

PROLOGUE:

NEW YORK, MARCH 23, 1984.

The taxi dashed desperately into another lane, hoping to percolate through the bottleneck on First Avenue. A siren wailed somewhere behind.

"Traffic's murder today. Anytime it rains, it's like that. Never fails."

The woman in the back of the cab put her face to the window, and focusing her eyes through streaking beads of water, stared beyond them at the black sheen of a rainwashed street.

"I dunno what it is about New York drivers," the cabbie said in a louder voice, "but every time it rains, they seem to go nuts."

Tessa Thorpe remained quiet, still gazing vacantly out the window, ignoring the driver's comment, his words somehow lost amidst the squawk of wipers rubbing against the windshield, the hum of the engine, and the splash of tires through the puddles.

The taxi pulled over to the curb. "Here we are, Bellevue. Ten-fifty please."

Bellevue. A name more ironic would be hard to find. Bellevue. A Beautiful Sight.

She paid the cabbie, got out, and slammed the door behind her, not bothering to wait for her change. Battling a pointless reluctance, she climbed the steps to the entrance door.

Thorpe made her living as a psychiatrist, specifically in the field of law enforcement. Officially attached to the NYPD, her services were also at times requested by the likes of the FBI, the CIA, and in one case, Defense Intelligence. This time it was Interpol. And although she relished the challenges her profession posed, she hated the atmosphere exuded by the institutions she invariably had to work in; like this place, Bellevue, although it still fared better than Creedmore.

The lobby, illuminated by a sterile white neon florescence, its walls painted a pale sickly green, contained a murmuring of subdued despair. She cut quickly through the crowd in the waiting room and walked straight to the reception.

"Can I help you?" a nurse asked in a nasal voice, her face full of the authority the counter between them had given her.

"I have an appointment with Dr. Goldstein."

"I'll call him. Just take a seat over there."

She headed over to one of the empty chairs by the wall and sat down, looking at the others waiting in the lobby: old people moping with solemn faces; children, oblivious of the anguish around them, playing much too loudly; and men and women, their manner and gestures betraying the discomfort associated with an unpalatable duty.

Tessa herself was a bit uneasy. She didn't like starting a case in the dark; she had never done so before and didn't see the reason why she had to do it now. Most of her subjects were dangerous psychotics, some of them high profile, but she was told that this was not the situation here, except perhaps for the possibility that he posed a danger to himself. There was indeed some criminality in the background of this thing, but from the briefing she got, this guy was some unwitting bystander. Although it was made to appear as an act of terrorism, evidence was mounting that this was not so. In any case, she needed him to talk.

Tessa liked her job, despite the fact that it practically robbed her of any semblance of a social life. And while she was certainly good-looking – bright brown eyes, thin but nevertheless inviting ruby lips, and lustrous dark brown hair (one lover referred to her as a languorous brunette) – she found the dating game tiresome. As macabre as it sounded, she enjoyed working with the criminally insane, although this guy was not a criminal, and she suspected he wasn't insane either.

"Dr. Thorpe?"

She looked up at a light-haired, lab-coated doctor with a bulbous

nose looming over her. "Oh, hello...Doctor Goldstein?"

"Yes, that's right. Can we go to my office?"

She jumped up to follow him and on the way to the elevator she asked, "How is he? Is he coherent? I need to talk to him."

"He goes in and out. Came in what you might describe as a hysterical state, straight from the emergency ward at Columbia."

"Medication?"

"Xanax, Prozac, Valium, whatever it takes to calm him."

The bell rang as the metal doors opened up in front of them. The small crowd in the elevator inhibited further conversation, and they rode up in silence to the third floor.

"He's a bit catatonic at times," Goldstein said as they left the elevator.

She walked by his side as they proceeded down a strip-lighted corridor, the walls covered with white tiles, almost like one big bathroom, but with an exaggerated smell of disinfectant.

"He's been writing something," he added, as he opened the door to his office. "They found him in his hotel room covered with a jumble of handwritten papers, along with some other stuff." He crossed the room to his desk by the window and pulled out a large manila envelope from one of the drawers and handed it to her.

She emptied the contents of the envelope, the bulkiest item being a stack of letters bound with a rubber band, as well as the aforementioned sheets of papers, many of them rendered illegible by blood stains. There were also two photographs: one with a group of African children posing with balloons, with the subject in the back row standing next to a pretty black woman who held one of the children in her arms. The other photo showed only a bunch of balloons in the sky. On the back of that photograph, someone had scrawled the word "Freedom!"

Then there were the newspaper clippings, four of them:

AMERICAN, TWO OTHERS, KILLED IN TURKANA DISTRICT
AMERICAN FOUND ALIVE!

BOMB BLAST ROCKS LONDON HOTEL – IRA SUSPECTED
KENYAN GOVERNMENT RELEASES AMERICAN DETAINEE

She returned the contents to the envelope, which she then stuffed inside her briefcase as they left the office. Goldstein led her down the same corridor as before and stopped at Room 304, a private room. Inside this room, a bed and a lamp-less night table were the only pieces of furniture. Sitting on the bed was a young man, knees drawn to his chest and hunched over with folded arms; his head, capped with shiny black curly hair, was cradled in his limbs as if he were exhausted. Both his wrists were heavily bandaged with gauze and cotton.

“Daryl? Daryl?” Goldstein said.

The slumped figure made no response.

“Daryl, how are you feeling?” A standard question that was met with silence.

“Dr. Thorpe has come a long way to see you. It seems you’re special.”

“My medicine,” the stricken man moaned from the alcove of his groin.

“Not for another...” the doctor brought his arm up to look at his wristwatch, “...hour and a half.”

The patient finally lifted his head, revealing a tawny complexion. He was young, in his early thirties, and his ethnicity was an ambiguous blend of Afro-European. Fairly good-looking, except that his face was bruised and puffed up.

“Self-inflicted,” Goldstein explained, seeing that Thorpe had taken note. “He gets these fits and starts hitting himself, especially when he comes down off the medication. Had to put him in restraints a few times.”

“Hello, Daryl,” Tessa said.

“You’re a policeman,” the subject said. “I mean woman. Policewoman. They sent one yesterday, a policeman, a man police, but I really wasn’t feeling well yesterday.”

"I'm a doctor. A psychiatrist."

"I don't feel well today either. I'll never feel well," he said, not listening to her. Then he motioned to her to come closer, closer, closer, so he could whisper in her ear. "I have a confession", he confided softly. "I killed them, both of them."

It was then that Tessa slipped up, despite her eleven years at the job. She forgot to move her head away when she made her rebuttal. "No, Daryl, that's just your guilt making you feel that way."

"DON'T YOU DARE FUCKING CONTRADICT ME!" he screamed, too late for her to take her ear away in time. She covered it, and with a grimacing face, summoned her professional discipline to check her initial anger, as Goldstein placed his hands on the young man's shoulders, fearing he might become uncontrollable.

An orderly stepped into the room, in an automatic response to the screaming, which was not allowed, and stood ready to intervene.

"Where's my medication?" the young man repeated.

"I told you, another..."

"Alright, don't fucking give it to me. Let me suffer. I deserve to be tortured. I understand." Then he went sort of glassy-eyed. "It doesn't matter what you do, or don't do...because the stars...the stars...they don't sing for me anymore." He paused to jerk his head up, looking at the ceiling, his eyes roaming in search of imperceptible objects. "Nothing...nothing...they're silent..."

Then he went into a brief fit of uncontrollable sobbing before punching himself in the face, at which point the orderly swiftly approached to hold his arms down on the bed. The patient summarily calmed down, giving Tessa the chance to try again.

"The doctor tells me you've been writing something," she broke in. "What is it? Want to tell me about that?"

The patient stared blankly upwards, taking his time before answering, "It's a story," he finally said.

"What kind of story?"

"A love story."

"Are you in the story?" After getting no response, she asked

another question. "Do you remember the man? Did you ever see him?"

Daryl Loomis just stared up.

"I want him off his medication by tomorrow," she promptly addressed Goldstein. "He's no use to me like this."

"WHERE'S MY MEDICATION?" he suddenly screamed at the mention of the word.

"And put him in restraints before I arrive," she instructed.

"Understood."

PART 1
ENCOUNTER

NAIROBI, AUGUST 15, 1979.

The sidewalks were crowded that day; a Monday morning, like any other Monday morning, the pavements stirring with a medley of bobbing pedestrians returning to routines they had abandoned on Friday afternoon.

On that day he casually sauntered along, finding himself immersed in a sea of ethnic diversity: African businessmen nattily dressed in three-piece suits and tasteful ties; circumspect Indians in drab-colored buttoned shirts and polyester slacks; Sikhs sporting their extravagant turbans and prominent beards; Somalis with Kushite faces of burnt copper marked by aquiline noses; Arabized-Indianized Swahili, an indigenous race from the coast of East Africa; and even more striking, quite incongruous in this urban setting, Masai warriors robed in their flashy red tunics and carrying their spears. All of them contributing to a potpourri of races and cultures jostling under a gentle August sun, in streets congested with horn-blaring traffic.

Nairobi, Green City in the Sun. A venue for international conferences. The Great Metropolis of Black Africa.

Daryl Loomis gave a casual glance to the cylindrical tower of the Nairobi Hilton, clear and prominent in the morning light, then, more attentively, to the office girls in tight skirts chattering loquaciously on their way to coffee houses for their mid-morning break. Their silky brown legs and softly swaying curves intoxicated him, filling him with the exuberant promises of a beautiful day.

Fuck, it's great to be alive.

In this diverse plethora of humanity, Loomis felt comfortable. Born from the union of a Nordic father and a Bahamian mother, he now lived in a place where he did not have to choose one heritage over the other. Here, he was neither white nor black, but an exotic blend. His curly black hair capped the square, long-jawed face of a northern European, which contrasted with the rounded features and

milk-chocolate skin within it. His lips were full and sensual, his nose a bit broad but subdued, his facial appearance not distinctive enough to fully define his origin. His eyes, which he considered as his most valuable asset in his pursuit of women, were wide and bright and hazel-colored, changing from a golden-amber hue to an opalescent jade, depending on the light.

He hummed as he walked, lacking any sense of destination, but content in knowing that today he had money in his pocket; drinking and womanizing money enough for at least two weeks. Feeling just fine, he ambled along, sometimes rather haughtily, putting both hands in his trouser pockets, leaving his lips alone to support the cigarette dangling from his mouth. With no plan to fulfill, no place to be until his meeting with Barnes, he was just killing time, carrying himself at a relaxed pace down Moi Avenue, his oversize cashmere sport coat hanging loosely from his broad shoulders.

Let the good times roll. That was life's purpose for Daryl Loomis.

But as he reached the small plaza in front of Standbank House, a young African in a pinstripe suit ran past, bumping Loomis roughly and jolting him out of his short-lived rapture. The man ran on ahead, as if in pursuit of an escaping bus, and Loomis saw a small package drop from his hands onto the pavement. Another African, similarly attired in a suit, picked up the package, then called in vain at the unresponsive runner, who was apparently already out of earshot. The man with the package finally turned toward a young African woman who was walking alone in the same direction.

"Huyu ame angusha bahasha yake, that man has dropped his package," he told her, *"but he didn't hear me. Now he has totally disappeared. Nifanyeje? What should I do?"*

The woman, her slender figure revealed under a clinging pink dress, slowed her gait to a halt, tilted her sunglasses to the edge of her curly-kit, wet-look, permed afro, and accepted the parcel from the stranger who beckoned her to inspect it. It was a thick brown envelope, with a plastic window showing the face of a one-hundred-shilling note.

"There's a lot of money in here, but there's no name or address written on it anywhere," she remarked in good Kiswahili, still scrutinizing the envelope. Her face was delicate and attractive. "I'm sure he'll be right back looking for it. He can't have gone far before missing such a valuable package," she added.

"No, that man is gone... *kabisa!* Completely! I saw him getting into a car. Now, what are we going to do with this?"

Loomis, who had stopped just behind them to watch what was unfolding, decided that this girl was good-looking enough to make the effort. He threw his butt down and stepped forward, and then grabbed the shoulder of the man's suit jacket and dragged him towards a parked car by the curb. Shoving him against the car, he exploded with a barrage of insults and accusations.

"*Wewe wasumbua msichana wangu, eh?* You bothering my girl? Thought she was alone you piece of shit...you *mwizi*...fucking thief...I should..."

"Just what do you think you're doing?" the woman exclaimed, her eyes bulging with disbelief. "He's not a thief! He happens to be a Good Samaritan who is trying to return money to its rightful owner!"

Loomis wheeled around to face her. "Good Samaritan my..." He checked himself, "It's a con, this man is a crook!"

Though his accent sounded American, she still could not construe his exact origin. "I don't know where you come from," she said, just as the shaken guy pressed against the Toyota broke Loomis's grip and dashed across the street, "but here in Kenya people tend to help one another, even if they are strangers."

Her tone, sanctimonious and preachy, put him off. Perhaps he should have minded his own business. "Maybe upcountry, but not in Nairobi," he retorted with an equally holier-than-thou voice, shaking his head slightly from side to side in order to sound more forceful. His intervention, considering that its sole purpose was saving a damsel in distress and consequently being rewarded with a romantic rendezvous, was appearing to be for naught.

Some of the people walking by had already stopped and gathered to view this exchange.

"How would you know?" she said, in the manner of a mother castigating her child. "And acting like you know me... Who do you think you are to come barging in, manhandling people?"

The onlookers chuckled at that, and Loomis was beginning to feel stupid. "Wait a minute, I was only... "

"If I were you, I would leave this instant before that man brings a policeman here to arrest you for assault."

This advice brought forth another burst of laughter from the spectators.

"You're shaming me in front of these people," he protested

"You *should* be ashamed," she chided.

Again, a hearty round of chortles from the audience.

"I should?" He looked at her, making a strong effort at being angry, but failed. Her expression, harsh as it was, could not hide the beauty of a flawlessly oval face, set with an engaging, full-curved mouth, a flat button of a nose, and, above her high noble cheekbones, almond-shaped eyes seductively hooded with an Oriental allure. It was the face of an African princess, covered in a skin of dark satin, the erotic camber of her jawline merging into a long and graceful neck. How could he get mad at that?

Distracted by desire, he embarked on his own patronizing lecture. "Listen, babe, that man was about to suggest to you a trip around the corner to share the loot, since obviously the owner cannot be traced, or perhaps he would convince you that it was stolen money anyway. He would argue against bringing it to the police by saying they would just pocket it and your loss would be their gain. Then this person leads you to a place known to him and – what do you know – an accomplice comes in claiming he's a policeman and is going to lock the both of you up. Now the first fellow starts getting panicky and urges you to pay the cop off with some 'chai' so that he'll let the two of you go free. If that ruse doesn't work, then the both of them will just take your money by force. Even

the person who dropped the envelope was in on it. You'll see there's only that one note inside, the rest is just paper stuffing to make it look like it contains a fortune."

"That is a ridiculous story. Maybe it's you who wants to keep this money."

A fit of guffaws erupted from the crowd. The group had become larger by now, sidewalk diversions being of popular interest to Nairobi passers-by.

"Now you're the one being ridiculous. A hundred shillings couldn't last me fifteen minutes at the bar. I'm not that desperate. You keep it."

The crowd thought that one was hilarious, and their strident belly laughs confirmed this.

"I certainly will not!" And with that she replaced her sunglasses and briskly walked away.

"Where are you going?" he asked incredulously.

She turned. "To the police!"

The crowd applauded, cheered, and whistled, and Loomis walked away feeling like a jerk.

* * *

His morning peace shattered, he made his way towards Mama Ngina Street, then entered a coffee shop. He joined the queue to buy his coffee and samosas, then wove his way past business people and tourists to get the last empty table, which was still littered with cups from previous patrons. While arranging himself in his seat he watched one of the bus girls as she cleaned an adjacent table, taking in the voluptuous outline of her tight skirt as it wiggled with her laboring. His size exactly, he noted. His ego still bruising from the envelope incident, he sought to soothe it, so when she came to his table to clear the used cups, he greeted her. "*Habari?*"

"*Mzuri*. Fine."

"What's your name?" Loomis inquired nonchalantly, while

squeezing a lemon slice over his samosas.

"Evelyn."

"Hello, I'm Daryl."

"Jambo," she greeted in a happy tone.

"Evelyn who?"

"Evelyn Mbita."

"Oh, *wimuseo!*" Loomis exclaimed. Recognizing from her African name the girl's tribal origins, he began to converse with her in the Kamba language, her mother tongue, making Evelyn giggle in admiration, as it was designed to do, as it was also designed to get her address, phone number, marital status, her hours off, and a tentative date for Wednesday, all of which he obtained by the end of their conversation.

"We shall meet," she said afterwards, going back to her duties with a smile.

* * *

Pamela Amonee Emuria stopped at the curb just as the pedestrian signal flashed red, even though the way was clear. One could never be too cautious with these madmen drivers, especially the city buses. She stood fidgeting, waiting for the light to change, as she knew she risked being late for her choir practice. But better late than never; first she had to do her civic duty.

After crossing the street she continued hurriedly down Moi Avenue until it curved around and became University Way, and walked up to the Central Police Station. She entered inside and greeted the reporting officer. "*Habari.*"

"*Mzuri,*" he said gruffly, his eyes stern and probing, peering at her from the recesses of his puffy black face.

She took out the envelope from her *kikapu* basket and placed it on the counter. "This envelope was dropped by someone and it contains a great deal of money," she explained in her proper, grammatical Kiswahili.

"Let me have a look." As the policeman opened it, he grinned, then broke into full-fledged laughter, raising the envelope to show to his fellow officers behind the counter.

"There's nothing in here but paper," he told her, "and this one-hundred-shilling note. See?"

He showed her by pouring out its contents. "They were just crooks trying to cheat you. Did not one of them ask you to share the..." he paused to laugh, "ha...the loot?"

"Yes, but...he ran away."

"You want the hundred shillings?" he asked, bending his head forward and leering at her, before giving her a deriding wink.

"No...no, you keep it."

Hearty laughter followed her as she turned and walked towards the door. Swelling with shame, she made a hasty exit out of the station and walked quickly on towards the university, this time not paying any attention to the pedestrian signals.

* * *

Loomis found himself returning in the direction he had come from, cutting across Tom Mboya Street to leave behind the big-business affluence of the city center for the sleaziness of the River Roadi quarter: a bawdy area of ramshackle lodgings, merchant bazaars, and seedy bars, its streets full of people too numerous to be contained on the narrow sidewalks alone. Contrasting styles of music shouted from speakers hung outside bars and eateries, giving the place a carnival air, while out on the pavement, maize roasters turned their cobs over makeshift grills which they fanned incessantly. Miraa sellers, standing behind wooden stalls, continuously wrapped and unwrapped the banana leaves shrouding their herba-ceous merchandise as they argued stridently with haggling clientele. In the tiny streets, big wooden handcarts, their sweat-soaked shirtless shunters huffing and panting from pulling their ponderous loads, vied with the motor traffic while Indian women in florid saris

window-shopped with their unrestrained children. Rambling past all of them was a madman covered in rags, his buttocks partly exposed, singing fragments of traditional songs in between his litany of disjointed obscenities.

Appetizing aromas of *pilau* rice and *mikate wa mayai*, a meat-stuffed omelet, emanated from the doorways of Arab hoteli's, reminding Loomis that he was still hungry. He walked into the Yassin Hotel, greeting Abdullah, the manager, with the Islamic greeting, "*Salaam aleikum!*"

"*Wa alaikum assalaam,*" returned the old Arab, chewing on a big wad of *miraa* stuffed in his left cheek. "You want to chew with me today, Mr. Daryl?"

"No, not today, Abdullah."

Abdullah popped a peppermint candy into his mouth to neutralize the bitterness of the masticated plant debris. He smiled showing green teeth. "Fresh from Meru, just now," he said, his jaws grinding non-stop.

"Some other time, *Bwana,*" said Loomis, using the respectful Swahili form of address.

"So where you from? I not seeing you for many days," the Arab said, switching to his Pidgin English. "You hungry? You eat, I pay. On house."

Limping on his bad leg, he led Loomis over to one of the Formica-topped tables and sat him down in a steel chair which squawked vulgarly against the floor whenever it was moved.

"Chicken biriani very nice today."

"Sounds good to me, but just a half plate. And one samosa." He was practically addicted to samosas, and ate at least one at every opportunity.

"Wey, *kijana!*" yelled Abdullah at a black waiter in a white frock that looked like a lab coat. "Take his order. Me, I'm paying."

After Loomis told the waiter what he wanted, the young man screamed it out to the kitchen in the back and strode vigorously to another table. The Arab bent his head close to Loomis's ear and

spoke in a low tone. "Mr. Daryl, I hear you in Tanzania."

"That's right. Came back on Saturday."

"Any gold?"

"No, Abdullah, no gold."

"Plenty gold in Tanzania. I have a friend...in Arusha...he does black market. Pays two hundred shillings one gram."

"I'll keep it in mind."

"What about red mercury? The Libyans paying a lot of money for that. They use it in jet planes."

"Never came across it."

"What? With all the digging you do?"

"I think it's a myth."

At this point, being called for more important business, the Arab said to Loomis, "We talk later, okay?" and hobbled off to his place behind the glass-fronted display counter that flaunted deep-fried Swahili snacks.

Tuning out the clamor of clanging chairs and yelled orders, he ate rapaciously.

Loomis then said goodbye to the Arab, who was on his way up to chew his miraa with a couple of cute Somali girls permanently residing in the second-floor lodgings. Grinning, Loomis turned and stepped back out onto the throng-filled streets.

* * *

Pamela was already late for her session with the university choir. When she arrived at the music hall she was dismayed to see the students milling about smoking cigarettes and laughing at their own private jokes. In her mind she admonished them. They could have been practicing the parts they had learned, or perhaps studying the next section of the score. She felt pressured, as the music festival was only three weeks away.

Music was the thread that wove Pamela's life; everything else she relegated to mundane necessity. For her, singing was aesthetically

the highest of all human activities, fusing language and melody to express the supernal feelings of the soul; an act which acknowledged the wonder of creation.

Her teaching was driven by this conviction, so the attitude of her students naturally disheartened her. She reckoned that the next hour would be one of overly arduous labor, and not of shared exultation. It was so much easier with her children's choirs, she reflected, their artlessness leaving them uninhibited to discover the triumphant delight of their own voices.

The session was difficult, as she expected, but only in the beginning. She took each section separately, the tenors, the sopranos, the altos... While working with one group, the others got bored, even sleepy. But she continued undaunted, coaxing and nagging until each section was perfect. When, towards the end of the hour, they were all put together, they themselves were amazed with how their own diverse voices led to the creation of a unified and glorious sound, and they sang with smiles of revelation on their faces. But the biggest smile of all was Pamela's. *They have heard, they have realized.* She knew that from this point on the rest of the sessions would be easier.

Leaving the hall with a fresh exhilaration, Pamela went to her office to mark her first-year students' papers on elementary music theory. She was happy, so happy that she forgot all about the unpleasant events of her morning in town.

* * *

Eventually Loomis circled back to the city center as the hour of his appointment with Barnes was drawing near. At Kencom House, he looked on at a rather disorganized mob fighting to gain entrance into the *matatu* vans and city buses which had rolled in to haul them away, the size of the crowd constant as a steady flow replaced those who embarked. The *matatu* conductors, young Africans sloppily dressed in dirty cast-off clothes and an odd assortment of hats –

from balaclavas to berets – shouted out their routes above the noise of the main-street traffic and banged uproariously on the sides of their vehicles to signal the driver to move on whenever no more passengers were forthcoming. There seemed to be an unwritten law which prevented a conductor from getting into a stationary matatu, for they all without exception ran behind clinging to the doors of the vans as they sped away before clambering inside. The city buses were no less colorful. As the buses filled up with passengers, people tried to enter their narrow doorways three abreast, shoving and squeezing past each other, frantically determined to get a place inside, while many of them lost their wallets to pickpockets. The latecomers had to stand on the steps and hang tenaciously on to the doors as the buses made sharp turns at arrogant speeds, transforming a simple shuttle home into a commuter's equivalent of an amusement-park ride.

Loomis dodged across the busy thoroughfare and wove his way through the brimming sidewalks, heading towards Nairobi proper. While trying to stay within the shade of monolithic office blocks, his thoughts turned to the beggars huddled or standing at their stations. Many of them were lame or sick. The most tragic were the children: coughing, crying infants who slept through cold nights with their abandoned mothers, attracting sympathetic souls to the tin cans set out in front of them; young boys, when not foraging in the dustbins for food, offering to keep an eye on your car for a small fee, earning them the name of "parking boys"; and little girls who, by the age of ten or so, would start their careers in prostitution, begging shillings from passers-by. Loomis, after his seven years in East Africa, realized this phenomenon was not just a simple case of poverty, but also the result of a breakdown in traditional mores coming in the wake of so-called progress.

Entering Uni-Afric House, he crossed the marble-walled lobby to the elevator. Disembarking on the third floor, he glanced to his left and saw the offices of Hydro-drill Limited, guarded by thick glass doors that exposed a teak reception counter on the other side of

them, and which required a strong effort to push them open.

"Hello, I'm Daryl Loomis. I believe Mr. Barnes is expecting me."

"One moment please." The receptionist, a young Indian girl, got on the intercom and spoke to it in a low, furtive voice – an office mannerism Loomis had come to hate. Looking up at him, she told him to have a seat.

He sat down and lit a cigarette to ease the nervousness he usually suffered before such meetings. Though not really caring about what other *wazungu*, Westerners, thought of him, he deemed it prudent to conceal his feelings about the Africans and the part they played in his social life. Most expatriates kept to themselves in exclusive clubs and fancy hotels, many of them money-minded professionals concerned with profits and getting the job done. The few Africans they did socialize with were generally highly placed wealthy elitist types. Uninterested in the lives of the local people, they were preoccupied with denouncing the inefficiency, indolence, and corruption which often marred the smooth running of their enterprises. Consequently, any discussions of the locals tended to be negative, and Loomis avoided such discussions, or else kept quiet while others talked. It made him feel awkward since most of his friends were mainstream black Africans, people whose company he enjoyed.

Still, his knowledge of the customs and languages of East Africa had gained him a reputation as a capable site administrator in addition to his skill as an engineer. He had an uncanny knack for uncovering and putting an end to such nuisances as petty theft, drunkenness, the pilfering of foodstuffs by the workers to seduce the village girls, and the clandestine selling off of valuable fuel. And although Loomis played around to the point of excess during his time off, he worked equally hard when under contract. As extreme as his vices were, he gave one hundred and ten percent when he was on the job. He took pride in his work and strived to instill this pride in his staff. His jobs kept him in the bush for months at a time, seven to eight months of the year, so naturally when he was released back

into the city he wasted no time indulging in wine, women, and song.

"Mr. Loomis, you can go in now."

He entered the managing director's office, only to be met by the back of a swivel chair behind an enormous pinewood desk.

"I'm not interested in any excuses," said a voice behind the chair. "We agreed they would be ready by eleven o'clock tomorrow and that's when I expect them to be delivered. Look, instead of wasting time with me on the phone, you should be moving your arse to make sure it gets done. Tomorrow, eleven o'clock, understand?!"

The chair swung around revealing its occupant, a handsome European in his early forties with dignified gray hair and a pair of steel-blue eyes. He was dressed in the colonial fashion: white short-sleeved button shirt, khaki safari shorts, knee socks, and desert boots. Cecil Barnes put down the cordless phone and gestured towards the straight-backed chair in front of the desk. "Sit down...Loomis, is it?"

"Thanks."

"Has Haley explained this job to you?"

"A bit." Loomis heard from others that Barnes was the toughest boss they had ever worked for. A ruthless businessman, the owner of about ten companies he had started from scratch, he was a real ass-kicking tyrant.

"Thirty exploratory boreholes in northern Turkana district. The locations have already been picked out by the consultant. We have about three hundred days to do it, with mandatory breaks every ninety days. A realistic schedule of works must therefore be drawn up immediately and strictly followed in the field. We are employing you as our site agent, field supervisor, and resident geologist, and I expect you to submit a technical report on the works and findings within a month of demobilization. If you have any questions, shoot. I have a busy day today."

"Plant?"

Barnes removed a sheet of paper from a blue spring file on his desk and handed it to Loomis. "That is the preliminary list of what

is available and earmarked for the contract. Check it, update it, and get the stuff mobilized."

"Hmmm, Dando 250, top drive," Loomis commented, studying the sheet. At that point a messenger came in with a pile of papers and telexes. Barnes received them with a more than typical aggression and went through them one by one, now ignoring his visitor.

"What's this?" Barnes demanded of the messenger, holding up a short slip.

The messenger, who had been fidgeting nervously, answered meekly, "Requisitions from Mustafa, sir."

"Bloody idiot! What use is this to me if he hasn't signed it yet?" He examined the next sheet. "And this? What the hell! Cypress doesn't cost this much! He's making a deal with sneaky relatives again. Alright, get out, I'll have to speak to him myself."

The messenger exited in a hurry, apparently relieved to get out of the office.

Barnes gave Loomis a conspiratorial glance. "Bloody Indians. Damn good employees, but if you don't watch them, they'll rob you blind," he said, assuming Loomis to be in total agreement. He then picked up the internal phone and berated his Asian purchasing officer.

When Barnes finally put down the receiver, Loomis asked him, "This rig is mounted on a Leyland, not a four-by-four?"

"So? What's the problem? It doesn't rain up there, it's a bloody desert. Are you expecting to get bogged down in mud? Forget it. You don't need a four-by-four lorry to carry the rig."

"What about the sand in the laagers?"

"Haven't you ever heard of sand traps? If you take the time to read the list I just gave you, you'll see that we have them. Listen, I don't have time to argue over the plant list right now. Go over it and then come back to me."

"I heard we're supposed to do double shifts. Am I supposed to work day and night?" Loomis asked.

"That shouldn't be necessary if you keep things under control. Are you worried? I heard you were bloody good with the *watu*." Watu, the Kiswahili word meaning 'people', was an expatriate term for the Africans.

Loomis remained cool at that last remark. But what really struck him about his comment was that this was not about color per se. After all, he himself could be considered a black man under other circumstances, yet Barnes did not treat him as such. That's probably because he was American. He didn't count as one of the 'watu'. In any case, he brushed this off and tried to resume a more professional air. "Has the consultant provided any maps yet?"

Sure enough, a map materialized from out of the spring file.

"As you can see, there are a lot of usable tracks," Barnes apprised him as Loomis studied the topo sheet.

"Lot of gullies and laagers too." He felt his professional air already waning.

"Look, Loomis," Barnes snapped. "I've been running operations in the bush myself for God's number of years, and not that, not rain, not tribal wars, not anything has ever stopped me from completing them on time. So let's get down to business. Do you agree to the conditions of employment we sent you?"

"Yeah, I've got the contract right here, signed and sealed."

"Fine. Now I'm sorry to rush you, but I have a meeting in fifteen minutes with a major client. We've got a big contract with them in Madagascar, and they've just increased the Bill of Quantities on very short notice. That's one reason why I'm in a very, bitchy, mood."

Loomis was put off by the slow emphatic drawl Barnes used in this last statement, and now he too wanted an end to this meeting. "Okay, look, I'll be back in about a month. That'll give me enough time to think about this, but I can tell you right now that I intend to mobilize a lot sooner than the tenth of October."

"Good. Go over those lists, draw up a schedule of works, and get in touch with me then. By that time I'll be in a better position to discuss this thing."

"Alright," Loomis said, getting up, "have a good day, Mr. Barnes."

"Good day," Barnes responded, but already his head was down, attending to some other matter on his desk.

* * *

Katy Hesland opened the office door without her hands it seemed, for when she entered, her arms were ladled with a load of textbooks. Stout, middle-aged, with short curly hair dyed a strawberry-blonde to hide the gray, she wore a smile that distended her huge, rosy-color cheeks. An American teacher brought to the university to bolster the instrumental section of the music department, she shared an office with Pamela, their desks facing each other from opposite sides of the room.

"Good morning, Pammy."

Pamela looked up and returned the smile. "Hi, Katy."

"Oh, what a day," the woman groaned, as she kicked the door shut with her foot, still fumbling with her books. Her face changed to one of exaggerated, mock weariness. "How I hate Mondays!"

"Just console yourself that it's nearly half over."

Katy put on her wide smile again. "Pammy, you're a miracle worker. Would you believe I was in the foulest mood all morning until I saw you just now? You seem to have a knack for always brightening my day."

Pamela bowed her head to avoid her friend's gaze. Any sort of praise like that, even in jest, made her feel slightly uncomfortable.

And Katy herself knew this, for how many times did Pamela tell her to please stop it, but she couldn't help being so effusive. *Darn*, she said to herself, *I put my foot in it again*. Of course, she didn't really understand the reason for Pamela's needless and burdening humility, but sensed it was deep-rooted. Some psychological thing.

"How's the choir doing?" she asked to dispel the moment of awkwardness.

"Very well, I think they'll be ready in time," said Pamela, with a hint of satisfaction.

"Wish I could say that about the band. We might have to scratch them."

"No, don't say that. After all the hard work you put in? It's been only three months since you got them going. And you started with nothing. Look how far you've come with them."

"Oh, ignore me, Pammy. I'm just singing the Monday blues. We'll see how it goes in the next few weeks," Katy said as she replaced the books into the shelves above her desk. "Jon has left already, hasn't he?" she said, trying to make small talk.

"Yes," Pamela told her. "On Saturday."

"Where to this time?"

"Back to Holland. He'll be staying for quite a long time. Eight months. He wants to make sure all his business matters are settled and to use the time to finish up the house."

"You mean 'palace' from the way he describes it." Katy had a loathing for Jon, but adroitly managed to hide this from Pamela. "So how has your day been?" she asked, changing the subject.

"It started out poorly but went well afterwards. I took a trip to town this morning to buy guitar strings, and somebody tried to rob me."

"You're kidding! In broad daylight? Was it a purse-snatcher?"

"No, those people who drop packages that look like they're full of money."

"Oh, those creeps! You know Roger, right? That Swedish fella? About one week after he arrived here they pulled that stunt on him and poor Roger, what did he know? He went with them and they took everything from him. He said he was almost arrested by a policeman. But of course you know that trick."

"Of course, yes." She knew now, anyway.

"So then what happened?"

"They ran away and I took the package to the police," she recounted simply, leaving out what she felt were irrelevant details.

"Good!"

"Aren't you going to ask me about the good part of my day?"

"No, it will only make me envious. The choir, right?"

"No, something else. I really need to go home and see my grandmother, she is not feeling well these days. So, I asked Dr. Otundo for three days off and he agreed, as long as I get someone to take over my classes."

"Someone?" Katy asked, raising her eyebrows.

"Pleased, Katy, I'll prepare the notes."

"There's a devil behind that angel face of yours. You know very well how many days I owe you."

Both women laughed.

* * *

Kenyatta Avenue, the widest street in Nairobi. A pair of elongated concrete islands runs along the middle of the avenue, dividing it into four lanes, ostentatiously adorned with trees. Nandi Flames ablaze with their red blossoms, tall, heavy-leafed palm trees, and Jacarandas foaming with clusters of lilac flowers, shade the busy city traffic. On the flanks of the street, behemoth buildings intermingle with the single-story remnants of an incongruous past. Kenyatta Avenue, the subject of picture postcards.

But Loomis continued straight on Koinage Street without turning on to the Avenue, in order to avoid the annoying catcalls of the shoe shiners, the bracelet hawkers, the conmen, and the black-market money changers who sought out their daily bread from the human multitude which streamed past. He followed instead his usual route through the backstreets, ducking through the cave-like passageways of the arcades underneath the buildings until he reached the Arch, the pub of the Ambassador Hotel.

Entering, he found that some of the rush-hour madness outside had already preceded him in, as evidenced by the noisy chatter. His eyes searched for the friends who had promised to meet him, finally

spotting Okova and fellow instructors from the Kingozi Language and Cultural Center.

"*Ham jambo wote!*" He greeted each by hand, and then solicited an unclaimed chair from a neighboring table.

"Daryl Loomis, the supreme *mjanja*, the rogue of rogues, back from the wild bush of Tanzania. Watch out Nairobi!"

"*Wacha!* Leave it, Omondi."

"You're late," Okova complained. "You're a *mzungu*. You're not allowed to follow African time."

Just as Barnes's reference to the *watu* made him ponder, he realized that his friends often referred to him as a *mzungu*, or a white man.

"*Wacha!* Leave it, Okova."

"Hey chief!" Omondi called to a passing waiter. Then, to Loomis, "Still cold Tusker, Daryl?"

"Yeah."

"*Tusker moja baridi.*" Omondi placed a ten-shilling note on the waiter's tray.

"Daryl, we were just discussing a great idea we got coming up," said Mathenge, another of the group of four that founded Kingozi, a cross-cultural consulting firm. "Cultural tours. We can still take clients to the game parks, but along the way we stop in the local villages and arrange for them to stay with a typical rural family for a couple of days. The younger tourists will go for it. Could be money, what do you think?"

"Sounds great. Why not? You already got Europeans acting out Swahili plays at Kingozi. You might have something."

"So, Daryl, what trouble did you get up to south of the border?" asked Omondi, with a breezy grin, a grin that was perpetually fixed on his soft boyish features.

"Who me? Just work, as usual."

"You didn't write," complained Okova.

Loomis swiveled to face him, and gave him an accusing stare. "I thought you were going to take some time off and visit me."

"I was busy."

Loomis took a swig from his beer bottle, not bothering with the glass that came with it. "Did you pay the rent?"

"We're drinking it."

"Damn it, Okova! Now I have to go back to the bank again. We shouldn't piss Kipkoech off like this."

"Don't worry, he's an understanding man."

"Well, if we're going to drink the rent money, I'd prefer to do it somewhere else."

"Don't you like this place, Daryl?" Omondi asked.

"This is part of a tourist hotel, the beer is too expensive," Loomis complained.

"There's no jukebox," added Okova. "And no available women. Just Sugar Daddies and Sugar Mommies out with their young things."

"But it's a good meeting place," said Omondi.

"Yeah, if you have appointments with ladies who are coming to meet you," Loomis pointed out. "Which I know, without a doubt, that you, Elvis Omondi, could never be lacking. But I am, so I say *kwaherini*, goodbye to you all. Let's go, Okova, let these guys drink their own rent money."

After leaving the Arch, while walking to Okova's Morris-Mini, Loomis narrated the story of the conmen and their would-be woman victim.

"What a silly bitch. You should have left her alone man," said Okova. He spoke with an African version of a black American accent, his pronunciation of English a product of three years as a foreign student in Jersey City. Even Okova's physical characteristics had become Americanized: he was tall, but he walked hunching his lanky body over in a pronounced slouch; a Van Dyke beard made his triangular face even pointier; and on his head, without fail, was some type of hat, usually a bizarre one, to conceal his prematurely receding forehead. Of late, Okova had taken a fancy to tweed peaked caps.

"Where should we go, Okova? I'm on safari to Kisumu tomorrow, so I want to get thoroughly pissed falling-down drunk. That way I can fall asleep on the bus. And ladies, bwana. God, I need a woman tonight." He broke his stride and paused, as if having a revelation. "Let's go to Outer Ring, it's close to home."

"Good. We'll pay Kipkoech tomorrow. Or maybe the day after."

Outer Ring was a residential estate for the white-collar working classes located at the eastern edge of town. At its core was a shopping center consisting of a long, two-storied, terraced building with apartments above a row of *dukas*, bars, and butcheries. By the time Loomis and Okova arrived, there was a flurry of activity within its glare of lights as wives and daughters hurried to finish their errands before dim twilight faded into total darkness.

Contained within the shopping center, gaudily visible and obtrusively loud, was the Delux Bar, where the pulsating din of Congolese music competed with the shrill laughter of drunken patrons. Inside the bar, gathered like faithful devotees in front of a shrine, a group of people stood around feeding coins into a glittering, stentorian jukebox. Large, languid waitresses, their ample busts and buttocks stuffed tightly into white uniforms, casually shuffled to and fro serving the customers, that is, whenever they weren't sitting down drinking with them. The atmosphere was one of raucous mirth, where stories were traded, plans made, politics discussed, and contacts exchanged. Alcoholic happiness led to strangers becoming friends, even kindred, in a transient moment of celebration at the end of the day.

Loomis and Okova slithered into a table, and after the mandatory teasing and flirting with the waitress, made their order: two Tuskers, one warm, one cold, and a whole roasted chicken. During the third round of drinks, Okova abruptly cut off Loomis in their conversation and said, "I think I know that girl."

Loomis turned his head around while Okova got up and wandered off. He returned shortly with two girls.

"This is Ziporah," he announced with an inebriated smile,

nodding his head towards an athletic-looking girl in a beige Punjabi Suit, "a switchboard operator at KCC, and this..." he put his arm around the shoulders of the girl on his right, "is Helen, her cousin, who is looking for a job." The second girl, Helen, was short and plump, but coquettish in a frilly red dress. "I'll find work for you, don't you worry," Okova said, staring deeply into her face. "Think you can teach wazungu to speak Kiswahili?"

"Maybe," she cackled, embarrassed.

"Girls, please join us," Loomis offered, making a sweeping gesture of welcome with his arm. "You must know the problem when two young guys like us go into a bar alone. So many girls coming up to you and annoying you. Just sit here for a while so they don't bother us. We'll buy the drinks."

The girls took their seats giggling, and more drinks were brought. Loomis was fond of African ladies. They were uncomplicated. No elaborate game-playing, none of this flirting without anything behind it; they were easy to approach, and if they agreed to your company, it was a sure bet you were going to get laid. As with most Africans, they appreciated joking around and having a good laugh. Like now for instance, when coy introductions gradually became playful banter.

"So, Ziporah," addressed Loomis with a disarming smile, "there is a question I always wanted to ask a telephone operator. May I ask it?"

"What is that?"

"Do you operators listen in on people's conversations?"

"I got a PhD in economics," Okova bullshitted to Helen. "Ten years I was in the States..."

"You know, as soon as I saw you," Loomis said, "my heart was pounding like a drum."

Ziporah snickered. "Stop it!" she said, genially.

"You have a car?" Helen asked Okova.

"Yeah...this car I got tonight is only my emergency backup vehicle," he fibbed. "My Mercedes is being serviced."

"Did anyone ever tell you that you have beautiful teeth?"

Then the chicken arrived.

"Is this really a whole chicken?" Okova asked incredulously. His question was directed to no one in particular, since the waiter had already hurried off. "Every time, never fails, these people always gotta taste some of it. But this one was a glutton."

Loomis called the waiter over. Gesturing with his index finger, he made the waiter bend down as if to accept a secret. "You have given us a deformed chicken."

"Eh? *Nini*? What?"

"This was a lame chicken, a cripple."

"What are you saying? This chicken is good."

"Is this a whole chicken?"

"Of course."

"Why does it only have one leg?"

Guffaws from everyone, including the waiter who took that opportunity to make a timely exit.

Finishing the meal, they raised their glasses in a toast. First, the men toasted the ladies. The ladies toasted back. All four of them toasted the waiters and waitresses, excluding the one that had served the chicken; then, a toast to the crippled chicken itself. People from the neighboring tables joined in and additional rounds were brought for more toasts: to life, booze, and the sweet difference between men and women. As a result of all this toasting, countless half-liters of beer were slapped down on their table while the jukebox blared on and on and the night became a continuous blur.

At around midnight, the pair roused themselves to leave and stumbled on their way to the Morris-Mini, accompanied by the two willing and eager ladies. They were drunk and happy, comforted with the thought of warm beds that night.

Fuck, it's great to be alive.

* * *

Pamela closed the windows of her bedroom and drew the curtains. There were a lot of mosquitoes about, born from the Long Rains just passed, but she had been too preoccupied to let her mosquito net down. Now it was too late, for those on the wing would sneak in. Instead, she let the pyrethrum coil sitting on her night table repel the troublesome insects. She was tired, having stayed up late preparing the notes for the classes Katy was to take, but gratified that she would be able to make her trip and reach her upcountry home by Saturday. Switching on her portable radio-cassette to play Tchaikovsky's 'Concerto No. 1 in B flat minor,' her favorite music to sleep to, she quickly undressed and got into bed, turned off the night lamp, and soon fell into a peaceful slumber.

August 15, 1979, the day Daryl Loomis first met Pamela Amonee Emuria, was drawing to a close.