

ECHOES OF

DESTINY

ANDREW WALYAULA

Echoes of Destiny

Andrew Walyaula

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ISBN-13: 979-8870-87-168-4

Printed by Elong'o Publishers

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Dedication

To my beloved mother, Margaret Ashono,

Your unwavering support, encouragement, and presence throughout the journey of writing this book have been the guiding light that kept me motivated. Your belief in my abilities and your endless words of encouragement have fueled my passion for storytelling. This book is a tribute to your love, strength, and the bond we share. Thank you for being my rock and my inspiration. This work is dedicated to you with all my heart.

With love and gratitude,

Andrew Walyaula.

Foreword

I often marvel at how the pathways of our lives as individuals with a shared cognitive commitment and unwavering focus on career can interact to cause tremendous paradigm shift in our world view. And so, when my son Andrew Walyula (his father is my cousin so in our Bukusu culture he is supposed to refer to me as his father) called me that Sunday afternoon, requesting that I write these Forward for his book Echoes of Destiny, it struck my mind and left me a happy father indeed! Happy because Walyula had not just fulfilled his long-cherished desire as an author but more importantly, he was enhancing the journalism career as one of the pioneer writers in our village, Lwandanyi. When Walyula decided to pursue journalism as a career after successfully completing high school, there was a lot of resistance and discouragement, particularly from relatives and neighbors who wanted him to join the already-saturated teaching bandwagon that was synonymous with our area. Growing up on the slopes of Mt. Elgon, teaching and joining disciplined forces were popular careers where employment was guaranteed after training and so, it was a tall order persuading people to accept *khusomela khuandika kamakaseti* (training for newspaper writing) as an occupation worth their son pursuing for a living. But I am now proud that I successfully went against the grain to strongly encourage and inspire Walyula to join me in the journalism sojourner, that has eventually evolved in his ability and prowess to document the rich cultural and historical heritage of the Bukusu people who mainly reside in western Kenya.

The Bukusu people are one of the most prominent and populous sub-tribes that constitute the large Luhya community of western Kenya. The Bukusu, known for their circumcision rituals and agricultural practices, primarily inhabit Bungoma and Trans Nzoia counties. Therefore, this book espouses a journey through the lives of Felix and Isabela, two individuals whose paths are woven together by fate, tradition, and the intricate threads of human experience, to tell the historical facts about the Bukusu people albeit in a unique narrative. Written in the lyrical rhythms

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of Sub-Saharan prose, specifically Bukusu, this narrative not only tells a story but also brings to life the rich tapestry of Bukusu culture — both its ancient roots and the ways it has evolved and transformed with the passage of time.

Many authors have written a form of history of the Bukusu, either as part of a wider piece of work or a full discourse. The majority of this writings tend to look at the history of the Bukusu from a migrational approach. So, set against the backdrop of Bukusu traditions and rituals, familial bonds, and personal aspirations, this narrative unfolds with both familiarity and unexpected twists. The journey encapsulates the essence of growth, resilience, and the unending pursuit of dreams. We navigate the depths of love, friendship, and the complexities that arise when traditions intersect with the choices we make.

Through each chapter, we are drawn into a world where characters come alive, emotions resonate, and the human spirit shines through even in the darkest of moments. It is a tale that traverses generations, cultures, and the universal themes that connect us all. As we journey alongside Felix, Isabela, and their loved ones, we are reminded that life's tapestry is a composition of experiences, hopes, and the undeniable power of human connection.

Echoes of Destiny is a celebration of the human spirit's capacity to endure, evolve, and create a legacy that transcends time. It is an exploration of the intricate dance between destiny and choice. It is a true testimony of determination, cognitive risk-taking and a vivid paradigm shift in career choice and intellectual transformation for posterity.

As you turn the pages, may you find yourself immersed in a world that mirrors our own Andrew Walyaula, where the trials and triumphs of its characters echo the heartbeat of existence. May their journeys inspire you to reflect on your own path, the people who have shaped it, and the potential for transformation that lies within us all.

— **Wanyama wa Chebusiri is a former BBC journalist and a media trainer..**

Preface

The pages you are about to embark upon hold a story that transcends time, culture, and the boundaries of human experience.

From the village of Mwamba to the bustling streets of the city, this narrative traverses landscapes that are both familiar and unknown. It delves into the depths of Bukusu culture, a culture steeped in history, rituals, and values that have stood the test of time. As the narrative unfolds, you will witness how this ancient culture intersects with the modern world, shaping lives and influencing choices in ways that are both poignant and profound.

The characters you will encounter—Wasike, Nakhumicha, Felix, Isabela, and their families—mirror the complexities and triumphs of real life. Their stories are an exploration of love, sacrifice, dreams, and the inescapable ties that bind them to their roots. Through their experiences, you'll delve into the meaning of being human.

In these pages, you will witness the relentless spirit of individuals striving to define their destinies amid the ebb and flow of life's currents. From the innocence of childhood to the challenges of adulthood, from the intimate bonds of family to the power of forging one's own path, this narrative paints a portrait of life's myriad shades.

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Chapter One

Lonely Christmas Bells

The morning sun cast its warm golden rays across the Sub-Saharan landscape, announcing the dawning of a new day. The air was filled with a sense of anticipation as Mwamba village stirred to life. It was a few days before Christmas, a time of celebration and togetherness for most, but in the home of Eliud Wasike, a village elder a different story unfolded.

Nestled like a well-guarded secret amidst the emerald slopes of a majestic mountain, Mwamba village exudes an aura of enchantment. This idyllic location stands as a natural boundary between two neighboring nations, offering Mwamba a unique synthesis of tranquility and vibrant existence. Here, the symphony of nature and the cadence of human lives merge harmoniously.

At the heart of Mwamba lies the enduring embrace of the mountain itself, a guardian figure casting protective shadows and offering refuge from the elements. Its towering peaks reach skyward with an air of timeless strength, a steadfast sentinel mirroring the resilience of the village it watches over. With each dawn, the sun's golden touch graces Mwamba, casting its radiant hues upon the sky and awakening the world with its warm embrace.

The river, a lifeline that weaves through the village, becomes an unwavering companion. Its sinuous course carves a gentle path, mirroring the diverse journeys of those who call Mwamba home. The river's waters become a source of sustenance, quenching both the land's thirst and the aspirations of its people. By its tranquil banks, Wasike and his family congregate not only to wash their clothes but also to weave the threads of stories that transcend generations. The river's flow sustains more than life; it nurtures the bonds that unite the villagers and their land.

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Past the village's edge lies a serene lake, the ultimate destination of the river's meandering journey. The calm waters of the lake mirror the vast expanse of the sky, offering a space where reflections blur the line between reality and dreams. This tranquil oasis provides solace to villagers, a sanctuary from the demands of daily existence.

Mwamba's fertile soil yields the rich bounty of sorghum and millet, painting the landscape with vibrant shades of green and gold. Tended by hands that bear the wisdom of generations, the fields exemplify the harmony between humanity and the earth. Under the watchful gaze of the sun, Wasike's, Clare Nakhumicha wife tends to the land, sowing the seeds of sustenance and reaping the rewards of labor as each season unfolds.

Cows, sheep, and goats graze upon the lush grasslands, their presence a vital thread in the fabric of Mwamba's existence. These animals offer companionship and livelihood, fostering the deep connection between humanity and the natural world.

Emerald thickets punctuate the landscape, serving as shelter for wildlife and grazing grounds for animals. Within these verdant enclaves, villagers find respite, their vibrant colors and textures a stark contrast to the expansive fields and riverbanks. It's amidst these thickets that Wasike and his sons lead their livestock to graze, immersed in nature's embrace.

As the sun yields to the horizon, painting the sky with hues of pink and purple, Mwamba readies itself for rest. The nocturnal symphony of crickets and frogs serenades the night, a melodious reminder of life's unceasing cycle. The silhouette of the mountain stands tall, a sentinel attesting to the tenacity of both nature and the people who proudly call this land their own. The darkness disappeared and it was dawn again.

The compound of Wasike's homestead was a flurry of activity. Three separate huts stood side by side, each sheltering one of his wives. The women moved with purpose, their hands adorned with vibrant beads, as they worked tirelessly to decorate their homes for the impending festivities. Bunches of colorful wildflowers were woven into intricate

patterns and hung on walls made of clay and wood. Intricately designed baskets, a symbol of the Bukusu culture, were suspended from the ceiling, adding a touch of rustic elegance to the interiors.

Amidst the bustling activity, Nakhumicha, the newest and youngest wife of Wasike, stood in the doorway of her hut. Her round belly bore evidence of the new life growing within her, a promise of generations yet to come. Fatigue lined her face as she watched the other wives meticulously beautify their homes.

The pregnancy ushered in a subtle but distinct transformation in Nakhumicha's daily routine. There was an almost instinctual shift in her movements, a rhythm that seemed to resonate with the very essence of life blossoming within her. She found herself drawn to a familiar space, the sanctuary of the toilet, as if an unspoken connection had been forged between her and this corner of the house.

Her footsteps were deliberate yet gentle, each one guided by a newfound sense of purpose. It was as though the pregnancy had painted her world with a different palette, and she navigated her surroundings with an aura of quiet reverence. She would retreat to the toilet, a place where she spent a considerable amount of time. The subtle changes in her body seemed to lead her there, a quiet call that she could not ignore.

Emerging from the restroom after what felt like an eternity, she carried her husband's shirt in her hands. The fabric, worn yet familiar, held a certain comfort for her, a symbol of their shared journey. With a delicate grace, she draped it over her shoulders, allowing the cloth to envelop her like a protective embrace. The shirt seemed to carry with it the essence of her husband's presence, a subtle reminder that they were united in this experience.

As she moved around the house, an unexpected melody escaped her lips. Her voice, soft and melodic, mingled with the air to serenade the unseen life growing within her. Her song, a blend of soothing lullaby and unspoken love, resonated through the corridors. Her words were a tender

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whisper meant solely for her unborn child, a promise of care and devotion that transcended words.

In her hands, she held a broom, its bristles barely brushing the floor as she moved. The act of sweeping took on a gentle cadence, a chore that now seemed to symbolize a deeper connection to the world around her. With each stroke, she moved not only dust and dirt but also an energy that reflected the transformation happening within her. The broom became an extension of her maternal instinct, sweeping away not just physical debris but also worries and uncertainties.

Nakhumicha's movements held a certain grace, an elegance that seemed to emanate from the very core of her being. Her actions, simple as they were, spoke volumes about the depth of her emotions. It was a dance of motherhood, a choreography of love and preparation that unfolded as naturally as the seasons. As she sang and moved, her aura radiated a sense of anticipation, a quiet excitement for the journey ahead.

However, Nakhumicha's heart was heavy. She wondered how she could celebrate the birth of Jesus when her own place within the family seemed so uncertain. It was widely believed that the last wife was often the most cherished, but for Nakhumicha, the reality was far from that idyllic notion. Wasike's affections were divided among his wives, but Nakhumicha's hut stood mostly empty, a stark contrast to the bustling activity in the others.

The sun climbed higher in the sky, pregnant women, like Nakhumicha, were held in high esteem. They were revered for carrying the seeds of the future, and thus, their well-being was of utmost importance. With a sense of determination, Nakhumicha picked a pot and set off to fetch water, her steps steady and resolute. The pot balanced gracefully on her head; a skill honed from years of tradition.

Slowly, she made her way back to her hut. Once inside, she set the pot down and surveyed her surroundings. The walls were bare, and a simple clay floor stretched out before her. With her fingers, she scooped up the

cool earth and began to paint. The clay soil transformed into hues of red and ochre, as her artistic touch brought life to the walls.

Using a banana as her brush, Nakhumicha delicately painted the words "Merry Christmas" on the wall. The words held a silent prayer for happiness and unity, a wish that seemed distant in her current circumstances. Her gaze lingered on the words, her thoughts drifting to her two children who were away visiting their grandparents. While they were learning about their heritage and culture, Nakhumicha was left alone, yearning for their laughter to fill her hut.

With Christmas Eve settling in, the village hummed with excitement. The air was alive with melodies sung by children, their voices carrying the promise of joy and togetherness. The aroma of fresh food wafted through the air as families prepared for the festive feast. It was a celebration of the birth of Christ, a time to come together and share in the blessings of life.

Yet, for Nakhumicha, the day felt bittersweet. Her husband's instructions to avoid visiting her own mother left her feeling isolated, a sense of loneliness deepening within her. As the evening sun painted the horizon with shades of orange and pink, the compound was full of activities. The first wife, Christine reveled in her privileges, while Nakhumicha's hut remained untouched, her efforts seemingly unnoticed.

The clock neared midnight, a knock echoed through the night, startling Nakhumicha. Her heart raced as she opened the door, her eyes widening in surprise. Wasike stood before her, a glimmer of warmth in his eyes. It was a rarity for him to visit her at this hour, and Nakhumicha's heart danced with uncertainty.

However, joy quickly turned to sorrow as word spread through the compound. The first wife's child, Wafula, had tragically passed away, leaving the family in a somber state. The festive atmosphere was replaced by mourning, and the shadow of grief enveloped them all.

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The heart-wrenching cries of grief echoed through the air, mingling with the heaviness of sorrow that hung over Christine. Her anguish was palpable, a raw emotion that flowed freely as she grappled with the unfathomable loss of her beloved son. The weight of her pain seemed almost too much to bear, as the universe itself shared in her mourning.

Amidst the sea of sorrow, Nakhumicha stood as a pillar of support, her presence a comforting balm to the wounded heart of Christine. Their bond was unspoken but profound, a connection forged through shared experiences and the understanding that only a mother can truly comprehend the depths of another mother's pain.

Eliud, his eyes rimmed with tears, leaned heavily on Nakhumicha's shoulder. He was a broken man, shattered by the loss of his son, a loss that had left a void too vast to comprehend. His voice trembled as he began to recount the haunting details of his son's final moments, a narrative that would forever be etched in his memory.

"My son died while I was watching," Eliud's voice quivered, a fragile thread holding back a torrent of emotions. His words were heavy, weighted with a burden of anguish that seemed almost insurmountable. "I couldn't stand it," he continued, his voice a mixture of pain and disbelief.

Christine's tear-stained face turned toward Eliud as he spoke, her eyes reflecting the torment that raged within her. Each word he uttered was a dagger to her heart, a reminder of the stark reality that her son was gone, taken from her in the cruelest of ways.

Eliud's voice trembled as he continued, his voice a poignant reflection of a father's helplessness in the face of tragedy. "Christine was preparing supper when we suddenly heard a sharp cry, 'help!' from his brothers." His voice cracked, the memory of that cry cutting through him like a knife. It was a cry that had shattered the tranquility of their home, signaling the arrival of a nightmare they could not escape.

"I ran there first," Eliud's voice wavered, "and I was told he had been choked by food." His words hung in the air, a grim testament to the

fragility of life and the randomness of fate. It was a simple act, a momentary lapse that had irrevocably altered the course of their lives.

Desperation and urgency had driven them to action, their hearts racing as they tried to save their precious child. "We tried first aid," Eliud's voice held a note of defeat, a realization that their efforts had been in vain. Their hands had moved with purpose, guided by a parent's instinct, but destiny had other plans.

His voice grew heavy with grief as he continued his narrative, recounting the arrival of neighbors who had rushed to their aid, offering suggestions and guidance in a desperate attempt to salvage what was slipping through their fingers. Each passing second had felt like an eternity, their efforts a futile battle against time itself.

"As his eyes started to change," Eliud's voice quivered, "a neighbor took him out of her hands." His words hung in the air, The truth had become painfully evident – their beloved son was slipping away, and there was nothing they could do to stop it.

Nakhumicha stood by Eliud's side, her presence a quiet source of strength amidst the storm of emotions. She listened to his words with a heavy heart, her own eyes glistening with unshed tears. As he recounted the painful details of their son's passing, she felt the weight of his grief and carried it alongside her own.

In the midst of their sorrow, Nakhumicha's touch was a gesture of compassion, a gentle reminder that they were not alone in their pain. She wiped away her own tears as well as Eliud's, offering comfort through her unwavering presence.

Eliud's shoulders sagged with the weight of his grief, his voice trailing off as he struggled to find words that could encapsulate the depth of his loss. The memory of that tragic day would forever be etched in his mind, a painful reminder of a life cut short.

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Nakhumicha, her heart heavy with empathy, reached out to him, her touch a silent reassurance that they would navigate this sorrow together. "Be strong," she whispered, her voice a tender echo of the strength that resided within them, a strength that would carry them through even the darkest of days.

Christmas morning dawned, but the celebrations were subdued. The news of Wafula's passing had reached other family members, and the air was heavy with sadness. The joyful songs of the children had given way to the hushed murmurs of condolences.

The sun cast its golden glow over the village, Nakhumicha stood by her hut, her heart heavy with the weight of solitude. The celebration of Christ's birth was a distant echo in her world, as she grappled with her own sense of place within the intricate tapestry of life.

The day stretched on, and the sun's rays began to soften. In the midst of the mournful atmosphere, a soft melody rose from the distance. The village children, young and hopeful, had gathered to sing a Christmas song, their voices carrying a message of unity and love. Nakhumicha listened, her heart stirring with emotion as the sweet notes floated through the air.

"Siku kuu, Yolile,

Siku kuu, Yolile,

Siku kuu, Yolile."

They sang, the words signaling the arrival of Christmas. The song resonated with the village, a reminder that even in times of sorrow, there was room for joy and togetherness. As the children's voices blended harmoniously, Nakhumicha's gaze turned upward, her eyes fixed on the vast African sky.

In the midst of the somber atmosphere that enveloped Christine's compound, a bonfire blazed to life, its flickering flames casting a warm and eerie glow upon the surroundings. This was to be the ritual for the

next three days – a communal act of mourning that brought the community together in shared grief.

Dusk settled over the village, people began to gather around the bonfire, their faces etched with expressions of sadness and empathy. The crackling of the fire provided a haunting soundtrack to the scene, its erratic dance mirroring the emotions that surged within the hearts of those who had gathered.

The bonfire, a symbol of both life and transformation, held a sacred place in this ritual of remembrance. The flames themselves carried the weight of the collective sorrow, serving as a conduit for the unspoken words that flowed through the hearts of the mourners.

In the midst of the gathering, the grandmother, Pricilla stood vigil over the body of the child, her eyes fixed upon the small form that lay in her hut. Her presence was a solemn one, a silent acknowledgement of the passing of a young life that had been so full of promise. It was her duty to watch over the departed, to ensure that the journey from this world to the next was undertaken with the utmost care and respect.

Christine, her eyes swollen from tears that seemed endless, moved through the gathering with a heavy heart. Her grief was palpable, a tangible force that seemed to engulf her. Every step she took was laden with the weight of the irreparable loss she had suffered, a loss that no words could adequately convey.

The night settled in, the mourners encircled the bonfire, their faces illuminated by the flickering flames. The crackling fire seemed to cast shadows on their grief-stricken faces, a visual representation of the darkness that had descended upon their lives. The air was heavy with a shared sense of loss, an unspoken connection that bound them together in their pain.

Stories were exchanged in hushed tones, memories of the child who had been taken too soon. Laughter was rare, replaced by the quiet camaraderie of shared sorrow. Each person had their own memories to

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contribute, their own moments of joy that now existed alongside the ache of absence.

The bonfire continued to burn; the night stretched on. Time seemed to lose its meaning in the midst of grief, the minutes and hours blurring into an endless stream of moments suspended in sorrow. The grandmother's vigil remained unbroken, her presence a steadfast reassurance that the child was not alone, even in death.

For three nights, this ritual of mourning would persist, the bonfire burning as a beacon of remembrance. The flames seemed to dance with a mournful grace, their movement mirroring the ebb and flow of human emotion. And as the village came together in the midst of this shared pain, the bonds that united them became even stronger.

The day passed, and evening descended once again. The compound was shrouded in a solemn hush, the usual sounds of laughter and celebration replaced by quiet contemplation. And then, as the clock ticked closer to midnight, another knock sounded at Nakhumicha's door. The gentle rap of knuckles against wood held a promise, a glimmer of hope amidst the darkness.

With a cautious heart, Nakhumicha opened the door to reveal Wasike, his eyes carrying a softness she hadn't seen before. There was a tenderness in his gaze as he looked upon her, and in that moment, Nakhumicha felt a connection that transcended words. Guided by an unspoken understanding, Wasike reached out and took her hand, a silent invitation to join him.

Leaving the confines of her hut, Nakhumicha stepped into the night, her heart beating in rhythm with the world around her. The air was cool against her skin, and the stars above shone with a brilliance that seemed to mirror the spark within her soul. Wasike led her to a clearing, where the moon's soft glow bathed the earth in silver light.

And then, summoned by the magic of the moment, the village children appeared once more. Their voices rose in unison, carrying the same song that had filled the air earlier in the day. "*Siku kuu, Yolile,*" they sang, their

voices weaving a tapestry of sound that enveloped Nakhumicha and Wasike.

In the presence of the man she had married, the man who had chosen her to be a part of his life, Nakhumicha felt a sense of belonging that surpassed the confines of tradition. The weight of loneliness began to lift, replaced by the warmth of connection.

As the song reached its crescendo, a sense of unity settled over the compound. The somber mood that had clouded their hearts slowly gave way to a glimmer of hope, a promise of brighter days ahead. In the midst of loss, the village had come together to find solace in each other's company, to share in the bond that made them a community.

The final notes of the song hung in the air, Nakhumicha looked up at the sky, her heart filled with a newfound understanding. And though her journey was far from easy, she knew that the threads of love and resilience woven into her story were as vibrant and enduring as the Bukusu culture itself.

It was dawn, Nakhumicha stood alongside Wasike, their hands entwined. In that moment, as the world awakened to a new day, she felt a sense of peace that transcended the challenges she had faced. The sun rose, casting its gentle light over the landscape, and Nakhumicha knew that with each dawn, there was a chance for renewal, for growth, and for the celebration of life's most precious moments.

Chapter Two

Echoes of Requiem

Wafula's requiem was organized on Boxing Day, a solemn occasion that echoed the mournful hearts of the community. In the intricate modus operandi of Bukusu culture, the departure of children was hastened

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compared to that of grownups. The rhythm of life continued with a solemn dance, and in this rhythm, time stood still for a while.

Amidst the rising sun, the third day unfurled its presence, a solemn reminder that Wafula's journey to eternity was at hand. The air held a heaviness, pregnant with emotions as if the very atmosphere mourned in unison with the grieving hearts. Preparations, meticulous and thoughtful, had cast a shroud of finality over the village – the final act in Wafula's earthly tale.

The sun ascended in the sky like a golden chariot, the community and the church converged like convergent rivers, finding their meeting point within the compound of Pricilla. The space seemed transformed, not just physically, but spiritually too, as the very earth itself recognized the gravity of the moment. The spirits of generations past seemed to linger in the air, bearing witness to the sendoff that was to unfold.

Relatives, friends, and family gathered like autumn leaves, each one carrying memories and stories, their voices rising and falling like a symphony of tributes. Their words were like streams of consciousness, flowing with the warmth of shared experiences, painting the canvas of Wafula's life with hues of laughter, tears, and whispered conversations beneath moonlit skies.

The body, cocooned in a shroud of cow's skin, was carried like a sacred relic – a vessel of memories, dreams, and the essence of a life well-lived. They bore him with the solemnity of pilgrims on a sacred journey, Christine's anguish was palpable, her grief like a tempestuous sea threatening to engulf her. Her heart felt like it was suspended between the earth and the heavens, torn between the agony of farewell and the warmth of cherished moments.

Co-wives became pillars of strength, their presence an embodiment of unity and solidarity. Their arms enfolded Christine like a shield, offering comfort in the midst of the storm that raged within her. Their whispered words were like gentle rain, tenderly soothing her soul and coaxing her forward, step by trembling step.

The ground, which had borne witness to the dance of life and the rhythm of everyday existence, now opened its embrace to receive Wafula's physical form. The earth seemed to sigh, recognizing a long-lost friend returning home. The soil, cool and damp, accepted his body like a long-awaited reunion, the ultimate act of surrender to nature's eternal cycle.

The final clods of earth covered the resting place, a hushed silence fell upon the gathering – a silence laden with the weight of farewells left unsaid and the promise of memories to be cherished forever. The sky, once a canvas of vibrant blue, now seemed to mirror the somberness of the moment, even the heavens paused in reverence.

The sun, now descending toward the horizon, cast its golden rays upon the scene, a final embrace that felt both bittersweet and consoling. It was nature itself was bidding farewell, acknowledging the passage of one soul from the earthly realm to the beyond.

Unlike the usual bustling activity surrounding the Christmas season, there was no time for exchanging gifts or cheerful gatherings. Instead, a somber mood engulfed family members, relatives, and neighbors who gathered to bid young Wafula farewell. Their voices whispered lamentations, punctuated by the soft sobs of Christine, a mother whose heart now bore an empty space that could never be filled.

The garments that adorned Wafula in his final repose, along with the linen and blanket that enveloped his still form, found themselves in the custody of his grandmother. These tangible remnants of his earthly journey, now imbued with the weight of memory, were entrusted to the care of an elder who had witnessed generations come and go.

The clothes, chosen with care to clothe him in a semblance of dignity, held traces of the life he had lived—threads of existence woven into the fabric. Each seam and fold told a silent tale of his presence, his laughter, and the moments he shared with those who had loved him.

The linen and blanket, which had served as a tender cocoon for his body, were like a protective embrace in his passage from one realm to another.

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They bore witness to his surrender to the eternal slumber, cradling him with a gentleness only matched by a mother's touch.

His grandmother assumed the role of guardian, holding in his hands these fragments of Wafula's existence. In her care, they became symbols of continuity, a tangible link connecting the past and the present. The garments and linens, now intertwined with memories that transcended time, held a sacred place in the tapestry of family history.

The decision for his parents to relinquish their ownership rooted in tradition or reverence for the journey of the departed. It marked a poignant act of separation, a relinquishing of the tangible world that Wafula had known, surrendering them to the realm of memory and the hands of an ancestor.

Wafula's parents, though bereft of the physical presence of these items, held within their hearts the intangible essence of their son. Memories danced through their thoughts, carried by the wind of love, nurturing the flame of remembrance that would forever burn within them.

In the dawn, Christine stirred from her restless slumber. The weight of her grief clung to her like a heavy shroud as she rose from her bed. Driven by an unrelenting ache in her heart, she was compelled to visit the resting place of her beloved son. With each step she took towards the grave, the ache intensified, manifesting as a chorus of wails that escaped her lips.

In the presence of the earth that held her son's remains, Christine's grief erupted like a torrential storm. Her cries echoed through the morning air, a heartrending lament that seemed to pierce the heavens themselves. Her tears flowed freely, mingling with the dew-kissed grass beneath her feet as she questioned the universe, pleading for an answer that would never come. "Why did you leave me, my son?" she cried, her voice a fragile echo of a mother's enduring love.

Moments later, the sound of footsteps drew closer, and Christine's mother-in-law approached, a silent companion to her anguish. The older woman's presence was a solemn comfort, a shared bond forged through

the threads of maternal love and loss. The two women stood together before the grave, the weight of grief hung palpably in the air, connecting their souls in an unspoken understanding.

Upon the grave's earthen surface lay a plate, a stark contrast to the vibrant green of the grass. Chilly coins, glinting in the early light, were placed carefully upon it. These offerings, small yet significant, were a symbolic bridge between the world of the living and that of the departed, a way to honor and remember a life extinguished too soon. With a heavy heart, Christine reached out and collected the coins, her fingers brushing against the cold metal seeking solace from the touch.

In the depths of her sorrow, Christine's voice trembled as she uttered words that mingled with the morning breeze. "If only these coins could bring you back to me," she whispered, the ache in her heart etched into each syllable. The chilliness of the coins seemed to mirror the emptiness left by her son's absence—a cold void that could never be filled.

Her mother-in-law, a figure of strength and resilience, stood by her side, offering a response that held the wisdom of generations. "God gives and He takes," she said softly, her voice a balm to Christine's raw grief. These words, while simple, carried the weight of faith and acceptance, a reminder that life's tapestry is woven with threads of joy and sorrow, creation and loss.

Christine's cries continued to echo in the stillness, her mother-in-law held a heavy stick, a tool of earth and connection. With each firm tap against the soil, she gently firmed the earth atop the grave. The rhythm of her actions spoke of a cycle—the cycle of life and death, of pain and healing, of memory and letting go. The stick, once a sturdy support for her steps, now served as a vessel for her emotions, a conduit for her love and reverence.

The sun climbed higher in the sky, casting its warm embrace over the village, a sense of purpose stirred among the women of the community. Around 9 am, Christine found herself amidst a group of women, each

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carrying a burden of grief, as they made their way to the river's edge. Clutched in their arms were the clothes that her son had worn in his final moments.

Beside the flowing waters, under the expanse of the open sky, the women gathered in a somber procession. Their footsteps were a quiet cadence, a reflection of the heaviness that permeated the air. With careful hands, they unfolded the garments that held fragments of a life now lost, each fold revealing a piece of the past that was forever imprinted on the cloth.

The river, flowing ceaselessly, bore witness to their ritual as the women immersed themselves in the water's embrace. The clothes, once worn by Wafula, were tenderly placed in the river's current, offering them up to the stream that carried away the weight of sorrow and the residue of death. The gentle lapping of the water against the fabric seemed to echo the rhythm of heartbeats, a connection that transcended the tangible and reached into the realm of the sacred.

The water flowed over the clothes, they were cleansed of the pain and anguish that had clung to them. And as the women bathed in the river's waters, a similar transformation occurred within their souls. The act of washing away the remnants of death was a gesture of rebuke—a declaration that they would not be defined by the shadow of mortality. In that shared moment, they emerged from the river's depths, not as mourners but as resilient beings, united in their strength to confront the harsh reality of loss.

This ritual held a deeper symbolism, a profound statement of a cultural truth that resonated through generations. In the village's belief system, death was not merely a passage to the afterlife; it marked a transformation that set the departed on a journey that disconnected them from the realm of the living. When one passed away, they became an "enemy," a term that encapsulated the idea of separation and estrangement. In this context, Christine and the other women's actions at the river were an embodiment of this belief—a ritualized act of distancing themselves from the deceased.

In death's wake, the bond between the living and the departed was severed, and the living were left to grapple with the reality of their own mortality. The act of washing the clothes and taking a shower served as a physical manifestation of this separation. The women stood as witnesses to the transformation that death brought, acknowledging the inevitability of their own journeys beyond the mortal plane.

Amidst the ebb and flow of the river's currents, Christine and the other women emerged from the water, their skin glistening with droplets of renewal. The clothes, now cleansed of the past, were carried downstream—a visual representation of the passage of time and the persistence of life's cycles. As they returned to the village, they carried with them a sense of catharsis, having engaged in a ritual that embodied both sorrow and strength, loss and renewal.

The night's shroud gradually lifted and the first tendrils of dawn brushed the sky with a tender touch, Christine found herself drawn to the resting place of her beloved son. It was a somber morning, the air heavy with the weight of grief that seemed to linger even in the soft light of early morning. The world around her was hushed, nature itself respected the solemnity of the moment.

With a heart heavy with sorrow, Christine approached the grave that now held the earthly remains of Wafula. The mound of freshly turned soil stood as a poignant reminder of the finality of life. She stood before the grave, her tears mingling with the dew-kissed earth, she was not alone.

Gathered around her were other women from the community, a circle of shared sorrow that united them in their pain. Their presence was not only a show of solidarity but a profound testament to the bonds that death could not sever. These women had come to offer their prayers, their words whispered to the wind with the hope that they might reach Wafula in whatever realm he now resided.

The scene was reminiscent of a passage from the Gospel of Mark in the Bible, a poignant parallel that mirrored the actions of the women who had

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gone to anoint the body of Jesus. The parallels between Christine and the women in the Gospel were not lost in the quiet moments of that early morning.

Just as Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome had come to the tomb with spices to anoint Jesus, Christine and the women by her side arrived with a shared purpose—to honor the memory of a loved one and find solace in their gestures of devotion.

In the gentle glow of the rising sun, Christine and the women began their quiet ritual. Their hands trembled slightly as they held the offerings they had brought, tokens of their love and respect for the departed soul. The air was thick with the scent of crushed herbs and the faint aroma of incense, a fragrant tribute that mingled with their whispered prayers.

The sun's rays, casting a golden hue upon the landscape, seemed to infuse the scene with a sense of serenity. It was a scene of raw emotion, where the boundary between the earthly and the ethereal blurred in the face of shared grief. The women bowed their heads and offered their silent prayers, their voices were a gentle chorus of remembrance, a bridge that reached beyond the confines of life and death.

And so, in the hushed moments of that early morning, Christine and the women stood before the grave of Wafula, not only to bid farewell to a cherished soul but to honor the legacy of love that continued to bind them. Like the women in the Gospel, they had come with offerings of the heart, their actions a testament to the enduring power of human connection and the profound impact that a single life could have on the lives it touched.

In the hallowed space between the earthly and the divine, as the sun's warm rays bathed the landscape in light, Christine and the women found a sacred bond that defied the limitations of time and circumstance.

The village, once shrouded in the shadows of grief, began to stir again. However, Christine's mourning did not subside. She carried her grief like

a heavy cloak, its weight becoming a part of her very being. In contrast, Wasike's demeanor seemed unchanged, his stoic facade masking the turmoil beneath. He turned to alcohol as a refuge, seeking solace in its temporary numbness.

In the midst of this shifting landscape, Wasike found himself with 18 children, and the promise of a new life on the horizon. Nakhumicha, the once-neglected wife, now held his attention more than ever before. Love flowed from him in waves, a bittersweet symphony played in the shadows of the child they had lost. The complexities of human emotion painted intricate patterns on the canvas of their lives.

"Is it because my child died that my husband has little time for me?" Christine's voice trembled as she posed the question to Nakhumicha, her pain seeking a voice.

The second wife, Fatuma, stood by, her presence a silent pillar of support. Her hand rested gently on her right cheek as she contemplated the weight of the question. A movement, a touch on the back, and the words "Be strong" were whispered like a secret to the wind. Christine's tears flowed freely, painting a portrait of the bonds that held the three women together, woven by grief and solidarity.

As March unfolded its wings, a month before the earth would be caressed by the seeds of new life, Nakhumicha found herself in a cocoon of exhaustion. The imminent arrival of her child painted the horizon of her days with both anticipation and trepidation. With just a month remaining, the world seemed to hold its breath, waiting for the miracle that would soon take place.

While other co-wives prepared their parcels of land for planting, Nakhumicha's role was limited by the life she carried within her. Her round belly had become a sacred vessel, holding the promise of the next generation. Her hands, once adorned with beads and paint, now found solace in the act of cooking for her family.

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Two figures, Isaac Wasike and Ross Wasike, became her companions in this season of change. These two children, borne of her and Wasike's union, held her hand as they navigated the unfamiliar terrain of farming. Their father, a guardian in both name and heart, watched over them, a silent sentry ensuring that their toil bore fruit.

With the gentle kiss of April's raindrops, the village stirred once more. The earth, kissed by moisture, welcomed the hands of its caretakers. Fields came alive with people, bent over in a dance of planting, as hope was sown alongside seeds.

But amidst this cycle of renewal, Nakhumicha's own season of birth approached. April was her month, a month in which the earth and she would both bring forth life. The rhythm of creation continued its eternal dance, weaving the threads of existence together in a tapestry of existence.

Chapter Three

The Song of Arrival

In the tender embrace of dawn, the village awoke to a newborn's cry emanating from Nakhumicha's hut. Like a chorus carried by the morning breeze, the joyous sound reached the ears of those nearby. Word spread like wildfire, igniting the hearts of family members who came together in celebration. Songs of praise resounded, harmonizing with the rhythm of exultation that pulsed through the air.

Eliud Wasike, his face radiant with an uncontainable joy, stepped into the threshold of Nakhumicha's hut. In his arms lay the culmination of a new chapter, a tiny being wrapped in the promise of generations yet to unfold. His smile spoke volumes, a silent ode to the miracle of life that had taken root within his family.

Their gazes converged on this new life, each pair of eyes reflecting the tapestry of emotions woven into the moment. "Welcome, Felix Wasike," Eliud's voice carried the weight of legacy and hope. He cradled his son, his touch gentle yet infused with the determination to mold this child's destiny. "A continuation of my generation," he declared with a father's pride, his words a proclamation that echoed through the ages. "You are the hope of the family, a son who will trace our lineage across the canvas of the world."

As he welcomed his son, Eliud's heart swelled with emotions too profound for words. Tradition and heritage coursed through his veins, mingling with the sheer joy of this precious arrival. Beside him stood the emblem of celebration: a vessel of *Busaa*. With measured reverence, he sipped from the vessel, the warm liquid a toast to the life he now held in his arms. "Felix's arrival demands grand festivities," he announced, his voice carrying the weight of conviction. The air was charged with

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anticipation, each soul an instrument resonating with the symphony of this moment.

Murmurs rippled through the gathering, the soft cadence of curiosity and speculation. The co-wives exchanged glances, their unspoken thoughts painting their expressions. They whispered amongst themselves. The women wondered aloud if their husband's celebration of this child surpassed his previous expressions of joy. The echoes of comparisons reverberated, sometimes whispering that he had rejoiced in the arrival of another child a day later.

A vital aspect of Bukusu culture stood at the heart of this conversation: the naming of children. Names were gifts bestowed by fathers, a testament to their role as guardians of heritage. The lineage of generations was etched into each name, a legacy carried forward. And so, in alignment with the rhythm of life, Felix Wasike received his name. Born in April, a month of perceived scarcity, he was christened Wanjala – a name that held both the strength of his lineage and the promise of his father's story. Just as Eliud Wasike had been named after being born during a festive season, so now did his son carry a name linked to his birth's narrative.

The mere act of naming Felix proved to be insufficient to soothe his unsettled soul. Throughout the night, his cries echoed through the humble abode, a plaintive melody that resisted the comforting efforts of his weary parents. Despite their best attempts to cradle him, rock him, and provide solace, Felix's cries persisted like a symphony of longing.

The night was a blur of exhaustion for his father and mother, a relentless exchange of their son in a desperate attempt to alleviate his tears. The first light of dawn painted the sky with delicate hues, they found themselves in the clutches of fatigue, their eyes heavy from the sleepless struggle to ease their child's distress.

But relief was on the horizon. With the arrival of the grandmother, a sense of hope mingled with the weariness that had settled over the household. The seasoned matriarch, wise and intuitive, sensed the gravity

of the situation. She was informed of Felix's inconsolable cries, a knowing expression crossed her face, as if she were privy to the inner workings of his heart.

"He's searching for a name," she stated matter-of-factly, her voice carrying the weight of tradition and ancestral wisdom. The room seemed to hush in reverence to her words, nature itself held its breath to hear her speak.

Her explanation unfolded like a delicate revelation, a reminder of the deep-rooted beliefs that governed their lives. She addressed the collective understanding that when an infant cried persistently, particularly at this tender stage of life, it was often a sign of their longing to be named after a forebearer from the lineage. It was a tradition that connected the present to the past, a ritual that held significance beyond the boundaries of time.

With a sense of purpose, the grandmother began to utter names, each syllable a whispered invocation to the spirits of their ancestors. She spoke of her husband, invoking his memory in the hopes of easing Felix's distress. She mentioned brothers, uncles, great-grandparents, each name a tribute to the lives that had come before. The room seemed to hold its breath, anticipation tinging the air as they waited for a response from the restless child.

But as the grandmother's litany of names wove through the room, a hushed silence prevailed. Felix's cries continued, unabated, his longing unquenched by the familiar echoes of those who had journeyed before him. The atmosphere seemed to hold a collective breath, the weight of generations hanging in the balance.

The grandmother's efforts, however earnest, proved fruitless in that moment. It was a reminder that despite their deep reverence for tradition and their desire to honor their lineage, the naming of a child was a process that could not be rushed or forced. It was a sacred bond that transcended mere syllables, a connection that would reveal itself in its own time.

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The sunlight began to filter through the windows, casting gentle rays across the room, the grandmother gazed upon Felix with a mixture of compassion and understanding. She recognized that the journey of finding his name was one that he would undertake in his own way, a journey that would weave him into the intricate tapestry of his family's history.

And so, with hearts both weary and hopeful, the family continued to cradle Felix. The world outside stirred to life, they knew that the search for his name was a journey that would unfold with the rhythm of time, a melody that would eventually find its harmony in the symphony of his life.

The night descended with an air of unease, casting its shadow over the household. Within the confines of the dimly lit room, Felix's cries echoed once again, a fervent lament that seemed to pierce the fabric of the night. His distress had reached an apex, his tiny frame wracked with inconsolable sobs. It was a symphony of despair that left his parents feeling powerless, their hearts heavy with concern.

They tried every measure within their reach. The gentle rhythm of breastfeeding, usually a source of comfort, yielded no solace this time. The hours wore on, a relentless cycle of desperation and helplessness, as they watched their beloved child endure a storm of emotions that defied their ability to quell.

Dawn's gentle light began to infiltrate the room, illuminating the contours of their worry-worn faces, the realization that the night had offered no respite weighed heavily upon them. Felix's cries had persisted, unwavering in the face of their soothing attempts.

And then, like a harbinger of hope, the grandmother entered the room, a figure of wisdom and strength. Her presence brought a sense of calm, a reminder of the generational knowledge that resided within her. As her gaze met Felix's tear-streaked face, a knowing expression crossed her features, as if she were attuned to the currents that flowed beneath the surface of his cries.

The grandmother's voice, weathered by years of experience, cut through the tension of the room as she began to speak. She uttered names, invoking the spirits of those who had come before, her words a tribute to the lineage that shaped their lives. Each name carried a weight of history, a connection to the past that held the promise of easing Felix's turmoil.

Yet, despite her earnest efforts and the resonance of the names she invoked, the room remained cloaked in the sound of Felix's cries. The weight of expectation hung in the air, a shared hope that this time, perhaps, the search for his name would reach its conclusion.

With a sigh that carried both resolve and acceptance, the grandmother addressed the room. "I will consult our relatives," she announced. It was a recognition that the search for Felix's name was a journey that extended beyond the confines of their home, a journey that required the collective wisdom and guidance of their kin.

And so, as the morning sun continued its ascent, casting its golden glow upon the world outside, the grandmother retreated to her hut, her footsteps carrying the promise of consultation and collaboration. Left behind were the weary parents, their eyes tracing the arc of her departure with a mixture of hope and anticipation.

In the quiet moments that followed, the room seemed to hold its breath, the echo of Felix's cries slowly dissipating into the air. The journey to find his name, though fraught with uncertainty, was one that the family would undertake together, a journey that would reveal itself in its own time and weave him into the intricate tapestry of his heritage.

Three days later, the compound's atmosphere shimmered with a new presence.

The day had arrived, a day of significance in young Felix's life as he was about to experience a ritual that would connect him more deeply with his ancestral lineage. Nakhumicha, his mother, carried him gently in her arms, a cradle of love and care that shielded him from the world's

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vastness. A melody escaped her lips, a song that seemed to weave itself into the fabric of the day.

In slow and deliberate steps, Wasike followed Nakhumicha. He carried a basin filled with water, a symbol of cleansing and renewal that would mark this momentous occasion. His presence exuded a sense of reverence, a recognition of the sacredness of the act they were about to perform.

Nakhumicha carefully washed her son's tender form, her words flowed like a gentle stream, her voice a soothing balm that seemed to caress both the child and the air around them. She spoke to Wasike, her words carrying a quiet inquiry that hinted at the weight of their decision. "Do you know of anyone who might be yearning to be named after this child?" she asked, her eyes filled with a mother's concern. "He cries persistently."

Wasike's response was measured, his voice carrying a tone of contemplation. "No," he replied. "Those I know have already been considered. Let his grandmother explore further. She possesses an intuition that may guide us." His words held a gentle assurance that the solution lay within the realms of their community.

Once the washing was complete, they placed Felix on a cloth under the warm embrace of the sun. It was a day that held both personal and communal significance, and they anticipated the arrival of more guests to share in this intimate celebration. The newborn's tender stage required a certain seclusion, a time for bonding with immediate family before unveiling him to the wider circle.

The time for guests drew near, a sense of urgency tinged the air. The need to clean and arrange the house was paramount, and it was Christine, who came to the rescue. Wasike, understanding the importance of preparation, set out to find her.

Christine arrived with a pot balanced gracefully atop her head, a symbol of her role as a contributor to the family's collective efforts. She carried water, a precious resource that held both practical and symbolic

significance. With humility and sincerity, she expressed her apologies for arriving later than anticipated, acknowledging the responsibility that came with her role.

The grandmother entered bearing gifts, her role extending beyond mere offerings.

The morning sun cast its golden glow upon the gathering, a steady stream of close relatives arrived, bearing offerings that spoke of their love and affection. The air buzzed with anticipation, each new arrival greeted with warm smiles and embraces. The gifts they carried were not merely material possessions; they were tokens of goodwill, symbols of the connections that bound this family together.

Nakhumicha, standing at the center of attention, radiated a quiet grace that drew admiration from all around. Her journey through the phases of pregnancy had been a test of strength and resilience, a journey that had now culminated in the arrival of young Felix. The atmosphere was charged with a palpable sense of reverence for the courage she had displayed, and for the miracle of life she had brought forth.

In a chorus of voices, the relatives offered their heartfelt congratulations. Their words, like delicate petals, floated through the air, a shower of blessings that enveloped mother and child. They praised Nakhumicha's unwavering spirit, her determination, and the new life that now nestled in her arms. Felix, welcomed with open hearts, became the embodiment of hope and promise for the family's future.

The praises continued, an eloquent symphony of gratitude and joy. The very air resonated with the echoes of their well-wishes, infusing the surroundings with an ethereal energy. Laughter and stories flowed freely.

Yet, as the sun arched higher in the sky, the rhythm of life beckoned to those assembled. The exchange of gifts, the heartfelt conversations, and the embraces were cherished moments that spoke to the deep bonds uniting the family. However, the cycle of time demanded that they could not linger indefinitely.

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With reluctant smiles and promises to meet again, the close relatives began to depart. Each step they took was imbued with the spirit of togetherness that had defined the day.

One week after the jubilant gathering that welcomed Felix into the world, Pricilla, arrived with a purpose. She bore news that the time had come for a significant milestone in Felix's young life—the ceremonial shaving of his hair.

Pricilla's presence lent an air of anticipation to the surroundings. The morning was crisp, alive with the sounds of birdsong and the rustling of leaves. The sky above stretched out in an expanse of azure, a backdrop that seemed to mirror the purity of the occasion.

At precisely 9 am the next day, Pricilla returned to the scene carrying a pair of scissors. Her steps were deliberate, each one imbued with the weight of tradition and the knowledge she carried. Behind Nakhumicha's house, where the sun's embrace was most tender, she found Nakhumicha herself, basking in the sunlight while cradling her son.

With a nod of acknowledgment, Pricilla shared a knowing smile with Nakhumicha. They were two women, united by the bond of motherhood, connected through the generations by a shared heritage. The tradition of shaving a child's hair was not a mere ritual—it was an act that bridged the past and the present, affirming the child's lineage within the embrace of the family.

Before delving into the task at hand, Nakhumicha shared a brief update with the mother-in-law. She spoke of their ongoing journey, the sleepless nights, and Felix's peculiar sleeping habits—only resting during the day. The corners of Pricilla's eyes crinkled with empathy as she listened, her face etched with the wisdom that comes from a lifetime of experience.

With a wistful smile, Pricilla offered another insight. "We've tried our best," she remarked, her voice carrying a soothing resonance. "Sometimes, the one who wishes to be named will reveal themselves in time, perhaps in a dream."

Pricilla set to work; the atmosphere took on a hushed reverence. The scissors glinted in the sunlight; their blades poised to shape a new chapter in Felix's young life. The breeze seemed to hold its breath; the very elements were attuned to the sacredness of the moment.

Pricilla's experienced hands moved with a gentle precision, snipping away locks of hair with care. The act was both mundane and profound, a tangible expression of a legacy that had been passed down through generations. The act itself was steeped in meaning—the shaving of the hair was a ritual believed to secure the child's connection to the paternal lineage, a gesture of belonging that resonated beyond the physical.

Reaching the midway point, she paused, her eyes meeting Nakhumicha's. With a serene nod, she invited Nakhumicha to complete the ritual. The torch was passed, a symbolic gesture that spoke of unity and continuity. As Nakhumicha took the scissors in her own hands, she felt a surge of responsibility and a deep sense of honor.

However, the proceedings were not without their disruptions. The act of shaving had stirred Felix from his slumber, and his awakening was accompanied by plaintive cries. Nakhumicha's heartstrings tugged as she navigated the delicate balance between tradition and her son's comfort. Tenderly, she comforted him, her soothing words and gentle touch soothing his distress.

The sun climbed higher in the sky, the trio—Nakhumicha, Pricilla, and Felix—shared a moment that transcended time. They were part of a lineage, a story woven through the fabric of generations. With the snip of the scissors, they continued a narrative that connected them to those who came before and those who would follow. And as Felix's locks fell to the ground, a new page turned, ushering in the promise of growth, discovery, and the unwavering embrace of family and tradition.

With the sacred task completed, Pricilla's hands cradled the locks of Felix's shorn hair. She folded the tufts of hair carefully within her grasp, each strand a repository of the child's early days. The sun dappled

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through the leaves as she made her way to a banana tree, its leaves offering a protective canopy that shielded her actions from prying eyes. In this quiet, secluded space, she tenderly placed the bundle of hair, a secret tribute to the significance of the moment.

Having entrusted the locks to the embrace of the banana tree's leaves, Pricilla returned to Nakhumicha's side. With a serene smile and a nod of acknowledgment, she bid farewell to the young mother, their shared understanding of the importance of the occasion unspoken but palpable. She ventured back to her own dwelling, Pricilla had tasks to attend to, chores that marked the rhythm of daily life.

In her hut, Pricilla set about her tasks, the warmth of the sun filtering through the walls as if to bless her endeavors. The mundane activities—folding clothes, preparing food, tending to the hearth—were part of the tapestry of existence that weaves its way through time. Yet, even amidst these practicalities, her thoughts wandered back to the moment she had just participated in.

Meanwhile, Nakhumicha's mind was a whirlwind of contemplation. As the sun traversed its path across the sky, casting patterns of light and shadow, she found herself immersed in a sea of questions. The ritual of shaving Felix's hair had been observed, and yet the child's response to names still eluded them. She pondered the mystery that encircled her son like a shroud.

With each passing moment, Nakhumicha's thoughts seemed to gather momentum, like a river flowing with the current of her concerns. She dwelled upon the words of her mother-in-law, who had spoken of the possibility that the one who wished to be named would eventually reveal themselves, perhaps in a dream. She clung to this thread of hope, allowing it to guide her through the labyrinth of her worries.

The day wore on, the sun began its descent, casting a warm, golden glow upon the landscape. The rustling leaves whispered secrets to the wind, their gentle murmurings like a chorus of reassurance. The village

continued its daily rhythm, the ebb and flow of life interwoven with the passage of time.

A subtle cloud of uncertainty lingered within Nakhumicha's mind, casting a faint shadow over the undeniable joy of motherhood. Her thoughts, like wisps of mist, gathered and dispersed, tracing the contours of an unspoken question that hung in the air. Could Felix truly be Wasike's biological son?

Her contemplations swirled; a welcome interruption came in the form of her husband's arrival. Wasike entered their home, cradling a parcel wrapped in banana leaves—a gift of meat from a celebration he had attended. Nakhumicha extended a warm greeting to her husband, the corners of her lips curling into a gentle smile as she acknowledged his return.

With a deft touch, Wasike moved to the kitchen, where he prepared to partake in the nourishment laid before him. The sizzle and crackle of cooking merged with his cheerful recounting of the day's events, his words painting a vivid picture of the celebration he had been a part of. Nakhumicha listened, her heart anchored in the present moment, even as the tendrils of her earlier musings lingered in the background.

Once the meal was prepared, Wasike sat down to dine. He savored each bite, Nakhumicha observed him with a mixture of admiration and familiarity, the everyday ritual of sharing a meal a comforting thread that wove through the fabric of their lives.

With the meal concluded, Wasike excused himself from the table, his destination being his first wife's home. Nakhumicha's gaze followed him as he left, the moments of solitude allowing her thoughts to resurface, like ripples in a still pond. It was during this quiet interlude that the sound of footsteps approached, drawing her attention.

A man passed by Nakhumicha's humble abode, his footsteps deliberate and purposeful. He greeted her from a distance, his voice carrying the warmth of familiarity and community. Congratulatory words flowed from

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his lips, a customary exchange in the wake of a new birth. But then, with a sense of urgency, he interjected a name—a name that sent ripples of astonishment through Nakhumicha's being, leaving her momentarily stunned.

The name he uttered held within it an enigma, a connection that seemed to transcend the ordinary bounds of conversation. It was a name that stirred a chorus of questions within Nakhumicha's heart, a name that resonated with the whispers of her own doubts and uncertainties. In the wake of his words, the air seemed to hold its breath, the universe itself was presenting a puzzle that begged to be deciphered.

The man's footsteps receded, Nakhumicha was left with a sense of wonderment, her thoughts now consumed by a name that had been thrust into the realm of her contemplation. In the midst of her ponderings, a subtle change began to unfold—an inexplicable shift in Felix's nightly cries. The night that had once been punctuated by his restless wails now held a newfound calm, a serenity that permeated the very air around them.

Life, as it often does, continued its rhythmic journey forward. The quiet evenings were now adorned with the presence of a son whose cries had given way to peaceful slumber. In the embrace of each passing day, the mystery that had briefly stirred the depths of her consciousness found its place within the intricate tapestry of life in Mwamba village.

Chapter Four

The Tapestry Unfolds

Felix grew. His steps became confident, his laughter echoing through the compound. The day arrived when he stood at the threshold of a new chapter: school. A world of letters and numbers awaited, promising to unveil the mysteries of knowledge.

Felix's heart danced with excitement as he stood on the threshold of a new chapter in his young life. The anticipation that had been building within him was now a vibrant current coursing through his veins. This was the day he had eagerly awaited—the day he would step into the world of learning; the day he would join school for the very first time.

In the days that preceded this moment, Felix had watched as his siblings embarked on their educational journeys, their satchels slung over their shoulders, brimming with books and dreams. He had observed them leave for school while he stayed behind, his young heart yearning for the opportunity to immerse himself in the realms of knowledge. His anticipation had grown like a delicate bud, unfurling petal by petal until it burst into full bloom.

The magnitude of his anticipation had reached extreme heights, a swirling mix of excitement and anxiety that churned within him. Each passing day felt like a lifetime, a countdown that he marked with both impatience and hope. And now, that day had finally dawned—a day that held the promise of new friends, adventures, and the magic of learning.

Nakhumicha shared in his elation. Her heart swelled with pride and joy as she prepared her youngest child for his first day of school. She had cared for him, nurtured him, and now she stood as his guiding star, ushering him into a world of possibilities. Her happiness was twofold—both for her son's journey and for the fulfillment of her own aspiration of taking her child to school.

Even before stepping foot into a classroom, Felix's innate cleverness radiated like a beacon. His parents had witnessed his intelligence in the way he interacted with his siblings' books, his curiosity and fascination evident as he leafed through pages and explored words that held the promise of understanding. His love for books had bloomed early, innate curiosity and thirst for knowledge.

The morning of his first day arrived, the sun casting its golden rays over Mwamba village. Felix, hardly able to contain his excitement, woke up early. His small hands trembled as he donned his new school uniform, a symbol of his initiation into the world of learning. Each button fastened, each shoelace tied, carried the weight of his dreams and aspirations.

The hour approached, Felix's father, Wasike, stood ready to accompany his son to kindergarten. The smile on Felix's face spoke volumes—joy, eagerness, and a hint of nerves that were dwarfed by his overwhelming enthusiasm. He radiated a vibrant energy that lit up the space around him, his aura a reflection of the incredible journey he was about to embark upon.

When the time came to leave, Felix's steps were sure and purposeful. Unlike some of the other children who clung to their parents, their tearful goodbyes echoing through the air, Felix embraced his new adventure with unwavering determination. He joined his fellow pupils with a confident stride, his heart full of excitement and anticipation. His father watched him go, a mixture of pride and emotion in his eyes. He knew, deep down, that this was the beginning of something beautiful.

As Felix embarked on this journey, his mother found herself engaged in an array of activities beyond the walls of their homestead. The forest, a sanctuary of whispers and secrets, beckoned her as she ventured to gather firewood. The echoes of her footsteps were like verses in a silent song that intertwined with the rustling leaves.

However, even as life danced forward, not all chapters carried the same melody. Christine, the first wife, remained ensnared by a web of

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resentment and anger. Wasike's detachment, his affections directed more toward Nakhumicha, fueled the fire within her. The embers of discontent smoldered within her heart, manifesting in her demeanor. The duties of a wife, once performed with grace, now took a back seat to her newfound defiance.

A subtle shift had taken root within the dynamics of the household—a shift that began to cast shadows over Christine's interactions with her husband, Wasike. What once was a vibrant connection, woven through the threads of marriage, now resembled a strained thread unraveling under the weight of unspoken tensions. Christine and Wasike found themselves drifting apart, their paths no longer converging as seamlessly as before.

The tides of time had ushered in changes, and the winds of change seemed to blow strongest between Christine and Wasike. Their conversations grew more infrequent, their once-eager smiles replaced by somber expressions. Christine, in particular, had found solace and companionship beyond the realm of their marriage, seeking solace and connection with her fellow co-wives and the matriarch of the household, Nakhumicha.

Wasike, the focal point of their marital union, now spent much of his time in the presence of his other wives. He would call his children to partake in meals with the other families. While the family convened under different roofs for breakfast, lunch, and supper, it was Nakhumicha who played a central role in bringing them all together. Her warmth and wisdom bridged gaps, offering a haven for the family's unspoken grievances.

However, beneath this delicate façade, a current of tension pulsed. The distance between Christine and Wasike became palpable, their interactions confined to a mere exchange of necessary words. The walls that once echoed with laughter and shared dreams now seemed to reverberate with aching silence.

With bitterness taking root and hatred brewing, Christine sought refuge in the arms of a village boy. The clandestine meetings offered an escape—a fleeting moment of connection that provided a reprieve from the growing chasm in her marriage. She would slip away to meet him, seeking a taste of the intimacy she craved. These stolen moments held a tantalizing allure, a brief respite from the weight of her discontent.

As her connection with the village boy deepened, so did her vulnerability. She showered him with gifts and wealth, using her resources to build an illusion of intimacy. The young man, in turn, embraced her offerings with open arms, accepting whatever Christine was willing to bestow upon him. His acceptance became a balm for Christine's bruised heart, a counterbalance to the emptiness she felt within her own marriage.

Unbeknownst to Christine, Wasike had begun to sense that something was amiss. He observed her behavior, noticed her absences, and grew suspicious of her whereabouts. He would visit her dwelling, only to find it empty. She would return home late, her explanations guarded, and her demeanor defensive. When he dared to inquire about her activities, her responses were laced with defiance—“None of your business”—a sharp retort that further widened the chasm between them.

Wasike's growing concern prompted him to delve deeper into his wife's actions. He sought answers from her friends, hoping they might offer insights into her uncharacteristic behavior. Yet, Christine had managed to shroud her actions in secrecy, guarding her secrets with a sense of ownership that left even her closest confidantes in the dark. The enigma of Christine's actions had grown, a puzzle that eluded resolution.

Amidst the fractured fragments of their marriage, the shadows of suspicion and mistrust grew stronger. Wasike found himself caught in a web of uncertainty, torn between his desire to salvage their relationship and the lingering doubts that festered. Within the confines of their household, beneath the weight of unspoken words and untold truths, the distance between Christine and Wasike continued to widen—a divide that threatened to redefine the very foundation of their marriage.

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In the clandestine realm where Christine's secrets held sway, her actions continued to unfold in the shadows, hidden from the prying eyes of her family. Her rendezvous with the village boy remained a well-guarded secret, a fragile refuge that offered solace amidst the growing discontent of her marriage.

One fateful day, Christine's path collided with Nakhumicha's in an unexpected twist. Their worlds converged, and for a brief moment, the veil that shrouded their respective secrets was lifted. Shock and disbelief rippled through both women as they locked eyes—a moment of truth that neither could have foreseen.

The weight of that encounter hung in the air, an unspoken recognition that shattered the illusion of secrecy that had cocooned their actions. The gaze they shared spoke volumes, conveying a shared understanding that their hidden lives were now exposed to each other. In that brief, charged moment, the walls of deception that they had carefully constructed seemed to crumble.

Nakhumicha, the matriarch who held the family together with her wisdom, had also been living a parallel existence, away from the watchful eyes of her loved ones. And as Christine looked upon her, she saw a reflection of her own struggle—a shared vulnerability that transcended their roles as co-wives and united them in a newfound alliance of secrecy.

It was in the quiet solitude of a thicket, their voices hushed by the weight of their shared truth, that Nakhumicha and Christine found themselves entangled in a whispered conversation. Hidden amidst the rustling leaves and dappled sunlight, they spoke of their transgressions, their clandestine liaisons, and the fragile threads that held their worlds together.

In the intimate space of their hushed confabulation, a pact was formed—a pact born of necessity and shared vulnerability. They agreed, with a solemn understanding, to safeguard each other's secrets. Their collective silence became a bond, a lifeline that would shield their actions from the

judgmental gaze of the world. It was an unspoken promise, a pact that bound them together as co-conspirators in a web of hidden desires.

Beneath the canopy of leaves, with the secrets of their hearts laid bare, Nakhumicha and Christine solidified their alliance. Their voices, softened by the gravity of their shared experiences, forged a connection that defied the boundaries of their roles within the household. In each other, they found an unexpected confidante—a fellow traveler navigating the tumultuous waters of forbidden emotions and desires.

Their faces bore no trace of the revelations they had shared. The world remained oblivious to the bond that had formed between them—a bond as fragile as the petals of a flower, yet as enduring as the unspoken truths that they now held in their hearts. They agreed not to reveal what had transpired.

Time carried its weight, carrying forth new moments and unforeseen encounters. It was on one of those ordinary days, while tending to his grazing duties, that Wasike found himself in a situation he never could have anticipated.

The sun cast its warm embrace over the landscape as he sat down to rest, his eyes absently scanning the horizon. In the distance, two figures caught his attention. At first, he paid them little mind, assuming them to be villagers going about their day. But as they drew nearer, a sense of familiarity pervaded his senses, and he found himself unable to look away.

A hauntingly familiar cadence of voices reached his ears, a symphony of words that held secrets and whispered promises. Straining to listen, Wasike's heart raced as recognition settled in—he recognized the voices; they were Christine's and a young man from the village.

A mixture of confusion and disbelief held him in place, his body frozen as he wrestled with the reality of the situation. In his astonishment, he chose to remain seated, hidden from their view, allowing the words to

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weave a tale before him. Their conversation drifted toward him carried by the wind, a dissonant melody of betrayal and deceit.

Christine's voice carried a hushed intensity, her promises laden with a reckless urgency. She spoke of stolen moments and promises of nights spent in each other's company, hidden from prying eyes. Her words painted a picture of clandestine meetings fueled by the secrecy of the night, as she tried to lure the young man with the prospect of a rendezvous.

The words that followed cut through the air like a blade, shattering the fragile peace that had held Wasike captive. Christine offered food as a token of her affections, a bribe to cement their unholy alliance. In whispers tinged with desperation, she painted a vivid picture of a life unburdened by the constraints of their present circumstances, a life she envisioned with him.

His heart pounding like a drum, Wasike's emotions boiled beneath the surface. The realization of his wife's betrayal and her audacity to openly entice another man in their village fueled a surge of anger within him. But he hesitated, allowing himself to remain concealed for a moment longer, caught in a web of disbelief.

The conversation continued, his patience waned, and he knew he could no longer remain a passive observer. The weight of his emotions propelled him to his feet, a mixture of rage, hurt, and humiliation surging through his veins. His breaths came in ragged bursts as he advanced toward them, his steps determined and swift.

Christine and the young man noticed his approach, their gazes locking onto the figure that emerged from the landscape. Panic painted their expressions as they realized they had been discovered, and instinct drove them to flee from the impending confrontation.

With a mixture of fury and determination, Wasike's feet pounded against the earth as he pursued them. His heart raced, fueled by the fire of betrayal, as he chased them through the fields and towards the edge of the village. The villagers, sensing the commotion, turned their heads to

witness the spectacle—a husband in pursuit of his unfaithful wife and her paramour.

They disappeared into the distance, Wasike's voice rang out, a raw shout that held within it the weight of his shattered trust and broken vows. "Run if you must, but you can't escape the truth!" he yelled, the echoes of his words carried by the wind.

In the aftermath of that fateful encounter, the village whispered with the news of the scene that had unfolded—the confrontation that had torn the veil of secrecy from Christine's transgressions. The breach of trust had cast a shadow over their lives, a somber reminder that even in the tranquil embrace of the village, secrets had a way of surfacing, leaving scars in their wake.

With a heart heavy like a burden too great to bear, Wasike returned to his compound, his steps weighed down by the bitter revelation that had shattered his world. The village elders, with their wisdom etched into their faces, approached him like pillars of support.

Christine, too, retraced her steps to the very place she had once called home—a home that now held the fragments of a trust that could never be fully mended. There, she unveiled the truth to her parents, her voice laden with a mixture of guilt, remorse, and the ache of shattered bonds. With each word she spoke, she peeled back the layers of deceit, exposing the choices that had led her down a path of betrayal.

The sun dipped below the horizon, marking the passage of another day, a new one dawned, carrying with it the weight of reckoning and the gravity of decisions that could no longer be deferred. A determined resolve settled within the heart of Christine's brother, Titus, a man who had stood by his side through trials and triumphs, and who now assumed the role of mediator in the unraveling of a marriage once thought unbreakable.

With the dawn's early light, he approached Christine, a calm determination in his eyes that belied the storm raging within him. He extended a hand, an offer of reconciliation and resolution, an invitation to

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engage in a conversation that held the power to reshape the trajectory of their lives.

They stood before Wasike, their gazes locked in a moment that hung in the balance between love lost and the possibility of a newfound understanding. Words, heavy with the weight of truth, flowed between them, carving a path toward the bitter acceptance of a reality neither had envisioned. Each sentence was a thread woven into the fabric of a decision that held the potential to heal the wounds that festered beneath the surface.

They spoke, voices softened by the gravity of the situation, agreements were reached—a mutual recognition that the bond they had once shared had been fractured beyond repair. The love that had once fueled their union was replaced by the ache of betrayal, and in its place emerged a quiet resignation that they could no longer coexist in the same manner as before.

Tears were shed, words of remorse uttered, and the promises they had once held dear were consigned to the pages of memory. With heavy hearts, they acknowledged that the journey they had embarked upon together had reached an impasse—one that could only be resolved by the painful act of letting go.

In the end, it was a choice borne of necessity, an act of self-preservation that transcended the boundaries of love and loyalty. With a heavy sigh and a lingering touch that spoke of both farewell and forgiveness, they parted ways, no longer bound by vows that had become tainted by deception.

Christine's departure left a void, a space once occupied by her presence now echoing with the silence of absence. She left her children behind, returning to the shelter of her parents' home. Life continued to flow, unrelenting in its passage. In the midst of this flow, a new chapter began to unfold for Christine.

But amid the shadows, an unexpected encounter with Peter breathed new life into her existence. Like a dormant seed responding to the touch of

sunlight, her heart stirred with the promise of a second chance. Love blossomed, rekindling the fire that had once burned so brightly within her.

In Peter's presence, Christine found solace—a refuge from the tumultuous emotions that had consumed her in the wake of her shattered marriage. His smiles were a balm to her wounded soul, his laughter a melody that chased away the haunting memories of her past. With each passing day, the bond between them grew stronger, defying the skepticism that whispered within her mind.

Love, as unpredictable as a summer storm, had taken root once again, casting its transformative magic upon Christine's life. The days were illuminated by the light of companionship, and the future held the promise of shared dreams and new beginnings. The wounds of yesterday were slowly healing, replaced by a sense of hope that her heart had thought forever lost.

The rhythm of her days changed, guided by the melody of laughter and the tenderness of affection. Peter's presence was a testament to the resilience of the human heart, proving that even amidst the ruins of a broken past, love could find a way to flourish once more. He became her anchor, grounding her in a reality far removed from the bitterness that had once consumed her.

Her heart danced to the rhythm of newfound love; Christine's responsibilities shifted. She had entrusted the care of her children to Wasike, easing the burden of motherhood that had once weighed heavily upon her shoulders. With fewer responsibilities, she found herself with more time to nurture the love that had bloomed in her life—a love that held the promise of a future free from the chains of past mistakes.

But amid the jubilation, a concerned voice emerged from the shadows. It was Titus, a voice of reason amid the whirlwind of emotions. He recognized the fragility of her newfound love and the complexities that still entangled her life. He offered a gentle reminder that time had not yet

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fully healed the wounds of her previous marriage, and that patience was key to proving her transformation to Wasike.

“Don't you see, Christine? Wasike is still watching, still assessing,” Titus cautioned. “By showing him that you've changed, you pave the way for a possible return to your children. But rushing into a new love so soon might jeopardize that chance.” His words were a plea, a heartfelt attempt to guide her down a path that led to reconciliation and the restoration of the family she had once known.

However, Christine's heart was a fortress of determination, her desires fueled by the intensity of newfound love. The concerns echoed by her brother were swept away by the powerful currents of her emotions. She was unwilling to wait, to give time a chance to mend what was broken. And in that decision, she continued to tread a path that had been strewn with both hope and uncertainty, guided by the unwavering beat of her own heart.

Their relationship deepened, Christine and Peter's connection was so profound that they contemplated marriage. For Peter, this felt like a conquest – the search for a partner was over, and he believed he had found the companion for life's journey. However, the course of love rarely runs smooth, and their path was fraught with challenges.

Despite the bond they shared, Christine's actions started to speak of a heart divided. The echoes of her previous life, the bitterness that had once consumed her, still lingered. Her treatment of Peter was marked by detachment and emotional distance. The rift between them grew wider, revealing fragments of unresolved emotions.

Perhaps the shadows of her past still clung to her heart. The memories of her life with Wasike, the man she had once loved, left an indelible mark. The heart's complexities defied easy explanation, and as much as Christine tried to embrace her new chapter, the pages of her past remained etched upon her soul.

Inevitably, the strains of their relationship reached a crescendo, and the bond that had once seemed unbreakable shattered. Christine found herself

once again on a path of solitude, but this time with a weightier burden – she was now a single mother, carrying the future of a life yet unborn.

However, the society in which Christine existed cast its judgment. Tradition whispered its expectations: a woman should be wedded to a single partner, her role defined within the contours of a marital bond. Christine's choices defied these norms, and the whispers of disapproval swirled around her like a tempest.

As Felix continued with education, Wasike and Nakhumicha's hearts swelled with pride. Their cherished son was on the precipice of transformation, poised to become a beacon of hope for their family's future. Yet, his education extended beyond the classroom. Wasike was determined to ensure that Felix understood the cultural tapestry that formed the fabric of their existence.

A new dimension of Felix's education unfolded at a tender age. In the embrace of nature, he was initiated into the realm of herding. The forest became his classroom, the cattle his charges. Wasike walked beside him, guiding him in the ways of their ancestors. He imparted knowledge of when to lead the cattle to grazing, when to guide them to water, and when to return them to the homestead. It was an adventure, a symphony of learning played out amidst the rustling leaves.

At times, the role brought both joy and challenge for Felix. His initial excitement waned as the reality of responsibility settled in. Yet, the presence of his mother Nakhumicha remained a constant. Her day began at sunrise, her hands sweeping away the vestiges of night from the compound. With unwavering devotion, she fetched water and crafted breakfast for her family.

One day, however, Felix's enthusiasm led him astray. His attention drifted from his duties as he ventured to play, allowing the cattle to stray into a neighbor's crops. The neighbor's outcry reached Wasike's ears, who

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swiftly intervened. Felix's lesson was a stern one, his father's displeasure expressed through discipline.

Beaten and chastened, Felix lay on the ground, his tears blending with the earth beneath him. Nakhumicha watched over him, a guardian of solace in the midst of his distress. As he rose from the ground, his resolve solidified. He vowed never to neglect his responsibilities again, his young heart infused with determination.

Felix's journey continued, a blend of learning and growth. The echoes of tradition intertwined with the melody of his education. School was more than just an institution; it was a gateway to a new world, a world he embraced with fervor.

In Wasike and Nakhumicha's eyes, their son's education held the promise of change, a key to unlocking the door to a brighter future. He was not only learning from textbooks but from the wisdom of his ancestors. Their compound, once touched by strife, was now a symphony of unity and hope.

During his early years in primary school, Felix's spirit gravitated towards the embrace of the church. It was within the hallowed walls of the place of worship that he found a sense of purpose and belonging. His young heart was drawn to the rhythm of church activities, and he eagerly immersed himself in its rituals and traditions. The church became his sanctuary, a place where he felt a deep connection that extended beyond the mere pews and stained-glass windows.

Felix's dedication was a beacon that shone brightly in the eyes of the church community. He walked in close companionship with the priest, his steps echoing the path of faith and devotion. The role of an altar boy became his honor, a privilege he wore with a sense of humility and pride. With each procession, each liturgy, he stood alongside the priest, serving as a bridge between the divine and the congregation.

His commitment grew, so did his influence among his peers. Felix's exemplary conduct and unwavering faith made him a natural role model for other children. His actions spoke louder than words, inspiring those

around him to seek a deeper connection with their faith. In the eyes of the community, he was a beacon of hope, a young soul who carried the torch of tradition into the future.

Yet, as the years unfolded, an interesting dynamic began to take shape. Although Felix was earning admiration and respect for his dedication to the church, his own aspirations began to take shape beyond the confines of the sanctuary. The dreams that danced within his heart were not those of the priesthood, a path that seemed to beckon to him from the sidelines. While he walked the path of devotion, his true passions yearned for a different journey altogether.

Despite the allure of priesthood, Felix was steadfast in his pursuit of his own dreams. His spirit yearned for a different calling, a different purpose that pulsed within him like a hidden melody. And as he grew older, he navigated the delicate balance between his devotion to the church and the quiet yearning that resided within him.

While his dedication to the church remained steadfast, his dreams and aspirations painted a broader canvas of possibilities. He continued to inspire others with his faith and integrity, but now there was an added layer—a young soul exploring the depths of his own heart, searching for the symphony that resonated with his true essence.

Chapter Five

Embracing the Rite of Passage

In the midst of his seventh-grade studies, Felix stood at a pivotal crossroads of tradition and self-discovery. The decision he was about to make would reshape his identity and usher him into the realm of manhood. The looming prospect of circumcision, an age-old rite of passage in the Bukusu culture, gripped his thoughts and emotions. With determination in his heart, he approached the ancient ritual that had been woven into the fabric of his community for generations.

Felix embarked on a journey of thorough consultations and self-discovery as he contemplated the significant rite of passage. It was no trivial matter—it was a decision that demanded introspection, understanding, and a deep connection to tradition. He ventured into this uncharted territory; he sought guidance from those who had walked the path before him.

Drawing upon the wisdom of friends and individuals who had already undergone circumcision, Felix engaged in conversations that delved into the intricacies of the practice. He probed for insights, eagerly absorbing their experiences and perspectives. Each conversation was a window into a world he had yet to fully comprehend, a world where tradition intertwined with personal growth.

Yet, Felix's quest didn't end with conversations alone. He was well aware that understanding required more than just words—it necessitated a physical and emotional readiness. With determination blazing in his eyes, he embarked on a journey of self-preparation. He knew that the road to circumcision was not paved with casual intentions; it required a rigorous commitment to readiness.

Exercise became his ally in this journey. He pushed himself to the limits, testing his endurance and fortitude. Every step, every challenge he

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overcame was a demonstration to his dedication. He wanted to ensure that his body was capable of withstanding the physical demands that circumcision entailed. It was a journey that required discipline and perseverance, traits that he cultivated with every stride.

Felix's dedication was not merely a recent development. Two years prior, he had been a pillar of support for a peer undergoing circumcision. He had observed the process closely, studying the procedure and the emotions it stirred. His role as an observer wasn't casual; it was a conscious decision to comprehend the essence of the practice. This experience was etched into his memory, imprinting upon him the gravity of the decision he would one day face.

His diligence and dedication stood as evidence that Felix's journey towards circumcision was far from a fleeting thought. It was a deeply considered decision, marked by a profound respect for tradition and an unwavering commitment to understanding. He approached this rite of passage with open eyes and a heart brimming with anticipation. Every step he took, every conversation he engaged in, and every exercise he endured was a reflection of his sincere desire to honor his heritage and embrace the transition that awaited him.

He blended the wisdom of those who had come before him with his own determination to prepare himself fully. He stood on the threshold of transformation, not as a bystander, but as an active participant in the shaping of his own destiny. And in this journey, he demonstrated that his decision to undergo circumcision was not a mere gaze into the unknown—it was a deliberate and conscious step towards a tradition that carried significance, purpose, and personal growth.

Empowered by the support of his peers, Felix embarked on the final leg of his journey towards circumcision. The camaraderie of friends who understood the significance of the path he was treading gave him a sense of camaraderie and reassurance. With their guidance, he began a series of tests to assess his readiness—tests that went beyond the physical and delved into the realms of mental and emotional preparedness.

Under the shroud of night, Felix would stealthily slip away from his home to practice. It was a secret venture, one that he knew his father, Wasike, was aware of. There was an unspoken understanding between them, a silent acknowledgement that Felix was on a quest of self-discovery and transformation. Wasike's tacit approval was an evidence to his belief in his son's readiness to face the challenge ahead.

Amid the whispers and speculations that fluttered through the village, Nakhumicha found humor in her son's determination. She would tease him gently, inquiring about his nightly escapades. Felix responded with a confident grin, standing firm in his conviction that he was prepared for the impending rite of passage. His resolve remained unshaken; his determination unwavering.

His aunts, curious about his preparation, joined in the chorus of inquiries. They were eager to assess his resilience and mettle. One of his aunts devised a test—a challenge that would put his determination to the ultimate test. With a daring smile, she placed a piece of burning charcoal against his toe, a test to measure his ability to endure pain without faltering. Felix stood firm, not a tremor in his stance, not a flinch on his face. He conquered the challenge with grace, showcasing his unwavering determination.

Word of Felix's readiness and his successful test spread like wildfire throughout the village. Gossamer threads of gossip carried the news, and yet, his father remained steadfast in his silence. Wasike's demeanor held an air of calm assurance, as though he knew that his son's journey was one of personal growth and conviction.

In the midst of the murmurs and raised eyebrows, Felix persisted in his unwavering belief in himself. The rumors that swirled around him seemed to dance in the periphery, while he remained focused on his inner readiness. He carried himself with a quiet confidence, knowing that his journey was not just about a physical transformation, but a symbolic step into the realm of adulthood, tradition, and self-discovery.

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As the sun cast its warm afternoon glow, Felix found himself seated under the shade of a towering tree, a place that had witnessed countless stories of growth and transformation. Gathering his courage, he turned to his father, seeking approval for his daring choice.

"Dad, I want to be circumcised this year," he declared, the words resonating with a mixture of eagerness and trepidation.

His father, taken aback by the solemnity of the moment, looked into his son's eyes, searching for certainty. "Are you sure of what you are saying?" he asked, his voice laced with a father's concern.

Felix met his father's gaze, his resolve unshaken. "Yes, Dad," he affirmed.

The weight of the decision was not lost on his father. He inquired, "Do you know what it costs to undergo circumcision?"

With a sense of conviction, Felix replied, "Yes, Dad."

Concerned about the process that lay ahead, his father probed further, "Or will you shame us by holding the hand of *omkheBakhebi* during the process?"

Felix's voice was unwavering. "No, Dad, I have made a decision."

But his father, a mixture of paternal protectiveness and tradition, attempted to test his resolve by initially denying him. "No, you will not be circumcised this year."

Felix, however, stood his ground. "No, Dad."

With a nod of acceptance, his father relented. "Ok."

Walking away from the encounter, Felix's heart swelled with satisfaction. The journey toward his transformation had officially begun. He eagerly shared the news with his peers, who were no strangers to the customs of their culture.

Night after night, Felix ventured out into the enveloping darkness to hone his inner strength and readiness. The journey that lay ahead was one of intense trials, a three-day ordeal that would test his limits and propel him into a new realm of adulthood. Yet, his determination remained unshaken, a resolute flame that flickered within him, urging him onward.

He understood the gravity of the rite of passage he was about to face—the transition from boyhood to manhood, an ancient tradition that had bound generations together. The significance of this journey went beyond mere physical transformation; it was a deep, spiritual transformation that resonated with the essence of his culture and identity. Felix was prepared to embrace the tribulations that lay ahead, for he knew that they were the crucible that would mold him into a man.

With each passing night, Felix's resolve grew stronger. The hardships that he encountered became a tribute to his unwavering determination. He willingly embraced the challenges that the nights presented, viewing them not as obstacles, but as stepping stones towards his ultimate goal. Every obstacle he overcame was a reminder of his commitment.

Nakhumicha observed her son's transformation with a mixture of pride and awe. To her, Felix's journey was a reflection of his maturity and his newfound sense of responsibility. He had evolved from the young boy who once required reminders to complete his tasks to a self-reliant individual who took on his duties without a second thought. His avoidance of the kitchen and his willingness to shoulder responsibilities independently were manifestations of his growing maturity.

Conversations among family members acknowledged this transformation. His mother, in particular, found solace in witnessing her son's evolution. "My son has truly matured," she confided to an in-law one day. "He is no longer the Felix I once knew; he carries himself with a sense of responsibility and maturity." The in-law nodded in agreement, acknowledging the growth that Felix had exhibited.

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The days drew closer to the initiation ceremony, Felix's determination remained unflagging. His nights of practice, his deliberate steps towards readiness, were not just about mastering the physical aspects of circumcision; they were a proof to his commitment to his heritage, his culture, and the path he was embarking upon.

Preparations for the sacred rite began to take shape as the community readied itself for this significant event. Felix, in particular, was deeply immersed in learning the rhythms of 'Chinyimba,' the traditional bells that would accompany his transition into manhood. It was a crucial aspect of the ceremony, and he was determined to master it.

The days inched closer to the initiation; Felix found himself sneaking out at night to meet with his peers who were also preparing to face the knife that year. They would gather in secrecy, sharing stories, fears, and hopes. Their bond grew stronger as they faced the impending rite of passage together.

Every night, from 9 pm to midnight, the village would resonate with the enchanting sound of the Chinyimba. It was a mesmerizing melody that echoed through the stillness of the night. Felix's mother, Nakhumicha, would listen to the rhythmic chiming, her heart heavy with a mixture of pride and worry. She understood the significance of this moment in her son's life and could only offer her prayers, hoping that Felix would undergo the process safely and emerge as a man.

The news of Felix's approaching initiation had reached far and wide, reaching not only his immediate family but also his uncles and various relatives. They were all informed and eagerly awaited his official invitation to the ceremony. Father's age sets within were also notified. They began preparations for the event, readying their gifts and traditional offerings to honor Felix's transition into manhood.

With the arrival of August, the mohel, the one skilled in the sacred art of circumcision, embarked on his preparations.

Lukembe were ceremonially anointed by the revered elders of the Bukusu tribe. The brewing of *busaa* marked the upcoming celebration,

connecting the initiates with their ancestors. *Ewanga* symbolized blessings and served as a public declaration that the event was not shrouded in secrecy.

The mohel was entrusted with the task of meeting specific qualifications before being granted the privilege to perform the circumcision. Throughout the entire circumcision period, the initiates were required to abstain from sexual intercourse. The knives used in the ceremony held a special place and were handled with utmost care. Interestingly, a knife that had been used to circumcise a father could not be employed to circumcise his son. Further adding to the intricacies, a knife used to cut a child born outside wedlock could not be used for a child born within the embrace of both parents.

A firm taboo existed within the Bukusu tribe, forbidding the burial of a boy who had reached circumcision age without undergoing the ritual. In the unfortunate event of a boy's passing, an initiator could conduct the circumcision as a final mark of his initiation journey.

Twin initiates carried their own unique customs. They underwent circumcision between the hours of 4:00 am to 5:00 am, a time believed to be less perilous due to the perceived vulnerability of twins. In the case of heterogeneous twins, a boy and a girl, a symbolic act involving a banana leaf took place before the boy's circumcision. The girl stood by her twin brother during his period of seclusion, providing support until his recovery.

The knife, the sacred instrument of the ceremony, held its own significance. The handle of the *lukembe* knife was carved from the root of the *Kamukimira* tree. The path the root took as it grew represented the shared journey of countless initiates, as this knife would be used for many circumcisions to come.

In Felix's journey, Wasike, his father, played a pivotal role. Determining that the time was right, Wasike set the date for Felix's circumcision on the 2nd of August.

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Setting the date was an essential milestone in Felix's journey towards initiation. The significance of this decision was not lost on him, for it marked the convergence of numerous factors that would determine his readiness to embrace manhood. With the date established, the gravity of the imminent transformation hung in the air, a reminder that his initiation was drawing near and that he had few chances of evading the rite now.

Within the community, plans shifted and reshaped themselves to accommodate the significant occasion. Those who held other engagements, particularly those who shared a close bond with Wasike, rescheduled their commitments to ensure they could partake in the initiation of his son. The importance of this event was recognized, and people were willing to adjust their schedules to honor the invitation and bear witness to Felix's transition into manhood.

Felix's preparations for the initiation ceremony entered their final phase. The days were punctuated by his unwavering commitment to perfecting the details of his journey. He ventured to the river's edge to gather the essential *bhiuma* plants—those that he would tie across his chest in the shape of an X, which he would rhythmically shake as he danced to the ancestral melodies during the three-day trek.

Crucial to the initiation process were his uncles, who had been notified in advance of their roles in guiding and supporting Felix through this transformative experience. Their presence and guidance were vital in ensuring that he navigated the challenges of the journey and emerged on the other side as a fully initiated member of the community, marked by the sacred markings of his passage.

Relatives and friends were also brought into the fold, informed of the set date for Felix's initiation. The anticipation and excitement rippled through the community as the news spread. Felix's initiation was not just a personal journey; it was a communal event that united the collective spirit of the village. The support and encouragement of those around him were evidence to the bond that tied them together, reaffirming their shared heritage and commitment to preserving their cultural traditions.

The days approached the appointed date, a sense of reverence and purpose settled over the village. The preparations, the rescheduled plans, the practices, and the guidance of the elders all converged to create an atmosphere of significance. Each gesture, each preparation, was a thread woven into the rich tapestry of tradition and culture, connecting Felix to the legacy of those who had come before him.

The preparations surged forward, and Felix engaged himself fully, fetching water for the fermentation of the *busaa* flour and participating in its preparation.

Felix went to fetch water, he was accompanied by a group of men, including his brothers. They teased him in good spirits, sharing laughter as they carried pots to the nearby water source. Amidst their playful banter, they offered words of encouragement, urging him not to be fearful and to continue showcasing his brilliance.

Back at home, the compound was a beehive of activity. Nakhumicha was among the women who were diligently washing pots. These pots were essential for the fermentation process that would produce *busaa*.

On their return from the water source, Felix accidentally stepped on one of his brothers, causing him to stumble and break a pot. However, rather than making a fuss, his brother displayed an act of generosity and pretended that he was the one who had broken the pot. This small gesture of sibling solidarity ensured that harmony prevailed, and they continued on their way home.

Upon their return to the homestead, the women were deeply engrossed in their work. They had removed the fermented flour outside in preparation for the next step. This flour would be carefully stirred and cooked over an open fire to create *kamakhallange*, a vital component of their traditional cuisine.

Felix eagerly joined in the communal effort. He collected firewood, ensuring that there was an ample supply to sustain the cooking process. As the flames crackled and the pots simmered, Felix played a crucial role

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in stirring the *kamakhalange* mixture. The women worked in unison; their voices filled with excitement as they discussed the upcoming three days of celebration.

The women's chatter was centered around the enjoyment they anticipated during this period. They spoke of the delicious dishes they would prepare, the songs and dances they would share, and the sense of togetherness that would define these festivities.

In their large pots, they had already combined the fermented sorghum flour and water, along with the *kamakhalange* mixture. The concoction was carefully prepared, with each ingredient playing a vital role in the creation of the cherished *busaa*. With patience and tradition as their guides, they knew that within three days, the *busaa* would be ready to be savored.

An essential aspect of the process was the presence of a caretaker for the initiate during his healing period. Isabela, Christin's third daughter, was chosen for this vital role. She would accompany Felix, especially on the third day, as he ventured to *esitosi*, adorned with a special grass crown, and walk naked to the place of his circumcision.

Two days before Felix officially commenced *khuminya*, he embarked on a journey to visit his uncles, his maternal relatives who resided in a distant village. Four men were assigned to accompany him on this journey of familial connection and tradition.

With blessings from his parents, Felix set forth on this pilgrimage, a rite of passage within a rite of passage. Their return was anticipated with both excitement and anxiety. People gathered in Wasike's home, a congregation awaiting the candidate who would soon face the ceremonial knife.

The day wore on and the sun reached its zenith, murmurs of concern began to ripple through the crowd. The absence of Felix and his companions was noted, and questions floated in the air. "Why have my in-laws delayed in returning him?" Wasike's thoughts mirrored those of the community.

In the late afternoon, as curiosity mingled with concern, Wasike posed the question to his fellow elders, who were sipping *busaa* while waiting. Theories emerged, speculating whether the celebrations had prolonged the delay or if unforeseen circumstances had befallen the journey.

The hours waned and darkness enshrouded the landscape, Felix remained absent. Wasike grappled with his own thoughts, questioning the possible reasons behind his son's prolonged absence. Was it fear that had driven him away? Or was there something more sinister at play? The uncertainty gnawed at Wasike's heart.

In his tumultuous contemplation, Nakhimicha, a compassionate presence, offered him solace and urged him to find rest. But rest eluded him, as the weight of the unknown pressed heavily upon his spirit.

Another day dawned, and yet Felix had not returned. Anxiety intensified, leaving Wasike and the community in a state of anticipation mingled with concern.

Finally, after three days, Felix and his companions emerged, their condition indicating the trials they had encountered.

Gathering them, Wasike inquired about their delay. Their response was unexpected, as Felix revealed that they had lost their way, and rather than reaching his uncles, they had feasted on vegetables and fruits during their unplanned journey.

Such an explanation was perplexing, as Felix was intimately familiar with the path to his uncles' village, and his companions were equally aware. The incongruity added a layer of mystery to the story.

Undeterred by the challenges he had faced, Felix donned the bells and initiated *khuminya*. The toll of exhaustion was evident, but there was no room for respite. With a pot balanced on his shoulder, he journeyed to the river to fetch water for the sacred floor paste. Cloaked in half-nakedness, he embraced the solemnity of his impending transformation.

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In that crucial moment, one of Felix's uncles stepped forward, his gaze solid as he locked eyes with the young initiate. The air was charged with a sense of anticipation, and Felix stood resolute, meeting his uncle's gaze with determination.

Then, in a tradition that had been practiced for generations, the uncle delivered a powerful message to Felix: "We don't fear a knife." These words were laden with significance, conveying the idea that the community had prepared him well for this moment, that he was strong and ready to face the challenges of the upcoming circumcision ceremony.

With the weight of those words still resonating, the ceremony took an unexpected turn. Suddenly and without warning, Felix felt a heavy slap across his face. It was a shocking and startling moment, one that left tears brimming in his eyes. But he knew that this was part of the ritual, a way to test his resolve and strength.

The slap, however, was not an isolated event. Another swift and stinging slap followed, intensifying the emotional and physical impact.

Despite the tears that welled in his eyes, Felix held his ground. He refused to blink or show any sign of weakness. He understood the importance of this moment, that it was a test of his mettle and his ability to endure.

After the slaps, the uncle stepped back, and another part of the ritual began. He took the floor mixed with water, and smeared it generously on Felix.

In this moment of transition, Isabela stepped forward. She carried rags and skillfully tied them around Felix's waist.

A chorus of voices resonated as they sang *sioya*. With each step, Felix ventured into homes, where onlookers witnessed his journey, offering gentle slaps as gestures of solidarity and encouragement.

The initiation ceremony began with a visit to their neighbor's house, a gesture of goodwill and community support. In a symbolic gesture, their

neighbor gifted Felix a robust male goat, signifying virility and prosperity.

As tradition dictated, Felix's journey took him through the village, moving from the nearest houses to those situated farther away. This procession mirrored the interconnectedness of the community, with each household participating in the celebration of this pivotal moment in Felix's life.

During this procession, Felix carried the *chinyimba*, that emitted a rhythmic sound, serving both as musical accompaniment and a symbol of significance. The resonating *chinyimba* bells announced to the entire village the importance of the event.

Accompanied by a joyful crowd, Felix made his way through the village. Traditional songs filled the air, paying homage to the community's valiant warriors and celebrating their courage. However, these songs also had a lighthearted side, occasionally poking fun at those who might have faced setbacks or made mistakes in the past. It was a time for reflection and humor, a way to acknowledge the past while looking forward to a brighter future.

The participation of young ladies in the event was notable. They wrapped colorful *lessos* around their waists. Some of them tied these *lessos* to poles, raising them high as they danced and sang along. This added a vibrant and symbolic dimension to the celebration.

The young boys of the village were equally engaged in the festivities. They carried sticks, which they proudly lifted and moved in rhythmic unison, matching their steps to the beat of the traditional songs.

Felix's brother played a vital role during this celebration. He bore the responsibility of safeguarding the gifts.

As Felix visited each house, his heart swelled with pride and gratitude. The outpouring of support from his community reinforced the significance of this rite of passage, not just for him but for the entire

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village. It was a time of celebration, camaraderie, and reflection, where tradition and transition converged in a harmonious dance.

By the end of the day, Felix had received a remarkable display of generosity. He was gifted nine cows, twenty goats, and chickens.

The first two days allowed Felix a measure of rest, a brief respite from the rigor of the process. Yet on the third day, sleep eluded him. In the stillness of midnight, the mohel approached, ensuring that all was in readiness.

As the dawn painted the sky with soft hues, Felix embarked on the final stage of his initiation.

As the events continued, there was a palpable sense of both exhaustion and exhilaration among the people gathered to celebrate Felix's initiation into manhood. The rituals, songs, and dances had filled the night with energy, but it was clear that everyone was beginning to feel the weight of the long and emotionally charged ceremony.

As the clock neared midnight, a particularly significant moment was about to unfold. A bull, generously gifted by Felix's uncles, was slaughtered. The atmosphere was charged with anticipation as the family and community members prepared for this climactic moment.

In the stillness of the night, Felix's uncle took *bhuse*.

They came together in a circle, singing and dancing around the compound. The rhythm of the songs echoed through the night, creating an ethereal ambiance.

In the midst of this spirited celebration, Felix's uncle stepped forward, his voice commanding silence and attention. His words carried the weight of tradition and the collective wisdom of the community. With a solemn demeanor, he addressed Felix, his words infused with deep meaning.

As he spoke, he held the *bhuse* in his hands. These words were not mere utterances; they were a bridge between generations, a passage from the old to the new, and a connection between the past, present, and future.

With a deliberate and purposeful gesture, Felix's uncle threw the *bhuse* onto Felix's chest. It was a symbolic act, signifying the transfer of knowledge, wisdom, and the collective spirit of the community to the young initiate. The *bhuse* represented the ancestral blessings and the legacy of their culture, which Felix was now entrusted to carry forward.

In this moment, under the moonlit sky, surrounded by the songs and dances of his community, Felix received the spiritual and cultural mantle of his people. It was a powerful and transformative experience, marking his official initiation into manhood and affirming his deep connection to his heritage.

The night wore on and the community's songs and dances continued, the anticipation of the upcoming rite weighed heavily in the air. The celebrations had been vibrant, but the real climax of Felix's initiation was about to unfold.

At five o'clock in the morning, the sky was painted with the first light of dawn, signaling that the time to proceed to *sietosi* was approaching. Felix's uncle, who had played a significant role throughout the ceremony, appeared once more.

With a solemn demeanor, he sought the attention of the gathered crowd. All eyes turned to him as he addressed Felix, ensuring that he was ready and that everything was in its rightful place. This moment of reassurance was a final check to ensure that the initiation would proceed smoothly and according to tradition. He led them to *sietosi*.

Behind them, Felix's father, uncles, and other respected elders were busy preparing *etiang'i*. The atmosphere was charged with a sense of purpose and significance as they meticulously arranged the space for this sacred event.

Meanwhile, the initiator, a skilled and experienced figure in the community, stood nearby, sharpening his knife in preparation for the circumcision. His role was crucial, as he would perform the delicate and pivotal act that marked Felix's transition from boyhood to manhood.

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Arriving at *sietosi*, he shed his clothing, surrendering himself to the transformative mud. Isabela, a steadfast presence, stood by his side, holding his garments as they navigated through the midst of the singing crowd.

In the dim light of dawn, as the village woke up to the day's significance, Felix stood on the muddy ground of *sietosi*. His uncle, stood before him with an air of solemnity.

With an alert and focused demeanor, Felix faced his uncle, aware of the gravity of the moment. His uncle, in a gesture meant to instill bravery and fortitude, delivered a firm slap to Felix's cheek

Bending down, Felix's uncle scooped up a handful of wet mud from the ground, it's cool, earthy texture in stark contrast to the tension in the air. With deliberate intent, he threw the mud onto Felix's chest, smearing it across his skin.

On Felix's head, a heap of mud was carefully placed. This mound served as a platform for the next step in the ceremony, resembling the raised antenna of an old-fashioned radio cassette player

The mud adorned his body, a symbol of his rebirth and metamorphosis. Amidst the embrace of his kin, he stood, a figure marked by both vulnerability and strength. With a grass crown placed atop his head, he emerged from the ritual space, his steps guided by the echoes of ancient song *sioya* and the communal spirit that enveloped him.

Felix and his uncle embarked on this significant journey to the circumcision site, they were accompanied by a procession of villagers who had gathered to witness and support the young initiate. In his hand, Felix's uncle held a calabash filled with *busaa*.

They made their way along the path, the uncle periodically took sips from the calabash, letting the frothy liquid flow down his throat. Then, in a ritualistic gesture, he would splash some *busaa* onto the road, marking their progress with this symbolic offering. The crowd followed closely behind, their footsteps echoing the gravity of the occasion.

While on this path towards manhood, the uncle sought Felix's attention. In a moment of quietude, he encouraged the young initiate to relieve himself if he felt the urge.

The journey continued, each step bringing Felix closer to the culmination of his rite of passage. The support and guidance of his uncle and the presence of the community provided him with a sense of reassurance and purpose as he embarked on this transformative ordeal.

His return home marked a significant transition in his journey. Unlike the firstborn sons who underwent circumcision at their grandfather's abode, Felix's rite took place within the walls of his father's home. The sands of *etiang'i*, placed outside his mother's hut, awaited his sacred skin.

Within the kitchen, his mother's heart ached with a mother's worry, her emotions etched across her face as she sat, legs stretched out before her. The anticipation was palpable.

Approaching his home, a familial welcome awaited him. His aunt, a cooking stick dipped in *busaa*, met his cheek with a resounding tap. His father, adorned in a *shuka*, reached out to touch his son's hand, a moment that carried the weight of generations. Guiding him to *etiang'i*, the site of his circumcision, Wasike oversaw the culmination of a journey that spanned tradition and transformation.

Under the skilled hands of the mohel, Felix faced the final threshold of his initiation. The blade of the *Lukembe* knife met his flesh, and with a decisive cut, he was irrevocably transformed. The air was filled with songs as the community celebrated his rebirth. Isabela, gentle hands removing the traces of mud, revealed the newness beneath.

Gifted with a sense of completion, Felix was led to a place of rest, his body an embodiment of healing and renewal. In the days following Felix's circumcision, the care and support of Isabela played a crucial role in his recovery and transition into manhood. Isabela took on the responsibility of looking after Felix's well-being with dedication and care. She ensured that he was well-fed, preparing his meals with great

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attention. His garments were meticulously cleaned, and she attended to his every need during this sensitive time.

During this period, Felix refrained from eating food cooked by his mother, as there were specific cultural restrictions in place. He also respected the tradition by avoiding the kitchen entirely. These practices were essential to the rites of passage, and Felix adhered to them with diligence.

The return home for Felix was set at 5 pm, and any deviation from this time resulted in a fine, which Isabela was tasked with imposing. This strict schedule helped Felix maintain his commitment to the traditions and ensured he fully observed the rites.

For three days after the circumcision, Felix remained indoors, isolated from others. During this time, he refrained from bathing. However, on the third day, he took a shower and joined the community again. His return was met with congratulations and gifts from those who had not yet had the opportunity to offer their tokens of support.

Before dawn on that significant day, Felix's father took the *etiang'i*, which contained Felix's foreskin, and discreetly disposed of it in a secretive location, ensuring that no one could find it.

Early in the morning, the fathers' age group congregated outside, maintaining a solemn silence. Felix's father approached them with money, offering it to each member. If the amount was insufficient, they refused to accept it, and his father pleaded while adding more to the offering.

As the days unfolded, Felix's body and spirit healed. He joined the ranks of his fellow circumcised boys, partaking in the ceremonial application of *lulongo* mud, a mark of solidarity and shared experience. However, a moment of forgetfulness led to a painful lesson when Felix failed to apply the protective mud. Ambushed by his peers, he endured their playful punishment, a reminder that each aspect of the journey held its significance.

The date of December 12 marked a culmination of Felix's transformation. *Khwalukha*, a celebration of his newfound status as a man, was meticulously organized. With the eve of the 11th drawing near, Felix arranged his sleeping quarters outside, a gesture that embraced the separation from boyhood.

Supper consumed, fire was ignited using long grass, the flames dancing in the night as Felix ran with the torch, proclaiming the name of the mohel who had guided his journey. The bonfire illuminated the darkness, and he was joined by others, each carrying a chicken as they moved as one.

Under the cover of night, they ventured forth, seizing the bananas still adorned with their inflorescence. Flames met fruit, and laughter mingled with the scent of roasted chicken. In the morning light, Felix cleansed himself in the river, donned fresh attire, and returned home.

He went home where they had prepared bananas and placed in a basket where he ate together with other and threw at each other as they run away.

Amongst the gathered community, he was welcomed as a man, surrounded by the wisdom of elders who imparted their counsel. The journey of Felix was celebrated, a testament to his strength, determination, and connection to the enduring legacy of his people.

Chapter Six

A Journey of Brilliance

Felix Wasike's footsteps carried him through the corridors of time. He reached the culmination of his primary education, he stood at the threshold of new beginnings. The sun of accomplishment shone upon him as he successfully completed his primary schooling.

The news of Felix's success resonated through the compound like a jubilant melody, weaving smiles upon the faces of his family. His father's heart swelled with pride, orchestrated a symphony of celebration. A goat was chosen, its sacrifice emblematic of a victory earned through hard work and dedication. From its flesh emerged *busaa* that flowed like a river of celebration.

The family was not merely celebrating a milestone; they were celebrating the transition of their son to a national secondary school. Felix's accomplishments held the promise of a brighter future, and the Wasike family reveled in the warmth of hope. Their ample savings ensured that Felix's journey to secondary school was a seamless one, unfettered by financial concerns.

Wasike's pride knew no bounds, and he spoke of Felix's brilliance with unwavering confidence. His chest puffed with the honor of a father whose son was not only excelling in school but also navigating the complexities of life with wisdom beyond his years. He spoke to the elders, his words a beacon of encouragement: "Give birth to as many children as possible, for you never know who among them will be your savior."

Ample land stretched before them, a legacy of space to be shared among their growing brood of boys. There were lands untouched by petition, territories yet to be claimed. The cycles of the seasons dictated the rhythms of their lives, guiding them on journeys of over seven kilometers

to graze their cattle, especially during the parched embrace of the dry season.

To celebrate Felix's triumphs, Wasike bestowed upon him two cows – a gift that transcended the material realm. With this gesture, Felix's status within Mwamba village soared. He became a figure of admiration, treated as though he hailed from royal lineage. Parents sought to align their sons with Felix's trajectory, believing that proximity to his brilliance could ignite their children's own flames of success.

But it wasn't just the young who sought his company. Elders, too, were drawn to him like moths to a flame, eager to glean insights from his experiences. They sought his guidance, perhaps in hope that a sprinkle of his brilliance might rub off on their own children.

Felix had become a name that resonated throughout the village, a name associated with academic achievement and the pursuit of higher education. In a community where many boys faced the temptation to leave school early and engage in farming or marry shortly after completing eighth grade, Felix's journey stood in stark contrast to the prevailing norms.

It was a common practice in the village for young boys to abandon their studies after primary education, opting instead to take up farming or enter into early marriages. Parents often played a pivotal role in facilitating these transitions, assisting their sons in finding suitable partners and starting their own families. This was viewed by some as a pragmatic approach to life, a way to ensure immediate security and stability.

However, Felix's path diverged significantly from this pattern. To some, his unwavering commitment to education seemed like an unconventional and potentially wasteful choice. They questioned the practicality of investing more time in school when there were pressing familial and economic needs to address. For them, the allure of immediate gratification overshadowed the long-term benefits of education.

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Conversely, there were those who recognized Felix's pursuit of education as a remarkable opportunity. They saw in him the potential to break free from the constraints of tradition and open doors to a world of possibilities. They believed that education held the key to unlocking greater opportunities, not just for Felix but for the entire community. To them, his journey represented hope for a brighter future.

Felix's decision to continue his education sent ripples through the village, sparking discussions and debates about the value of tradition versus the promise of progress. It forced people to confront their own beliefs and priorities, challenging the status quo and inspiring reflection on the choices they had made or would make for their own children.

As Wasike sat outside Nakhumicha's hut, he noticed a group of white men approaching from a distance. The sight of white visitors in the village was not uncommon, as they often came to explore and document the natural beauty of the area. It was a regular occurrence that didn't particularly concern him.

However, after a few minutes, one of his fellow villagers arrived with the group of white men in tow, explaining that he had brought them to Wasike's compound because he was considered the village elder and could help communicate with the visitors. Although Wasike didn't speak English, he was known for his wisdom and respected position within the community.

Nakhumicha, his wife, came out to inquire about the purpose of the white men's visit. Wasike admitted that he didn't know. Communication was challenging due to the language barrier, but they resorted to using sign language to facilitate understanding.

Recognizing the need for a translator, Nakhumicha suggested bringing their son, Felix, who was currently out grazing the cattle some distance away. Felix was known to have a good grasp of the English language, having received an education beyond the village's norm. His ability to bridge the language gap would prove invaluable in deciphering the intentions of the white visitors and facilitating a meaningful conversation.

Nakhumicha sent one of their younger children to fetch Felix from the fields. It took a little while for Felix to arrive, but when he did, he was met with an unexpected scene. A group of white men, unfamiliar to him, was seated in their compound, and his parents looked concerned yet intrigued.

Felix approached, his parents introduced him to the visitors, albeit in their native language, Bukusu. Felix greeted them respectfully in English, which he had picked up from his formal education. The visitors responded with smiles and nods, signaling that they were indeed in need of someone who could communicate in English.

With Felix as their interpreter, the conversation began to flow. The white men explained that they were researchers and conservationists interested in studying the local flora and fauna of the region. They were particularly intrigued by the biodiversity of the nearby forest and hoped to learn more about the indigenous species.

Felix translated their words to his parents, who then shared the information with other villagers who had gathered curiously. The villagers were quite familiar with the forest and its rich diversity of plant and animal life.

The researchers, eager to engage with the community and learn from their knowledge, expressed their desire to collaborate with the villagers in documenting the flora and fauna of the forest. They explained that they believed such collaboration could be beneficial for both parties. The white men would gain valuable insights into the local ecosystem, while the villagers might benefit from increased awareness and potentially even financial support for conservation efforts.

Felix carefully translated all of this, ensuring that the message was accurately conveyed. The villagers, including his parents, discussed the proposal among themselves, considering the potential benefits and any concerns they might have.

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After a thorough deliberation, Wasike, as the village elder, addressed the visitors through Felix. He expressed the community's willingness to cooperate and share their knowledge of the forest. However, he emphasized the importance of preserving the forest's delicate balance and ensuring that the researchers' activities would not harm the environment or disrupt the villagers' way of life.

The white men acknowledged these concerns and assured the villagers that they were committed to responsible research and conservation practices. They also promised to provide resources for environmental education and initiatives within the village.

Among the visitors to Mwamba village was Dr. Lincoln, a man whose curiosity had been piqued by the sight of Felix moderating and translating the conversation between the white researchers and his fellow villagers. Dr. Lincoln, a prominent member of the visiting team, couldn't help but interrupt to satisfy his growing interest.

"Excuse me," Dr. Lincoln began politely, "I couldn't help but wonder, where have you learned up to, young man?" His question was directed at Felix, who wore a friendly smile that revealed both his youth and a spark of intelligence.

With a sense of pride and enthusiasm, Felix responded, "I have just completed primary school and am awaiting the opportunity to join high school." His words were spoken with a youthful exuberance, showcasing his ambition and eagerness for further education.

Dr. Lincoln and his fellow researchers exchanged surprised glances. They hadn't anticipated such a mature and articulate response from a young boy in a rural village. Dr. Lincoln couldn't contain his admiration as he approached Felix, a sign of his genuine interest.

"You talk like a university graduate!" Dr. Lincoln exclaimed with a warm smile, clearly impressed by Felix's command of the English language and his ability to engage in meaningful conversation. "You must be very clever!"

Wasike watched the exchange with a mix of curiosity and pride. He was keen to understand the nature of their conversation but respected Felix's independence and didn't intrude. He knew his son had always been a bright and diligent student, but this unexpected recognition from a prominent visitor was something quite extraordinary.

The conversation between Felix and Dr. Lincoln continued, the researcher's interest in the young boy grew. He saw potential in Felix, far beyond what he had initially anticipated when visiting Mwamba village.

"I think," Dr. Lincoln began, "that we can offer you a remarkable opportunity, Felix. We could sponsor your education, all the way to your last degree, if you're interested."

Felix was taken aback by the offer, his eyes widening with astonishment. The concept of sponsorship to pursue higher education was a dream beyond his wildest imagination. He felt a surge of excitement and hope welling up within him.

However, Felix understood the importance of consulting his father, as it was a decision that would profoundly affect his family. He turned to Wasike, who was still quietly observing the conversation. Felix spoke earnestly, "I appreciate your offer, Dr. Lincoln, but I'm still under the umbrella of my father. I can't make such an important decision without his guidance and approval."

Dr. Lincoln respected Felix's response, appreciating the deep sense of family and tradition that guided the young boy's decisions. He nodded in understanding, "Of course, Felix, family comes first. We would be honored to discuss this further with your father and ensure that this opportunity aligns with your family's wishes and values."

Felix felt a sense of relief and gratitude as he relayed Dr. Lincoln's offer and his own response to Wasike. The idea of pursuing higher education with the support of these generous sponsors was both exhilarating and daunting. He knew that his father's wisdom and guidance would be

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essential in making the right choice for his future. Felix immediately shared with his father what the whites had suggested.

Wasike's heart was torn between pride and apprehension. He grappled with the decision, torn between the desire to see his son soar and the reluctance to let him go. Ultimately, he refused the initial offer. But destiny had other plans. The white men persisted, recognizing Felix's potential as a beacon of change for their village and beyond.

After much deliberation, an agreement was reached. They would sponsor Felix's education, facilitating his journey through secondary school and even university. And as if a star had risen in their midst, the village felt the promise of transformation. Wasike's chest swelled with pride, Nakhumicha's heart glowed with the radiance of a queen.

With the agreement between Felix's family, the community, and the researchers firmly in place, both parties were eager to embark on this collaborative journey, driven by a shared vision of exploration, discovery, and cultural exchange.

Felix, now a young scholar with boundless potential, played a pivotal role as the bridge between his community and the researchers. His fluency in both languages, coupled with his profound understanding of the cultural nuances of Mwamba village, made him an invaluable asset to the project.

In the weeks that followed, the researchers and villagers worked closely together, forging connections that transcended language barriers. They ventured deep into the lush forest, where they encountered a rich tapestry of plant and animal species previously unknown to the scientific world. These discoveries were meticulously documented, thanks to Felix's adept translation skills and his ability to ensure that communication flowed smoothly between the two groups.

The project progressed; Felix's role expanded beyond mere translation. He had a natural curiosity and an insatiable thirst for knowledge. Through his interactions with the researchers, he began to develop a deep interest in ecology and conservation. He eagerly absorbed the wisdom

shared by the scientists, grasping complex ecological concepts with astonishing ease.

Felix didn't keep this newfound knowledge to himself; he became a passionate advocate for environmental protection within his community. He took it upon himself to educate his fellow villagers about the significance of their natural surroundings and the importance of preserving them for future generations. His ability to convey these intricate concepts in a relatable and accessible manner made him a respected figure in Mwamba village.

Beyond the scientific discoveries, it fostered a sense of unity and shared purpose within the community. Together, they witnessed the interconnectedness of all life forms in their forest, and this realization deepened their appreciation for their environment.

The project's success was not limited to the realm of science; it also had far-reaching implications for Felix's personal journey. His sponsorship by Dr. Lincoln opened doors to opportunities he could once only dream of.

Felix's bond with Dr. Lincoln continued to strengthen as they spent more time together. They delved deeper into their personal backgrounds, sharing stories of their respective journeys, dreams, and aspirations. Over time, they transitioned from collaborators to genuine friends, their connection rooted in mutual respect and shared values.

After the research project had concluded, Dr. Lincoln approached Wasike with a request that carried the promise of a transformative experience for Felix. He sought permission to take Felix to the city, to provide him with a glimpse into a world beyond Mwamba, a world full of opportunities and possibilities.

With Wasike's cautious but ultimately supportive consent, Felix embarked on his first-ever journey to the city, guided by Dr. Lincoln. The city was a stark contrast to the serene and rustic beauty of Mwamba. Tall buildings reached for the sky, bustling streets were filled with the hum of life, and vehicles of all shapes and sizes moved in an orchestrated chaos.

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Dr. Lincoln took Felix on a tour of their offices, allowing him to witness firsthand the world of scientific research, innovation, and discovery. He introduced Felix to his colleagues, scientists, and professionals from diverse fields, broadening the young boy's horizons and sparking his imagination about the endless possibilities that education could unlock.

During his time in the city, Felix was exposed to a life he had only heard of in stories. He visited museums, libraries, and educational institutions, each visit igniting his curiosity further. It was a transformative experience that fueled his desire to excel in education.

He prepared to return to Mwamba village, Dr. Lincoln presented him with a parting gift that would prove invaluable on his academic journey. He handed Felix a pile of books, carefully selected to nurture his thirst for knowledge and fuel his intellectual growth. The books were a gateway to worlds far beyond his current reality, a portal to explore history, science, literature, and countless other subjects.

In addition to the books, Dr. Lincoln also provided Felix with some financial assistance to cover his immediate needs as he awaited the next phase of his education. This gesture of generosity would ease the burden on his family and ensure that he had the resources necessary to pursue his studies with dedication and focus.

Felix returned to Mwamba village with a heart filled with gratitude, determination, and a newfound sense of purpose. The experiences and knowledge he had gained during his city visit were seeds that would continue to grow within him, propelling him toward a brighter future. In the wake of these opportunities, changes rippled through their lives. Nakhumicha, once the heartbeat of her household, was now treated with even greater reverence. Wasike employed a maid to ease her burdens, recognizing her role as a linchpin in their family's journey. Farmhands were hired to tend to their animals, liberating Felix from chores so that he could devote more time to his studies.

Felix's return to Mwamba village was a moment of excitement and anticipation for his family. They had gathered at the bus station, eagerly

awaiting his arrival. Nakhumicha was the first to spot him as he stepped off the bus, and she rushed to greet him. His siblings followed suit, their faces filled with curiosity and wonder.

Wasike remained a bit reserved, but his heart was bursting with pride and anticipation to see his son again. He couldn't wait to hear about Felix's experiences in the city, a place that was still largely a mystery to most villagers.

The day promised to be a busy one for Felix as everyone in the family wanted to hear his stories. What did the city look like? How did it feel to walk alongside white people? Despite the fatigue from his journey, Felix was ready and eager to share his experiences with his family.

His mother took charge of Felix's luggage, which was filled with the precious books he had received as a gift. She balanced the luggage expertly on her head, a skill honed from years of balancing water pots, and led the way home. Felix's father greeted him warmly and asked about the journey. Felix replied that it had been a good one and that he had so much to share, so many stories from the city.

After a hearty meal of chicken, Felix had a chance to sit down and talk with his father privately. He explained in detail how the journey to the city had felt, the bustling streets, and the sights he had seen. He reassured his father that the sponsors were genuine, describing how they had taken him to their offices, museums, and libraries, making him feel welcomed and valued. Wasike listened intently, his heart swelling with pride for his son.

Felix went on to explain the plans for the future. Dr. Lincoln, one of the sponsors, would be coming to take both Felix and his father to the school where Felix would continue his education. This news filled Wasike with hope and optimism for his son's future. The sacrifices and hard work of their family were beginning to bear fruit.

Later, Felix rejoined his siblings, he became the center of attention, with everyone eager to hear more about the city. He shared stories of street

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children harassing people, cautioning them to be vigilant. "In the city, you have to walk carefully," he warned. "There are people who might try to snatch your luggage or wallet by force." He recounted a disturbing incident he had witnessed, where a man had his belongings snatched, leaving him helpless. The police had arrived too late to apprehend the culprits.

Felix also described the city's bustling train stations, where trains carried both passengers and luggage, and where some people even rode on top of the trains. The city, he explained, was a busy and vibrant place, unlike anything he had ever seen in Mwamba village.

His siblings listened with wide-eyed fascination, hanging on to every word of his city adventures. Felix's return had brought a breath of the outside world to their doorstep, inspiring dreams of what lay beyond the familiar boundaries of their village.

Felix quickly became a local celebrity in the village, and the villagers were eager to hear his stories of the city. He was more than happy to share his experiences, and his enthusiasm was contagious. He continued to speak about his time in the city, his audience grew larger, extending beyond his family to the entire community.

His tales of the bustling city streets, encounters with street children, and the impressive train stations fascinated the villagers. They listened intently, their imaginations running wild with the possibilities of what lay beyond their remote village.

Word of Felix's achievements and his promising future spread, more parents in the village began to consider sending their children to school. Education was no longer viewed as an unattainable dream but as a tangible goal worth pursuing. Felix's journey from a village boy to a city scholar had proven that with determination and the right support, even the most challenging dreams could be realized.

The phrase, "It always seems impossible until it's done," had never rung truer in the village. Felix's success had shattered the perception of what

was achievable, inspiring a new generation of students to strive for excellence and dream beyond the boundaries of their village.

The transformation that Felix's journey had brought to Mwamba village was nothing short of remarkable. With the growing number of children attending school, classrooms, and teachers became insufficient in the small community. This surge in interest in education caught the attention of the government.

Understanding the importance of education and the positive changes it had already brought to the community, the government swiftly responded. They recognized the need to expand the educational infrastructure in Mwamba. To meet this demand, they set up additional classrooms and recruited more teachers. Many of these new educators were locals who had successfully completed their own education up to at least Form Four.

For the government, finding individuals from the village who had completed Form Four was like striking gold. These individuals were sought after not only to teach but also to fill various roles in the workforce, including positions in the military. The government saw the potential in the village's youth and aimed to harness their skills and knowledge to benefit the nation.

The positive changes didn't stop with the government's intervention. Well-wishers from within and outside the community were also moved by the transformation taking place in Mwamba. They stepped forward to sponsor bright and promising students, ensuring that no child with the potential to succeed would be held back by financial constraints.

Amid the transformative currents that reshaped the village, Wasike made a significant decision to bolster the security of their home. He believed that keeping dogs would help protect their family and property. Among the dogs, there was one that stood out as particularly brilliant—Esangi. This canine sentinel was vigilant, and his presence was felt in every corner of their compound.

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Esangi was not just an ordinary guard dog; he was deeply affectionate towards most members of the family, providing a sense of security to the household. However, an unusual twist marked Esangi's behavior in the presence of Felix. Despite his warmth towards others, he harbored an inexplicable aversion to the young boy. This curious dynamic created an underlying tension in their otherwise peaceful home.

One midday, as Felix ventured to check on the herd boys and their cattle, an unexpected incident occurred. Esangi saw an opportunity to escape his confines, and a sudden frenzy of movement disrupted the tranquility of the day. Without warning, Esangi lunged at Felix, his jaws finding their mark.

Felix's scream pierced the air, a chilling melody of pain and surprise. The sound reached his father, who was working nearby. The sight of his injured son filled him with immediate worry and dread. Without hesitation, he rushed to Felix's side, his heart heavy with concern. Felix's wounds were severe, and his cries were met with comforting words and immediate attention.

The incident left a somber shadow over the household. Although Felix's physical wounds eventually healed, the memory of that traumatic day lingered in their hearts like an echo of a dissonant chord. Esangi, once seen as a symbol of security, now carried an undertone of danger within the family. They couldn't afford to take any chances that might jeopardize Felix's safety.

To protect their family and prevent any recurrence of such a harrowing incident, Eliud made a heart-wrenching decision. The dog who had been a loyal guardian, was carefully hunted down. His presence was considered a bad omen, and Wasike believed that removing Esangi from their lives would help restore peace and security.

Wasike did not take this task lightly. With a heavy heart, he captured Esangi and secured him in a sack. It was a difficult and emotionally charged moment for the family. He walked silently towards the river, the

weight of the situation pressing on him. Upon reaching the riverbank, he solemnly threw the sack containing Esangi into the flowing waters.

He didn't look back, nor did he speak to anyone as he made his way back home. Meanwhile, Felix was receiving traditional medication and care to help him recover from the physical and emotional wounds inflicted by the once-beloved Esangi.

Chapter Seven

Navigating New Beginnings

Dr. Lincoln's arrival in Mwamba village was met with great excitement and anticipation, especially by the Wasike family. He had come a day before Felix was set to join secondary school, and his visit was a source of joy and hope for the family's future. As his car pulled into the compound, the family members couldn't hide their happiness.

Wasike was among the first to approach the car. He wore a broad smile, a reflection of his relief and gratitude that their long-awaited visitor had finally arrived. Felix, equally delighted, didn't waste a moment in greeting Dr. Lincoln. The bond between them had grown since their initial encounter, and Felix admired the doctor's wisdom and guidance.

"Are you ready?" Dr. Lincoln inquired, his eyes filled with a mixture of pride and encouragement. Felix's response was swift and resolute, "Yes, I'm ready like yesterday." His determination to pursue his education and make the most of this life-changing opportunity was palpable.

Nakhumicha, Felix's mother, was equally thrilled about Dr. Lincoln's visit. She hurried to the kitchen to prepare a special meal for their esteemed guest. Her culinary skills were well known in the village, and she was determined to make the occasion memorable.

Dr. Lincoln had brought presents for the family, a gesture of his appreciation and support. He understood the challenges they had faced, and he wanted to make their lives a little easier as they embarked on this new chapter. The gifts included school supplies for Felix, essential items for the household, and perhaps a few surprises that would bring smiles to their faces.

As Felix received the presents, he couldn't help but feel a deep sense of gratitude towards Dr. Lincoln. The doctor's presence in their lives had

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been a beacon of hope, illuminating a path to a brighter future. Felix knew that this opportunity was a result of hard work, determination, and the kindness of someone who believed in his potential.

The evening spent with Dr. Lincoln was a heartwarming affair, filled with shared stories, laughter, and a delectable meal prepared by Nakhumicha. It was a time for creating lasting memories, and their conversations touched on various aspects of Felix's aspirations, the potential challenges he might encounter in his new school environment, and the collective hopes they held for his future.

Dr. Lincoln, with his warm and reassuring demeanor, offered words of encouragement and valuable advice. He wanted Felix to know that he had the unwavering support he needed to succeed on this remarkable journey. The air was thick with hope and excitement as they contemplated the bright future that lay ahead.

The sun dipped below the horizon and the stars illuminated the night sky, they gathered outside to bask in the tranquility of the village. It was a moment of reflection and serenity, a stark contrast to the bustling city life that Dr. Lincoln was accustomed to. The village, with its simplicity and charm, left an indelible impression on their hearts, reminding them of the beauty found in life's quieter moments.

The following morning marked a significant milestone in Felix's life, as he prepared to embark on his journey to secondary school. Dr. Lincoln, ever the kind-hearted mentor, offered to accompany Felix and his family to the school, further solidifying the bond between him and the Wasike family.

Surrounded by his eager and emotional siblings, Felix couldn't contain his excitement, and tears welled up in his eyes. Boarding school awaited him, where he would spend three months away from home. It was a long time, indeed, but a necessary step in pursuing his dreams. The villagers gathered to bid him farewell, offering their blessings, gifts, and heartfelt prayers for his success.

The car ride to the secondary school was a mix of emotions—excitement, nervousness, and a touch of homesickness. Felix sat in the backseat, his heart racing with anticipation for the opportunities that lay ahead. He understood the significance of this moment, recognizing that it was a pivotal step toward achieving his dreams and making a lasting impact on his family and community.

Upon their arrival at the school, Felix was greeted by the bustling activity of students and the diligent preparations of teachers. The imposing school buildings loomed before him, and he couldn't help but feel a sense of awe and responsibility. Dr. Lincoln, along with Wasike and Nakhumicha, provided unwavering support as Felix navigated the enrollment process and settled into his new environment.

The school staff extended a warm welcome, ensuring that Felix's transition was as smooth as possible. As the moment to part ways with his family and Dr. Lincoln drew near, Felix's emotions were a mixture of excitement, gratitude, and a hint of homesickness. He was ready to embark on this educational journey, but he knew he would miss the familiar faces and comforts of home.

Dr. Lincoln, in his characteristic wisdom, reminded Felix that this was just the beginning of his educational journey. He encouraged him to work diligently, stay focused on his studies, and seize every opportunity for personal growth. Felix nodded in agreement, his determination shining through. He understood the magnitude of this opportunity and was determined to make the most of it.

They drove away from the school; Felix watched the institution that would become his second home recede into the distance. He knew that the path ahead would be strewn with challenges and sacrifices, but he was propelled by an unwavering determination to succeed and fulfill his dreams.

Back in Mwamba village, Wasike and Nakhumicha returned to their daily routines, aware that they had made a profound investment in their son's

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future. In the heart of the village, Mr. Wasike's elation knew no bounds. Felix's enrollment in secondary school marked a milestone, transforming his son into a prince destined for greater horizons. Nakhumicha, a beacon of strength and grace, was hailed as a queen for giving birth to this young prince. The air was pregnant with anticipation as dreams began to intertwine with reality.

The journey ahead was one punctuated with ambition and possibility. Wasike envisioned a future in neurosurgery, driven by an unyielding desire to conquer all obstacles. The trajectory was set, and the stars seemed aligned in his favor. His determination knew no bounds, and with each step, he inched closer to his dreams.

As the academic year unfurled its wings, Isabela, a soul equally brimming with dreams, embarked on her own educational journey. Her dedication was unwavering. Despite the challenges she faced during her primary school years, Isabela recognized the potential that lay within her. Her aspirations were firmly rooted in the desire to become a teacher, to impart knowledge and shape futures.

Wasike made his way to the cowshed, he couldn't help but reflect on the changes that education had brought to their family. It was a transformation that had begun with Felix but was now extending to Isabela. His determination to support her in pursuing her education remained unwavering, despite the challenges they had faced.

Nakhumicha, busy with dinner preparations, listened to her husband's thoughts on Isabela's educational journey. She nodded in agreement, acknowledging the influence that Felix had on their youngest daughter. "You're right, dear. Isabela has a role model in Felix. Even though she didn't perform well in the beginning, I have faith that she will improve as she continues her education journey."

The pot of meat stew simmered on the fire, Wasike finished his meal and rose from his seat. He announced his intention to visit the cowshed, a nightly ritual to ensure that all their livestock were accounted for and safe.

While Wasike stood at the door, he couldn't help but share a lighthearted moment with Nakhumicha. "You know," he began with a chuckle, "if it weren't for education, I would probably be finalizing arrangements for Isabela's marriage by now."

Nakhumicha joined in the laughter, her eyes sparkling with warmth. "Ah, yes," she replied, "they were going to bring 18 cows for her, you know. She's respectful and hardworking. Do you remember how you married me?"

Wasike's face lit up with a fond smile as he reminisced about their own journey. "Of course, I remember," he said. "It was one of the most challenging and hard-fought engagements I ever pursued. I even shed a few tears at times because of how determined I was to make you mine."

Returning from his brief visit to the cowshed, Wasike settled back into his seat beside Nakhumicha. Their conversation had shifted from their daughter's education to their own shared history.

Wasike's eyes held a fondness as he recounted the story to Nakhumicha. "I first noticed you when I was herding in your village," he began, his voice filled with nostalgia. "You, along with your sisters, were going to fetch water. I followed you closely that day and discreetly marked your home. From then on, I made occasional visits, discreetly inquiring from people about your family and how you were doing."

Nakhumicha, intrigued by this revelation, leaned in closer. "So, what did they tell you about us?" she asked with a playful smile.

A warm smile spread across Wasike's face as he recalled the impressions he had gathered. "All I heard were praises," he replied. "Your family is highly respected, and you, my dear, are held in high esteem. You know, these virtues make a woman quite challenging to win over."

Nakhumicha chuckled at the compliment but encouraged him to continue. "Well, then what happened next?" she inquired, eager to hear the rest of their love story.

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Wasike's eyes locked onto Nakhumicha's as he continued to unravel the tale of their courtship. "I had fallen for you, and my heart wouldn't let you slip away," he confessed. "I couldn't bear the thought of someone else winning your heart before me. So, I knew I had to expedite my plans to make you mine."

Leaning gently on her husband's sturdy shoulder, Nakhumicha's eyes, like pools of deep, contemplative darkness, gazed into the flickering candlelight. Her voice, soft as the evening breeze, carried the weight of a thousand emotions as she spoke. "It was too fast to fall in love at first sight," she murmured, her words carrying the enchantment of a whispered secret.

Wasike, his eyes tracing the curves of his beloved's face with a tender touch, couldn't help but smile. His voice, a melodic baritone, resonated with the sincerity of his feelings. "Yes, indeed, you are a special woman," he began, his voice rich with admiration. "A woman with character and a heart that knows how to love deeply."

The flickering candlelight seemed to dance in tune with their affectionate exchange, its glow a witness to the intimacy that enveloped them. The atmosphere in their humble abode was charged with a unique warmth, as if the very walls of their hut had absorbed the love that flowed between them.

Wasike continued, his words like sweet notes of a love song. "Let me tell you, my dearest, the bond between us solidified every moment I passed by your home." He recalled those early days when he had first set eyes on Nakhumicha, a vision of grace and beauty by the river, and how that chance encounter had forever altered the course of their lives.

Nakhumicha's heart swelled with the tenderness of his words. The love that had blossomed between them over the years was like a vine, its roots deep and unwavering, its branches reaching for the heavens. They were bound by a love that had grown stronger with each passing day, and it had transformed their lives in ways they could have never imagined.

The hut itself, with its earthen walls and thatched roof, seemed to exude an aura of love and serenity. The gentle rustling of the wind outside was like a comforting lullaby, cradling them in its embrace. The air was scented with the subtle fragrance of the wildflowers that Nakhumicha had lovingly placed in a vase on a wooden table nearby.

In the intimate cocoon of their hut, time seemed to stand still. Their love was a flame that refused to be extinguished, a beacon of warmth and comfort in the ever-changing world outside. The candle continued to cast its soft, romantic glow, as if acknowledging the love story that had unfolded within these earthen walls.

The night was a canvas of shadows and secrets, the perfect backdrop for the tale.

"I had to tell my parents," Wasike began, his voice carrying the weight of memories from days long past. His words hung in the air, pregnant with anticipation. "They received the news with a shock, their faces etched with disbelief."

Nakhumicha listened attentively, her eyes like deep pools reflecting the flickering candlelight. Love, she knew, had a way of defying expectations, taking root in the most unexpected of hearts.

"Indeed, love has no formula," Wasike continued, his words like a river flowing gently through the night. "It prevails over anyone, anytime, and it can be a force that both uplifts and wounds."

The hut itself seemed to lean in, its earthen walls echoing with the tender confessions of a love story that had weathered trials and tribulations. The night, with its gentle symphony of crickets and rustling leaves, bore witness to their love, as if nature itself approved of this union.

Wasike went on, his voice a mixture of nostalgia and warmth. "The push and pull of our love story was a tumultuous dance," he admitted. "For a month, the issue of our union was debated, and even our relatives were reluctant to give their blessings."

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Nakhumicha's gaze remained locked onto his, her eyes shimmering like stars in the velvet sky. Their love had been tested; their patience stretched to its limits. But it had endured, and that was what mattered.

"During that time," Wasike confessed, "I felt like I was treading on thin ice. I couldn't help but wonder if the delay was a deliberate test of my penitence. But I remained calm, and I kept a close eye on you."

"I even made friends in your village," Wasike revealed, a touch of humor in his voice. "All to secure my territory, to show your family and mine that my intentions were genuine."

Nakhumicha couldn't help but smile at his admission.

Wasike's heart, once burdened by uncertainty, now swelled with the tranquility of knowing that their families and relatives had given their blessing for their union. It was a significant milestone, but they both understood that it was only the beginning of a journey fraught with challenges, a journey they were determined to undertake together.

With a tender smile, Nakhumicha looked into Wasike's eyes, her gaze as soft and comforting as a lover's embrace. "I couldn't help but notice your frequent appearances in our village," she confessed, her voice like a melodious whisper in the night. "You seemed to know my daily routine, from fetching water to visiting the market."

Wasike nodded, his eyes sparkling with the memory of those clandestine encounters. "Indeed," he admitted, his voice filled with affection. "My friends regaled me with tales of your beauty and grace, and I couldn't resist the urge to see you for myself. I even left my cows to graze in someone else's field just for a glimpse of you."

Nakhumicha's laughter rang out like a delicate chime, the sweetest melody in the stillness of the night. "You were quite the determined suitor," she teased, her eyes reflecting the candle's warm glow. "Leaving your cows to wander just to catch a glimpse of me."

Wasike chuckled, his love for Nakhumicha evident in every glance, every word. "I knew I had to do whatever it took to win your heart," he

confessed, his voice a soft murmur in the night. "And I would do it all over again if it meant having you by my side."

Under the veil of the night, the hut became their haven, a sanctuary for their love. Nakhumicha, her eyes filled with adoration, rose gracefully and fetched a soft, warm blanket. They cocooned themselves in its gentle embrace, two souls bound by a love that had transcended time and distance.

They nestled together. Wasike's voice resonated like a soothing lullaby in the quietude of the night. "Each day without you felt like an eternity," he confessed, his words dripping with longing. "All I yearned for was the moment when you would be mine."

The memories flowed like a gentle stream, and Nakhumicha listened with rapt attention, her heart dancing to the rhythm of their shared history. The hut seemed to hold its breath, captivated by the love story that unfolded within its humble confines.

With each word, Wasike painted vivid images of their journey. The nights spent stealing glances, the days filled with secret meetings, and the undeniable pull of their hearts towards one another. It was a narrative of love that had defied the odds, and now, it was etched into the very walls of their home.

As Wasike continued, his voice filled with warmth and passion, Nakhumicha couldn't help but be swept away by the intensity of his emotions. In that moment, their love felt like a fire that could never be extinguished, burning brightly even in the darkest of nights.

Their journey to marriage had been fraught with anticipation, like waiting for a sunrise after a long, starry night. Five months had passed, each day an agonizing wait. Finally, a meeting was arranged, and the die was cast. The moment had arrived to visit Nakhumicha's home and formally express their intentions.

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In this pivotal step, there were two possible outcomes, each carrying its own significance. It was a moment of truth, where the proposal could be either accepted or denied. Their hearts beat in unison, knowing that their future hung in the balance.

Wasike then revealed a fascinating custom, a glimpse into the complexities of their culture. When a girl was found to be a virgin, the entire traditional process was meticulously followed. However, if she was not, a clandestine negotiation of dowry took place, hidden from prying eyes. Subsequently, the girl would be spirited away from her daily chores and locked in her suitor's house for three days, marking the culmination of their union.

The morning sun bathed the homestead in a warm, golden glow as Nakhumicha went about her daily chores. Her hands were a whirlwind of activity as she prepared breakfast for the family, who were already out in the fields tending to the maize crops. The air was alive with the sounds of nature, the chirping of birds and the distant hum of village life.

In the midst of her bustling kitchen activities, an unexpected arrival caught her attention. Three men stood at the threshold of their home, their presence like a sudden breeze that stirred the tranquil morning air. Nakhumicha, still in her element, gracefully greeted the visitors, offering them chairs as a sign of hospitality. She assured them that her parents would soon be available for conversation and asked them to wait.

She disappeared into the depths of the house to fetch her parents, and the three men engaged in quiet conversation. Their voices were hushed, and their expressions betrayed a sense of anticipation. Nakhumicha's heart pounded with curiosity, her instincts telling her that something significant was unfolding.

In the kitchen, she continued her tasks, the clinking of utensils and the sizzle of food on the hearth creating a comforting rhythm. She couldn't help but eavesdrop on the conversation in the other room. Her father's voice rose, and the word "girl" caught her ear. At that moment, she knew. The three men had come to propose, to seek her hand in marriage.

Her heart quickened, and her hands momentarily faltered as a surge of emotions washed over her. It was a mixture of excitement, nervousness, and a profound sense of destiny. The fate of her future hung in the balance as she listened intently, the kitchen's warmth a stark contrast to the emotional whirlwind that gripped her.

The conversation concluded, leaving them with a glimmer of hope. They were assured that their proposal would be considered and a response would be provided in due time. It was a lifeline, a thread of possibility that they clung to. Yet, they were also acutely aware that rejection was a possibility, the words "we don't marry within the family" a stark reminder of the challenges they faced.

Nakhumicha's father, a man of wisdom and deep consideration, knew the weight of this decision. He conferred with her mother, and together they called for a clan meeting. The fate of their daughter's heart was a matter that extended beyond their family, and they sought the wisdom and consensus of the community.

The clan gathered, their voices filled with deliberation and a sense of responsibility. The decision to allow Nakhumicha to marry Wasike was not taken lightly. It was a pivotal moment, a declaration that love could transcend the boundaries of tradition. When the agreement was finally reached, and it was decided that their union would be blessed, it was a moment of profound significance. The collective support of the clan bestowed their love story with a sense of destiny, a bond that would endure through the ages.

It was no longer a mere hope or a distant dream. Nakhumicha would indeed become Wasike's wife, a realization that sent ripples of joy and anticipation through their hearts. In this tranquil moment, they were alone, cocooned in the sanctity of their love.

Wasike, his eyes reflecting the radiance of the moon, recounted the pivotal conversation he had with his father. They had sat beneath the sprawling branches of an ancient tree, their meal spread before them.

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"I remember my father clearing his throat," he said, his gaze locked with Nakhumicha's, "and in that instant, I was more attentive than ever before." His words hung in the air like a melody, each one carefully chosen to convey the depth of his emotions.

His father's narrative had unfolded like a cherished tale, each word a thread weaving together the story of their love. Wasike listened with bated breath, the minutes stretching into hours as his father spoke of the journey, of traversing the distance to reach her home.

"I was anxious," he confessed, his voice low and intimate, "I felt as if the sun would rise and set before he reached the crux of the matter." In the moonlight's embrace, Nakhumicha's eyes sparkled with curiosity, mirroring the impatience he had felt that day.

And then, like a symphony reaching its crescendo, his father had revealed the most pivotal detail of all. "Your side had agreed," he had declared, the words holding a weight that was nothing short of monumental. His heart had danced in jubilation, their dreams inching closer to reality.

"It was upon us," Wasike continued, "to prepare, to set the date, and to meet your side for the dowry negotiation."

The clan converged, their voices resonating with agreement, like the harmonious chords of a love ballad. They meticulously selected a date, one that would mark the beginning of a new chapter, the forging of an unbreakable bond.

"Now, the day that brought joy to my life was when I came to visit you with my two brothers," he said, his voice carrying the resonance of that pivotal moment. Nakhumicha's eyes sparkled with fond recollection as she responded, her smile radiating like the morning sun. "Oh, yes, I remember," she replied, her voice laced with nostalgia.

As they exchanged these words, their connection deepened, like two souls recounting the chapters of their love story. The memories of that day had etched themselves into the very fabric of their beings, a day that had set the course for their shared destiny.

"It was not only enticing to you," Wasike continued, his gaze locked with Nakhumicha's, "it was also a turning point for me. My thoughts and my heart had shifted entirely toward you. I found myself constantly wondering when we could officially be together." His words hung in the air like a promise, a vow to cherish every moment they had shared and those yet to come.

Nakhumicha, her eyes reflecting the depths of her love, nodded in agreement. "Let me confess," she admitted with a soft chuckle, "I also had many long days of waiting." The hut seemed to hold its breath, as if it too was captivated by the unfolding love story within its walls.

On that momentous day, Wasike had arrived at his future wife's home for the very first time, accompanied by his two brothers. The occasion was steeped in tradition and significance, a formal visit that symbolized the merging of their two families. They were graciously welcomed into their in-laws' house, where a sumptuous lunch awaited them. Yet, the tradition demanded that they would not partake in the evening meal. It was customary to leave early when visiting one's mother-in-law's place.

As the conversation flowed, a subtle tension hung in the air, for tradition dictated certain rituals. Wasike and his mother-in-law could not shake hands, nor could they enter each other's homes. When they engaged in conversation, it was done from a respectful distance. The same held true for Nakhumicha and her father-in-law. These customs, steeped in heritage and symbolism, reminded them of the intricate web of tradition that surrounded their love.

Their love story was not just a union of two hearts; it was the intertwining of two families, two histories, and two destinies. In the glow of their hut, surrounded by the echoes of tradition, Nakhumicha and Wasike reveled in the profound moments that had brought them to this point, where love had triumphed over all else. Entering the compound of Nakhumicha's family was like stepping into a sanctuary of tradition and hospitality. The atmosphere buzzed with palpable excitement, and their

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arrival was met with warm anticipation. Nakhumicha's father stood at the heart of the compound.

In the quiet of the early morning, the slumbering village came to life with a sense of purpose. It was a day of great significance, a pivotal step in the intricate dance of marriage. Wasike's brothers and aunts stirred from their makeshift beds, their hearts already filled with the weight of tradition and responsibility.

The preparations had begun days ago, carefully overseen by the clan. Eighteen cows, a symbol of wealth and commitment, had been chosen and meticulously fed, ensuring their strength for the journey ahead. They grazed until late evening; their bellies full in anticipation of the morning's travel.

As dawn painted the horizon with hues of orange and pink, Wasike's brothers and aunts assembled in the homestead. They had spent the night in his home, a sign of unity and solidarity in this momentous occasion. Their faces were marked with determination and a sense of duty, for they knew the importance of this day.

Nakhumicha's village, a distant realm, awaited their arrival. To ensure an early start, they began their preparations well before the first light of day. Fires were kindled, and the aroma of fresh-brewed *busaa* filled the air, invigorating their spirits. The two goats, carefully selected for Nakhumicha's mother, added to the offerings that would signify their intentions.

With each passing moment, the excitement and anticipation grew. The elders, the custodians of tradition, gathered to bless the procession and release them on this journey of love and commitment. The cows, adorned with symbolic decorations, stood patiently, as if aware of the solemnity of their role in this age-old tradition.

The sun kissed the horizon, casting a golden glow over the landscape as they set forth on their journey. The rhythmic clatter of hooves against the

earth echoed in the stillness of the morning. Wasike's brothers and aunts walked with purpose, their hearts heavy with the weight of tradition and the hope of a promising future.

Ahead lay the distant village of Nakhumicha, a place where two families would soon unite in celebration. The path was not just a physical one but a symbolic bridge between two worlds, two hearts bound by tradition and love.

Under the tender embrace of the early morning sun, the journey commenced. The cock, a herald of dawn, heralded their departure with its melodious crow. As they embarked on this significant pilgrimage, songs of praises bubbled from their lips like a lively stream.

Each step they took was a rhythmic dance, a proof to tradition and love. Morning dew clung to the emerald grass, glistening like scattered jewels in the first light of day, and a chorus of birds joined the melody of their voices. The villagers, going about their daily routines, paused to witness the procession, offering nods of acknowledgment and well wishes.

To lighten the journey's gravity, they shared jokes and laughter, their spirits buoyed by camaraderie and the promise of love. Amid the banter, Wasike was hailed as a true man, his stature elevated by this symbolic march.

Yet, amidst the joy and camaraderie, an unexpected twist emerged. One of the cows, perhaps sensing the gravity of the occasion, bolted into the thicket, its sudden flight catching everyone off guard. The group quickly sprang into action, urging the remaining cows forward while a few embarked on the challenging task of retrieving the runaway.

They pursued the wayward cow through the labyrinthine thicket and the aunts remained behind, tending to the grazing cattle and taking a well-deserved rest. The sun, ascending higher in the sky, painted the landscape with warm hues, casting long shadows that seemed to stretch towards their destination.

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Time continued its relentless march, and as the sun crept closer to its zenith, a palpable sense of concern began to overshadow the group. The anticipated arrival time of 10 a.m. was now in jeopardy, and their worry grew with each passing moment.

As the pursuit of the runaway cow continued, the men began to realize the futility of their efforts. The elusive bovine seemed determined to evade capture, weaving through the dense undergrowth with an agility that belied its size. Frustration gnawed at them like a persistent itch, and their faces bore the strain of the chase.

Amid this exasperation, one of the men, driven by a surge of desperation, made a fateful decision. With a swift and forceful motion, he hurled a substantial stick toward the fleeing cow. The stick sliced through the air; an arrow aimed at a bovine target. Its trajectory was true, and it struck the cow's front leg with a resounding thud.

The immediate consequence was palpable. The cow's frantic flight was instantly curtailed as the stick found its mark. Pain radiated through its wounded limb, and it began to limp, a piteous sight that contrasted sharply with its previous exuberant escape. Though they had achieved a measure of success by immobilizing the cow, a new dilemma emerged.

The group was now faced with a dilemma—how to proceed with a lame cow in tow. The cow's injury presented a conundrum. They were on a mission of love and tradition, bearing offerings of cows to Nakhumicha's family. To present a limping, injured cow would not only mar the gesture but also raise questions about their ability to care for the animals.

With a collective sigh of resignation, they returned to the rest of the group. It was not the outcome they had hoped for, but it was the practical choice. The men trudged back, their disappointment etched in their expressions, to rejoin the waiting women.

The ladies, seated together, had been engaged in anxious conversation during the men's absence. Worried about what might have transpired in the thicket and the delay it had caused, their faces revealed a mixture of concern and relief upon the men's return.

Reunited, they gathered the cows, understanding that they had little choice but to press on. The journey's challenges had not dimmed their determination to honor tradition and love. With the injured cow now a limping companion, they resumed their trek, forging ahead with the weight of their purpose guiding them through the winding paths and open fields.

Despite the trials of their journey and the unexpected setback with the injured cow, the spirit of camaraderie prevailed among the group. Laughter, like a resilient weed breaking through hardened soil, managed to flourish amid the changing mood. It was a testament to the resilience and unity of these travelers, who had faced adversity with grace and shared determination.

The women, with their characteristic nurturing instincts, recognized the toll that the pursuit of the runaway cow had taken on the men. Hours of strenuous exertion under the unforgiving sun had surely left them parched and fatigued. With generous hearts, they extended calabashes filled with cool, refreshing water to their companions. It was a gesture of genuine concern for their well-being, an offering of sustenance to rejuvenate their spirits.

As the men quenched their thirst with the life-giving elixir of water, they found solace in the thoughtfulness of the women who had accompanied them on this significant journey. The bonds of kinship and shared purpose were reinforced in this simple act of care.

Their steps grew lighter as they neared Nakhumicha's home, the culmination of their arduous trek. Excitement crackled in the air like static electricity before a storm. Each footfall seemed to resonate with anticipation, and the rhythmic hoofbeats of the cows added a musical cadence to their approach.

From his vantage point in the family hut, Nakhumicha's father, a wise and patient patriarch, listened keenly to the sounds that signaled the arrival of their visitors. The distant songs of celebration reached his ears,

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and the distinct rhythm of hooves on earth told him that the procession was drawing near.

In that moment, he must have pondered the significance of this event—the union of two families, the fusion of traditions, and the promise of a future bound by love. He was the guardian of tradition, the protector of family honor, and the overseer of this momentous occasion.

Surrounding him were Nakhumicha's brothers, her pillars of support and protectors of the family's honor. Their faces, adorned with expressions of approval, seemed to say that they had entrusted their sister's future to these visitors, and it was a responsibility they took seriously.

The cows, the tangible representation of Wasike's commitment and love, were led to a safe enclosure within the compound. Their presence was symbolic, signifying the fulfillment of age-old customs and the promise of a future built on shared values.

It was a moment of celebration and gratitude as they gathered together. The cows, standing in a neat row, seemed to bear witness to the solemnity of the occasion. Eighteen cows—an impressive and meaningful dowry, a testament to Nakhumicha's character and virtue. In this part of the world, such a dowry was not easily attained, and it spoke volumes about the esteem in which Nakhumicha was held.

The family's gratitude was palpable as they welcomed their guests. Food, prepared with love and tradition, was offered to nourish the bodies and souls of those who had come together on this special day. Plates laden with delicious dishes passed from hand to hand.

Busaa flowed freely like a river of camaraderie and joy. Its slightly bitter taste was a reminder that life's sweetness is best savored alongside its challenges. As they raised their calabashes and sipped the frothy brew, they toasted to this union, to love, and to the promise of a future filled with hope.

Nakhumicha's father, a man of few words but profound wisdom, spoke with a quiet pride. He shared anecdotes of his daughter's diligence,

respect, and unwavering commitment to her family. His words were not merely a father's praise but a proof to the qualities that had drawn Wasike to his daughter.

Wasike, in turn, was hailed as a hardworking man, a pillar of the community who carried the promise of becoming a village elder. His dedication to his family and community mirrored the values cherished by Nakhumicha's family.

The joyous celebration continued unabated. Music, like the heartbeat of the gathering, filled the air with its rhythmic cadence. Drums pounded like thunderous applause from the earth itself, beckoning everyone to join the dance of life.

People, young and old, swayed and twirled, their movements a vibrant expression of their happiness. They moved in harmony, like a river flowing through the heart of the village, as if each step was a brushstroke on the canvas of this memorable day.

Laughter and merriment echoed through the village; a chorus of voices raised in celebration. Elders, with their weathered faces etched with wisdom, watched the festivities with approving smiles, knowing that the traditions of their ancestors were being upheld with reverence.

Nakhumicha's mother, a paragon of maternal love and grace, was bustling with activity. She meticulously packed *busaa*, the frothy brew of camaraderie and tradition, in a container for her cherished son-in-law. It was a gesture of welcome and acceptance, a symbolic offering that extended the hand of friendship and family.

Across the compound, a magnificent cock, with feathers that shimmered like molten gold in the afternoon sun, had been prepared for Wasike's father and mother. It was a symbol of honor, a token of respect from one family to another, a tribute to the new bonds that were being formed.

As the day waned and the golden hues of the sun began to cast long shadows, the ceremony drew to a close. The men who had tended to the

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cows during the journey, their dedication and diligence acknowledged, were each given a chicken as a token of gratitude. It was a small but heartfelt gesture, a recognition of their role in ensuring the safe passage of this symbolic dowry.

Before embarking on their journey back, they shared one last round of *busaa*, a final toast to the day's festivities and the bright future that lay ahead. The cock, a regal sentinel of this momentous occasion, stood proudly, its crowing a triumphant fanfare announcing the unity of two families.

With hearts full of contentment and the echoes of celebration still ringing in their ears, they began the journey home. The sun dipped below the horizon, painting the sky with hues of orange and pink, as if nature itself was applauding this harmonious union.

The journey back home was a jubilant affair, marked by animated chatter and laughter that seemed to dance along with the memory of the day's celebrations. It had, without a doubt, been a triumphant and joyous occasion.

As they walked, their spirits remained high, and their hearts were warmed not only by the camaraderie of the day but also by the success they had achieved. The challenges they faced earlier were now nothing more than amusing anecdotes to be shared and laughed about. They knew that the memory of this day would linger in their minds for years to come, a cherished chapter in the story of their lives.

Despite the weariness that inevitably accompanies such festive occasions, they managed to adhere to the strict timetable set for their departure. The sun, making its slow descent towards the western horizon, cast long shadows that stretched out before them. It served as a gentle reminder that nightfall was steadily approaching, and they fervently prayed to the heavens for a safe journey back to their respective homes.

In this rural setting, nightfall was not merely a transition from day to night but a transformation of the environment itself. The village, usually tranquil during the day, could become a different world altogether once

darkness draped its surroundings. Tales of wild animals that prowled the vicinity were shared among them, each adding their own embellishments to make the stories more spine-tingling. The presence of these nocturnal creatures seemed magnified by the shroud of night, lurking in the shadows, waiting for an opportunity.

Their pace quickened with each step as they ventured further into the journey. Urgency gripped them, spurred on by the need to reach the safety of their homes before the curtain of night fell completely, enveloping the landscape in obscurity. The once-vibrant surroundings now seemed muted and mysterious, and the distant calls of nocturnal creatures created an eerie symphony in the background.

Above, the heavens themselves seemed to be preparing for a grand spectacle. Dark, brooding clouds gathered, pregnant with the promise of rain. The air grew heavy with anticipation, and a few drops of rain began to fall, lightly kissing their cheeks. It was as if the skies were offering a gentle warning, a prelude to the impending deluge.

Back at Nakhumicha's home, the family had taken precautions against the approaching rain. Fallen leaves, once scattered on the ground, were swiftly collected and expertly tied together by skilled hands. They were transformed into makeshift coverings, which were then draped over the family dog to keep off the rain.

The clever trick to stave off the impending rain seemed to have worked like a charm. As they slowly diverged from the group and made their way to their respective homes, Wasike's brothers decided to pay a visit to his newly constructed hut. It had been a long day, and the fatigue weighed heavily upon them, but they were curious to see how their brother was settling into his new life.

When they entered the hut, they found Wasike soundly asleep, his slumber deep and peaceful. It was evident that he had been waiting for their return, and perhaps the anticipation had exhausted him to the point of dozing off. However, as soon as he heard the familiar voices of his

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brothers, he roused from his slumber, his eyes slowly blinking open. Greeting them with a warm smile, he invited them to sit down and make themselves comfortable.

Nakhumicha, curious about the early moments of their conversation, asked Wasike with a playful grin, "What was the first question you asked when you woke up, my love?"

Wasike chuckled, recalling those precious moments. "My first question," he began, "was whether they had accepted the cows." His gaze, filled with love and affection, met Nakhumicha's. "You see, my dear, the cows were like messengers of our intentions and our commitment to your family. Their acceptance was of utmost importance to me."

Nakhumicha, bemused, looked at Wasike's brothers, who seemed somewhat taken aback by his single-minded focus on the cows. One of them, with a hint of amusement, commented, "You know, we expected you to inquire about how the journey went, or if we had faced any difficulties along the way."

His brother smiled at their jesting and then went on to recount their journey, describing how smoothly everything had transpired. However, he couldn't help but mention the one incident that had briefly marred the otherwise harmonious day. "The only challenge we faced," he explained, "was when one of the cows suddenly bolted and ran away from the rest. It took some effort to retrieve it, but eventually, we managed to do so."

As the brother spoke, Wasike listened intently, nodding his head in agreement. They had been the ones who had chased after the wayward cow and could attest to the comical and chaotic chase that had unfolded. Laughter filled the hut as they reminisced about that particular moment, and the memory of their adventurous pursuit became another cherished tale to add to the growing tapestry of their shared experiences.

With the day's events recounted and laughter echoing in the hut, the brothers settled down to enjoy each other's company. They had played their roles in the significant journey that had brought Wasike and Nakhumicha together, and now, as they sat together in the tranquil

embrace of the night, they cherished the bond that united them as a family.

The day had arrived for Nakhumicha to embark on her journey to visit her future husband. It was a significant moment, an opportunity to get to know him better and, if time allowed, to interact with other members of his family. However, they were aware that this visit would be brief, just a matter of hours before she would return to her own home.

Nakhumicha wasn't alone on this journey; she was accompanied by three of her close friends. Their hearts were filled with a mixture of excitement and nervousness as they approached Wasike's compound. The sun painted golden streaks across the sky, casting a warm and inviting glow over the landscape.

They entered the compound. They spotted Wasike in the midst of herding goats. His face lit up with a wide, welcoming smile as he caught sight of Nakhumicha and her companions. He moved with an air of eagerness, hastening to greet them, leaving behind his goat-herding duties.

Wasike's mother, equally delighted by the visit, joined the group briefly. However, she soon excused herself, leaving the young visitors to enjoy their time together. No one ventured inside any of the houses that day. They chose to remain outside, basking in the open air to avoid any temptation that might arise in the secluded corners of a home.

The three girls who had accompanied Nakhumicha played a pivotal role during this visit. They acted as guardians, surrounding her like a protective shield. Nakhumicha was a treasure to her family, and it was essential that she remained a virgin until her wedding day. Her friends were entrusted with ensuring that this precious status was maintained.

The hours passed, the day seemed to dance forward with both swiftness and grace. Their time together was marked by laughter, shared stories, and the gentle exploration of their blossoming relationship. Nakhumicha and Wasike found comfort in each other's presence, their connection growing stronger with each passing moment.

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In the afternoon, as the sun began its slow descent towards the horizon, the inevitable moment of departure approached. It was time to bid farewell. The realization that they had only scratched the surface of what they wanted to say and share left an ache of longing in their hearts.

Wasike's smile remained warm, and his eyes glistened with affection as he said his goodbyes. Nakhumicha and her friends, who had become like sisters on this journey, turned to leave his compound.

The journey back from Wasike's compound to Nakhumicha's village was filled with lively chatter and laughter. Nakhumicha's heart was aflutter with happiness, and her friends couldn't help but sing Wasike's praises. They described him as a man of remarkable qualities - dark, tall, and undeniably handsome. His physical appearance was complemented by a kind and gentle heart that seemed to radiate warmth.

Nakhumicha's friends, knowing the significance of this budding romance, offered words of reassurance and encouragement. They told her just how fortunate she was to have found a man like Wasike. With genuine smiles on their faces, they assured her that he would truly care for her and cherish her as she deserved. They emphasized the importance of being submissive and respectful, not just to Wasike but to his entire family. In their eyes, marriage was a sacred bond that required unwavering commitment from both partners.

As they walked, Wasike, on the other hand, was lost in a whirlwind of thoughts. He couldn't help but reminisce about Nakhumicha's radiant smile, which had the power to brighten even the darkest of days. Her curvy figure, her sparkling white teeth that seemed to dazzle like pearls, and her long, graceful neck were etched in his memory. She stood tall and slender, a true epitome of black beauty that had captured his heart.

While they walked along the path, his mother joined him in silent contemplation. She could see the affection in her son's eyes and, with a knowing nod, congratulated him on his choice. It was evident that he had found someone truly special. However, she couldn't resist imparting a mother's wisdom. She reminded him of the responsibility that came with

caring for Nakhumicha, not just as a husband but as her protector and provider.

With every step they took, the bonds of love and affection between Nakhumicha and Wasike grew stronger. Their hearts beat in harmony, and their souls resonated with the promise of a beautiful future together.

That night, as the world outside their hut embraced the gentle embrace of the moonlight, Nakhumicha found herself drawn to a window. The luminous glow of the moon painted a silvery path across the dirt floor, inviting her to stand there, bathed in its celestial radiance. A million stars adorned the midnight canvas, their twinkle like a chorus of tiny bells playing a melodious lullaby. The night was alive with the soothing symphony of crickets, their chirping creating a harmonious backdrop to her thoughts.

In this tranquil and chilly evening, Nakhumicha was transported into a reverie. Her heart was no longer just a heart; it was a heart in love, a heart that yearned, a heart that had found its other half. She saw herself not just as a woman but as a wife, a partner to Wasike, her beloved. She imagined them late at night, beneath the vast canopy of stars, sharing whispered secrets and sweet nothings.

In the cocoon of her thoughts, she could almost hear his voice, like a gentle breeze, murmuring words of love that caressed her soul. He drew nearer, his warm breath dancing upon her skin, his lips so close to her forehead that she could almost taste the promise of love lingering there. Each moment was an eternity, suspended in the delicate balance between desire and reality.

But just as she was about to be kissed by the ethereal touch of her lover's lips, a soft, familiar voice called out to her. It was her mother, a gentle reminder that the world outside her dreams still existed. The enchanting moment was broken, but not forgotten, as Nakhumicha reluctantly withdrew from the embrace of her reverie.

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She rejoined her family for dinner, the rich aroma of their meal mingling with the remnants of her dreams. Her sisters and brothers, knowing her heart's secret, teased her playfully. They told her that she was the fortunate one, blessed to have Won Wasike's heart. In response, she couldn't help but agree, her eyes shining with a radiant light that revealed the depths of her affection.

With animated gestures, she painted a vivid picture of the day they had spent at Wasike's place. She spoke of their warm reception, the laughter shared, and the hours spent in each other's company. In her eyes, in her words, and in the very air around her, love was palpable. It was as if the universe had conspired to bring them together, and now, there was no turning back.

Her mother, her voice filled with the wisdom of generations, offered her words of encouragement. She reminded Nakhumicha that love was a precious gift, one to be cherished and nurtured. She encouraged her daughter to embrace the love that had blossomed between her and Wasike, to let it grow and flourish like a vibrant flower in the garden of their hearts.

Beneath the thatched roof of their humble hut, bathed in the soft glow of a kerosene lamp, a sense of unity and warmth enveloped them. They were a family, bound not just by blood but by love, and Nakhumicha's love story had become a cherished part of their collective narrative.

Resting in the solitude of his grass-thatched hut, Wasike couldn't escape the magnetic pull of Nakhumicha's presence. Her memory wrapped around his thoughts like a warm embrace, and it was the most beautiful thing to ponder in the tranquil moments before slumber claimed him.

As he lay there, his hands folded atop his chest, his gaze traveled beyond the confines of his modest abode. In his mind's eye, he saw Nakhumicha, a vision of ethereal beauty, standing by the riverbank, her lithe form gracefully silhouetted against the shimmering water. She was engaged in the timeless ritual of fetching water, a chore that had transformed into a serene ballet of love and longing.

With his cows left to graze contentedly, Wasike had stolen away from his duties to steal a glimpse of his heart's desire. Nakhumicha, unaware of his approach, was lost in the melody of a love song that escaped her lips in a lilting, heart-stirring cadence. The river flowed gently, carrying with it the sweetest of serenades, and the world seemed to stand still, entranced by her presence.

Drawing nearer, Wasike couldn't resist the temptation to playfully tickle her. The sudden sensation of his touch sent a delightful shiver through her being, and a startled gasp escaped her lips. She turned, her eyes wide with surprise, and there he stood.

In a heartbeat, Nakhumicha flung herself into his arms, their embrace was an evidence to the power of love. They clung to each other, their heartbeats in sync, their souls intertwined in the most profound of connections. They held each other tightly, the world around them seemed to fade into the background, and all that remained was the purity of their love.

A gentle breeze whispered secrets of their love, its caress carrying the scent of blooming flowers and fresh, fertile earth. The sun, with its radiant golden rays, painted their moment with an ethereal glow, as if the universe itself had conspired to make this encounter perfect.

They reluctantly pulled away; their hands still intertwined as they ventured away from the river's edge. Finding a peaceful spot beneath the shade of a sprawling tree, they settled down. Their eyes locked, and their smiles spoke of the love that words could barely convey.

She nestled onto Wasike's thighs; her gaze fixed on his eyes as if she could read his very soul. Their conversation was like a river of love, meandering through the most profound depths of their hearts. They shared secrets, dreams, and whispered sweet nothings to each other, each word painting a canvas of love and affection.

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Wasike gently brushed a strand of Nakhumicha's hair from her forehead. His touch was a caress of tenderness, a gesture that spoke of a love that knew no bounds.

Their voices filled the air, mingling with the symphony of nature around them. The birds in the trees seemed to sing sweeter, the leaves rustled in time with their laughter, and the river flowed with the rhythm of their hearts.

In the midst of their intimate conversation, a profound moment of connection and love, Wasike leaned in to kiss Nakhumicha. Their lips were mere inches apart, a breath away from sealing their love with a kiss that held the promise of forever.

But before their lips could meet, the world outside their cocoon of love intervened. The barking of dogs outside shattered the magical moment. One of Wasike's cows had sneak away from the safety of the shade.

The days were slipping through their fingers like grains of sand in an hourglass. The anticipated day when Nakhumicha would finally unite with Wasike in wedded bliss was rapidly approaching, and both lovers found themselves lost in the intoxicating realm of fantasy. In this world of dreams and whispered promises, they believed that life could be a tapestry woven with the threads of their love, a life where each day would be a symphony of shared moments and tender affections.

Nakhumicha, with her heart filled with boundless love, had become the missing piece of Wasike's soul—a part of him that he had longed for, yearned for, without even knowing it. In her, he found completeness, and the union they envisioned was like the fusion of two souls, destined to become one in the dance of love.

Yet, in the midst of this euphoria, there was a shadow that loomed. Wasike already had two wives, a fact that cast a pall over the anticipation of their union. The question that lingered, unspoken but ever-present, was how their relationship would coexist in this complex web of multiple marriages.

Children were conspicuously absent from the equation. Their love had not borne the fruit of offspring, and in the eyes of their custom, this was not a failing but a deliberate choice. The traditions dictated that when a father or mother entered into a new marriage, the children from their previous unions were to be hidden away, removed from the celebration of the new union. They were not to partake in the feast or festivities.

In this delicate dance of love, Nakhumicha and Wasike found themselves navigating the intricacies of tradition and modern desires. Their hearts ached to be together, to merge their lives in love's embrace, but they were also mindful of the complexities that surrounded them.

Love, they knew, was a powerful force that transcended tradition and custom. It was an emotion that could not be confined by societal norms or expectations. In their hearts, they carried a flame that defied convention, a love that burned fiercely, unapologetically.

As the days grew shorter and the hour of their union drew near, Nakhumicha and Wasike clung to the promise of a future filled with love, joy, and shared dreams. Their love was like a beacon, guiding them through the stormy waters of tradition and uncertainty, towards the shores of their destiny.

They knew that challenges lay ahead, that the path they had chosen was not without obstacles, but they were willing to face whatever trials awaited them. Their love had already weathered the storm of secrecy and stolen moments, and it had emerged stronger, more resilient.

Nakhumicha's heart was a canvas painted with the colors of love. She envisioned a life where she and Wasike would wake up each morning to the sweet embrace of dawn, where they would whisper words of love into each other's ears, and where every day would be an adventure, a new chapter in their love story.

In her dreams, she saw herself as a bride, adorned in the finest attire, walking down the aisle towards her beloved. She imagined the look of

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adoration in Wasike's eyes as he watched her approach, the promise of forever etched in his gaze.

Wasike, too, had painted a vivid picture of their future together. He saw himself as a devoted husband, cherishing Nakhumicha as the most precious treasure in his life. He imagined the laughter of their children, the joy of their shared moments, and the warmth of their love filling their home.

The anticipation hung in the air like an electric charge, a palpable current of excitement that coursed through the hearts of everyone involved. The forthcoming wedding of Nakhumicha and Wasike was not just an ordinary event; it was destined to be a spectacle, a celebration that would outshine all that had come before it. The clans on both sides were determined to make this union the epitome of perfection, an occasion that would be etched in the annals of their history.

In the heart of Nakhumicha's world, her friends were like a closely knit sisterhood, a constellation of love and support. They gathered together, a vibrant tapestry of personalities, to deliberate on the intricate details of the upcoming nuptials. The main topic of discussion was not merely what they would wear on this momentous day, but also the gifts they would bestow upon their beloved friend.

Tailors and seamstresses found themselves in high demand, their nimble fingers dancing over rich fabrics to craft the most exquisite garments. The clinking of sewing machines and the rustling of silk and satin filled the air as they worked tirelessly to bring their visions to life. For these artisans, it was not just a job; it was a labor of love, a contribution to a celebration that held profound significance.

The ladies, both young and old, aspired to be a vision of elegance on this special day. The prevailing fashion was a harmonious blend of gold and black, a combination that symbolized both regality and depth of emotion. Each woman was determined not to be left behind in this sartorial endeavor, and some even went to great lengths, borrowing money to ensure that they could meet the demands of this grand occasion. It was

their collective effort to showcase to Wasike that Nakhumicha was a person of the people, a woman whose radiance and beauty would be celebrated by all.

In the heart of the village, the menfolk were not to be outdone by the ladies. They too were busy with preparations, ensuring that the wedding would be a resounding success. The elders and respected members of the clan gathered in solemn meetings, discussing the customs and rituals that would be observed during the ceremony. It was a time for the passing down of tradition, for the sharing of wisdom, and for the affirmation of the sacred bonds that would be forged.

The wedding preparations were in full swing, and Nakhumicha's aunts played crucial roles in ensuring that every detail was attended to with meticulous care. They were the unsung heroes of the festivities, working tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure that the celebration would be a resounding success.

In the heart of the village, Nakhumicha's aunts were busy with their preparations. They gathered together, a formidable team of women, each with her own unique set of skills and expertise. Their hands moved with precision and grace as they embarked on their tasks, transforming simple ingredients into culinary delights.

The first order of business was the brewing of busaa. Enormous pots were brought out, and fermented floor were carefully measured and mixed. The women worked in harmony, their hands stained with the remnants of their labor, as they stirred the concoction with large wooden spoons. The air was filled with the earthy aroma of the brewing process, a scent that was both familiar and comforting.

Next came the preparation of flour. Mounds of millet and maize were ground into fine powder, the grinding stones bearing witness to the strength and determination of the women. They took turns, their bodies swaying to the rhythm of their work, as they transformed grains into flour with unwavering dedication.

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Roasting meat and chicken was another essential task on their checklist. Large skewers laden with succulent cuts of meat and plump chickens were placed over open fires, the flames licking the flesh and imparting a smoky, savory flavor. The women turned the skewers with practiced expertise, ensuring that every piece was cooked to perfection.

On the side of Wasike's clan, preparations were equally fervent. Pots brimmed with busaa. The aroma of the fermented beverage filled the air, a heady scent that promised joy and revelry.

Two mighty bulls had been set aside for slaughter, a gesture of abundance and generosity that would befit the occasion.

As the bridegroom, Wasike had taken great care in selecting his attire for the momentous day. He had sewn a white suit, a symbol of purity and new beginnings. His crisp white shirt and black tie added a touch of sophistication, a nod to tradition and modernity coming together in harmony. Black shoes and belt, adorned with a goldish watch that graced his wrist, completed his ensemble. The best men, chosen to stand by his side, would mirror his attire, creating a striking visual of unity and cohesion.

The wedding dress, a symbol of her transformation from a young girl into a bride, was a gift from her aunts. They had chosen it with care, envisioning Nakhumicha as a radiant vision on her special day. The dress was a masterpiece of craftsmanship, adorned with intricate embroidery and delicate lace that seemed to shimmer in the sunlight.

She sat with her aunts, they delved into conversations about the intricacies of marriage. They were not just imparting knowledge; they were passing down wisdom that had been gleaned from generations of women who had walked this path before her. Their words were steeped in the richness of tradition, carrying with them the weight of experience.

One topic that arose was the matter of Nakhumicha's virginity, a subject that held profound significance in their culture. Her aunts approached the topic with a mixture of delicacy and frankness, seeking to prepare her for the journey she was about to undertake. They encouraged her to embrace

her role as a wife and to enter this new chapter of her life with an open heart and mind.

Other members of their clan also shared their insights and advice with Nakhumicha. They spoke of the importance of respect and submission in marriage, values that had been upheld for generations. Nakhumicha listened intently, absorbing the collective wisdom of her community. She understood that she was not just marrying Wasike but joining a larger family, a network of support and guidance.

Nakhumicha's parents, too, played a pivotal role in preparing her for her upcoming marriage. They showered her with love and reassurance, reminding her of their unwavering support. They knew that their daughter was embarking on a new and sometimes challenging journey, and they wanted her to know that she could always turn to them for guidance and comfort.

In the midst of these conversations, Nakhumicha was told something that resonated deeply with the gravity of her decision. She learned that when she left her family home to join Wasike, her cup, plate, spoon, and bed would be destroyed. This was a powerful symbol, signifying that there was no turning back. Once she crossed the threshold into her new life as a married woman, there would be no chance of returning to her childhood home, except as an occasional visitor.

This tradition, though seemingly harsh, carried a profound message. It emphasized the permanence of marriage and the commitment that came with it. It underscored the idea that marriage was a sacred bond, one that demanded unwavering dedication and resilience. It was a stark reminder that marriage was not to be taken lightly, that it required sacrifice and steadfastness.

However, in modern times, the landscape of marriage had shifted. Many parents advised their daughters that if things were not going well in their marriage, they could return home. This change in perspective raises questions about the dynamics of contemporary marriages. Does this

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newfound flexibility lead to escalating divorce rates? Does it inadvertently foster a sense of disrespect between husbands and wives? Are women now more empowered to make choices about their own lives and happiness?

The morning sun painted the horizon with warm hues of gold and orange as Nakhumicha's aunts and sisters bustled about in eager anticipation. It was a day filled with the promise of new beginnings and the sweet fragrance of love in the air. Their joy was palpable, a contagious energy that enveloped the entire compound.

As the hours slipped away, the women continued their preparations with meticulous care. Every detail had to be perfect, every adornment just right. Nakhumicha, the radiant bride-to-be, was the focal point of their efforts. She was like a blooming flower, ready to unfurl its petals to the world.

They dressed her, each fold of fabric and every jewel that adorned her seemed to whisper tales of love and tradition.

Before noon, the moment had finally arrived. The aunts and sisters had gathered with an air of excitement and purpose, ready to embark on their journey to deliver Nakhumicha to her husband's home. They had prepared a vehicle, a modern touch in a ceremony steeped in tradition. Faces were adorned with smiles that radiated happiness, and laughter danced in their voices.

However, amidst this sea of joy, Nakhumicha herself was a whirlwind of emotions. Anxiety fluttered in her chest like a caged bird. It was not lost on her that this day would mark a profound change in her life. She was about to step into uncharted territory, into a world of intimacy and vulnerability that had previously been a mystery.

This would be her first time sharing a bed with a man, and the prospect both excited and unnerved her. The man she was going to join was not just a stranger but the foundation upon which her new family would be

built. The nervousness was a natural response to the unknown, a reminder that love and marriage were journeys filled with both anticipation and uncertainty.

The vehicle carrying Nakhumicha and her entourage made its way towards her husband's home, the landscape seemed to mirror her inner turmoil. The road stretched out ahead, winding its way through lush fields and ancient trees. It was as if nature itself was bearing witness to this momentous occasion.

They neared their destination, Nakhumicha's heart beat like the rhythm of a love song. She was about to cross a threshold, leaving behind the life she had known to embrace the promise of a new beginning. Her anxiety began to transform into a sense of purpose and determination.

Love, in all its complexity and beauty, was at the heart of this journey. It was a force that transcended the boundaries of time and tradition, uniting two souls in a sacred bond.

The arrival at Wasike's place was met with a sense of anticipation, as the vehicle carrying Nakhumicha and her entourage pulled into the compound. The sun was beginning its descent in the sky, casting long shadows that stretched across the earth. It was a moment marked by a quiet and solemn atmosphere, as if the world itself held its breath in anticipation of this significant event.

The aunts and sisters disembarked first, their footsteps echoing softly in the compound. The day was designed for their presence alone, a time for the women of Nakhumicha's family to accompany her to her new home. There were no boisterous celebrations, no grand processions—only a sense of purpose and duty that hung in the air like a gentle breeze.

In contrast to the bustling activity that had filled Nakhumicha's home earlier that day, there was a sense of serenity at Wasike's compound. The world seemed to slow down, and there was a stillness that belied the importance of the moment. It was as if time itself had paused to witness this sacred union.

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The absence of commotion did not dampen the spirits of those present. Laughter and joy reverberated through the air, an affirmation of the love and happiness that filled their hearts. The aunties, in particular, took it upon themselves to ensure that Nakhumicha was not lost in a whirlwind of thoughts and emotions.

They engaged her in captivating stories and anecdotes, drawing her into the rich tapestry of their shared experiences. It was a time for bonding, for weaving the threads of their familial ties even tighter. As they sat together, the world outside seemed to fade away, leaving only the warmth of their connection.

The day had been long, and appetites were hearty. The provisions that had been brought along—*busaa*, flour, roasted meat, and chicken—were shared and savored. The flavors danced on their taste buds, a celebration of life and love. Every bite was a reminder of the traditions and customs that bound them together.

As the evening sun cast its golden glow over the landscape, Wasike decided to add another layer of enchantment to the day. He played music that filled the air with melodies that resonated with the hearts of those present. The music became a backdrop for their conversations, infusing each word with a lyrical quality.

It was during this time that the aunts and sisters made their departure, one by one, leaving behind only a single young aunt to accompany Nakhumicha. Their parting was marked by embraces and words of encouragement, a passing of the torch to the next generation. As they left, their laughter lingered in the air like a sweet melody, a reminder of the joy that had filled the day.

Now, the compound was bathed in the soft glow of twilight. The world seemed to take on a dreamlike quality, as if reality itself had been touched by magic. Nakhumicha and her young aunt were the sole inhabitants of this enchanted space, and they felt the weight of the moment settle upon them.

In the fading light, Nakhumicha's thoughts turned to Wasike, her beloved. She could picture him in her mind's eye, tall and handsome, his smile a reflection of the love that bound them together. It was a smile that had the power to melt her heart and make her forget the world outside.

As the evening deepened, Nakhumicha and her young aunt settled into the embrace of the night. The stars began to twinkle in the vast expanse of the sky, like diamonds scattered across a velvet curtain. The moon, a luminous orb, cast a silvery glow that painted the world with its ethereal light.

As the night deepened, a sense of anticipation hung in the air, heightened by the intimacy of the hour. Nakhumicha and Wasike had shared supper together, yet there was a subtle tension in the way their eyes seemed to avoid meeting. It was as if they were both aware of the gravity of this moment, a threshold they were about to cross into the realm of married life.

Nakhumicha's aunt, a wise and perceptive woman, couldn't help but notice the hesitancy in their glances. Concerned, she decided to take matters into her own hands. With a gentle smile, she rose from her seat and moved closer to Wasike. Her touch was warm and reassuring as she reached out to clasp his hand, her fingers intertwining with his.

With a tender tone, she called Nakhumicha to join them, her voice carrying the weight of tradition and wisdom. The aunt's gaze shifted to the palms of the young couple, and she examined them closely. Her eyes held a knowing gleam, as if she could see into the future.

She asked Nakhumicha to extend her hand, palm up, and then she turned her attention to Wasike's hand. As she studied the lines and contours of their palms, she began to share her insights. In the soft glow of the lamp, her words carried a sense of ancient knowledge and mysticism.

The aunt predicted that this union would be blessed with a son as their firstborn, a symbol of strength and legacy. Her words hung in the air like a whispered secret, a promise of the future they would create together.

Nakhumicha and Wasike exchanged a glance filled with wonder and anticipation.

But the aunt's observations didn't end there. She was a keen observer of the physical attributes of the couple, attributes that were believed to influence the characteristics of their future child. With a playful smile, she asked them who was taller, even though the answer was evident. It was a moment of shared laughter, a reminder that they were about to embark on a journey that would be filled with love, joy, and the occasional teasing.

She guided them to stand side by side, their figures silhouetted in the gentle lamplight. The aunt couldn't resist playing the role of a matchmaker, initiating their intimacy in a playful yet meaningful manner. She spoke of how their union would create a harmonious balance, where each would complement the other, forming a partnership that was greater than the sum of its parts.

As the night wore on, the aunt sensed that it was time for her to step back and allow the newlyweds their privacy. With a knowing smile, she bid them goodnight and retreated to the living room. It was a shared house, a space where love and family coexisted harmoniously.

The aunt, a guardian of tradition and keeper of wisdom, did not succumb to sleep that night. Her curiosity burned brightly, an insatiable desire to witness and understand the unfolding of this sacred union. She had played her role in guiding and observing, and now she wished to be privy to the intimate moments that would shape Nakhumicha and Wasike's future.

In the stillness of the night, as the world outside slumbered, she listened attentively to the soft whispers that emanated from the bedroom. Her senses were finely tuned, attuned to the subtle nuances of love and desire that filled the air.

It became evident that Nakhumicha was hesitant, her heart and body trembling on the precipice of intimacy. Her whispers were laced with uncertainty, a reflection of the vulnerability that comes with such a

profound moment. It was as if the weight of tradition and expectation bore down on her shoulders.

Wasike, experienced and patient, understood the delicacy of this moment. He knew that he had to be the gentle guide, the one to lead Nakhumicha into the depths of their shared love. His words were like a soothing melody, his touch tender and reassuring.

Wasike slowly and lovingly seduced his bride. He whispered words of love and desire, his breath warm against her skin. All over sudden Nakhumicha screamed with pain and that is how the aunt ascertained that indeed she was a virgin.

The morning sun heralded a new day, its golden rays streaming through the windows of their humble abode. The world outside was alive with the sounds of nature awakening, a symphony of chirping birds and rustling leaves. But inside, in the sanctuary of their love, Nakhumicha and Wasike stirred from their slumber.

As they rose from their bed, a sense of contentment washed over them. Breakfast awaited them, a simple yet nourishing meal that they shared in the intimate cocoon of their home. Nakhumicha, for the next seven days, was spared from the daily chores, her husband's way of showing his care and consideration.

These days, there was a palpable shift in their relationship. Nakhumicha, now his beloved wife, drew closer to Wasike with a newfound intimacy. She reveled in his presence, her eyes constantly seeking his, like two stars in the same night sky.

Their laughter filled the air, a sweet melody of shared jokes and whispered affections. They were in the midst of their honeymoon phase, a time when love blossomed like the most vibrant of flowers. Every glance, every touch, was filled with tenderness and longing.

They turned to Nakhumicha's aunt, the wise guardian who had guided them through this journey of love. Gratitude filled their hearts as they

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expressed their appreciation for her unwavering support. They wished for nothing more than to honor their union with the gift of a child.

The aunt took their blood-stained beddings, the tangible evidence of their consummated love. She left quietly, allowing the newlyweds their privacy with a chicken. Her heart was filled with blessings for the couple, a silent hope that their love would bloom into a family.

Nakhumicha and Wasike embraced the days that followed, their love grew stronger with each passing moment. They cherished their time together, whether it was sharing meals, taking leisurely walks, or simply lying side by side, lost in each other's eyes.

The world outside continued to turn, its rhythm echoing the heartbeat of their love. Each day, they learned more about each other, carving out the contours of their shared life. Their home, once a place of solitude, had transformed into a sanctuary of love and companionship.

As the sun set on their early days of marriage, they looked forward to a future filled with promise and possibility. Their love story, woven with threads of tradition and devotion, was a testament to the enduring power of love.

In the quiet of their bedroom, as they lay entwined, they knew that their journey together had only just begun. With hearts full of love, they whispered sweet nothings into the night, dreams of a life together as eternal as the stars that adorned the dark velvet sky.

After a week, the day of their official wedding had finally arrived, and it was a celebration that would be etched in their memories for eternity. Nakhumicha and Wasike, the stars of the day, were adorned in garments befitting the importance of the occasion. Their love, which had grown from a tender bud to a flourishing bloom, was now ready to be sealed with the sacred bond of matrimony.

The venue was a quaint church nestled within the heart of their village, a place that had witnessed countless unions over the years. It stood as a

symbol of love and commitment, its weathered walls bearing witness to the stories of generations past.

As the radiant morning sun bathed the landscape in golden hues, the church came alive with the hustle and bustle of preparations. Friends and family members bustled about, their faces adorned with smiles that mirrored the joy in their hearts. The atmosphere was electric, charged with the anticipation of witnessing two souls become one.

Inside the church, the pews were adorned with intricately woven ribbons in shades of black and gold, a proof to the union that was about to take place. The fragrance of freshly picked wildflowers wafted through the air, lending a touch of nature's beauty to the sacred space.

Nakhumicha and Wasike, standing at the threshold of a new beginning, were resplendent in their attire. She, in a stunning white wedding gown that flowed like a cascade of silk, and he, in a sharp black suit that exuded sophistication. The contrast in their attire only served to emphasize the unity of their love, the merging of their distinct paths into one shared journey.

The church was adorned with floral arrangements that seemed to bloom with a vibrancy that mirrored the couple's love. The altar, where they would exchange their vows, was adorned with white lilies, symbolizing purity and devotion. The priest, a venerable figure with years of wisdom, stood ready to guide them through the sacred ceremony.

The ceremony itself was a fusion of tradition and modernity, a reflection of the couple's unique love story. As they exchanged their vows, their voices trembled with emotion, their promises of love and fidelity ringing out like a melodious symphony.

All their parents were present, their eyes glistening with pride and affection. They had witnessed the journey of their children's love, from the first stolen glances to the momentous occasion before them. Their blessings, spoken in hushed whispers, were like the gentle caress of a parent's love, a silent affirmation of their unwavering support.

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Friends and relatives, their hearts brimming with happiness, looked on as Nakhumicha and Wasike exchanged rings. These simple bands of gold, encircling their fingers, represented an unbreakable bond that would endure the tests of time.

Outside the church, the vibrant colors of the African landscape painted a picturesque backdrop. The ululation of women and the jubilant beats of drums filled the air, a jubilant chorus that celebrated the union of two souls.

Two bulls were slaughtered to mark the momentous event, their sacrifice a symbol of abundance and prosperity. The scent of roasted meat filled the air, a mouthwatering aroma that tantalized the senses.

The ladies on Nakhumicha's side were a vision in black and gold, their dresses a testament to the richness of their culture. Their elegance and grace added to the overall beauty of the occasion. The men, in their pristine white suits, stood in solidarity with the groom, a symbol of unity and support.

As the ceremony drew to a close, the church's doors swung open, and Nakhumicha and Wasike emerged, bathed in the golden light of the afternoon sun. Their smiles radiated happiness and love, a beacon of hope for all who witnessed their union.

Chapter Eight

Bearing the Weight of Expectation

The predicament surrounding Wasike's brother, Benson inability to father a child weighed heavily on the minds of the entire family, casting a long shadow over their otherwise joyous existence. It was a matter of great concern, a cloud that refused to dissipate despite their attempts to discern the cause.

The family gatherings were once filled with laughter, the contagious giggles of children, and the vibrant chatter of women as they shared the secrets of life. Now, they had grown somber, conversations more hushed, voices tinged with worry. The elders convened under the shade of a massive acacia tree, its branches offering a protective canopy under which the clan could seek refuge from the sweltering sun. Their faces, etched with lines of wisdom and age, held the weight of generations. It was here, amidst the ancient roots of this tree, that the issue was to be addressed.

Benson, a tall and robust man with a countenance as serious as the situation at hand, sat quietly as the family elders questioned him. He recounted the nights of passion he had shared with his wife, the fervent desire that enveloped them like a cocoon. Yet, despite their most ardent efforts, the cradle remained empty, devoid of the laughter of a child.

The clan elders, their eyes weary with the burden of tradition and expectation, felt the gravity of the situation. They knew that in their community, fertility was considered a divine blessing, a family's prosperity and continuity. To not have an heir was to risk the fading of one's lineage into obscurity, a fate worse than death itself.

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Amongst the elders was a young aunt, wise beyond her years. She was entrusted with the delicate task of investigating the issue further, of examining the physical attributes and capabilities of Benson. It was a role that weighed heavily on her, but she accepted it with a sense of duty to her family.

In the hushed chambers of their home, away from prying eyes, she meticulously observed Benson, her eyes casting a discerning gaze over his form. It was an awkward and intimate encounter, one that required discretion and modesty. As she examined him, her thoughts swirled with a mixture of empathy and curiosity.

The night air was heavy with anticipation as the young aunt reported her findings to the elders. With solemnity, she informed them of her conclusion: Benson could not father a child. It was a verdict that shattered the hopes of his family, a verdict that would reverberate through the corridors of their lives for years to come.

The family found themselves in the throes of an agonizing dilemma. How could they ensure the continuity of their lineage when one of their own was incapable of bearing a child? It was a question that gnawed at their hearts, a question that seemed to have no easy answers.

The days turned into weeks, and the family grappled with their predicament. They consulted with medicine men, seeking remedies and cures for Benson's infertility. They embarked on pilgrimages to sacred sites, praying fervently for divine intervention. Yet, the cradle remained empty, and the laughter of a child remained an elusive dream.

The weight of expectation bore down on Benson, a burden that seemed insurmountable. He watched as his brothers and cousins celebrated the birth of their children; their homes filled with the joyful cries of infants. He yearned for a child of his own, a legacy to carry his name forward.

Benson's wife, too, felt the weight of the situation. She had been thrust into a world of scrutiny and judgment, her every move and action observed with a critical eye. The whispers of the community haunted her, casting a shadow over her confidence and self-worth.

As the days turned into months, the family grappled with the difficult decision that lay ahead. They were bound by tradition and the need to ensure the continuation of their lineage.

The decision was made in hushed whispers, like secrets exchanged beneath the cover of a moonless night. The clan, after meekly consulting with its elders, arrived at a resolution that would reshape the lives of those involved. It was an unconventional solution, a response to an issue that had gnawed at the edges of their community – the barrenness of Benson's marriage.

In the quietude of their village, where the evenings unfurled like a velvet tapestry, Wasike assumed his clandestine role. He was now a pivotal figure in the resolution, tasked with balancing the precarious scales of fate. When the moon hung low in the sky, and Benson was absent from his home, Wasike would stealthily make his way to his brother's house.

Carrying with him a slender stick, Wasike would approach the threshold of Benson's abode. To an outsider, the stick was an inconspicuous piece of wood, but to the inhabitants of the home, it held profound significance. It was a symbol of their unspoken arrangement, a discreet signal of Wasike's presence.

When Benson returned from his nightly sojourns and encountered the stick, he was acutely aware of its meaning. It was an unspoken cue, a sign for him to quietly retreat, to allow Wasike the time he needed with his wife.

Benson's wife eventually gave birth to twins – a joyous occasion, or so it would have seemed in any other circumstance. But in this close-knit village, deeply rooted in tradition and cultural norms, the arrival of twins carried a heavy burden. It was a burden that would soon lead to a heart-wrenching ritual that defied the natural instincts of a mother's love.

The news of the twins' birth spread through the village like wildfire. Whispers and hushed conversations painted the situation with trepidation.

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Twins were considered a bad omen, a breach of cultural norms that could disrupt the harmony of the clan.

The elders of the clan, steeped in the traditions of their forefathers, deemed it necessary to uphold these norms, even at the cost of human suffering. And so, with heavy hearts and a sense of solemn duty, they convened to make a decision that would forever alter the course of Benson wife's life.

In a ritual that blended sorrow and necessity, the clan gathered to address this perceived transgression. One of the twins had to be sacrificed to appease the ancestors and restore the equilibrium that had been disrupted by their birth.

The day of the ritual dawned, heavy with sorrow. The village elders, draped in traditional attire, led the somber procession. The air was thick with tension and grief as the village braced itself for the unthinkable.

Chapter Nine

Navigating Challenges and Choices

Felix's initiation into secondary school introduced him to a new world, a tapestry woven with threads of diversity. It was here that he encountered students from far-flung corners of the globe, each bearing their unique stories and perspectives. Felix's classroom was a microcosm of cultures, with European students occupying a significant presence.

Humble and quiet, Felix navigated his early days with a sense of introspection. He observed the dynamics, listened to the myriad of accents, and absorbed the rich tapestry of stories that unfolded before him. His solitary moments provided him with opportunities to reflect on the journey he had embarked upon.

A turning point occurred when a fellow student, Bruno, approached Felix one day. Hailing from the heartland of the United States, Bruno's parents were among the colonizers who had journeyed to new lands. Their conversation marked the genesis of a friendship that would shape their experiences in ways unimaginable.

As they talked, Felix painted a vivid picture of his village, Mwamba. The landscape he described was captivating, with the village nestled

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strategically on the slopes of a mountain. Twin rivers meandered beside it, the lush greenery painting a scene of beauty and abundance. Fertile lands and thriving vegetation adorned his words, capturing the essence of his home.

Bruno reciprocated by sharing the tapestry of Illinois, a state located in the heart of the United States. His words painted a picture of diverse landscapes, with prairies, woodlands, and fertile plains converging to create a harmonious blend. Rivers, including the Mississippi, traversed the terrain, weaving a web of connectivity that facilitated trade and communication. Bruno's words revealed a history shaped by geographical features and human interaction.

Their friendship blossomed as they exchanged stories and experiences. Bruno introduced Felix to his circle of friends, sparking curiosity and fascination among his peers. In the evenings, their camaraderie deepened as they gathered, sharing meals and conversations that spanned continents and cultures.

A year later, Bruno's intentions shifted as he approached Felix once more. Their dialogue took a different turn, exploring personal aspects of their lives. In a casual exchange, Bruno inquired about Felix's social life, his hobbies, and interests.

"Do you drink alcohol?" Bruno posed the question, curiosity glinting in his eyes.

Felix's response was a firm, "No."

Undeterred, Bruno probed further. "Do you have a girlfriend?"

Felix's answer remained unchanged, "No."

Bruno's surprise was evident, and his attempts at persuasion followed. "Who do you spend your leisure time with, apart from learning and playing?"

Felix's response was simple and true to his nature. "You know me, I enjoy spending time in the library."

But Bruno was persistent, his words urging Felix to embrace a different path. "Try these experiences, and you'll discover a side of life you never knew. We're grownups now."

Despite Bruno's earnest attempts, Felix held steadfast to his convictions. He was unswayed by the allure of experimentation, preferring to chart his own course.

Bruno's support had been a pillar, providing food, funds, and companionship. However, his persistence in urging Felix to depart from his values led to a pivotal decision. Feeling his boundaries had been crossed, Bruno chose to withdraw his assistance.

With the taproot of support severed, life became a challenging landscape for Felix. The weight of his circumstances bore heavily upon him, prompting him to reconsider his stance. Amidst the throes of his internal struggle, he reached a decision borne out of desperation.

On a weekend destined to be etched in memory, Felix joined Bruno and their companions on a clandestine adventure. Sneaking out of school's confines, they embarked on a journey fueled by alcohol and the allure of women they had hired. The night seemed endless, a symphony of carefree indulgence.

As dawn approached, Felix returned to school with his companions, a sense of guilt nestled in the pit of his stomach. The school matron's register revealed their absence, and the consequences of their actions loomed ominously.

Morning brought a foreboding note to their beds, instructing them to gather their belongings and proceed to the deputy principal's office at 8 am. Felix's heart sank as he read the words. The weight of his choices hung heavy in the air.

Carrying his box and belongings, Felix arrived at the deputy principal's office, his steps a march of both resignation and anticipation. His friends

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followed suit; the camaraderie that had once defined them now overshadowed by the specter of impending consequences.

As they reached the office, Felix's fears were confirmed. His friends were leaving school, escorted by their parents, their futures rewritten by a single night's choices. It was an unspoken sentence, the verdict delivered without the need for words.

With each moment that passed, Felix's dread deepened. His father accompanied him, a silent witness to the unfolding events. The office bore witness to the unraveling of his actions, as the deputy principal painted a stark picture of their transgressions.

The words echoed in the room, punctuated by the tension that thickened the air. Felix's actions, sneaking out to drink alcohol and consorting with women, were laid bare before his father's eyes.

Without a second thought, Wasike's anger erupted like a volcano, the weight of his disappointment crashing down. Blows and kicks were exchanged, the deputy's attempts at intervention proving futile. Teachers intervened, pulling them apart, but the damage was done. Expulsion was the only recourse.

Returning home, Wasike's silence was deafening. For three days, he bore the weight of his emotions in silence, leaving Felix to grapple with uncertainty.

On the fourth day, the silence was broken. Wasike's voice carried a finality that could not be ignored. Felix would be given another chance, another school, a fresh start. But the message was clear: repeat this folly, and all would be lost.

Wasike's actions spoke of both disappointment and love. Felix's actions had cast a shadow over the village, and the opportunity for redemption came at a price. His father's efforts secured a place for Felix in a provincial school, a lifeline to a second chance.

As Felix wrestled with the implications of his actions, Isabela's journey took a different trajectory. Despite her circumstances and the separation of her parents, she continued to thrive. Each day brought improvement.

The transition to the new school brought Felix face to face with a reality he had not anticipated. Dr. Lincoln's benevolent sponsorship had been severed, leaving Felix dependent solely on his parents for sustenance. The newfound responsibilities weighed heavily on his young shoulders, forcing him to grapple with circumstances that once seemed distant.

In the corridors of his new school, Felix navigated the labyrinth of change. But this was a landscape marred by new challenges. The absence of Dr. Lincoln's support manifested in unexpected ways, as the lack of basic commodities became an unsettling norm. Felix's life became a daily struggle, and the echoes of his past now resonated with newfound intensity.

The hallowed halls of learning, which once held promise, now carried the burden of uncertainty. On occasions when school fees went unpaid, Felix found himself banished from the institution he once hoped would lead him to his dreams. The sting of humiliation accompanied him on the journey back home, a stark reminder of the chasm between aspiration and reality.

This existence, unbeknownst to Felix before, became his daily crucible. Coping became his art, and surviving his anthem. The dreams he harbored, the ambitions he nurtured, all were tested under the weight of adversity.

Academically, the toll of his circumstances began to show. The once bright spark of his performance dulled, like a flame flickering against a relentless wind. The strain of his challenges took residence in his schoolwork, casting shadows on the path he had hoped to illuminate.

At home, his father's stern disposition was a constant presence. The disappointment that had previously manifested as silence now found its voice in stern words and strict discipline. Felix's mother, a beacon of

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unwavering belief, tried to counterbalance the harshness with her faith in her son's potential.

Yet, amidst the clouds of hardship, a silver lining emerged in the form of a newfound friendship. Felix met Evans, a companion who etched himself into Felix's life with sincerity and devotion. Evans's presence brought an oasis of relief, offering companionship in a world that had grown increasingly challenging.

Their bond deepened, and Evans's dedication became a balm for Felix's troubled soul. The friendship was a refuge, a reminder that amidst the storms, pockets of warmth and trust could still be found. But beneath the surface, Felix's curiosity gnawed at him. He sensed something beneath the surface, a tension he couldn't quite decipher.

One evening, in the quiet cocoon of their shared space, the truth unfurled. Evans's words hung in the air, heavy with the weight of their implications. "Felix, I have feelings for you."

In an instant, the world seemed to shift. Felix's response was swift and instinctual. He pushed Evans away, a reflex born from a mix of shock and fear. His actions belied the turmoil within, a whirlpool of emotions that threatened to consume him.

Felix's next steps were guided by a resolve to seek justice. He approached the teacher on duty and reported the incident with an urgency that mirrored his own internal chaos. The outcome was decisive—Evans was expelled, severed from the fabric of the school and from Felix's life.

The echoes of that choice reverberated through Felix's journey, a stark reminder of the power of his decisions. In the wake of Evans's expulsion, Felix grappled with emotions he had not anticipated. The complexity of human connections left its imprint, an indelible mark that would continue to shape his perceptions.

As the chapters of his secondary school journey came to a close, Felix stood at a crossroads. His dreams of becoming a neurosurgeon, once fueled by unyielding determination, now faced an unforeseen barrier.

Despite attaining grades that held the potential to propel university, the cluster points could not allow.

Isabela, on the other hand, was a portrait of resilience and triumph. Despite facing her own share of challenges, she emerged victorious. Her dedication bore fruit as she achieved success in her studies. Although other paths were open to her, she remained steadfast in her decision to pursue teaching—a choice that was both a tribute to her roots and a testament to her unwavering spirit.

Felix, faced with the reality of his circumstances and the evolving landscape of his aspirations, found himself at a crossroads. The trajectory of his dreams had been altered, and the tapestry of his life was woven with threads of adaptation and transformation. With a heart still aflame with ambition, he turned the pages to a new chapter, one that held the promise of a different path.

Journalism became his new compass, a field that beckoned with the allure of storytelling and discovery.

Chapter Ten

Journeys Converged and Relationships Forged

University marked a new phase of life for Felix and Isabela, a juncture where their dreams reached higher altitudes. Their paths diverged, leading each of them down corridors of knowledge, exploration, and

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growth. Wasike, a steadfast pillar of support, sold four bulls to pave the way for their higher education. His sacrifice was etched into their pursuits.

Amidst the academic journey, Christine's return added an unexpected dimension to the familial landscape. After years of staying single and embarking on new chapters, her journey had circled back to Wasike. With her came a child born out of wedlock. In Mwamba village, Wasike's embrace of this reality was an affirmation of the evolving definitions of family, acceptance, and forgiveness.

In the ancient whispers of the wise, it is spoken that when the mighty bull bestows its seed, the nascent life that emerges does not bear its name, nor its lineage. Instead, like a tender secret whispered among the winds, the future calf finds its place in the embrace of its mother, an unbroken bond unfurling through the ages.

Fueled by determination and guided by their father's enduring belief, Felix and Isabela embarked on the challenging terrain of university life. Isabela's journey, however, took an unexpected turn as she encountered love in the most unforeseen places. A chance meeting led her to a man who captured her heart, and their connection grew like a seed nourished by time and shared experiences.

In a world where choices were often dictated by tradition, Isabela and her newfound love embarked on a journey that defied conventional norms. Their relationship blossomed, marked by picnics, shared moments, and the inevitable intimacy that companionship bred. As the chapters of their university years turned, the bond deepened, each interaction weaving a tapestry of memories that would remain etched in their hearts.

The pinnacle of their love story approached as Isabela's final year drew near. With a heart brimming with affection and hope, she took the bold step of bringing her fiancé to her childhood home. But this decision was not merely a personal one; it was a revelation that challenged the very fabric of societal expectations.

The intricate dance between tradition and individuality unfolded as Isabela penned a letter to her family, announcing her intention to bring her fiancé for introduction. It was a bold move, a declaration that she was ready to pave her own path, even as she navigated the delicate journey of respect and familial bonds. As Wasike read the letter, a smile graced his lips.

Termites, known for their synchronized flights, held a symbolic resonance in the moment. Just as they paired up in their descent, Isabela too stood side by side with her chosen partner. Felix, the harbinger of her arrival, felt joy swell within him at the prospect of his sister's happiness.

The anticipated day arrived, heralded by a palpable air of anticipation. Isabela, resplendent in her newfound love, advanced towards the familial gate, hand in hand with her fiancé. Felix, the keen observer, spotted the duo from a distance.

Approaching closer, the identities became clear—Isabela and her partner, Bruno. But Felix's reaction was one of mixed emotions. Recognition swept over him as he realized that the man standing beside his sister was none other than Bruno, his secondary school friend who had played a role in his expulsion.

Felix's mind whirred with conflicting sentiments, a cacophony of memories and unresolved tensions. But as Bruno extended a friendly greeting, his words broke through the barriers of the past. An outstretched hand and a simple inquiry bridged the chasm that had separated them. "Long time, how are you?" Bruno's words held an olive branch.

With his initial shock dissipated, Felix extended his hand in response, recognizing the evolution of individuals over time. "I have been well. Welcome," he replied, a gesture of acceptance that transcended past grievances.

As Isabela and Bruno were welcomed into the familial fold, conversations flowed, narratives intertwining as they sought to understand the path that had led them to this moment. Wasike, the

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patriarch and guardian of this tale, listened with a mix of curiosity and wisdom. He posed questions that pierced through the surface, aiming to uncover the essence of Bruno's intentions and character.

The conversation unfolded, Bruno's intentions were laid bare—a declaration of transformation and growth. He assured Wasike that the person he had become was a testament to change, a marked departure from the actions of their shared past.

And in the face of this evolution, Wasike's blessing was granted. With a nod of approval, Wasike's words conveyed not only his acceptance of their union but also his belief in the power of change and the potential for redemption.

In this juncture of revelations, relationships, and evolving dynamics, the closing of one chapter marked the beginning of another—a chapter where bonds were reaffirmed, choices were made, and the winding paths of individual journeys converged into a shared narrative of love, growth, and possibility.

Meanwhile, the current of life propelled Felix along a different trajectory. The allure of the city's lights had drawn him, the hum of its rhythms resonating with his aspirations. A job beckoned, and Felix answered the call, venturing into the heart of urban life. This new chapter was painted with the colors of ambition, a canvas upon which he would draw the lines of his destiny.

Felix's journey took a remarkable turn when he secured a highly coveted position at a government-owned television network. The job was not only prestigious but also lucrative, promising a rewarding career ahead. Embracing the opportunity with zeal and dedication, he ventured into his new role with fervor, determined to excel in every aspect.

His newfound financial stability allowed him to express his gratitude to his family, particularly his father. He understood the significance of the gift he had in mind. With his hard-earned money, Felix purchased a television set and proudly presented it to his father

As the sun dipped below the horizon, a familiar ritual began in the community. At 7 pm, when the sky was painted in hues of twilight, people from all walks of life gathered in their homes. The reason for this daily congregation was a young man they had all come to love and admire – Felix. With each evening news broadcast, he assumed the role of their guide, delivering information that mattered to their lives.

Felix had not merely become a news anchor; he had transformed into a local hero, an embodiment of the aspirations of the community. The collective pride was palpable, and a sense of joy rippled through the village. Everyone, from the young to the old, made their way to their television sets, anticipating the familiar face and voice of their beloved son.

Over time, Felix's impact extended far beyond the confines of his community. His professionalism and charisma garnered attention well beyond the boundaries of his hometown. He transcended from a local news anchor to a renowned celebrity. His charisma was infectious, drawing people from all walks of life to want to associate with him.

In the course of his career, Felix had the privilege of meeting influential personalities such as big politicians, renowned doctors, and esteemed professors. When these notable figures appeared on his show, they found themselves under the scrutiny of his tough, incisive questions. His interviewing skills were nothing short of remarkable; they were an art form in their own right.

What set Felix apart was his ability to ask the questions that truly mattered. He possessed a rare talent for extracting candid, insightful responses from his guests, revealing the deeper nuances of the issues at hand. His interviews transcended the commonplace and became discussions that held the nation's attention.

Felix's impact wasn't confined to his immediate surroundings. His reputation as a skilled interviewer soon reached global heights. The world took notice of this talented individual who had the ability to engage in

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conversations that were intellectually stimulating and emotionally resonant. His reach extended far beyond the borders of his home country, placing him on an international stage.

Two years into his illustrious career, an American media company recognized the treasure they had found in Felix. The opportunity that presented itself was a game-changer. The world was now eager to listen to his voice, to witness his captivating interviews, and to hear the stories he shared.

Felix was ready for the next chapter in his life. He accepted the offer from the American media company, propelling him into an international sphere. His arrival on the global stage marked a significant moment in the world of journalism. The community that had once gathered in their homes to watch their local hero had now seen him rise to the ranks of international acclaim.

In the realm of international journalism, Felix soon realized the profound truth that lay at the core of his endeavors – to be a source of knowledge and information to others, one must constantly feed the mind. Just as a tree can't give fruit if its roots are not nourished, a knowledgeable and informed head can only be the outcome of continuous learning and growth.

This epiphany became the driving force behind Felix's relentless pursuit of knowledge. He knew that if he were to excel in his international career, he had to be not only well-informed but also ahead of the curve. He couldn't afford to remain stagnant in a field where information was a currency and being at the forefront of current affairs was paramount.

His commitment to personal and professional growth was mirrored in his library, a room in his home where the walls were lined with books. The library became his sanctuary, his personal treasure trove of wisdom, and a testament to his insatiable curiosity. In fact, his collection of books began to outweigh his wardrobe.

While in London, he would often explore the city's streets after work, a place where he could satiate his unending appetite for knowledge. His

favorite haunts were the numerous bookstores and libraries that London had to offer. The quest for new books, fresh perspectives, and untapped knowledge was a pursuit that never lost its fervor.

Felix's passion for reading soon made him a well-known figure in the literary circles of London. People would recognize him in libraries and bookstores, sharing his enthusiasm for books and learning. These encounters with fellow book lovers often resulted in animated conversations, and Felix's network of like-minded individuals grew exponentially.

Amid the stacks of books and the labyrinthine shelves, Felix found more than knowledge – he discovered love. In the labyrinthine aisles of a local library, his heart encountered Jane Mwaniki, a Kikuyu lady. Love knows no boundaries, and their connection transcended not only the borders of the library but also those of tribe and tradition.

Their love story was not one that can be found in books but one that would be written in the pages of their own lives. Their bond was woven from shared moments spent among the rows of books, their laughter echoing through the hallowed halls of knowledge, and their shared dreams of a future together.

With his heart deeply engaged and Jane by his side, Felix knew that he was embarking on a new chapter of his life. It was a path that would not only take him to the frontlines of international journalism but also to the heart of a different kind of journey – one of love, companionship, and shared aspirations.

Embracing this newfound love and commitment, Felix felt the need to share his happiness with his family. He wanted them to be a part of the path he had chosen, to experience the joy and fulfillment that Jane brought into his life. The decision to introduce Jane to his family was a significant step, one that would bridge the gap between his heritage and his future.

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His journey was no longer a singular pursuit of career and knowledge; it had become a multi-dimensional voyage, where love and family played an equally vital role.

Felix's family, whose support had been unwavering throughout his life, embraced his decision with open hearts. They recognized that the love between Felix and Jane was a reflection of the growth and transformation that Felix had undergone.

The Wasike household was alive with preparations for the upcoming marriage, a joyous celebration of love that transcended differences. On the other side, in Mwaniki's family, the atmosphere was equally vibrant as they got ready for the union of their daughter with Felix.

Felix's journey to marry Mwaniki included a crucial step called *Kuhandu Ithigi*. This stage was marked by a visit to Mwaniki's home, accompanied by his parents, friends, and respected elder women and men from the community. This visit served as a formal way to express his intention to marry Mwaniki and seek the blessings of her family.

During this visit, both families engaged in discussions concerning the dowry payment. Representatives from each side were appointed to record all the demands made by the bride's family. The dowry items were diverse and included goats, crates of sodas, sacks of wheat flour, beer, tanks, and *sufurias*.

The culmination of this process occurred on the *Ruracio* day. The groom and his team, laden with the agreed-upon dowry items, set off to Mwaniki's family home. Upon arrival, they signaled their presence by hooting their cars, a joyous announcement of their arrival.

The bride's aunts were quick to respond, rushing to lock the gate of their homestead. The groom's team had to negotiate their entrance, a process filled with lively singing, dancing, and playful negotiations.

As the ladies from the groom's side carried the dowry items on their backs and approached the gate, they sang heartfelt songs, pleading with the bride's family to allow them in. In response, the bride's aunts sang

back in a spirited, lively exchange. This back-and-forth continued for approximately twenty minutes.

Ultimately, the groom's team was permitted to enter the compound, where welcoming songs filled the air, and they were ushered in with warmth and hospitality. As the rest of the guests enjoyed the entertainment and refreshments, representatives from both families gathered inside the house to proceed with the dowry payment process.

In this significant moment, Felix was put to the test. He was presented with women who shared similar features with Mwaniki, all fully covered in colorful traditional African garments. His task was to identify his beloved amidst these veiled figures.

The first attempt to choose the bride was unsuccessful. Felix's second choice was also incorrect, as was the third. For each incorrect guess, he paid a penalty, which consisted of three goats. Finally, with persistence and determination, Felix successfully identified Mwaniki among the veiled women, bringing a collective cheer and celebration from both families.

After the formalities of dowry payment and the playful yet significant tests, there was much joy and celebration. The families came together, toasting to the union of Felix and Mwaniki. Following the event, Felix took Mwaniki as his wife, and together they returned home, hand in hand, stepping into the new chapter of their lives as a married couple.

Chapter Eleven

Bonds Tested and Unveiled Truths

The day of the Christian wedding had arrived, a day of immense significance and transformative power in the lives of Felix and Wairimu. The entire Wasike family had gathered, their hearts aligned in celebration of this union, a union that would not only bind two individuals in matrimony but also reshape their understanding of identity, family, and the intricate connections that weave our lives together.

The love shared between Felix and Wairimu was a radiant beacon, illuminating their path and dispelling any shadows of doubt. The community had rallied together to prepare for this day, and the air was thick with the anticipation of what was to come. Bulls had been slaughtered, clothes had been sewn, and every detail meticulously planned. The stage was set for the grand culmination of their profound journey—a wedding that would bind them in the holiest of matrimony.

The eve before the wedding held a space for familial wisdom. Wasike, a father whose life experiences had etched profound wisdom into his heart, shared his counsel with his son. The uncles, the bearers of ancestral legacy, imparted lessons on the art of being a man within the context of family and community. Nakhumicha, her heart brimming with maternal affection, bestowed her blessings upon her son, offering him a wellspring of encouragement and a profound sense of belonging for the chapter that lay ahead.

The dawn of the wedding day arrived, heralding a new beginning and radiating the promise of love's fulfillment. Amid the bustling preparations and the joyful anticipation, the bride and the groom emerged as a portrait of elegance, hope, and dreams realized. Wairimu, draped in the allure of tradition and adorned with the glow of love, walked the path to the church—a journey marked by the whispered vows of the heart and the solemnity of love's commitment.

Inside the church, a sacred space of union, Felix and his father stood at the threshold of a life-altering moment. The sanctity of the occasion was palpable. The exchange of vows resonated through the sanctuary, their words weaving a promise that transcended the boundaries of time and space.

The climax of the ceremony arrived with the exchange of rings, those small circles of metal that held within them the vastness of their love. As Felix gently slid the ring onto Wairimu's finger, their eyes locked in a dance of unwavering devotion—a promise to stand together through life's myriad ebbs and flows.

But life, unpredictable and capricious, had a twist in store. The air inside the church thickened with tension as an unexpected figure burst into the sanctified space—an intruder in a scene of holiness. This man, David Barasa, bore with him a secret that had been shrouded in the shadows for far too long. With the weight of his words, he unraveled a hidden truth—an earth-shattering revelation that he was Felix's biological father.

A stunned silence seized the room. Nakhumicha's mouth fell agape in disbelief, and Wasike's eyes revealed a complex mix of astonishment and confusion. The shock of the revelation reverberated through the air, challenging the narrative that had been woven for years. Felix's world felt suspended in a haze of revelations, his identity shaken to its very core.

In the aftermath of this revelation, private conversations ensued. The family members, their hearts and minds in turmoil, gathered behind closed doors to discuss the implications of this stunning revelation. Wasike, grappling with a truth he had never anticipated, sought clarity amidst the chaos of emotions. The clergy, guardians of sanctity, facilitated these discussions, allowing the family to navigate the tumultuous aftermath of this revelation.

Nakhumicha stepped forward to share a truth that had long remained buried in secrecy. She revealed that all of the children, including Felix, were not Wasike's biological offspring; they belonged to David.

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Christine, also summoned the courage to stand and deliver her testimony, affirming that her children, too, were not Wasike's but rather the progeny of another man. This revelation sent shockwaves through the congregation, and the magnitude of the unfolding truth began to sink in.

Benson's wife, standing amidst the bewildering revelations, offered her own testimony. She explained that when she realized Benson could not father children, she sought solace in the arms of another man, and she was certain that the twins were not Wasike's, but the offspring of her extramarital relationship.

Ultimately, a decision was reached to allow the wedding to proceed.

Isabela and Bruno, a couple whose love had already withstood the trials, found themselves faced with an unforeseen challenge that would test the limits of their devotion. Fate had a curveball in store for them, a reminder that life's most profound challenges often arrive unannounced. As the clock of their lives continued to tick, time unveiled a truth that sent shockwaves through their world—a truth that would reframe their perspectives on health, love, and the uncertain future that now lay ahead.

The revelation that they both tested positive for HIV/AIDS was a seismic shift in their journey together. It was a diagnosis that carried with it both uncertainty and fear, a heavy cloud that threatened to cast a pall over their love. As they absorbed this life-altering news, they knew that their love would be their greatest strength, a steadfast anchor to navigate the stormy seas ahead.

Despite the weight of their diagnosis, the couple made a monumental decision—to migrate to Illinois. The journey, however, was not without its complexities. Isabela had to navigate the challenges of adapting to a new culture, securing their footing in a foreign land, and rebuilding her life from the ground up.

As she was adapting, she received a surprising invitation that would introduce her to a reality she had never known. She was called back home and told a truth that had remained hidden from her for so long—she was not a biological daughter of Wasike, the man she had known as her

father. Instead, she was introduced to David, the man who was her true biological father.

Epilogue

The journey that unfolded across these pages now takes its final steps, leaving behind footprints etched in memory and experience.

The characters we came to know—Felix, Isabela, and their families—have each embarked on their own unique paths. Their stories, once intertwined with the rhythms of Mwamba village, have evolved and taken them to distant horizons. Yet, even as they follow divergent paths, the echoes of their shared history resonate in the chambers of their hearts.

Felix's pursuit of a dream that led him from his village to the city reflects the human spirit's ceaseless desire for growth and self-discovery. The complexities of family, identity, and unforeseen challenges shaped his journey, guiding him toward unforeseen destinies.

Isabela's story, marked by determination and resilience, speaks to the strength of the human heart when faced with adversity. Her pursuit of education, her commitment to her dreams, and her love story with Bruno showcase the beauty of connection and the power of love to transcend barriers.

The culture of Bukusu, once a steadfast presence in their lives, remains an indelible thread that ties them to their heritage. The essence of Bukusu culture lives on, a reminder of the unbroken ties that bind us to our roots.

As we bid farewell to these characters, we find ourselves standing on the threshold of possibility, much like they did at various occasions in their lives. The narrative serves as a mirror reflecting our own experiences, aspirations, and the ever-present passage of time.

As we step away from these pages, may the echoes of these lives linger, inspiring us to embrace our own stories with courage, compassion, and the unwavering belief that our paths are marked by both the known and the unforeseen.

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Glossary

Busaa-local brew

Omukhebi-a mohel

Lukembe-knife

Ewanga-white chicken

Kamakhalange- cooked fermented flour that is used to brew *busaa*

Esitosi-the sacred site where the initiates get smeared with mud

Khuminya- the period leading up to the circumcision

Sioya-a melody that carried both the weight of tradition and the promise of transition

Lessos- a type of cotton fabric printed with colored designs, used mainly for women's clothing

Bhuse-the remains of the bull's intestines.

Sietosi-the sacred circumcision ground

Etiangi-a designated area where Felix was to undergo the circumcision ritual.

Shuka-is a traditional fabric originating in East Africa.

Sufurias- large cooking pots

Ruracio-the dowry negotiation and payment part of the traditional ceremony.

ECHOES OF DESTINY

Unveiling the intricate threads of life and culture in "*Echoes of Destiny*," a captivating tale that traverses the landscapes of love, dreams, and heritage. Set against the backdrop of the enchanting Bukusu culture in sub-Saharan Africa, this novel weaves a tapestry of stories that resonate with the human spirit's pursuit of purpose and identity.

Felix and Isabela navigate the currents of their aspirations, encountering unexpected twists and turns along their journeys. From the serene Mwamba village to bustling cities and distant horizons, their lives unfold against the rich tapestry of tradition and modernity.

As their paths intersect with others who hold the keys to their destinies, friendships are formed, dreams are pursued, and love finds its way into the most unexpected corners of their lives. But as the ties of heritage shift and change, ancient customs meld with the evolving forces of time, blurring the lines between past and present. "*Echoes of Destiny*" explores the universal themes of family, infidelity, ambition, and the intricate dance between tradition and change. With vivid characters, evocative landscapes, and a narrative that resonates with the heart, this novel is a tribute to the enduring spirit of humanity and the echoes that reverberate across generations.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrew Walyaula is an accomplished African journalist and author driven by a deep passion for African culture. Armed with a degree in Media and Communication, he has become a seasoned storyteller, weaving narratives that celebrate the richness of his heritage.



ISBN 9798374037579

