

The Succession

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Published: 2013

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Chapter 1

FINALLY, head teacher Thomas Jefferson reached the main point for having called this meeting.

“Fellow teachers, as you are all aware, the Board has accepted my retirement from my position as Headmaster of this school. I have served this school for eighteen years and am grateful for the opportunity availed to me. The Board has also communicated that it shall fill the vacant position in the next few weeks. There is no automatic replacement so this might just prove to be an opportunity for one of you.

That will be all for this morning’s meeting. It is now nine o’clock and we must attend to our various classes now.”

As the twenty-six teachers rose from the old wooden table around which they had sat during the meeting, they clustered themselves into their usual “gossip” groups. Thomas Jefferson had a good idea of what the topic was, and as he rose from his own seat at the head of the wooden table, he adjusted his spectacles.

Eighteen years earlier and straight from his native Scotland, Thomas Jefferson had joined this missionary school as a teacher of English. Before coming to Africa, he had been apprehensive of what the situation would turn out to be. He had suspected that lions freely prowled the streets in Africa at night. He had believed that a few Africans still wore tree barks to cover their buttocks, were extremely promiscuous, lazy and that they lacked common intelligence. And that they still worshipped false gods in mountains. Indoctrinating biblical teachings and values into the staff and pupils, and through these, to the rest of the community had been one of the prominent terms of his job offer.

To prepare for the challenge of converting the people to Christianity and also to curb the promiscuity, he had carried with him nicely packed bibles and pamphlets. He had not altogether been certain on how he was supposed to curb the reported "laziness" of the local people other than through sheer physical force. To prepare for the anticipated harsh, primitive and unsophisticated African life, he had arranged two pairs of khaki shorts of surpassing ugliness, two short sleeved shirts and one jacket. For his transport, he had managed to find for himself an old VW which the owner had planned to incinerate after no one showed any interest in it during a local auction sale.

Upon his arrival in Zambia, Jefferson had been surprised to find roads, buildings, bars, shopping malls, banks, night clubs, hospitals and all the latest vehicles that he had left back in Scotland. As a result, he had starkly stood out with his ancient appearance and transport mode, gaining constant stares and ridicule from curious local onlookers.

He had proceeded to rural Kabwe where Sambililo mission school was situated. Again he had been shocked that the school had been built in a similar manner to the ones he had left in Scotland. He had felt uneasy as the teachers at the school had all dressed up to welcome him.

He had only worked for a year as a senior teacher of English before rising to the position of Deputy Headmaster under Peter Graham. Three years later, Peter

Graham had returned to Ireland, and Thomas had replaced him as school Headmaster.

He had been at the helm of the school since then.

As he hung his striped jacket onto his chair in his office, the issue of his successor came to mind. After working with them for a long time, he was aware that a good number of them had the necessary skill, experience and academic background and that one of them could emerge from the group.

To his relief, he stumbled upon a realization that the task of choosing his successor would be much easier now than it would have been in the past. In the past, the *Zambian* staff had resented his decision whenever a promotion went to a European teacher. They complained that there was racism at the school and became hostile to the promoted European teachers. Efforts to explain to the teachers that more than experience was required fell on deaf ears.

An incident of ten years earlier came to mind. A young teacher from Ireland had won promotion to a vacant senior teaching role, and the *Zambian* teachers who had also been expectant had raised a protest. Though not required to do so, Thomas Jefferson had decided to explain to the protesting teachers that the major consideration in the promotion had been the academic status.

The depth of the resentment had become manifest a week later when the newly promoted teacher had asked her *Zambian* counterpart to show her where she could buy pounded groundnuts to try out a local cuisine.

“Just ask your degree,” she had been told.

The number of foreign teachers at the school had continued dwindling as their contracts expired one by one. Jefferson was the only European teacher left at the school now and for the first time, he realized that there wouldn't be another cry of racism when a new head was selected.

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JUMA Siame, a senior teacher of Chemistry at Sambililo, walked confidently to a grade twelve class. Since graduating from Kwame Nkrumah College with a Teaching diploma eight years earlier, he had always set for himself a target of achieving a hundred percent pass rate in every exam class he handled. Not once had this target ever been even neared, but that did not discourage him from renewing the same target every year. Successive grade twelve classes had kept failing him badly every year, but he was hopeful that this time there was promise. The class he was about to handle that morning was by far the brightest combination of pupils yet. Having that thought on that morning made him very happy.

In reality though, something else made him happy that morning. During the staff meeting, the head teacher had mentioned that his successor would be selected from among the *Zambian* teachers this time. For a *Zambian* to occupy that position, it meant that the board had enough confidence in the teachers. Of course, that gesture would be of little or no use to him as an individual if the promotion did not come his way. But he was very sure that it would come his way. With a respected diploma and eight years' working experience, he felt that he was equal to the task. Added to this was the fact that he was a married man, and by

perception, responsible. Everyone knew that Juma was a deacon at a local church which held its noisy prayers at the school every weekend,

As Juma reached his class, he caught sight of another teacher, Moses Phiri. The two had a lot in common. Both taught grade twelve classes and they were also senior teachers. However, whereas Juma taught Chemistry, Moses taught Mathematics.

"How is your morning, Moses?" Juma asked, extending his hand for a hand shake. Moses shook it warmly and replied, "As fine as it can be. By the way, did your wife prepare those sweet potatoes with peanut again for your lunch today? Please invite me for lunch. Those potatoes we had last time were delicious!"

"Ah, today she prepared nothing. You see as we move towards the end of the month, we have less money at our disposal. But if you love peanut in sweet potatoes that much, why don't you marry a Bemba woman?"

"But Bemba women talk too much. And they are useless in bed," replied Moses.

"You should know!" laughed Juma.

The two teachers laughed and then went their separate ways to their respective classes.

Juma took a moment to reflect on Moses. He found Moses to be eccentric. Whereas all the other teachers carried books and other aids to their classes, Moses carried nothing. Instead, he only moved with a stick in his hand. And whenever he was not holding conversation with anyone, he would be whistling silly tunes to himself. He never tucked his shirt, and being tall at almost six feet, he always walked with huge awkward steps.

Moses had joined the school three years earlier straight from the University of Zambia, where he had graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Education. He was easy going and he freely mingled with his fellow staff members. But when it came to pupils he was a menace. That was especially true for male pupils.

Apart from these two teachers, the school had two other senior teachers, Ackim Hamweenda and Nawa Sitali, teachers of Agriculture science and Biology respectively. Juma hadn't seen Ackim in a long while, but he had seen Nawa in that morning's staff meeting. Nawa overtly loved his job, and he was usually the first teacher to arrive for work. He had built a reputation with the teachers and pupils alike, having been at the school for seventeen years. His examination classes usually performed well year in, year out.

Regardless of the weather, Nawa was always seen in some jacket, the favorite of which was a green checked one. He always said that a gentleman knew no weather.

Like Juma, Nawa was a married man. He had six children and looked after nieces and nephews in his small two-bedroom house.

As Juma settled to teach his grade twelve class that morning, a sudden realization hit him. He was probably not the only teacher in queue for the upcoming vacant job at the school.

Chapter 2

How many times has this happened?

This was the question on Moses' mind as he stared at Maria, one of his pupils, sleeping soundly next to him on his bed. He ran his fingers through her short, black hair and she moaned sleepily. Moses knew very well that this act, which he had now turned into a risky regular practice, could earn him a straight dismissal if he was to be caught and reported to the headmaster. But Moses toyed dangerously with a thought that he was not going to be punished for this. He drew his hope from two factors, the first of which was that there was a critical shortage of well trained teachers at the school and the school would not risk losing a good teacher like him. Secondly, someone had whispered to him at the bar that all male teachers, including the headmaster himself, indulged in the same hobby regularly. Moses had wanted to know the source of those rumors but the man telling him was not a teacher. He had just been told by someone who had himself been told by another person who had claimed to have been told by someone who knew what was going on at the school. As a result, Moses knew that the second defense was as solid as water and that in an event he ever tried to raise it, it would merely be grounds for yet another legitimate dismissal.

How many times?

Moses had noticed Maria in his grade ten class during an algebra lesson. She had not been taking any notes and she had not been asking any questions. When he gave the class a test in algebra, she had emerged thirty-second in a class of thirty-two pupils. Moses had instantly recognised a crisis and had asked her why her performance had been so pathetic. She had confessed that her background in Mathematics had been very poor and Moses had arranged to be coaching her privately. They had agreed on a reasonable monthly fee for the tuitions, seeing that she was only but a pupil with no income of her own.

When the time had come to pay the fees, Maria had at first said that she had come with the money and they had proceeded as usual with the tuition in Moses' house. At the end of the session, Moses had asked for his payment. She had opened her purse but there had been no money. She had then searched herself all over but to no avail. Afterwards she had stripped down to her underwear looking for the money but none could be found. Finally, even the underwear had been stripped but still no money had been found. Instead, she had ended up in his bed.

And this had happened thirteen times already.

The issue of paying the tuition money was never brought up again. Instead, it was Teacher Moses who now had to part with his scarce resources from his meager teacher salary to carter for her needs. And Maria was fashion conscious.

By seven thirty that morning, Moses was already at the school. As soon as he reached the staff room, he was told by one of the female teaches, who for some reason looked annoyed, that he was needed by the headmaster as soon as he arrived. Moses leaped up from his seat in the staff room and headed outside quickly. He was very much afraid. Why would the headmaster want to see him so early in the morning? Did it have something to do with the girls? Had someone reported him about his overnight extra curriculum exploits with Maria? Was a dismissal awaiting him?

Moses began to sweat profusely from every pore on his body. How now was he going to look after himself and his aged father in the village? What was he going to say? He took his long steps even faster this time, preferring to know whatever it was in store for him now rather than later. He reached the headmaster's office and then knocked. A voice from inside invited him in. He walked in, still clutching his stick in his shivering hand.

Moses tried to gauge from the headmaster's face whether his suspicions were correct or not. But he found this difficult, partly because the headmaster was not the type to show emotion on his face and also partly because his face was covered by the glass from which he was drinking water. Moses waited impatiently. He sincerely felt that the headmaster was testing his patience. Even if Moses was wrong and was about to be sentenced to death, he found it unacceptable that the headmaster was torturing him with such unnecessary suspense.

"Good morning sir," Moses blurted out at last after seeing that the headmaster was taking forever to set the ball rolling. He preferred to get done with it once and for all.

"Good morning Moses, please pull a seat," replied the headmaster. Moses almost declined, but then quickly changed his mind and sat down. He looked at the headmaster impatiently.

"How is work proceeding with you?" the headmaster asked. Moses did not like such questions at such times.

"Fine," he replied quickly, not wanting to waste any time on a formality question.

"And are you receiving support from the other teachers?"

Moses almost told the headmaster to quit beating about the bush but he instead said, "Yes."

The headmaster then proceeded to take another long swig from his glass as Moses almost burst with anxiety. Was this about the Maria scandal?

"It is a tradition of this school at this time every year to draw up a program for Preventive Maintenance of the school. The teacher who handled the last one did well, although there were some few problems. But with you in charge this time, I expect it to run smoothly. I am putting you in charge of the program, to manage it this year."

Moses was very, very delighted. With a broad smile he said, "Thank you very much sir. I will not let you down sir."

He was so relieved.

"As you know, this program helps us keep our school clean and prevents diseases. It means I do not expect to see stagnant water bodies, tall grass, dirty surroundings or indeed any atmosphere that can put the pupils at risk of contracting diseases."

"Count it done sir."

"Secondly, it builds in pupils the ability to learn work, to be responsible..."

"Capacity Building sir," he cut in.

"Pardon me?"

"Sorry sir, I meant that by making pupils take responsibility for their own cleanliness, we are building capacity in them for the future."

"Right. And I have full confidence in you."

“I am humbled sir.”

“Well, get down to work then. Remember that on this assignment, my appraisal will be based on the results that you will give me. What I am looking for at the end of the day is a cleaner, well maintained school. And I shall be on the lookout for cases of coughing, diarrhea and malaria among pupils. How you go about managing this program is entirely up to you. I have already signed for money to be used for this important exercise.”

As soon as Moses walked out of the headmaster’s office, he threw a clenched fist into the air. He was very happy.

He had expected a disastrous outcome from their meeting, but it had been very different. It had confirmed what had been on his mind for some days now, that he was being seriously considered for a position of higher responsibility. The headmaster had used the term “manage” which obviously meant that he was being considered for a vacant managerial job. Above all else, the headmaster had stated clearly that he had full confidence in him. If that was not a strong enough hint, nothing would be.

He just had to become the next head teacher.

These happy thoughts made him reflect on his personal life. He knew quite clearly that his affairs with school girls were inappropriate, and he had to do something about it to clear his image. As long as no one discovered the affair, he would be alright. But if the worst happened and he was cornered, Moses could always suggest that being a single man, he was dating for the purpose of finding a marriage mate. But that still could not justify his dating school girls. Perhaps he had to think seriously about ending these affairs.

That was all Moses had to worry about. Otherwise, his performance at work had been good. His pupils’ pass rates had always been good. There were always more of his pupils passing Mathematics than those failing it.

And this improvement was generally credited to his teaching prowess.

There was above all one area in which Moses had a clear advantage over his fellow teachers. He possessed a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Zambia. There was only one other teacher who had a degree, but he was on suspension because of indiscipline after a fist fight with one of his male pupils. Moses ruled him out of the race. Obviously, he was the only one worth monitoring and the headmaster’s assignment had confirmed it. He would execute the assignment above expectation and earn the promotion. He would be the next headmaster without question.

He smiled and threw his fist into the air once again.

Chapter 3

Nawa possessed no academic degree, diploma or certificate but he too was fully confident that he stood an excellent chance of becoming the next headmaster. As he sat down on a rickety stool in a local bar that evening enjoying his beer, his mind went through what he knew were his strengths. He had unmatched

experience at the school, having taught there for nineteen years. Even the present headmaster had found him teaching at the school. Nawa gulped down his beer and then called for his fourth. A rhumba song with a heavy bass rhythm was buzzing in the sound system.

Nawa also knew that his love for his work was legendary. He was always the first teacher to report for work every morning. He was popular with his pupils and he produced good pass rates every year. So great was his committed to his work that his love for the bottle did not seem to affect his output. He never allowed pleasure to interfere with his work. But he did allow work to interfere with his pleasure, such as this evening when he had decided to come with his pupil's books to the bar. He would mark their work in between drinking and dancing sessions.

Another area of clear advantage was his marital status. He was married to a beautiful woman with whom he had six children. He considered himself to be a responsible man.

He knew that he had not bothered to advance his academic qualifications over the years. As a result, he had seen most of his peers rise in rank above him. Most of them were now either headmasters or deputy headmasters. But Nawa realised that he was not far behind notwithstanding. He used his charm and skill to get his way up the ladder. As of now, he was senior teacher, which- as was the case with all other senior teachers at the school- made him head of department. Given his academic background, his current situation was more than what he could ever have bargained for. He knew of others with similar qualifications as his who worked and retired at assistant teacher level. He considered himself lucky to have a job at all, that is, to say nothing about his being head of a department. He called for his fifth beer and also lit his cigarette. He inhaled deeply and then released a ball of smoke into the air. He tapped his feet on the floor.

He saw some girls enter the bar. They looked young and new to the bar. He pulled at his cigarette and released the smoke. The girls reminded him of Moses, one of his fellow senior teachers. Nawa did not really consider Moses to be a competitor on the race to the vacant position. Moses had the academic paper but his output was rather average. Besides, his illicit carnal activities with the school girls had made him an unsuitable leader at any level. If anything it made him a candidate for outright dismissal.

His beer arrived and he took a sip.

Nawa's mind then shifted to Juma. He considered Juma to be even less competitive than Moses. If the school considered the academic paper as being of paramount importance, then Juma was behind Moses. If they considered experience, then again Juma was far behind Nawa. What Juma possessed, everyone else possessed in higher units. Like Moses, Juma's output was not impressive. But unlike Moses, Juma was a married man with two children. But even in this area again, Nawa would wallop him hands down.

"Anything that you can do, I can do it better. I am the toughest," he sang to himself.

These happy thoughts lifted Nawa off his stool on to the dance floor. He picked on a slim girl in a white trouser and red blouse and pulled her close to him. He

then swirled her around and then held on to her waist tightly while gyrating his own waist vigorously.

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IT was while in his second year at Kwame Nkrumah Teachers college that Juma first met Julie. He had seen her at church seated in the pew opposite his. She had been sitting with her mother and occasionally she had been stealing glances in his direction as the sermon continued. Juma had pretended to have been paying “more than the usual attention” to the preaching, but all along, through the corner of his eye, he had sharply tuned his line of sight to an acute angle so that he could watch Julie without it being obvious. To Juma, the sermon had been long and extremely boring and as soon as the service had ended, he had “accidentally” bumped into Julie, who was wearing a perfectly fitting flowery yellow dress. The two young churchgoers had exchanged warm greetings and had lied to each other about how touching and inspiring the service had been.

This had become a pattern, week in, week out. That is how Juma had found himself addicted to going to church. And before long he found himself unable to refuse when he was appointed as one of the church ushers due to his regular, exemplary attendance.

After a while, Juma had asked Julie to visit him at campus. She had agreed, and Juma had meticulously prepared himself for her visit. He had gone to the barbershop, had polished his shoes and had sprayed his room with borrowed air freshener. Finally he had bought two soft drinks and two meat pies and had then sat in his room, waiting anxiously for her coming.

Julie had turned up an hour and a quarter late, and this had raised Juma’s impatience. But she had come alone and this had raised his hopes. Finally, she had come with a bible perched underneath her armpit, and this had raised his confusion.

“Are...are we...we are not going to hold a bible study, are we?” Juma had asked anxiously. His motives had nothing to do with a bible study. If anything, what he was contemplating doing with Julie was explicitly condemned in the same bible. In fact the same bible stated in no uncertain terms that those practicing what Juma had in mind would “not inherit the kingdom.”

“I just brought this bible in case someone walks into the room and finds us,” she explained. The explanation made a lot of sense and the tension was reduced a little. After exchanging pleasantries, Juma had again looked at the bible now on Julie’s laps but she had smiled

“It is alright,” she had said. Juma had understood her to mean, if they were there to commit fornication, what difference would it make if they also committed a minor blasphemy?

Being his first encounter with a girl, Juma found that he was quite inadequate for the task. His question, “Can your mother repair a leaking tap?” was closely followed by “How many times does a goat go to the toilet in a day?”

The confusion was now increasing the tension in the room, and the two found themselves quiet most of the time. Juma had tried very hard to conjure up some more questions that would lead to a conversation but he kept asking silly questions. His carefully planned script had gone horribly wrong.

Julie had sensed the situation and she had tried to help by shifting from her chair on to sitting on the bed next to Juma. Juma's mind froze and even the thoughtless questions ceased. He found himself listening intently to the faint sound of a barking dog in the distance.

Chapter 4

JUMA was moderately curious when the headmaster called him to his office two days after the staff meeting. Normally, the headmaster would talk to him about work whenever he passed through the office in the afternoons. For the headmaster to have specifically called him this early, it meant that there was a matter of urgent importance.

"Good morning sir," Juma said as soon as he entered the headmaster's office.

"Good morning Juma, please sit down," replied the headmaster. He removed his spectacles and then folded the letter that he had been reading.

"The Education ministry, through the school board, has expressed acute displeasure with our schools in the area of inappropriate teacher-pupil relationships. They say that moiré and more male teaches are having inappropriate relationships with school girls and incidences of school girl pregnancies are high. This is unacceptable and the ministry has asked all schools to do something about it."

Juma nodded in agreement.

The headmaster continued, "Our board would like us to address this issue immediately, and I think that the best way to approach this is to isolate the teachers who seem disposed towards this practice. Not one will confess to this crime so a discreet investigation must be underway to address this problem. I want you to personally handle this assignment and manage it all the way."

Juma beamed with a wide smile.

"At the end of the exercise, I shall expect a detailed report on the method you shall use to capture this information, your actual findings and your recommendations. I shall appraise the success of this assignment through the output. At the end of the day, I shall expect all teachers involved in this vice to be uncovered and action recommended must be clear."

As Juma walked out of the headmaster's office, he coupled his broad smile with a triumphant throwing of a clenched fist into the air. What the headmaster had just assigned him to do was an extremely important exercise. It hinged on the actual moral fibre of the profession. It had come from the ministry itself, through the school board, through the headmaster and now Juma was to champion it. Certainly this was good news. He would share it with his wife Julie once he got home after work.

Why had he been chosen to handle such a sensitive task when there were other teachers around? Obviously, it meant that Juma was seen to be a clean person in that area. Above all, the headmaster was obviously setting him up for a vacant management job in the school.

Juma had no idea where he would start the exercise from. But he was very sure that he would present a very good report- his best effort ever. It was not only about the inappropriate relationships that he would eliminate. This time he was doing it to also campaign for the job of headmaster.

He at once realized that he would need a more intelligent head to work with in total confidence, and the first and only person that came to his mind was Violet. Violet was not a school teacher; she was a researcher with the UN and had worked in the area for seven years. She and Juma had worked on an assignment of mutual interest to their professional fields two years earlier, and they had become friends from then on. Everyone appeared to be aware of that close friendship, except for Juma's wife.

Before he fully realized what he was doing, Juma found himself knocking at the front door of Violet's house at exactly one o'clock that afternoon. Violet opened the door, and with a sweet smile, she invited him inside the house. Juma walked inside slowly, eyeing her lacy, translucent dress suspiciously.

"Well, I was not expecting you but I am very glad that you have thought of paying me a visit all the same. You are welcome. As you can see, I am not working today and I spent most of my morning hours sleeping. Do you care for some *nshima* with eggs, beans and lettuce?"

"Sure that sounds appetizing," replied Juma.

"Good. Let me finish the preparations then. In the meantime, feel free. You may remove your shoes too in order to relax."

Juma declined the last part of the invitation. He was not used to having lunch with women who asked him to remove his clothing. Besides, he rather doubted that the well decorated and spotlessly clean room would go well with the smell that would emanate from his stockings.

The meal was ready in fifteen minutes. They ate while discussing general issues without referring to the purpose of the visit even once.

"So what brings you here?" Violet asked after she had removed the dishes. Juma explained in detail the purpose of the visit, with emphasis on the importance of the exercise.

"That sounds interesting. I think we can work out something together. But why don't we go to my bedroom first? We can take a nap first and then see what happens."

"Your bedroom?" he blurted.

"Yes my bedroom. I will not bite you."

"But..."

"You do need my help right?"

"Yes, but..."

She started to unbutton her dress while standing in front of him. She then allowed the dress to fall freely off her body and onto the floor on the red carpet.

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THERE was noisy excitement in the school dining hall during dinner. A tall boy called for order and a hasty prayer was offered. Afterwards, plates and spoons were heard clattering against each other. Noisy discussions accompanied the meal.

Quite unexpectedly, senior teacher Moses entered the hall and went straight up to the platform. He scanned the audience and the entire hall fell into dead silence.

“Good evening boys and girls,” he said in his deep voice.

“Good evening sir,” the pupils answered in unison.

“Without wasting my time here, I just came to let you know that Preventive maintenance shall be commencing next week. As you all know, unless you are an idiot, preventive maintenance is essential. It helps prevent diseases and I expect you to stop missing classes due to having diarrhea every other week. This exercise shall start with you.

I demand total cleanliness of your bodies first. Wash your clothes and bathe every day, not just when you feel like. If you have one under pant—which is the case with most of you, wash it at night every day. Wearing the same underwear day in day out without bothering to wash it is the reason why this dining hall smells as though we are on a farm when you are gathered like this. And yet the moment you walk out of this hall, it begins to smell normal again. When you bathe, it is not just about your face, hands and legs, no. Wash all private areas, wash your anus. No one shall wash your anus for you. I shall be conducting daily inspections on you all, whether boy or girl.”

There was a controlled murmuring sound from the middle of the hall. Moses ignored it.

“Apart from your bodies, you shall clean the school surroundings. You shall cut grass down, dig pits, clean toilets...”

This time a loud murmur emerged from one of the corners in the hall. Moses stopped speaking and looked belligerently in that corner. After silence had restored itself, he pointed to the same corner and said, “All that I have said so far shall be performed by the pupils in that corner.”

A small boy raised his hand.

“Yes?” snarled Moses.

“Sir, not all of us in this corner murmured. It will be unfair for those of us who were just listening.”

“Can you then point out who was murmuring?” Moses posed the challenge.

No one moved.

A girl’s hand went up.

“Yes?” snarled Moses again.

“Sir, when such punishment is given...”

“Young girl it is not punishment, it is preventive maintenance,” shouted Moses.

“When such work is given to pupils, you find that prefects simply supervise the rest of us. They do not want to participate in working and yet we are all pupils.”

“Your prefects will play a supervisory role. That is why they were chosen to be your prefects.”

A bigger boy raised his hand and said:

“Sir, I have a complaint against you. I know that this corner has made a mistake by murmuring. But the punishment is too much. Digging a pit for instance is difficult. Last time a pupil fainted while digging a pit. Can't you just be fair and change the decision?”

“Yes this can be changed. Instead of the whole group digging the pit, I want you personally to dig one pit deep enough to hide yourself while standing straight.”

No one asked any more questions.

After giving the pupils a very severe reprimand, Moses dismissed them from the hall, with the meal only half eaten.

Chapter 5

Nawa walked straight to the bar after knocking off that hot day. He ignored several greetings on his way. All he wanted was the biting feel of a cold beer running down his throat. As he drew nearer, he heard the sound of one of his favorite songs playing. Without as much as a thought, he began to run towards the bar. Walking wasn't getting him to the bar quickly enough. He might find the song finished.

"Bar man, bring six beers please!" Nawa shouted to the barman as soon as he reached the door. He entered the bar and looked for a seat near the counter. His six beers were brought. He opened the first one and gulped down all the beer at one go. He then let out a long, loud belch. He then opened a second bottle and again drank all the contents at once. The burning but bitingly cold sensation in his throat made him open the third bottle. This time he took a sip. It was only then that he started to scan the surrounding, checking if he could identify anyone.

He saw patrons drinking in small groups and talking loudly on top of their voices, trying to be heard above the sound of the music. Others were already on the dance floor. Then he saw a woman drinking by herself in a corner. He gulped down the remaining beer and then opened his fourth. The beer was taking effect in his mind, and he found himself really enjoying the heavy beat and his vision began to get hazy.

Nawa had just decided to join the woman drinking alone when he caught sight of one of his workmates. His workmate was drinking in a corner with three pretty girls. Nawa finished the fourth beer and then carried the two beers with him to his friend's corner.

"Moses, I did not expect to find you here," said Nawa with a drunken smile. Moses looked up and saw his workmate looking jovial with two beers in his hands.

"You are welcome Nawa, please join us. We are here enjoying our drinks while waiting for the evening to wear on."

Then, turning to the girls, he said, "Girls, meet my fellow teacher, Nawa."

Then he said to Nawa, "Nawa, meet my girlfriend Cynthia. And these are her friends Aggie and Stella." The girls giggled.

Nawa pulled a seat and sat down after positioning himself next to the plump, light skinned girl in a short red dress, the one who had been introduced as Stella. He took a swig from his beer so that he could have a clearer look at her.

"So how is your family Nawa?" began Moses. Nawa suddenly spat out his beer.

"My family... well... yes, my family is fine...my mother, she is good. My father too, not complaining. "

"Actually, I am referring to your wi..."

“Waiter!” yelled Nawa as he stood up. The waiter walked over to their table and then Nawa said, “Bring us another round here.”

The waiter took the money from Nawa and then disappeared into the crowd.

“Nawa, what I was asking...”

“What time did you get here Moses?” Nawa interrupted with his own question. He looked uneasily at his friend.

“We came about thirty minutes ago. We need to chill because as you know, today is a Friday.”

“Yes daddy’s day out,” replied Nawa thoughtlessly and then he laughed very loudly.

“Yes indeed. Let us enjoy ourselves.”

Moses gulped down his beer and then said, “Nawa, remind me. How is your child, the one who was down with malaria?”

Nawa almost cursed at his friend. Instead, he took a swig from his beer and said, “Well, that was my nephew from Livingstone. He had come for a holiday at my house when he fell ill. He is alright now.”

“I mean Inambao, your second...”

“Where the hell is this damn waiter!” yelled Nawa, looking frantically in all directions. The waiter arrived with their beer and then placed it on their table. Nawa passed a nervous glance at Moses, but his colleague appeared to be in some deep discussion with his girlfriend. Nawa took advantage of that lapse in security to ask Stella to dance with him.

Being a seasoned dancer, Nawa mesmerized everyone with his agile dancing antics. Every now and then, he swirled Stella around and the audience cheered. He discovered that each time he swirled her round, her short red dress flew up and he could see a substantial amount of thigh. Soon, he stopped dancing and his style was now only confined to swirling Stella round.

Shortly after midnight, Nawa staggered out of the bar with Stella. He did not know whether Moses had left or not, or whether he was still seated with his girlfriend. He was too drunk and all he needed was Stella. The two staggered to an isolated dark corner and Nawa began to touch Stella all over.

“Do you have enough money?” asked Stella. Nawa was too breathless to speak. He just produced a bunch of cash from his pocket and then showed it to Stella. She smiled.

“Then take me to your house,” she said.

“No. What do you think my wife will... I mean my wife’s brother... err... my brother’s wife will do?”

“Then, let us go to my house instead. I live with my sister in a one roomed house.”

The two then staggered into the darkness, holding on to each other tightly.

* * * * *

JUMA cursed himself for turning up for this date at the newly opened Le Cuisine restaurant in town. Violet had convinced him to dine with her as they launched the assignment. To have rejected her offer would have dealt a damaging blow to his project and his ambition to become the next headmaster at the school. Besides he was deep into her hands now, having seen the inside of her knickers

already. He would go along with her until she had fully helped him, and then he would end the affair.

Until now, his seven month pregnant wife, Julie appeared unaware of this friendship. He knew that it would be a disaster if ever he was caught. The trouble would not end at his home. It would follow him even to his local church, of which he was a deacon and now treasurer.

He looked at his watch again. It was six-thirty and there was still thirty minutes before the agreed meeting time. Juma had decided to arrive early so as to acquaint himself with the place before his date arrived. He had no intention of looking lost or foolish at the crucial time.

To prepare himself for this occasion, he had iron pressed his green jacket which he only wore when going for important church services. He had polished his shoes very carefully. Again this was because he didn't want to look low class at the new restaurant. But as it turned out, he had overdressed for the occasion. The other guests were only casually dressed and carefree and they were enjoying themselves with hearty discussions on their tables. Juma had picked the table right in the middle of the room and this had made him very visible. And because of his dressing, waiters had jostled over each other trying to serve him. He had smiled apologetically when the last waitress had come to him and asked, "Welcome sir. What may we serve you? Can I bring the menu?"

Again he looked at his watch as another waiter approached his table. This meal was on Violet's account and he had come without any single coin. Not that he had any at home or the bank. He waved the waiter away as everyone stared in his direction. Everyone was dining; he was the only one sitting and doing nothing.

Juma began to regret this decision to come. Surely he could have suggested another way of launching his assignment than in this embarrassing atmosphere. He decided to leave. He had just lifted himself off his chair when he felt a tap on his shoulder.

"Hey Mr. Handsome, already here?" asked Violet with a sweet smile. She was in loose black slacks and a purple sleeveless coat. She smelled good too.

"But you are late," protested Juma.

Violet looked at her watch and then said, "But it is six-fifty, ten minutes ahead of schedule."

"Is it?" he asked nervously as yet another waitress approached their table. The waitress greeted both of them and Violet asked for the menu. The waitress put one on Violet's side and the other on Juma's. She then stood a few inches away waiting for their orders.

Violet ticked her choice in ten seconds and the waitress turned to Juma. He looked at the menu with alarm. He realized that there was nothing he recognized on the menu and yet he had to make a choice quickly. He read through the list three times, desperately looking for anything suggesting chicken, beef, pork or even eggs. He knew that it was too late now to choose what Violet had chosen because the waitress was already holding Violet's order. There was silence as Juma tried to make up his mind, his heart beating audibly in the process. Because of pressure, he directed his finger to item three when he discovered to his horror that it contained "caterpillar" in its long name. The last time he had eaten

caterpillars was twelve years ago and his face had swelled very badly while he was still eating his meal.

Juma decided to tick at item sixteen, that being the date he was born.

“You have ticked on mushroom soup sir. Are you sure that is all you will have?” the waitress asked. Juma pulled back the menu quickly and then quite at random, pointed his finger in between item eleven and twelve. The waitress took the orders and then left the table.

“So how was your day my dear?” Violet asked Juma.

“I handled three classes but it was okay. What about you?”

“I was conducting research in a village three hours away from here. I am tired but very happy to see you.”

“I am happy to see you too.”

Violet smiled. Then Juma said, “Have you drawn up the questionnaire yet?”

“Yes I have it in my bag. But you obviously have to make typed copies before distributing to the teachers.”

The waitress brought their orders. Before Violet, she placed potatoes, chicken and vegetable salad. And before Juma, she placed a plate of pork chops and French fries. She also placed a bowl of mushroom soup next to his plate. Juma beamed with unbridled joy at his good order, which he had ticked blindly.

The two set out to their meal.

“How is your wife doing?” Violet asked Juma as she started to work her way through the meal.

“She is resting. I am sure she is fine.”

“What will happen if she catches us one day?”

“Huh? I mean... what was your question?”

“I said, what will happen if she catches us one day?”

“I will insist that there is nothing going on between us.”

“What will you do if she rejects that explanation? Or if she beats me up?”

“Yes.” replied Juma. That was not the answer to her question so Violet pressed it, “What if she says that I am your girlfriend?”

“Yes,” replied Juma again.

Violet stopped eating and looked at Juma. He was clearly distracted. With his fork and knife, he was chasing around a piece of meat all over his plate in an effort to pin it down and cut it. He was trying so hard that once, the meat almost fell off his plate. Until now, he had not succeeded in putting anything in his mouth and he was salivating very badly. Whereas Violet’s plate was almost half way gone, his remained as it was when brought. As things stood, he would remain with a full plate at the end of the meal.

“You asked me about my girlfriend’s wife?” he blurted out, his concentration focused on the resisting pork chop.

“Waiter, can I have a dish of water please?” Violet called out. The water was brought to their table.

“Personally,” began Violet “I prefer to eat with my fingers. I find it easier because that is how I was brought up.”

She then washed her hands and then started to pick her food with her fingers. Juma was very appreciative of this. He also washed his hands and then shifted his seat closer to the table. His first target for assault was the same pork chop which

had made him feel foolish as he chased it whole evening. He threw it in his mouth and crushed it with his teeth without any mercy. The next chop suffered a similar fate. Not even bone pieces were spared. Occasionally, he threw into his mouth pieces of fries. Within five minutes, he had overtaken Violet's rate of consumption.

Chapter 6

"Of late, I have been receiving numerous complaints from pupils concerning meals. They have been complaining that meals are no longer served on time, and that the meals are no longer enough for them to concentrate on school. They also say that they are served vegetables and beans all the time.

But considering that the school allocates a huge budget towards pupil's feeding, I am quite shocked with the revelations. I need these problems solved within two weeks. I want you to manage this assignment," said the headmaster just before knocking off time that day.

Nawa was overjoyed. With a smile, he replied, "Yes sir, count it done."

"Good, so then I will place you in charge of the budget too. You are free to manage this in your own way. But at the end of the exercise, I shall be on the lookout for results. I want a confirmation from pupils that the meals are enough and are served on time. I want them to be fed reasonably well, considering the money that you shall have in your control concerning the same."

Nawa leaped with a clenched fist as soon as he disappeared from the headmaster's view. He considered it an honour to be placed in charge of food. Food was a very important aspect of the school budget. For the headmaster to consider him to take charge of that important aspect, it meant that Nawa was considered reliable and able to deliver. It meant that he was surely being considered seriously for the position of headmaster.

"Can you explain to me why food rations for the pupils keep going down all the time?" Nawa asked the school cook, Tembo a few minutes later.

"Boss, we are cook only what we are given by other boss in charge. When we ask, he tell us there is no money so we ration and now pupils complain."

"I am now in charge," said Nawa with an air of authority. "Give me a list of food rations that are required for the problem to end. Money is not a problem now."

"Yes boss."

"I also want to know why the meals are not served on time."

"Boss, we have two big pots for school. One big pot keep break down. So only one pot now is reliable."

"What is wrong with the pot?"

"I think no spare part, boss. But it is old, that is why."

"Alright, I will bring some experts to have a look at it tomorrow."

"Boss, you are good man. I wish there were many like you."

"Actually, I am now just waiting to be appointed as the new..." said Nawa before cutting off his sentence. He marched away from the school cook.

Nawa decided to pass through Stella's house on his way to the bar to celebrate his new fortune. As he walked, he began to analyse his other two possible competitors for the position of headmaster.

He first thought about Moses. Moses had a degree and he was hard working. However, he had no experience worth talking about. Besides, his multiple illicit affairs with his own pupils had now become common knowledge. Moses would not make the grade, concluded Nawa.

What about Juma? Juma had a diploma and reasonable experience. He was also known to be a pastor at his local church. But Nawa believed that Juma would only fool the foolish, not him. He was in an adulterous affair with a lady from the UN while his wife was heavily pregnant at home. Nawa decided that Juma would also not make the grade.

That left only him and Hamweenda. Hamweenda was the fourth senior teacher at the school. He too had a degree but his output was unrelated to his paper. As if that was not bad enough, he was on suspension for having a bare knuckle fist fight with one of his pupils in class after the two had argued on the real meaning of the word "cock" during a lesson on Animal Husbandry in Agriculture science.

That left only him.

Nawa reached Stella's house. The door was shut but he could hear whispers inside. He waited and listened with alarm.

"You know that I love you very much," the female voice was whispering.

"Then show me now baby," the deep male voice whispered back.

Nawa could not stand it any longer. His chest welled up in anger as his heart beat faster. So Stella was busy having an affair with another man after all he had spent on her? Summoning all his strength, Nawa gave the thin shut door a mighty karate kick and the door flew off its hinges on impact, with its handle and nails flying all over the room and crashing against the wall. With an audacious determination, he walked inside the house.

On a small makeshift bed sat a very startled and shocked old woman and a young girl of about fourteen. They stared at Nawa with very confused and questioning expressions on the faces. In one corner was a black and white TV which was showing a soap opera.

"Do I have to show my love other than saying it?" the female actor was saying, as Nawa watched in horror and embarrassment.

"Err... Stella... she... where is Stella?" he stammered in embarrassment.

"Is this how you enter my daughter's house?" the old woman asked, clapping her hands once in total astonishment. Nawa scratched his head. His mouth went dry.

"Who are you?" the old woman demanded. Nawa did not reply. His eyes darted towards the door as he thought of running away.

"You do not want to tell me who you are? Alright, let me shout "thief"..."

"No, no, no madam, do not do that, I am just a neighbor living next door and I am lost because this is not where I live. I saw a lizard running into this house and it locked the door... so I said to myself, if that lizard was my son..."

"He is lying mother. I know him. He is one of the teachers at Sambililo School. His name is Mr. Nawa," the little girl interrupted.

“In that case, let us just go and report him to his headmaster and then bring him here so that he sees for himself what one of his teachers has done.”

Nawa went down to his knees. He pleaded, “Please madam, I beg you in the name of the most high, please do not do that. I am sorry. Please let us negotiate.”

“Were you coming to kill my daughter? Why did you come in that manner?”

“Madam, how can I ever dream of killing your daughter?” he asked with fear in his forced smile.

“What are you doing here? I will shout.”

“She came to give me extra... I mean I came to give her extra lessons.”

The old woman stood up and wrapped her *chitenge* properly and then said, “I think we must see the headmaster.”

Nawa dipped into his pocket and produced a bunch of notes. He said, “Please think about my apology. I ask you not to go to the headmaster’s office.”

With that he handed the money to the young girl and then got off his knees. He left the house and headed towards the bar.

Chapter 7

MOSES took headmaster Jefferson on a conducted tour of the school three mornings later on a Saturday. He wanted the headmaster to see for himself that good progress was already being made on the assignment to commence preventive maintenance. He took him to behind the hostels where grass slashing was in progress. Trenches were being dug and there was dust everywhere. The headmaster nodded. Very soon this messy eyesore would pave way for a new look school with beautiful gardens and clean surroundings.

Next, he took him to the classroom blocks where mopping and scrapping of walls was going on. They also toured the toilets and there too, work was starting.

In thirty minutes, the tour was over and Moses felt certain that he had successfully impressed the headmaster on the assignment so far. He had even sacrificed his Saturday in order to make sure that the exercise went on smoothly. These, he felt, were the credentials that would be considered at the time to select the new headmaster.

Something still tugged at his conscience. His illicit affairs with school girls were going to be an obvious obstacle if they entered the public domain. But he was making steady progress in ending these. So far, he had ended eight illicit affairs with his pupils and was remaining with only seven. Of these, Maria was proving to be the most difficult to cut off. Whenever he invited her to discuss the dissolution of their affair, they always ended up in bed. He had tried to end it three times already.

Moses parted company with the headmaster after assuring him that he would transform the environment to standard. The headmaster walked back to his office. As he walked, he watched the buildings. They were looking terrible at this stage, much worse in fact, but that was because initial works had to be done. Soon the school would be shining.

Jefferson then caught sight of a second teacher that quiet Saturday afternoon rushing towards the dining hall area. He whistled after him.

“Nawa, what are you doing here today, on a Saturday?” Jefferson inquired.

“Well, I am on my way to collect the budget and plans from the school cook. You see sir, I took the assignment you gave me on pupils’ meals very seriously and I am ready to sacrifice this Saturday in order to complete the exercise.”

“It sounds good,” said Jefferson.

“In fact, I have made wide consultations on this issue and I have sat with pupils’ representatives as well as the kitchen staff. We are heading somewhere. My assurance is that I will raise the school meals to standard.”

Jefferson smiled. He smiled because each time he saw Nawa, he was always in a jacket regardless of the weather. He said good bye and headed straight to his office.

Jefferson usually utilized the quiet Saturday mornings to catch up on work that had remained unattended to during the week. He also used the mornings to reflect on his personal life as well.

Just as he was about to enter his office, he found yet a third teacher waiting to see him.

“Good morning Juma, what are you doing here today, on a Saturday?” he asked.

“I took my assignment on finding ways of stopping teacher-pupil relationships very seriously. So I came to see you in order to present to you my method of doing so.”

Jefferson smiled. He invited Juma into his office. Both sat down and Jefferson asked, “So what have you got for me?”

Quickly, Juma produced a document and slid it across to Jefferson across the table.

“Is this my report already?” he asked.

“No sir. That is the tool that I shall use to get the data that shall indicate who must be targeted for reform.”

“This looks like a questionnaire,” said Jefferson, flipping through the pages.

“A post-survey analysis of the responses will indicate qualities in respondents who appear pre-disposed to the traits under scrutiny,” replied Juma, spluttering terminology that he had been carefully coached to use by Violet.

Jefferson nodded his head.

“With your permission, I shall distribute the questionnaire to every teacher at this school.”

“You got it.”

“Then I shall leave that one in your hands for you to fill in. Since you are not being examined in this regard, your answers will only help me as a control mechanism.”

In an instant, Juma flew out of the office. Jefferson threw the questionnaire into his drawer, preferring to deal with it later. He shifted his attention to the in tray and began by approving requests for petty cash. He then turned his attention to leave applications. He approved two, and turned down two.

* * * * *

Moses was having trouble trying to convince Maria that the light complexioned woman wearing a mini skirt and sitting on his bed was his aunt. Maria had turned up at his house unexpected at around midnight.

“Err... sweetheart... this is my aunt,” said Moses to no one in particular. The two women eyed each other suspiciously, each assuming the other to be Moses’ aunt being referred to.

Maria was concerned that she had found Moses alone with his scantily dressed, beer smelling aunt in the bedroom. She knew that there were indeed such aunts in families, but Moses had never mentioned anything to her. Maria also noticed that Moses’ aunt was staring unhappily at her.

Because Moses had tried in the recent past to end his relationship with her, Maria decided not to cause trouble with questions. This drunken aunt of his could influence him to leave her for good. She needed to get her onto her side. She wasn’t sure how.

Cynthia on the other hand was unhappy with the way Moses’ aunt was staring at her. Moses had said she was his aunt, so she was his aunt. Otherwise she could have corrected him. Cynthia noticed that Moses’ aunt looked a bit too young to be an aunt. She would be better placed as a niece.

Cynthia had no intention of seeking clarification on the matter. The last thing that she wanted was for Moses’ aunt to shout “prostitute” at that hour. That would attract a serious gathering of a crowd in the teachers’ compound, which would be followed by a guaranteed clothes stripping and beating.

“Sweetheart, where will your aunt sleep?”

Chapter 8

Where were you born?

Hospital/ health center

Bush

Brothel

Grandfather’s hut

Headmaster Jefferson scanned through the list of answers on Juma’s questionnaire. After listening to Juma as he introduced his questionnaire, his confidence in acting on it had grown. He was curious to know what exactly Juma would be looking for, and how he would interpret the answers. A quick scan through it had showed that it was well arranged. Now Jefferson wanted to answer it and get it out of the way.

This particular question wasn’t wrong in itself, just awkward. It appeared to have taken a sudden twist from the earlier questions which he had answered happily enough. He had written “55” in the gap where he was supposed to indicate his age. He had also answered questions to do with his family and education background. He quickly ticked “Hospital/ healthy center” and then looked at the next question.

Were you ever taught by a female teacher?

Yes

No

He ticked "Yes."

How big was your favorite female teacher's bosom?

Tiny

Medium

Massive

Jefferson was alarmed. He desperately looked for "No idea" but it was not there. If he ticked "massive", someone would interpret it as an attempt to justify the huge size of his wife's bosom. If he ticked "tiny" it would appear as though he was regretting his wife's bosom size. He ticked "medium".

How best would you describe a school girl's buttocks?

Soft

Hard

Jelly-like

Jefferson was bewildered. Whichever answer he ticked would raise questions regarding how he knew what a school girl's buttocks would feel like. He had decided to leave the question unanswered when he realized that he had earlier signed that he would answer all questions truthfully to the best of his knowledge. He looked at the question again and jiggled with "soft" and "jelly-like" in his mind. In protest, he ticked "hard."

The next question startled him.

When looking at school girls, do you tickle your private parts?

"This is a damn disrespectful way of enforcing school ethics," Jefferson muttered to himself as he looked for "No". He noticed in anger that the only answers available were "a bit", "enough" and "too much". He ticked "a bit."

How often do you fantasize about sleeping with school girls?

A bit

Enough

Too much

He did not like this questionnaire at all, but he still had sworn to answer it. In order to sound consistent, he ticked "a bit" again.

He looked at the next question.

Which girl type do you often fantasize about?

Slim

Fat

None of the above

In a hurry, he ticked "none of the above" before it disappeared from the damn questionnaire. It was only then that he realized that he had walked into a trap. His answer was not at all consistent with his previous answers. He furiously started to erase his answer with a rubber in order to make his responses appear consistent by ticking "fat". His answer stubbornly refused to go away and he only succeeded in making the paper dirty. He knew that this would only make him look unreliable. In fury, he hurled the questionnaire back into his drawer.

* * * * *

IT was a few minutes before dinner preparations were due to start that same Saturday that Nawa arrived with two men in blue overalls. The men were carrying a black bag each.

“Which pot has been giving you problems?” Nawa asked the cook. The cook pointed to a large electric pot in between two other pots.

Turning to the two men in blue overalls, Nawa said, “Alright. Can you get down to work. Check all the electric problems and fix them.”

“Yes boss,” the two men responded.

“But I think your men should wait until dinner is prepared first. The pupils will start making noise if we delay again today,” observed the cook.

“Look old man, I have the authority here. You have been sitting on this problem for a long time. In fact, I should charge you for this negligence.”

The cook nodded and then took a seat in the corner of the kitchen.

“Alright guys, get to work,” Nawa ordered the two men.

The first man opened his bag and removed some tools from there. He then positioned himself in between the two large pots, kneeling under the faulty one to make accessibility easier as Nawa nodded his head with satisfaction that work had finally started.

“It is a simple matter,” he announced as he poked his screw driver into some hidden point under the pot, and found himself thrown violently to the ground by the strong current. He lay in that same position panting as the others watched in horror.

“Maybe switch the electricity supply to the pot off first,” offered the cook looking worried.

“Yes,” agreed the second man, standing next to Nawa.

“No,” the first man protested, getting up off the floor.

He stood up and then looked at the pot again, then at his fellow electrician and then at the pot yet again.

“Zulu you fix the pot, I need to urinate first,” the first man said to the second.

“No Chola, you must do it. I have diarrhea,” the second answered.

The two stared at each other, each waiting for the other to fix the problem.

“I am not touching that pot again,” said the first man.

Nawa cleared his throat and said, “Maybe the two of you should divide yourselves so that this job finishes quickly. One of you should go outside the kitchen to switch off power...”

Before Nawa could finish, the two men were scrambling against each other trying to force themselves past the door to carry out the latest suggestion.

“These boys are experts. They know their job very well. They will fix everything here. You will see,” Nawa said to the cook, trying to reassure him with a forced weak smile.

“Nawa my friend, these boys do not know what they are doing. They will only burn themselves up.”

“And how would you, a cook, know this?”

“I had been a school cook for a primary school for ten years before upgrading to being a secondary school cook. Now I am cook here at a respected mission school. My ambition is to be a cook at the university. I have experience and I know that the problem will be solved only if you replace that pot with a new one.”

“That will be expensive. It is much cheaper for these boys to fix it and then I shall remain with a balance from the budget. I know what I am doing.”

“Where did you get these boys from? Why didn’t you just bring in a company to do the same repairs?” asked the cook.

“These boys are from the compound nearby. I know them well. They have made many repairs in the compound. They are very cheap compared to a company. These will only need money for drinking. Then I can keep the rest of the money for my usage. I need to buy seed for my new garden and I also need to drink from that new place in town.”

“Nawa be careful. Your ambitions are fine but the way you want to achieve them is not good. The school has released money so use it to solve this long standing problem.”

“I am here to solve the problem. In case you haven’t seen, I am here to solve the same problem that you have been sitting on for ages.”

“If these boys know what they are doing, where are they now? Maybe they have run away.”

Nawa waved his hand dismissively. He then walked to the window and then pointed outside.

“They are up on the main supply pole. They want to cut power first. I am telling you, these boys are pure experts...”

There was a gigantic, deafeningly loud bang from the same direction that Nawa was pointing. Both he and the cook scampered out of the kitchen in order to see what had caused the explosion. From a distance, they could see fiery sparks emanating from a giant ball of fire up the power transmission lines. The whole school was instantly plunged in total darkness. Nawa looked under the transmission lines in time to see the two electricians getting off the ground and scampering into the darkness away from the scene.

Chapter 9

By Tuesday afternoon, Headmaster Jefferson was sure that he would succumb to a heart attack, and then began hoping that he would but then began to fear that he might not.

“What were you thinking Nawa?” he demanded.

“I am sorry sir. But I will clean up sir. I am truly sorry,” said Nawa.

“Do you know the cost of the disaster? Well, let me break it down for you. We lost two days due to the demonstration by the pupils. The kitchen was closed because of no power and the school shall have to foot the bills to repair all the property that was damaged. All the smashed windows shall have to be fixed, not to mention the original problems of the damaged pots.”

“I understand sir.”

“That is not all. There is also the huge cost of fixing the transmission lines that you burned up, including the transformer. The electricity company has refused to replace any of that and they want us to bear the costs of repairs.”

Nawa shook his head regrettably. The headmaster then removed his glasses and then took a sip of water from a glass on his table.

“You may return to your class Nawa,” said the headmaster.

Nawa had just left the office when a group of protesting teachers entered the headmaster’s office.

“What is it this time?” he asked the angry teachers.

“We are angry because of this,” said Teacher Mulenga, waving a document in the headmaster’s face. “What does the idiot intend to do with these answers?”

“Well,” began Jefferson slowly “it was a directive from the board to try to root out the growing incidences of teacher-pupil relationships. The answers will be examined and will indicate how best to tackle the problem.”

“What does my wife’s buttock size have to do with school ethics?” he asked.

“Also there was a question on how many times I masturbate in a week. Is that a new method of enforcing ethics?” added another teacher.

“Well,” replied Jefferson, “I agree that some of the questions were not very respectfully phrased. But please fellow teachers, do not frustrate this exercise. Let us not lose the focus of the exercise.”

“Sir, that idiot just wants to know our sexual habits. What about his? What about his sleeping with that UN researcher while his wife is heavily pregnant?” shouted yet another teacher. Jefferson took another sip from his glass. He then cleared sweat off his forehead with a brown handkerchief.

“Please fellow teachers, do not take this personal, the answers will be treated with confidentiality.” he counseled.

“Sir, he asks us to indicate our names on page one. How confidential can you say that is?”

“Alright I have taken note of your concerns. As you go out, please ask Juma to come and see me immediately,” concluded the headmaster.

“Also tell him that none of us will answer question 23,” said Mulenga as they walked out.

Jefferson shook his head. He took yet another sip of water and then picked up his phone. He dialed a number.

“Hello,” a female voice answered.

“Hello, may I please talk to the board chairman?” asked Jefferson.

“In connection with?”

“In connection with a vacant senior position at this school.”

“Is that you Mr. Jefferson?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, I didn’t recognize your voice. Do you have flu or something?”

“Yes.”

“Please hold on for the chairman, Mr. Jefferson.”

As he was waiting for the chairman to come to the phone, Jefferson saw Juma walk into his office.

“You called for me sir?” Juma asked.

“Yes Juma, it is with regard to your questionnaire. Your fellow teachers are protesting,” replied Jefferson, still holding the phone against his ear.

“But I thought it was explained to them before distribution.”

"They feel that it invades their privacy. Let me assure you Juma, they are furious with you."

"Were they specific with the offending questions?"

"Yes. Question 23 for example."

"What does the question say?"

Jefferson turned the pages of the questionnaire and read out the question aloud to him.

"Have you and your partner been licking each other's private parts of late?"

"What?" The voice on the other end of the phone connection yelled. Jefferson jerked up.

"Sorry, I was not asking you, Board Chairman."

"Yes you were!"

"It is a misunderstanding sir," tried Jefferson, sweat falling all over his forehead.

"I heard you clearly. You asked me, "Have you and your partner been licking each other's private parts of late?" Are you denying it?"

"I admit that I said that sir, but..."

"Yes just admit it. Can I ask you something Jefferson?"

"Yes sir."

"Have you been spying on me and my wife?"

"No sir, it is the..."

"Then if you want your pension, you must explain to me how you knew what goes on behind closed doors in my bedroom."

Jefferson was now shivering like a leaf.

* * * * *

On exactly the day that Moses was planning to inform Maria about his decision to finally end their affair for good, she informed him that she was pregnant with his child.

Moses was very horrified.

"But you told me that you were using contraceptives," he yelled at her thoughtlessly.

"Yes I was," replied Maria, "And yet I am pregnant."

"Are you hundred percent sure that it is mine?" inquired Moses.

"Of course, there is no one else."

"What about those boys you study with at night in the classrooms? Have you tried pinning the pregnancy on one of them?"

"As a teacher, I expect you to know that studying together does not result in pregnancy."

Moses at once realized how much trouble he had put himself into. If this news reached the headmaster, he would certainly lose his job, what with the ongoing campaign to end teacher-pupil affairs. He was not ready to marry. And even if he was, he would never think of marrying Maria.

"Can we abort it?" he asked her.

"What?" shouted Maria. "Do you want me to die?"

"No, that is not what I meant. But I think you should have been more careful."

"You should not have pulled down your pants in the first place," protested Maria. Moses was silent.

“Do you love me?” she asked him.

：“Yes I do,” replied Moses without conviction.

“Then marry me.”

“What?”

“Marry me.”

“No Maria, I think that you are too fast.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, there is still school for you if we abort...”

“I am not aborting anything. So let us forget school. School is finished for me.”

“Then just go home and then we can discuss the issue after the child is born.”

“Do I look stupid to you, Moses?”

“Look Maria, we have to be careful now...”

“If you think you can pull a fast one on me, you are mistaken my dear. I am not falling for that sick joke.”

“That is all I am prepared to do, Maria. It is either you take it or you leave it. If you need support money, I shall do it fully. Marriage is not by force.”

“Today you tell me that marriage is not by force? Are you not the same man telling me that you will climb the highest mountain for me each time you wanted to sleep with me? Aren’t you the one who was shivering with lust when undressing me?”

“This meeting is over Maria. Now leave.”

“This is what we shall do, Moses. On Saturday, you and I are going to Lusaka to see my parents and announce our marriage to the elders. Other formalities will follow. That is my position.”

“Are you joking?”

“It is either that or I shall go and inform the headmaster about this.”

Moses was now shivering all over.

Chapter 10

The crowing of a cock at around four o’clock in the morning woke Nawa from a deep sleep. He opened his eyes and found himself on an unfamiliar bed. He rubbed his eyes and tried to remember where he was. He looked around him and noticed the four brick walls that made up this tiny congested room. A loose wire on which were hung clothes ran from one end of the room to the other. His memory only came back after moving his hand and landing it on another human body next to him. He jerked and then saw Stella sleeping naked next to him and snoring loudly. Finally he vaguely remembered the drinking party of the previous night. But he couldn’t remember how he had found himself doing this.

Nawa got off the bed and put on his underwear, trousers, shirt and jacket and then headed towards the door. He looked for the key in the darkness but he could not find it. Although the door was locked, all it needed was a hard pull on its handle. The handle dislocated from the door and the screws spilled all over the

floor. Nawa threw the handle onto the bed next to Stella, kicked the door open and then marched outside.

Nawa began to worry about what he was going to tell his wife when he got home. He knew that he was carrying a strange perfume on his body and therefore no story would work. If only he could get home before she woke up, he would rush to the bathroom and take a quick bath. At least then he would erase the evidence. These thoughts heightened his speed as he walked in the early morning darkness towards home. A few early risers were on their way to work but Nawa paid no attention to them. Eventually he began to run home. How he appeared to onlookers as he ran while his old three piece jacket flapped in the air was the least of his worries.

He reached his house, feeling exhausted and breathless. He checked for signs of life but there was none. The lights were all off and it meant that everyone was asleep. He quickly reached the door, put the key in the keyhole and slowly turned it without making any noise. The door opened quietly and he let himself into the dark sitting room. He closed the door behind him and with a smile, he sighed in relief. He removed his shoes and then began to tiptoe into the room.

"You are finally here," his wife said belligerently while standing right in his way with her arms akimbo.

* * * * *

"I know that the girl we found at your house was not your aunt," said Cynthia, sitting across Moses' desk in his tiny office at the back of the Mathematics department. Moses did not reply.

"You wanted to sleep with me but you did not know that your girlfriend was also there, right?"

"It's none of your business Cynthia."

"You are wrong about that. You have pressed a wrong button."

"What do you want Cynthia?"

"I want compensation."

"Are you crazy? You are just a prostitute that I picked in the bar. What compensation are you entitled to?"

"I discovered that I am pregnant and you are responsible."

Moses felt his head spinning. Already he had to contend with Maria's pregnancy.

"Look you prostitute. Just find the man responsible. You sleep with a lot of men every night. What makes you think I am responsible?"

"I just know. We can go for a test if you are refusing."

Moses got off his seat. He stretched his hands and then said, "So, what do you want from me?"

"You must marry me..."

"No, no, no Cynthia. Do not even think about that."

"Why not?"

"People will be mocking me that I married a prostitute."

"But you slept with me without any problems."

"Look, I am preparing to marry someone else now, so forget that marriage line."

"Alright," said Cynthia as she got off the seat. She walked towards the door.

“Where are you going?” demanded Moses.

“I am going to see your headmaster. Maybe he will understand.”

“Please Cynthia, can we talk quietly? It has not come to that. Come and sit down. This matter does not involve the headmaster. We can solve it right here as mature people.”

“I need six months of your salary and I am out of your life.”

* * * * *

“I... err... the car... I had a problem with the car,” blurted Nawa nervously as he faced his angry wife in the doorway of his sitting room.

“A problem with the car? Which car? We do not have a car!” she yelled at him.

“A car’s friend... a friend’s car was asking for my help.”

“What do you know about cars?”

“Sweetheart it is not what you think...”

“Oh so you now know what I am thinking?”

“Let us not wake up our lovely children...”

“I do not care!” she shouted on top of her voice. “Let them wake up. If anything, let the entire neighborhood wake up. Let them know what a useless neighbor they live next to!”

“The school function... it lasted long... way into the night... people couldn't stop dancing.”

“Oh now it is no longer the car but the school function? Let us hear it.

“It was both the car and the function. I pleaded with them to end it but it went on and on until a few minutes ago. I came straight here from the function.”

“I hear you. Right now, I want you and me to go to the headmaster and find out why the function went on the whole night.”

“No, no. Do not involve the headmaster. He was not aware of the function.”

“The headmaster was not aware of a function in his own school?” the wife shouted.

“He... he... was not invited.”

“Not invited to a function within his school?”

“He was in the toilet when they were sticking his invitation on the notice board.”

Nawa’s wife let out a mock laugh. Then she said, “I may not have gone far in my education but I know that it is not possible to hold a school function without the knowledge of the headmaster. Where did you sleep?”

“I didn't sleep, I was at the function.”

“Who else was there?”

“Moses. We can go and ask him right now,” replied Nawa, feeling certain that Moses would cover him.

“Moses? That promiscuous bachelor? The one who impregnates school girl after school girl? Only the two of you attended your so-called function? No wonder.”

“There were many others but I have forgotten all of them.”

“At forty-nine, you still behave like a teenager. When will you grow up? Your friends are busy building houses for their families whereas you drink every cent you lay your hands on. Will you ever grow up? What sort of curse is this?”

“I simply lost touch with time... I am sorry. It will never happen again. I promise.”

“Oh save your breath. You have made that promise many times.”

Nawa looked down in shame. The wife shouted and shouted.

Finally she said, “Give me money for food right now.”

Nawa breathed a sigh of relief. Usually this was the signal for the end of a fight. He said, “Please sweetheart, check in my jacket pocket. Get everything from there.”

Nawa’s wife calmed down and picked the jacket from the sofa. She began searching in the pockets and then she retrieved something.

“What is this?” she yelled, waving pink, lacy knickers in his face. Nawa froze with shock and horror. He had forgotten to remove Stella’s knickers from his pocket.

“What is this, asshole?” she shouted at him. Nawa was silent. Sweat started running down his armpits.

“I am talking to you, you buttock!” she yelled.

Nawa let out a dry cough but no words came to his mind.

“So you were with a prostitute again, right? What exactly do they give you which I do not? Are you normal or sick? Answer me!”

Nawa scratched his head.

“So this was the function, right? This was the car problem, right?”

“I... I... I can explain.”

“Aren’t you even ashamed of opening your mouth? How do you think you can explain this?”

“This... it... This is a terrible mistake,” explained Nawa. “It must be that idiot of a clothes seller. Today he brought gents and ladies underwear. I bought that one for you because of the great love that I have for you.”

Nawa’s wife clapped her hands and shook her head. She said, “You bought for me a used one? One that is torn in the middle? One that is dirty and whose elastic is almost gone?”

“Then he must have sold me Mrs. Daka’s knickers by accident. I found the two talking in the staff room.”

“Listen to me you scrotum. I am fed up with all this rubbish. I am leaving with all my children and you can keep your house. Bring in one of your prostitutes. Let her try because I have failed.”

Chapter 11

Moses woke up from a deep sleep that Monday morning feeling thoroughly refreshed. He knew that the headmaster would announce this successor that morning. He was very determined that it would turn out to be he. He made a silent prayer and then got off his bed. He then took a long bath, brushed his teeth and shaved. Afterwards he selected a black pair of trousers and a blue shirt. As he was getting dressed, his mind went through the events in the period of the succession battle. Along the way he had managed to kick out the habit of flirting with school girls. He had accompanied Maria to Lusaka to see her parents and had agreed to

marry her. They had charged him for the pregnancy as well. All that had contributed towards his staying away from school girls.

Also, from the time Cynthia had turned up at his school demanding to see the headmaster, Moses had dropped his habit of picking prostitutes.

These, according to him, were the only minor blemishes- in addition to the minor issues associated with the Preventive Maintenance program—on his otherwise flawless career. He still had his work experience, very good performance and of course, his bachelor's degree. He was very sure that he would be the chosen one that day.

His conviction grew when he considered his two main opponents Nawa and Juma. Both were of inferior academic standing, he reasoned. As for Nawa, there was no way the board was going to appoint an irresponsible, uneducated, certified drunkard to hold the most powerful post at the school. He smiled when he recalled the anger on the headmaster's face as he responded to Nawa's failure to manage an extremely simple task of improving pupils' meals, only to plunge the school into an electricity crisis for two days. That had resulted into a riot by pupils with property worth a lot of money damaged. Among the teachers, it was termed "The Big Bungle".

His attention now turned to Juma. That hypocritical pastor was busy carrying out an adulterous affair with the UN researcher when his wife was heavily pregnant. He had poor social skills and this would make his eligibility to be the next boss a very tall order. It had been rumored that he had once again plunged his fingers into the coffers of his local church to support a personal venture, but the church had decided to handle the issue quietly. And lest anyone forgot, he was the author of that questionnaire which had come to be termed the "Big Sex Expose" among the teachers. The headmaster had seethed with rage in reaction to that piece of pornography that Juma had authored.

In comparison, Moses felt he had beaten the other two candidates hands down. As he left his house to go for work that morning, he felt happy and confident.

* * * * *

As his wife was busy preparing his breakfast that morning, Juma began to think of the most dignified manner in which he was going to celebrate his being appointed as the new boss at school. He did not want to over celebrate as others would think that he was not expecting it and that it had come as a surprise to him. On the other hand, he did not want to under celebrate as it would appear to others that he did not appreciate or fully understand the appointment. He had to find a balanced way.

His wife had selected a blue shirt for him to wear on top of a black pair of trousers. To her, the combination showed authority and confidence.

Juma knew that he would have no worries on his academic standing. His Teaching diploma would do the trick. Why, the previous deputy, Ms Green only had O levels to show for her academic strength, and even these, she had acquired over a period of ten years, writing one subject at a time. In addition to his paper, Juma had good experience and very good work output.

He had stopped his affair with Violet and the two were now just ordinary friends. He believed that he had moral authority to run the school as its head.

Juma knew that his well and expertly conceptualized questionnaire had not been fully accepted by his uncivilized colleagues at school. He attributed the resistance to sheer jealous.

His breakfast was brought. Juma ate slowly, making sure not to let any of the peanut porridge to drip onto his well ironed shirt. His mind then turned to his two opponents, Moses and Nawa.

Juma considered both to be pagans, drunkards and womanizers. As for Moses, he had lamentably failed to manage the very easy task of preventive maintenance. Instead of cleaning up the school, his approach which displayed a total lack of planning had already resulted in the school looking uglier, with trenches dug all over. Pupils had revolted against his style as he had been unable to control the girls.

If somehow the botched school preventive maintenance assignment did not get Moses out of the race, then his legendary affairs with school girls—which had earned him the term “The Chief Taster” among teachers—certainly would. Moses had caused a number of school girls to discontinue with their education after impregnating them. The latest case involving Maria had ended in his agreeing to marry her.

If for some regrettable reason the board still made the mistake of appointing Moses as the new boss, Juma would at once write to the Education ministry headquarters in Lusaka.

Juma then thought of Nawa. He shook his head. His lack of education was in itself a disqualifying factor. As if that was not enough, he had also botched an excellent opportunity presented to him to prove his management ability. Instead of solving the food problem involving pupils, he had only succeeded in inducing a two day blackout which had led to riots in the school. This had almost certainly closed the curtain on what was otherwise a hopeless ambition from the beginning.

Having thus reassured himself that he had won this contest with ammunition to spare, Juma gave his astonished wife a kiss on her cheek and then left for work.

* * * * *

Nawa said a prayer of thanks in advance of his appointment to the position of head as he woke up that morning. He took a long bath and then put on a pair of black trousers. He then picked a white shirt but his wife objected. She gave him the blue shirt instead.

“You look like the new headmaster now,” she said. Nawa gave her a hug.

Their marriage had improved after they had been counseled by elders. Nawa had not touched the bottle in public for three weeks already, and he had done away with whoring as well. It was only the habit of smoking which was proving difficult to break completely.

He was a changed man now and this had been noticed by all. He knew that he had no paper but his years of long loyal service campaigned for themselves. He was the oldest of the three competitors, and the other teachers would find it easier to show him respect as their boss. His work output was very good and his dedication to duty was unquestionable.

Nawa knew that some small mind would refer to his small miscalculation leading to a minor, normal power outage as a dent in his career but he knew that everyone who mattered had already forgotten about it.

Nawa then thought of Moses. Between Moses and his degree, there was no connection. He performed and acted like one who had not seen the inside of the classroom. He could not resist the allure of young flesh and this had completely thrown him off track in his career. Now he was married to Maria, whom he had not wanted to marry in the first place. Before impregnating Maria, he had been in a relationship with Precious. Before Precious he had been with Lillian and Grace at the same time, and before them, there had been Pauline. Pauline had taken over from Jane, who had fallen pregnant and had to be expelled. Jane had earlier replaced Mary. It was no wonder that Moses found it hard to control girl pupils during the preventive maintenance program. He had slept with most of them and they had simply refused to join the laborious exercise. The prefects had tried reporting the resisting girls to Moses, but his hands were tied. As a result the exercise had died a natural death, much to the chagrin of the headmaster.

Nawa then thought of Juma. He felt that Juma was a pretender at church. His true character was that of a thief and an adulterer. He could have fooled some people sometimes, but he was not going to fool all the people all the time.

Nawa felt that Juma had been presented with an opportunity on a silver plate to display his management skills through tackling the teacher-pupil affair scandal. He had botched it right from the start, dreaming up a pornographic method of capturing data instead. The exercise had fallen straight on its face and the headmaster had not protected Juma when teachers had announced their withdrawal from participating in it.

He hugged his wife again and then walked out of the house. He did not want to miss it when the outgoing headmaster announced him as the new boss.

Chapter 12

FINALLY, Thomas Jefferson reached the main point for calling this meeting.

“Fellow teachers, I am so happy to address you this morning. As you are all aware, the board has appointed a new headmaster for our school to replace me. I am glad today to be part of this happy occasion when finally the unveiling of my successor is announced.”

Thomas Jefferson then looked around the table at the teachers. They were all looking curious and appeared geared for the announcement. Jefferson also noticed his three senior teachers in attendance. They were all in blue shirts and black trousers. They also looked very nervous but expectant.

“I want also to thank all of you fellow teachers for your patience and cooperation during the period leading to today.

As you are aware, from here, I am going to address pupils at their Monday morning school assembly. I will announce to them who the new head is. But it will be disrespectful of me to tell them before I tell you.”

The room was very silent.

“We also have visitors amongst us as you can see who have come to witness this occasion too. I start by introducing them:

“On my immediate left is Mr. John Phiri. He is from the Education ministry headquarters in Lusaka.

“Next to him is Miss. Hugh, also from the ministry although she is from the provincial education office here in Kabwe.

“On my right is Dr. Charles Lungu. He is the board chairman of our school.

“And next to our board chairman is Peter Smith. Ladies and gentlemen, I am glad to introduce Peter Smith as our new headmaster.”

