iron law."

Nshimba did not deny it. "The optics were necessary."

"And yet you are here now, on this call, asking me to calm the same people you frightened with your tanks and curfews."

"They still listen to you."

"You do not want them to."

"Duma," Nshimba's voice shifted slightly, less formal now, less guarded, "that teacher's burial could bring this country to a boil again. You know it. Let us not turn it into a campaign rally."

"A burial is not war," Duma replied flatly. "Unless you plan to make it one."

"I am asking for a ceasefire," the president said, quiet but firm.

Duma blinked. "A ceasefire?" he repeated, almost incredulous. "What is the catch, Mr. President?"

There was a brief pause on the line. "Two cabinet secretary seats," the president said. "Your choice."

Duma chuckled and turned away from the garden, his voice low and amused. "You want to buy peace at a funeral."

"I want to prevent bloodshed," Nshimba replied, then added, "I do not care what happens at that teacher's burial, Duma. Let the chants rise. Let the speeches run wild. But after that, I need to be calm. I am pleading with you, my friend. This country needs breathing space."

He paused, then said, quieter now, "I have two funerals of my own to attend. They butchered my men in the Parliament, Duma. In that very chamber. They were dragged from their seats and hacked down like dogs. I have not even mourned. But I cannot stop. I have a country to run."

Duma did not miss a beat.

"Those two MPs brought that to themselves," he said. "Who opens fire inside a House with all those people? They only wanted to loot and go."

There was a silence between them, bitter, knowing, heavy with the truth only politicians shared.

"You want to stay in control of the country while pretending the fire is out. And you are willing to pay in power." The opposition leader continued.

Silence again.

"And you know I would be a fool to say no."

"You are no fool."

Duma exhaled deeply, lifting the mug of milky tea to his lips.

"If I take those seats, the people will think I sold their grief."

"You are the only one who can turn it into justice."

Duma sipped, set the cup down, and called out, "Malik!"

The call was still open when he turned and added quietly, almost to himself, "No one from your government will be there?" he asked, ignoring the plea.

"None. I promise you that."

The middle-aged man sipped his tea, squinting at the light. "Good. Let us bury him. Properly."

"But do not fuel the people," Nshimba said.

"Do not kill them," Duma shot back.

Silence.

"That man taught biology to children, and your people cracked his skull like he was a criminal. You lost your balance that day."

"We both did."

Duma smiled. "By evening," he muttered, "we shall see who still stands."

He lowered the phone for a moment. "Malik!" he called again.

A heavyset bodyguard stepped onto the veranda.

"Prep the pilot. We leave for the burial in thirty minutes. Make sure no one from their side tries anything."

"Understood."

"No mistakes. And Malik, whether the President likes it or not, I will speak and they will listen."

Malik nodded and turned away.

Duma lifted the phone again. "You know the funny thing, President?"

"What?"

"I do not hate you."

"You should."

"There are no permanent enemies in politics," Duma said, chuckling softly. "Only permanent interests."

He ended the call, set his mug down, and looked out across the garden. The flowers danced in the breeze, unbothered. Somewhere in the distance, a helicopter engine whined to life.

Duma had just set his half-finished mug of tea on the veranda table at his Loresho home when his security aide stepped forward with a quiet nod. "They are ready for you, sir."

He stood, slipped into the dark overcoat draped on the back of his chair, and walked toward the rear of the compound. At the far end of the expansive lawn, his helicopter, the same one that always remained stationed there when not hired out, sat humming softly, its rotors already spinning in anticipation. He climbed aboard without ceremony. The aircraft lifted moments later, banking eastward as the lush green of Loresho shrank below, carrying him toward the grieving hills of Homa Bay.

Up in the air, he kept to himself. His aides spoke only when spoken to. Through the window of the chopper, the hills rolled gently beneath them, green folding into gold, the lake coming into view just beyond the ridges. At exactly 12:30 p.m., the rotors stirred the air above Homabay, flattening the grass and whipping at the black and white funeral tents as the chopper descended.

The moment his shoes touched the ground, a young local official moved towards him with a lowered voice, walking beside him as they approached the canopied area. "You've arrived just in time, sir," he said respectfully. "Mass is about to begin."

Duma offered a curt nod and walked ahead, flanked by his security. His face remained unreadable. His black shades masked the tiredness around his eyes. The crowd parted as he approached the VIP tent, and a hush settled like dust. Even the murmurs of recognition held a restrained sorrow. No chants. No slogans. Just quiet grief.

The teacher's casket sat at the centre of the grounds, flanked by wreaths, the soil beneath it freshly turned. Duma paused a moment

before sitting. One of his aides drew the seat back for him, and he settled without ceremony, scanning the crowd in silence.

And far off in the North, the air pulsed with a different energy altogether.

The sun blazed down on open land where a circle of Maasai warriors jumped in rhythm to drums, red shukas flashing in the heat. They rose and fell with the beat, each jump higher than the last, a spectacle of tradition and joy. The guests clapped, some filming, some laughing.

But two of the dancers were out of rhythm.

Their feet barely left the ground. Their smiles were taut. Hidden beneath the fold of their cloth was steel, not meant for celebration, but for execution.

While one corner of the country mourned in silence, another welcomed guests with song and concealed weapons.

Even as the mass prepared to begin, the mood beneath the white funeral tents in Homa Bay was one of tightly held rage. Eyes red from both weeping and sleepless nights stared ahead, hollow, burning with quiet contempt. Every prayer, every hymn, every eulogy barely held back the truth they all carried in their hearts, the one who caused their kin's death still breathed.

The OCS had been arrested, yes, but bonded out just as easily, along with the officers who had last seen Obilo alive. They had not just witnessed his final moments; they had participated in them, carrying out orders from above with brutal precision. It was not justice. It was a theatre. A hollow act. The system, as always, smiled with bloodied teeth.

If only tit for tat were legal in this country, one woman thought as she clutched the folded photograph of her cousin. If only grief were allowed to bite back.

Men sat with fists clenched on their laps, women rocked slowly with anger folded into sorrow. And as their eyes followed Duma's

silhouette toward the VIP tent, none missed the weight in his stride. They had not forgotten the curfew, the tanks, the silence.

Meanwhile, far to the northeast, where the wind carried no mourning but rhythm, colour and song, the Maasai jumped.

Their shukas flared with each leap, dust rising as the crowd moved in unison, their chants rising like the midday sun.

"Nikiyaa! Aiyo aiyaaa!"

"He is here! Aiyo aiyaaa!"

The warriors danced in a half-circle, surrounding the newly arrived guests. Faces bright, voices loud. Yet among them, two men, older and stiffer, barely lifted off the ground. Their jumps were shallow, brief. The weight hidden beneath their layered garb was too much to bear.

Still, they smiled, masking effort with honour. Eyes scanning the field for the cue. The guests were all here. The plan was in motion.

The guests had begun arriving early: the Cabinet Secretary for Internal Affairs, the Deputy Commissioner of Police, the local Member of Parliament, the County Assembly representative, and a handful of dignitaries from surrounding counties. Among them were former political hopefuls who had not made it past the last ballot but understood the political value of visibility. Where there were voters, there was always an opportunity to reinvent. The VIPs sat under a vast tent pitched in the centre of the compound, directly facing the still-unopened police station. The entrance bore a polished marble plaque covered by the national flag, the kind that would soon read This station was commissioned by..., and Mbeke was certain the name carved into it would be his. Security around the area was tight. Over thirty armed officers patrolled the perimeter, rifles slung, fingers loose near triggers. Others, ostensibly unarmed, were posted around the compound, recruits assigned to the new station, but each one concealing a sidearm somewhere in their uniform. In truth, a police officer without a weapon was like one missing a limb, a right arm, at that.

The Cabinet Secretary rose from his seat, adjusted his glasses, and stepped forward to the microphone with a practiced smile. The murmurs quieted. Behind him, the marble plaque waited for its unveiling.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, his voice firm, measured, "let me start by assuring you that the government is fully committed to restoring order and safety in this region. We have already increased security presence, and let me make it clear, cattle rustling will be a thing of the past. The police presence is not temporary. We are here to stay."

He paused as polite claps rippled through the tent. He gestured to the land behind the station.

"This land has sat idle for too long. The Ministry of Education, together with the local government, is planning to build a new school right here, adjacent to this station. Our children deserve access to education. This is how we secure our future."

Louder applause followed, rehearsed, bought applause. The kind that lasted just long enough for the cameras to capture.

News reporters standing by their vans caught it all, their headlines already writing themselves: "DCP Back to Work While Teacher Obilo Is Buried." The contrast wrote itself, here, a staged celebration with ribboned promises and rehearsed hope, while miles away in Homa Bay, the mood was heavy, the air laced with mourning and quiet rage. There, they buried a man. Here, they unveiled a station. Both events were dressed in national colours. Only one smelled like justice.

It started with a low commotion at the back of the crowd, shouting, then a sudden shuffle of feet against the dry ground. Heads turned. A woman let out a startled gasp. From the corner of his eye, Sunkule saw two uniformed officers wrestling a lanky man to the ground. Another pair joined in, hands gripping tight as they frogmarched him away from the gathering and towards the far edge of the compound.

Oketch.

Sunkule's jaw tightened. He did not need confirmation; it was one of his own. He and the rest of his men, dressed like locals and spaced among the crowd, glanced discreetly in that direction. The rifle had been stripped off the bony bastard before the gathering noticed. But for the trained eye, the moment was a red flag.

One of the arresting officers held up the weapon. An FNC rifle. Foreign. Illegal. Slick and deadly. Someone swore.

Sunkule's gaze remained fixed on Oketch as the man was thrown against the police van. His knees buckled beneath him. The lightweight fool had thought he could pass the rifle off as part of his body. But anyone with decent sight would have noticed that what jutted from his side wasn't the curve of a hip bone or the swell of muscle. It had been too stiff, too square. And the idiot had not even bothered to mask the weight with a limp.

They had told him to wait. To blend. But Oketch had always been impulsive; he did not understand patience. Now he would cost them everything.

Sunkule's hand fell to his waist. Cold metal met skin beneath the folds of his robe. Around him, the rest of his men faded deeper into the crowd. Not vanished, no, they were still there. Watching. Adjusting positions. Hands moving slowly to where steel slept under cotton.

Some of the plain-clothed officers, the government's own, also began shifting, disappearing subtly behind bushes, mingling into the press of the villagers. Trained eyes met trained eyes. There was no mistaking it now.

The air had shifted.

Sunkule licked his lips and cursed under his breath. This was too soon.

At the podium, the Deputy Commissioner of Police stood upright, his chest bulging out as if wearing two bulletproof vests instead of one. Perhaps he was. He had not missed the tension either. A brief whisper to the man beside him, another in sunglasses and a blue suit and the

two shifted closer to the exit flap of the VIP tent. The Commissioner's eyes scanned the crowd, but he betrayed no panic.

Sunkule hated that calm. It was the same smugness men wore when they believed the system would always save them.

They had come for him. And not just him.

Sweat beaded down Sunkule's temple. Behind him, the Maasai dancers continued their song, the rhythm thinning slightly. Two of them no longer jumped subtly, slightly, a few inches less than before. Their burden was heavier than the song allowed. The crowd barely noticed. But those watching closely, those who knew, could see the restraint.

From above, the sun beat down mercilessly, as if it too waited for the moment everything would ignite. A journalist near the centre of the crowd whispered to her cameraman to keep rolling.

The VIPs did not sit as straight anymore. Something was wrong. Something was about to happen.

Sunkule's fingers tightened around the grip beneath his robe.

Hell was pacing just outside the tent.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

From where Deputy Commissioner Mbeke sat, his eyes tracked the scuffle near the rear of the gathering. The man being whisked away looked gaunt, half-starved. Not a threat by appearance, until Mbeke saw the weapon one of the arresting officers held aloft. That was no standard-issue G3. It gleamed too clean, too foreign.

An FNC. His stomach knotted. Damn! That was close. He reached for his handkerchief and wiped a trickle of sweat off his brow. The heat pressed in, thick and oppressive, even under the tent's generous shade. The MC's voice became background noise, like a fly circling a wound.

Beside him, the Cabinet Secretary fidgeted nervously, his fingers drumming against his knee, a sheen of sweat across his temples despite the breeze from the mounted fans. A low cough escaped his throat, a thin mask for fear.

A young officer walked briskly towards Mbeke, his face taut with urgency. He leaned in close and whispered into his ear, "Sir... we have one in custody. He was armed. Not one of ours. We believe he is an assassin."

Mbeke's expression remained unreadable. He gave a slight nod, then asked quietly, "Are you sure it was not just a herdsman? Some of these nomads carry rifles to protect their livestock."

The officer shook his head firmly. "No, sir. The weapon was brand new. Serial numbers filed off. This was not for herding goats."

Mbeke straightened slowly, his eyes scanning the crowd before locking with the Cabinet Secretary's, then shifting to an MP seated two seats away.

"That's it," he said, his voice flat with finality. "We're out of here."

Across the compound, Sunkule saw the subtle exchange. Saw the shift in the DCP's posture. The way the CS stopped bouncing his knee and started preparing to stand. He could almost hear the whisper that had triggered it.

Sunkule touched the mic pinned inside his collar, just under the plaid fabric of his shuka. His lips barely moved.

"Shift to plan B," he whispered.

As if the air had changed direction, the crowd began to lean forward. From the podium, the MC squinted at the movement near the front row, at the whispered conversation among the VIPs. Years of working events like these had taught him one thing: read the room or be swallowed by it.

He cleared his throat into the mic. "Ladies and gentlemen... ehe... There is a slight change in the programme," he announced. "The commissioning of the new police post will take place immediately, right now, before our *waheshimiwa* depart."

Murmurs rippled through the crowd.

From the side, a slender Maasai girl in her teens, beads woven tightly into her braids, walked forward, balancing a flat wooden plate. Atop it lay a large ceremonial pair of silver scissors. She stepped carefully, each foot measured on the dusty grass. Her eyes avoided the armed men, the camera lenses, and the officials. She had been told to walk to the tall man in the grey suit.

Mbeke bent slightly to receive the scissors, murmuring his thanks. Then he took a breath, composed himself, and began the slow walk to the edge of the station compound. The door to the small police post—a temporary one, barely painted—had been decorated with a blue ribbon. He walked beside the CS, flanked by bodyguards who did not remove their eyes from the crowd even for a moment.

Behind them, the MC gestured to the Maasai dancers. "Let us join the Deputy Commissioner in this historic moment! Come, come!"

The dancers had retired to their seats, sweat still fresh on their brows. But two among them did not rise to the rhythm.

They stood for war.

The two Sunkule men, shuka pulled over one shoulder, eyes blank, jaws clenched, rose slowly, heavily. Not a bead of music in their bones. Beneath their layered clothes, the weight of death shifted as they began to move.

It was now or never. The Maasai dancers had risen, adorned in their vibrant reds and clinking beads, as the MC called them forward to accompany the official walk to the police post's front doors. The drums had started again, irregular, impatient thuds echoing through the compound like a forewarning. The dancers leapt and swayed, high into the air.

But something was off.

One of the dancers jumped too high. A G3 rifle crudely strapped beneath his traditional shuka dislodged and clattered to the ground.

Everything froze.

He barely had time to snatch it up before the nearby officer raised his weapon. But the dancer was faster. He rolled, then came up firing.

The officer's head snapped back as blood misted the air.

Chaos exploded. Screams. Shouts. Gunshots, deafening bursts from every direction. The second dancer ducked low, drew a pistol from beneath his beaded sash, and fired repeatedly at the police officers. Bodies dropped. People scrambled over each other, shoes abandoned, chairs overturned.

Mbeke turned sharply, hand instinctively going to his holster, but he was too exposed.

The bullets shattered the police station windows behind him, ripping through the still-sealed building as if it had never been built. Glass rained onto the dust. Marble cracked. A flag fell.

More attackers emerged from the crowd, rifles drawn from beneath suits and vests, joining in the fray. The disguised Sunkule men. They

fired ruthlessly into the bodyguards forming a wall around the dignitaries.

The Cabinet Secretary ducked low, dragged by two of his aides.

"Get him out!" Mbeke barked before a sharp impact staggered him. He had taken one in the shoulder. Gritting his teeth, he pulled his sidearm and returned fire with one hand.

A bullet punched through his thigh.

He fell to one knee, firing blindly into the dust and blood haze. He saw one of Sunkule's men go down with a scream, but another took his place. Behind him, two officers had fallen. Another staggered, hit in the neck, spraying the dusty air red.

Sunkule watched from behind a pillar, his rifle firm against his chest. His eyes locked on Mbeke, still trying to crawl, still barking orders, still fighting.

He nodded to the last of his men.

The final round came from behind. A clean shot to the back.

Mbeke slumped forward. Silent. The dust around his body turned dark.

Sunkule staggered out from behind cover, blood soaking through his side. He raised a trembling hand, his weapon hanging loosely by his hip. "We got who we wanted," he said, voice hoarse. "No one else has to die this after—"

A sharp crack cut him off. A single bullet punched clean through his forehead, snapping his head back. He crumpled to the ground, dead before his knees hit the dust.

Another officer rushed up, breathless, eyes wide with disbelief. He grabbed the shooter by the arm.

"What the hell was that for? He was the last one alive; we could have gotten something from him. He could have told us who sent them."

The shooter did not flinch. A slow, smug grin crept onto his face, but he said nothing.

He did not have to. The silence said it all. The orders from above had been painfully clear: none of the assassins were to leave that compound breathing, mission success or not. No loose ends. No answers.

And so the final thread was cut with a bullet.

News travels fast. Especially when it wears blood on its boots.

By the time word reached the funeral grounds in Homa Bay, the afternoon sun had dipped lower, stretching shadows across the mourners. The crowd was restless, stirred not by grief, but by something darker, rage, vengeance and that twisted sense of justice that rides on rumours.

Duma stood tall on the podium, his voice booming through the tinny speakers. "The killers of our beloved teacher will surely pay!" he shouted.

The crowd roared louder than before, surging with applause, fists in the air.

It was only when an aide leaned in and whispered into his ear that Duma realised the real reason for their frenzy.

The news broke just before five in the evening. The sun was still hanging lazily over the city's skyline, staining the clouds gold, but no one cared to look up. Every television screen, every radio station, and every digital news banner across the country bore the same headline in bold:

"DCP Gunned Down in the North by Vengeful Citizens — Dozens Dead in Police Station Ambush"

In homes, offices, bars, and matatus, the country paused to inhale the weight of those words. For a moment, it felt as though time itself bent, frozen by the echo of gunfire and vengeance fulfilled.

At the funeral grounds in Homa Bay, the mood had shifted before the news was even announced. As Duma stood on the podium and declared with conviction, "The killers of our beloved teacher will surely pay," he had not known that vengeance had already rippled across the

dirt outside the new police station. But the people had. Somehow, they knew. Word had passed like wind through the crowd, whispers turning to cheers, mourning turning to celebration.

It was supposed to be a sombre event. A teacher was buried. A nation grieving. Yet as the final clods of earth were packed down on Obilo's grave, people smiled. They clapped. Some even laughed. It was almost surreal.

To the observing eye, it could have been mistaken for a wedding.

Linet sat beside her father-in-law beneath the white funeral canopy, their shoulders touching as they watched the crowd erupt in jubilation. The old man nodded slowly, as if he had seen this sort of joy-before-grief long ago. Linet, her face still streaked with dried tears, managed a smile. Not the fake kind she had worn for weeks, but a tired, honest smile, one that asked, Can justice bring peace?

In that moment, she believed it could.

But the irony did not escape anyone with a conscience. How strange, how disturbingly human, to find happiness in the death of another. How twisted, how natural, to feel relief when blood has been answered with blood.

Not everyone celebrated.

Miles away, in the heart of Nairobi's plush diplomatic suburb, Amina Mbeke collapsed into her couch as the breaking news bulletin concluded. Her house was grand, the ceilings tall, but even that much air could not dilute the grief choking her.

She screamed into her palms.

Sobbed into her scarf.

The staff did not know what to do; none dared approach her. The wife of the DCP, now a widow.

She had seen it first on social media, unconfirmed whispers swirling like dust in the wind, rumours, she had thought. Surely her husband would call. He always called. Always. She tried reaching him,

again and again, her hands trembling as she clutched her phone, praying for that familiar voice.

But the call never came.

And then the news bulletin aired.

There it was. His name. His picture. The bold words scrolling at the bottom of the screen, merciless in their finality.

She did not scream. She did not faint. She just stared. The room around her seemed to fall silent, though voices still spoke and televisions still blared. Only one truth reached her now.

He was gone.

The president, appearing on screen shortly after, offered his condolences. He spoke with grace and statesmanship, saying all the right things.

"The government regrets the loss of lives, including that of Deputy Commissioner Mbeke. His service was exemplary. In light of the successful operation and restoration of public calm, I hereby lift the State of Emergency declared a day ago. Let us move forward in unity and vigilance."

The national broadcast cut to a flag fluttering slowly on screen as the presidential seal faded in, then out. Across the country, televisions dimmed, radios turned to static, and a heavy silence fell.

But inside the private wing of State House, the President was already walking away from the camera lights. The long corridor ahead was silent, draped in gold-framed portraits of former leaders and lined with the red carpet only he walked on daily. His pace was steady, each footstep muffled by the weight of leadership rather than the thickness of the fabric.

From a recessed doorway halfway down the corridor, Wendo Bala, his senior advisor, emerged and fell into step beside him.

"It was worth it," Bala said, voice low.

The President didn't answer immediately. His gaze lingered on a portrait of a predecessor who had survived a coup, then another of one who hadn't survived a scandal. "Was it?"

"Yes," Bala replied without hesitation. "The people sacrificed. They lost sons, fathers, daughters. It was only fair they took one back. Justice had to be loud."

He exhaled, not quite a sigh. "I just hope history sees it that way."

"It will," Bala assured. "Because history is written by survivors. And tonight, they feel like survivors."

The President gave a small nod, then pushed open the tall mahogany door at the end. The red carpet ended beneath his feet. But the decisions he had made would follow him far beyond that.

It was what people wanted to hear. No more curfews. No more tension on the streets.

But unity? That was wishful. What the nation had now was silence. A lull. A pause before the next eruption.

In a brightly lit medical facility in the capital, away from the noise and the mourning, Dr. Nathaniel Odour stood by a TV mounted high in the corner of the autopsy lab. He was in his usual white coat, latex gloves still on, having just finished examining a corpse from a road accident.

Beside him stood Mercy, his assistant, fiddling with a clipboard, her eyes darting to the screen.

When the news confirmed the death of the deputy commissioner of police, Dr. Odour exhaled through his nose and muttered, "Shame. I would have liked to cut him open myself."

Mercy blinked. "Sir?"

The doctor pointed at the television with his pen.

"That man... the things they say about him. The way he moved, how he organised his network, how he survived this long. I want to know if his body was ordinary. His brain, his nerves. Was he born different or just raised in hell?"

Mercy said nothing. She had worked with him long enough to know when he was speaking out of clinical curiosity. This was not admiration; it was science. He did not mourn the man. He just wanted to understand him.

"Maybe he's not so different," she finally said. "Maybe evil is just... ordinary."

Odour smirked. "That's the scariest thing you've said all week."

Back in Homa Bay, as the sun dipped and music played for the wrong reasons, Duma stepped away from the podium.

He had given the people what they wanted. Words of revenge. A promise of justice. But he could not shake the look in their eyes.

Not sadness.

Not closure.

Triumph.

It haunted him.

Later that night, news segments dissected every angle of the event, who fired first, who died bravely, and who was still missing. Mobile phone footage showed people running, screaming, and ducking as windows shattered. Photos of the destroyed police station flashed on screens, bullet-ridden walls, empty shells on blood-smeared floors.

Mbeke's face, the last image captured before the shooting started, became the symbol of the tragedy. A grainy photo of him turning his head slightly, frowning at something just off-camera. It would be printed on posters, shared online, hailed as the last moment of a man who tried to hold the line.

The station's grand opening had turned into a massacre.

But in the minds of many, it was a sacrifice worth making. The mastermind was dead. His men, all wiped out.

The story, for now, was over.

But stories like this never really end. They go quiet. They go cold.

And then they return, wearing new faces, new names.

Vengeance had been served.

But justice? Justice was still waiting.

In a quiet office somewhere in Nairobi, a man in a tailored grey suit closed the file marked "OPERATION MB-49." He slid it into a drawer lined with others just like it, each labelled with different names, dates, and codenames. His phone buzzed once. A message:

"Stage two. Proceed."

He smiled.

Then picked up another file.

Inside, a photo of Duma.

Also by Moses Atsulu

The Heart Pumps Blood
Vow of Vengeance
The Courier
Orders From Above

About the Author

Moses Atsulu is a Kenyan writer whose work boldly explores the intersection of justice, politics, and the human condition. With a sharp eye for realism and a deep empathy for the overlooked, Atsulu crafts stories that challenge authority, stir emotion, and echo long after the final page. Orders from Above is his latest contribution to the conversation on power, loss, and the weight of silence.