Rebel without a Gun

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Foreword

Rebel without a Gun was first published, under the title *The Prophet*, in 1978 in Kenya, although the circumstances and background of the story are rooted in Uganda under the rule of Idi Amin. Those of us who lived through that period of terrible transformation were deeply affected not only by the misuse of military power but also the inability or unwillingness of most people to make a stand against the regime. Those who found the courage to speak out, like Archbishop Janani Luwum in 1977, paid the ultimate price. Amin was an expert in the old colonial policy of divide-and-rule: exploit the differences, often based on tribal allegiance, between those who might one day be a source of opposition and, as time and opportunity allows, pick them off one by one, until there is nobody left with the power or influence to mount a challenge. Some of those who cheered Amin's takeover later became targets of his death squads.

This novel was written with such thoughts in mind, but it was never intended as a political statement. It is, from start to finish, a story about a young man and his relationships with those around him; someone who feels compelled to speak out against the injustice of a harsh regime in a country (given the mythical name of *Mashariki*) that no longer allows any expression of dissent with the ruling military government. His name is Daniel Lanebi, a clergyman who becomes increasingly isolated from the people around him because of his 'unreasonable' – perhaps suicidal – determination to speak the truth, come what may.

During the writing of this book, a prominent Kenyan churchman, who had dared to condemn the corruption among the ruling elite, was subjected to intimidation and received death threats. Perhaps we should not be surprised at such situations. The Church has always had a 'prophetic' role in society (that is, declaring uncomfortable truths to the rulers and people), and those who take this role seriously are not going to be very popular among the rich and powerful!

Uganda is not mentioned in the novel, but I hope many Ugandan readers will recognise aspects of their country – and their country's history – in these pages. But the story could apply to many places in Africa and beyond, where the cost of opposition to those in power may be imprisonment, torture and death, and where the only effective voice of opposition seems to lie with regional or ethnic groups which do not represent all the people of the land.

This is the sort of circumstance faced by Daniel Lanebi, the central character of this story. Everyone seems to be warning him to shut up or face unpleasant consequences, but how can he keep quiet when, all around him, fear and violence are growing and there seems to be no end to the suffering of his people? And how can he give his support to an opposition movement which is tribally based and which counters violence with more violence? Lanebi's dilemma lies at the heart of this narrative.

Introduction

Uzima Fiction Series

The world of literature stands in a vigorous opposition against the world of reality, to the extent that the world of imagination oftentimes becomes the enemy of the world of reality. Literature seeks to improve on and change the world of reality. This is the reason why we ask, 'What new thing is the writer saying?' when we see a new book being launched by a publisher.

We have so many problems which need the urgent attention of the writer and the social philosopher. When a new writer arrives we want to find out what illumination she or he brings to our problems. Marxists say the duty of the philosopher (and the writer for that matter) is not only to explain the world, but to change it. They ask of the writer his social vision, by which they mean the way the writer portrays forces in conflict, and the way out the writer offers to the extant problems.

I have discussed the Uzima Fiction series with the Managing Editor of Uzima Press, the Reverend Horace Etemesi, and now see that the view of the Christian about literature is not necessarily different from that of the Marxist. The materialist approach to literature by Marxists makes the economic superstructure and the social reality predominate in considerations of the artistic vision; the fundamental meeting point of the Marxist literary theoretician and the Christian literary theoretician is on what literature can do to change the ailing world in which we live. In the Christian worldview the idealism of life after death predominates the considerations of the cartisti vision: 'Our purpose is good fiction; that which can be read without a sense of shame', says the Reverend Horace Etemesi. 'Children in teens do not have to hide the books they are reading when their father arrives because these books are embarrassing. Uzima wants to produce a literature which is sound in moral health and moral issues.'

'This is not a new concern,' says Horace Etemeis. 'Critics have shown this same concern for moral health in literature ever since the classical times. No one entertained writers who lowered the moral tone of society and indeed the dignity of literature, by their fondness for maimed and diseased and low characters.'

Writers of the trivial literature, were said to be dealing with 'rag-bag characters in rag-bag language.' They were said to be picking on the excesses and affectations of man and glamourising them. This same thing could be said of the modern pulp literatures which are peddled on the pavements of modern African cities. Writers of this literature dwell on bedroom scenes, putting special prominence on sex in their compositions. One wonders what time these characters are supposed to work, eat and sleep. The works bound in expensive flossy covers make the modern man appear ridiculous, by giving him insatiable lust for drinks and women of moral turpitude. The writers of pulp literature make the modern man constantly a victim of ridiculous situations, where he has always to lose in the face of challenges.

Paradoxically, the characters in African trivial literature are soundly educated: they are high school people, university graduates, and capable of having a better sense of judgment than the authors give them. And yet they are kept in frivolous squabbles with prostitutes, and indeed made to see excessive drinking as a virtue rather than a malaise. These are the same people who will not want to win when they are entangled in a predicament. They oftentimes submit ruefully to the situations which need correction. It is as if, for these characters, life is impossible to change. We really do not admire them as people, and no parent who reads the pulp literature will want his son to be like these squalid characters.

We may argue that these characters entertain us thoroughly; we do not put the books down when we are reading about the rag-bag characters. And yet it is disappointing that characters who have so great a sense of humour have such little brain when it comes to making decisions. It is for this reason that I keep saying that if we were asked to rewrite some of these books, we would sure want to retain the entertainment. But we

would want the rag-bag characters to be a little more forthright in making their decisions, and seek in a very serious way to improve their lot. For the Christian reader, the main concern in reading literature should be to see how people in trying and tempting situations use their Christian worldview to overcome these situations. This struggle in the individual and in society is seen as the struggle between evil and good. A writer who deals with the struggle between good and evil must not make it too easy for the reader by preaching solutions. We as readers on the other hand should not be dismissive about a literature which portrays moral laxity. I once told the Kenyan readership to get hold of their pulp literature, and actually read them, and then after that throw the books into dustbins. I still believe that we should read the pulp literature first and then tell other readers about strengths and weaknesses of that literature; let us use the literature to demonstrate how evil and good are in perpetual combat. These are my own views, and not of Uzima Press, but I insist that we should seek to see how the writer can criticise society and yet retain his moral sobriety, and this is where the Uzima Fiction Series come in handy.

A work of art has its own rules, its own life, and its own inner dynamics. The sensitive reader has to identify these attributes. The writer, too, must be concerned with rules of composition as well as the message he want to encapsule in the artistic imagery. The image is the vehicle of the message, and this must not be forgotten when we wants to comment on society through artistic composition. The case I want to make for the Uzima Fiction Series is, the book of fiction must be an accomplished work of art first, and then, *only then*, make a vivid comment on society. It is for this reason that I commend the writers who appear in this series who are serious not only in terms of content, but of form, too. They observe the rules of composition to the letter, and yet have important things to say about our societies; they go ahead and show that the message is important, but so is the art of composition. Here they fulfil the requirements proposed by Uzima Press for their fiction series, that one who writes a true novel is that very one who is faithful to his society: you have

something useful to say, but at the same time you hope that you are saying it well. This is as it should be.

Nairobi,
Chris Wanjala, Editorial Adviser,
June 1978.
Uzima Fiction Series.

Chapter One

Daniel Lanebi walked briskly along the gravel path from his house to the white concrete church on the other side of the same compound. It was just before seven o'clock in the morning. The sky was heavy with grey clouds, and the sun could not be seen through the bright shroud covering the craggy peaks of the Chwak mountains in the east. The air was cold and damp; Daniel shivered a little as he walked and pulled up his sweater to cover his neck.

On reaching the side entrance of the church, he took out a key and unlocked the badly-fitting door. A large drop of water from the eaves landed on top of his head; he looked up, wondering whether the roof had leaked during the early morning storm. Inside the vestry, he found it almost as damp as outside, and much darker. He switched on the light, sat down at a small table in one corner of the room, picked up a Bible and opened it.

He started shivering again. A strong draught was blowing under the door into the room. The long rains, which had begun the previous month, had brought with them the coldest weather that Daniel had ever experienced in Etiak or anywhere else in the north of the country. He had lived in Etiak town for nearly three years, as the pastor of St. Thomas' Church, but he had known the town well since childhood as his parents' home was less than twenty kilometres away. He began to read the page in the Bible where he had left the marker, but the words seemed to go through his head without leaving any impression. He closed the Anjeri Bible and opened an English Bible at the same place; it didn't help. He could not focus his mind on the words in front of him. It wasn't because of the cold, Daniel knew – for such weather usually kept him alert when reading or studying. No, it was the shooting during the night which dispersed his concentration.

The gunfire had sounded too close to have come from the army shooting range, which was adjacent to the barracks five kilometres to the northwest of Etiak. Besides, the automatic fire

had come from another direction – or so it had seemed to Daniel, as he lay in bed. His wife, Rebekah, four months pregnant, had clung trembling to him, and he had tried to calm her with his firm touch and with reassuring words: 'It's only soldiers practising, my dear. Probably on a night exercise at their training ground.' Fortunately their two daughters, aged three and five, had slept through the disturbance.

The shots had been fired at about midnight, or a little later. There had been three or four spurts of automatic fire during a ten-minute period. Then the silence of the night had reasserted itself. Without turning any light on, Daniel had felt his way to the kitchen door and looked out; there was nothing to be seen but stars above the motionless silhouettes around. The cicadas and frogs were resuming their nighttime chorus. Daniel returned softly to his bedroom. Rebekah soon fell into a deep sleep but he lay awake, troubled, for two or three hours; eventually it began to rain heavily and the monotonous drumming of the rain on the roof drugged him into a heavy slumber. The rain had stopped before dawn, but the air still felt wet. The sun had not risen high enough to disperse the clouds and dry the atmosphere.

Daniel closed the Bible he had been trying to study and knelt by the chair he had been sitting on. As was his custom, he began his prayers with the Lord's Prayer, speaking the words aloud, pausing after every phrase, allowing the familiar words to strike him in a new way.

'...And lead us not into temptation...But deliver us...' He broke off the prayer as he heard the scrunch-scrunch of footsteps on the path leading to the vestry door. It sounded like one person, hurrying but not running. 'Surely Rebekah would not disturb me now?' Daniel thought irritably. The footsteps grew louder and then stopped at the door of the vestry. There came a soft but urgent knocking. 'Reverend! Reverend!' a hoarse voice called out, obviously not his wife's.

'I am coming,' Daniel replied, assuming a calm voice but feeling anxious. He quickly rose from his knees, rushed to the door and opened it.

Before him stood a small nervous-looking individual. It was Boaz Erasu, a small trader who ran a hardware shop at Empotang, the eastern suburb of Etiak.

'Erasu, it is good to see you,' said Daniel, shaking the man's sweaty hand.

'It's good to see you, reverend,' responded the other, breathlessly.

'Come in, come in, and tell me your news.' Daniel held the vestry door wide-open and his unexpected visitor went in quickly, sitting down on a short bench facing the doorway. He looked at the pastor with staring eyes. He seemed to be shivering.

'You have been running,' remarked Daniel, wondering why Erasu was still feeling the cold.

'Yes, reverend—I mean, no: I have cycled here.'

Daniel noticed sweat stains round the armpits of Erasu's shirt. 'You've cycled fast.'

'As fast as I could.'

'Although there is no church service here on Saturday morning?' Daniel's gentle sarcasm – aimed at someone who rarely, if ever, attended church – was badly timed: he realised this as soon as he looked more closely at his visitor's unsmiling features, a mere moment before Erasu said in a hoarse, subdued voice: 'There were shootings in Empotang last night.'

'Empotang?' Daniel's expression changed from pretended calm to undisguised shock. He had guessed right about the shooting – it had come from the town itself, not the barracks.

'So you never heard the shooting? But everyone in Etiak must have heard.'

'I heard. Tell me what happened.'

'You know Apwulo – the one who owned Empotang Wholesale Stores?'

'Owned? Isn't he still there?'

'Yes, reverend...but he is dead. So is his eldest son, Etumo. Those were the first shootings. Then they went to Apwulo's brother's house in the village – I think you know him, he used to come to your church – '

'Yes, I know him. What –?'

'They dragged him from his bed and shot him in his own garden. Then, after they had searched the house, they went away.'

'They? Who are "they"?'

Erasu looked at the pastor in disbelief; the question seemed too foolish to be anything but a bitter joke.

'The soldiers, of course! As you must know very well, reverend.'

Daniel said nothing, so Erasu continued: 'Who else could it have been?'

'Did you see them?'

Erasu laughed nervously. 'Eeeh! I kept my shutters firmly bolted. I wished to stay alive. But you heard the shooting—it came from automatic rifles. Who else has got such weapons?'

Daniel paused, reluctant to give a frank reply. Then he said: 'It is rumoured that the APA now possess these weapons.'

The initials APA stood for *Asekeri pa Anjeri* – or Soldiers of Anjeri – a tribal guerrilla movement which opposed the southern-based government and its domination over the northern Anjeri tribe. Although an Anjeri himself, Daniel had no sympathy with the narrow tribal motives of the APA and even less sympathy with their violent methods. Also, he felt very reluctant to express any disapproval of the national army which he believed had a right to maintain internal stability within the country. Moreover, his elder brother, Reuben Obwolo, was currently stationed at Etiak barracks. Although this relationship was known by very few people, Daniel felt bound to defend the army against bad reports out of loyalty to his brother. 'It might perhaps have been guerrillas and not the soldiers, Erasu.'

The other man shook his head. 'The women say they saw the uniforms. Anyway it would be crazy for the Asekeri to kill Apwulo.'

'Why?'

Erasu peered at the pastor suspiciously, before replying: 'Well, reverend, because I know – as everyone in Etiak knows – that you are a man of peace, I will answer you.' He leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees. Daniel noticed that

he had an animal-tail, perhaps a lizard's, tied round one wrist. Erasu spoke very quietly: 'I will tell you what I have heard – *heard* I say – I know nothing for sure. But you must swear not to pass this on to anyone else.'

Daniel's face was close to Erasu's and he could smell the stale sweat of the other's unwashed shirt. He did not mind the smell – in his job as pastor this was nothing unusual – but he did not like the tone of Erasu's words. They sounded a little too dangerous for his comfort; he did not wish to be a receiver of rumours, nor a carrier of dangerous information. But his curiosity had been stirred and, he convinced himself, what concerned people living in his parish also concerned him. 'I do not swear, Erasu. But, as a pastor and a Christian, I give you my word.'

'Thank you, reverend: I know you can be trusted. So I will tell you what I have heard. It has been said – but not by me of course – that Apwulo was gun-running for the APA. and that this was why the soldiers shot him and ransacked his shop.'

'And was he gun-running for the guerrillas?'

Erasu chuckled nervously. 'Do I know such things?' He was looking down at the floor, scratching the sole of his left foot as though he had felt a jigger at work. After a while, he looked up and said, as though challenging Lanebi: 'But if Apwulo was doing so, he was a patriot.'

Daniel said simply: 'A patriot to the country?'

'I mean to the tribe. Yes: to our country too. Isn't Anjeri our country?"

'Our country is Mashariki, Erasu.'

Erasu turned his head sharply to one side as a sign of disgust. 'That name – Mashariki – means nothing. It is an invention. We might as well still be called British Tropical Africa.'

Daniel could see that his visitor was suffering from great bitterness over the pervious night's killings, which the trader obviously blamed on the Achwala tribe that dominated the army. He could also sense that the other man knew much more about Apwulo's death than he would be prepared to admit. Daniel, however, did not wish to know any more. As a pastor in

the Episcopal Church of Mashariki he dared not compromise his non-tribal loyalty by getting mixed up in politics. 'I am a pastor, not a politician,' he would tell certain friends who urged him to speak about political matters in his sermons.

But he felt uneasy about his neutral position. Like most people in the region he had felt the increasing insecurity which shrouded Anjeri since President Gwino has come to power in a military *coup d'etat* two years before and, more noticeably, since the formation of the Asekeri pa Anjeri. Daniel had tried to shut his ears to the rumours of killings and counter killings in the rain forests to the south-west of Etiak and along the border with the neighbouring country of Chabon. He had even rebuked his congregation for spreading stories of clashes between army patrols and villagers. He had earnestly preached peace and brotherly love not only from the pulpit of St. Thomas' Church, but also at the monthly services he conducted at Etiak barracks. On countless occasions, he had assured his parishioners that there was nothing to fear, for 'nothing can separate us from the love of God.'

Now that killings had occurred in his own parish, Daniel found his own assurance shaken. Events seemed to be closing in on him, and there was fear in his heart.

'Did you come to discuss politics, Erasu?" he asked at last.

Erasu rose to his feet suddenly and stamped his foot in annoyance. 'Eeeeh, reverend! I am forgetting why I came. I was asked to bring you to the families.'

'So soon?'

'It is safe now. The soldiers are not around.'

'I wasn't thinking of that.'

'It was Apwulo's daughter, Rachel, who asked; she was very insistent.'

Daniel nodded, recalling Rachel's conversation and baptism a few months earlier. He wondered how her new faith would cope with the double loss of her father and eldest brother.

'It was good of you to do as she asked. Thank you. I will go immediately.'

'I will accompany you there, reverend,' replied Erasu respectfully, with no hint of his earlier secretive tone.

They left the vesry and walked in silence towards Lanebi's house, where Erasu had left his bicycle.

'Are we going in your car?' Erasu asked, cautiously.

Daniel had a noisy and battered Volkswagen Beetle, which an aged white missionary had given him on retirement; but he preferred to use his bicycle for short journeys within Etiak—especially in the present circumstance, when he wished his arrival to be quiet and inconspicuous.

'I will cycle with you. Wait a moment, while I tell my wife I am going out.'

* * *

Ten minutes later the two men were cycling abreast down the old, narrow tarmac road which led eastwards from the centre of Etiak to the suburb of Empotang. The tarmac had been laid by the colonial administration twenty years earlier in the hope that Eitiak would expand into a large town and trading centre, linked by a fast road to the southern capital of the French-speaking country of Chabon, which lay to the north east. But the often discussed road-link had never been constructed—the present tarmac road petered out into a dry-season track less than a kilometre beyond Empotang. In the present political climate, with President Gwino openly accusing the Chabonese president of supplying guns to the Anjeri guerrillas, it seemed unlikely that the plan to construct the road would be revived in the near future. In spite of the opening of a copper and cobalt mine in the area, Etiak had remained an undeveloped town, and Empotang, originally a separate village, seemed no more than an ambitious shanty.

Lanebi and Erasu passed a blackened cotton ginnery on their left. There was no clear dividing line between central Etiak and Empotang, but the old ginnery was often regarded a marking the boundary. Beyond it, the buildings along the road became increasingly drab and dirty. The bars, the brothels, the wholesale and retail shops all displayed the same indifference to outward appearance; they served their own community, who knew where

to get what they needed and did not have to be wooed by fresh paint and slogan-filled advertisements. Empotang, unlike the rest of Etiak, had kept its sense of community. The people there did not want to lose their identity in the larger town. Two or three prosperous traders, of whom the dead man Apwulo had been one, had resisted the temptation to buy more attractive premises in Etiak high street. Some of his neighbours explained that it was because he was a 'loyal Empotang man'. Other people, mainly shopkeepers in Etiak, claimed that in Empotang Apwulo could more easily cover up his profitable smuggling with his friends across the border.

The tarmac was so broken up at one point that Lanebi and Erasu got off their bicycles and wheeled them along, over the cracks and potholes. Already they could hear the wailing of mourning women. Outside a bar a fat woman whose bulging thighs overflowed the small stool she sat upon, was chanting a traditional Anjeri song for warriors lost in battle. No one was listening to her. No one else seemed to be on the street except an old leprous beggar, who silently reached out a fingerless hand towards the two cyclists. Daniel gave him thirty cents before passing on up the street. Erasu glanced at the pastor scornfully; and said, without sounding scornful, 'He will spend it on drink, reverend.'

Daniel did not reply. He walked on silently towards the shop from which the wailing of women could be heard. He noticed two fearful faces staring down from a second storey window; the faces disappeared suddenly when he stared back.

The crowd gathered outside Apwulo's shop numbered well over a hundred. They entirely blocked the tarmac road and filled the alley on one side of the building. Most of the wailing came from inside the shop, but there were several women weeping and lamenting outside. The men folk were strangely subdued, speaking amongst themselves in quiet, bewildered tones, too shocked to express the anger and hatred in their hearts.

Most of the crowd were looking inwards towards the shop, as if they were expecting someone bringing the latest news to appear in the doorway. Hardly anyone noticed the arrival of Erasu and

Lanebi, and those who did showed no special recognition for the vicar of Etiak, even though he was wearing his clerical collar. Daniel felt like a stranger – an unwelcome stranger.

Erasu leaned his bicycle against a concrete post and strode aggressively towards the outside of the crowd. 'Let us through!' he cried, pushing a shoulder between the backs of two men. He signalled to Daniel who followed uncertainly. The noise from the crowd had increased; a man, holding a bottle in the air, had begun cursing and the women's wailing had reached a new climax. Two young men near the centre of the crowd were now arguing loudly about the hour when the shootings had taken place. Erasu and Lanebi shouldered their way through the unyielding close-packed bodies. Erasu shouted above the noise: 'Get out of the way! Move aside! The pastor has arrived.' Gradually, the crowd became quiet, the silence spreading from the centre, where Erasu was yelling, to the edges, like a ripple in a pool. The people nearest the doorway made a passage for Erasu and Lanebi, who walked the last few steps without having to jostle.

The crowd was hushed now. Some women were still sobbing to one side, echoing the lamentation from inside the house. The name 'Lanebi' was being whispered around. Otherwise, it was disturbingly quiet outside the shop. Daniel wondered whether this was a silence of respect or a silence of resentment. Erasu had slipped away into the crowd but Daniel did not turn around to look for him. He did not wish to look into the faces of the people, the faces that could be accusing---' you who so often preach peace and love, what help can your peace bring to the dead and bereaved?' He looked straight ahead at the shop entrance; the door, broken and splintered, hung loosely from the top hinge. He could see nothing inside, but the wailing inside continued unabated. He paused for a brief unspoken prayer. It seemed that there were no words of comfort within him.

The face of Rachel, the teenage daughter of Apwulo, appeared at the doorway. Her cheeks were wet. She managed a weak smile and said, 'We are glad you have come, reverend.'

Encouraged, Daniel went inside.

Chapter Two

The Republic of Mashariki had a history which in many respects was typical of tropical Africa. In the great imperial carve-up, the colonial sword sliced through tribes and ethnic groups in cutting out the boundaries for the newly created territories; these new boundaries forced together various tribes, whether hostile or friendly to each other. In the British territories the *Pax Britannica* enforced a tolerance, though not a love, between the different ethnic groups.

British Tropical Africa, renamed Mashariki at Independence, had been subject to the same painful process. The areas enclosed two traditionally hostile, and ethnically distinct, tribes: the Achwala in the south and the Anjeri in the north. The small river, which the colonial map makers had found convenient to use as a border between the British territory and the French territory lying to the northeast, cut across the region occupied by the Anjeri and thus made a number of northern clans foreigners to their tribesmen on the south of the river.

The British administrators established their influence in the deep south of Achwala territory. They governed indirectly where possible, mainly through the powerful and arrogant warrior-chieftains who exercised absolute rule over their Achwala clans. The Anjeri were relatively neglected by the colonial authorities, although western education had been established in the north by the missionaries before the turn of the century. Eventually, resentment built up over the way the British seemed to favour the southern tribe. Anjeri leaders complained but took no action; theirs was a traditionally peaceful, passive tribe which had rarely taken up arms against other tribes. Then it became known that some Achwala clans had driven out the inhabitants of several Anjeri villages in the midwest of the country and settled there. It was said that these Achwala were armed with rifles. It was assumed by the Anjeri that the British supported this theft of their land and villages. A hastily gathered army of Anjeris attacked the Achwala settlers and wiped out a number of families. In the confusion, two British officials were also killed.

The response to these killings was fierce. The British, lacking sufficient troops of their own at the time, sent off two Achwala chiefs with their clan armies to quell the rebellion and make an example of those who dared to kill officers of His Majesty's Government. The vengeance they took was out of all proportion to the crimes of the Anjeri, hundreds of whom were brutally killed. Eventually peace was restored with the belated arrival of British soldiers. The Achwala warriors returned south, but the disputed area remained in the hands of their chiefs. The Anjeri had never regained their lost villages and they had never forgotten this.

Since that bloody confrontation, the two tribes had rarely come to blows with each other. *Pax Britannica* had outlawed tribal war. But the presence of the British was not the only reason for the continuing peace. Between the two majority tribes lived, quietly and inconspicuously, three small tribes, geographically separating the Achwala and Anjeri right across the country, except in the extreme west, where the disputed villages were situated.

The country's transition to internal self-government and then to full independence had been a generally peaceful process. The optimistic days before and immediately after Uhuru were like strong beer to the various tribal leaders.

A national patriotism was experienced in the shared desire to see the end of British rule. People of every clan and tribe sang the same national anthem, cheered the same flag. Each political party included the word 'Unity' in its title. Tribalism, they said, would be forever buried.

The Anjeri had by then recovered much of their lost pride. They had diligently educated their sons and produced administrators, traders and politicians of the first rank. They were confident that they would play a leading role – at least equal to that of their old enemies, the Achwala – in the future development of Mashariki.

The central minority tribes had effectively played the role of a buffer state, and they believed that, after independence, this role would develop into that of mediator between the two big tribes

when differences arose. Their smallness and weakness were a guarantee of the friendship – or at least the tolerance – of their powerful neighbours.

Strangely enough the first Prime Minister of Mashariki, James Okaho, was a member of one of these tribes. Perhaps his appointment was not so strange, for the political parties were based on tribal loyalties and neither the Achwala nor the Anjeri members of Parliament would elect a premier from the other tribe.

Prime Minister (later President) Okaho pressed ahead with the educational and commercial development of the newly independent state. He was a lawyer by profession and was not much interested in military matters. Perhaps he was genuinely aware of the expansion of the armed forces under the guiding hand of David 'Byelo' Gwino, his Minister of Defence; or, if he knew about it, lacked the power to reverse the process.

Gwino, with the strong-armed guidance of his fellow Achwala, Major-General Suleiman Sekio, trebled the size of the army in less than five years. Most of the senior officers and two-thirds of the ranks were Achwala by the time that President Okaho was overthrown.

The *coup d'etat* which made Gwino president was almost predictable. The takeover was swift, well organised and almost bloodless. Okaho, on a goodwill tour of North America at the time, did not try to return home. He accepted a Visiting Professorship in Political Science offered him by one American university.

President Gwino had an engaging smile. He seemed to enjoy his position in a way that the serious-minded, unsmiling ex-president had never done. He smiled broadly at the members of parliament who applauded him enthusiastically after his speech promising the 'restoration of true democracy, unbiased justice and unfettered freedom.' He smiled for the cameramen when he took a beautiful Anjeri girl as his wife (his first three wives were not at the ceremony). He smiled at the ambassador of the country which had handed over a fleet of obsolescent fighter planes. His most triumphant smile was given when the mayor

of the capital city, Port Thomson, unveiled an enormous plaque that announced the city's new name, 'Byelo'. This was also President Gwino's nickname; it meant, in his language, a broad-bladed knife.

* * *

Daniel did not return home until two o'clock. He felt and looked exhausted, and his wife Rebekah was wise enough not to question him. She handed him a mug of tea, and, without a smile, he took it and drank it up in a few long draughts. She refilled the mug immediately from a kettle of thick, milky tea and stirred in three spoonfuls of sugar.

Again Daniel drank the tea without comment.

Rebekah sat down on the sofa, opposite her husband.

'Where are the children?' he asked at last, his eyes brightening.

'Sarah is playing with Mrs. Okoth's children. Margereta is with Damali in the bedroom.' Damali was their twelve-year-old niece who had lived with them for the past three years, helping with the household chores when she was not at school.

'Is Damali missing school?' Daniel asked, looking at his watch.

'It is a holiday today. The President's birthday.'

'Aaah, yes. I had forgotten.'

'I shall bring in Margereta.'

'No – it's all right.' Daniel rose from his chair and sat down on the sofa beside his wife. He took her hands in his and stroked them with his thumbs – a sign that he wished to tell her something important. She knew it would be about his visit to Empotang; and she had already heard from neighbours about the killings there. Daniel looked at his wife's face in profile. The face still had some of the plump youthfulness it bore when they married eight years ago. He felt a deep thankfulness for having such a patient, understanding woman for wife.

The eight years of their marriage had brought Daniel great happiness and, in spite of some disappointments, he had never regretted his choice of wife.

He was twenty-eight when he married Rebekah who was ten years younger. There had been much opposition to the marriage from her family; Daniel was then a student at a theological college, training for the church's ministry, and what financial prospects does a pastor have? It was well known how poor the average pastor in Mashariki was. Rebekah herself had not reached secondary school; the results of her primary-leaving exam were very good but her parents could not – or would not, perhaps – find the necessary school fees. They wished to marry her off fairly soon and her father was anxious to receive the bride price. During the year after she had left primary school, when she was fourteen, she had attended a Christian rally at Etiak stadium. She had been moved deeply and had committed her life to Jesus Christ during the meeting. When she told her parents about 'being saved', they were at first amused, then annoyed, and later, infuriated. This hardening attitude developed because her father was planning to marry Rebekah to a prosperous young landowner living in a nearby village. The man was known to be living with two women already and to have fathered a couple of children by someone else's wife, but he claimed to be a 'sincere bachelor' and, besides, he was offering a generous bride-price for the young Rebekah. She, however, did not fall in with the plan; partly because she didn't like her suitor and partly because her Christina faith had given her a different ideal of marriage; she now wished to marry a committed Christian like herself and she didn't plan to share her husband with other women. Rebekah's mother, who was the second wife of the home, rebuked her for talking like an unweaned child; her father fumed against her, beat her and threatened to drag her to the man's bed. But the daughter had inherited some of the father's stubbornness. She defied her parents' wishes and snubbed her would-be husband when he visited the home. Finally her suitor gave up, complaining that the girl wasn't fit to live under his roof. Rebekah thus gained a respite from her parents' matchmaking—but not from their bitter comments. Her father felt that she had publicly disgraced him.

Then she met Daniel Lanebi. At that time, he was an agricultural adviser – really a field worker – based at the Regional Farm Institute in the main Anjeri town of Ong'ok, seventy kilometres to the southeast of Etiak. Daniel had stayed several days in the area of Rebekah's home, advising local farmers on planting and harvesting their food- and cash-crops and giving out seed-samples of new strains of millet and sorghum. When Daniel had visited her father's shamba, Rebekah had been struck by the young man's enthusiasm for his job; he had intense, bright eyes and spoke persuasively, but not arrogantly, of the new farming methods that he believed in. Rebekah had overheard him testifying to her parents how Christ had become his Saviour during his training at Ong'ok Agricultural College and how he believed that productive farming was 'good stewardship' of God's gifts. Later, she spoke with Daniel briefly and told him shyly that she hoped he would return soon – 'to give more help to the farmers'. Of course, she had another reason, but her dreams of becoming his wife, which had begun form this first meeting, were castles in the air – and she knew this in her heart.

She wasn't so certain about the impossibility of her dreams when the young agriculturalist contrived to pay three more visits to her village within the next six months, and on each occasion had time to talk to her. In retrospect, Daniel could not say why this sixteen-year-old girl had attracted him so much. It wasn't because she was very beautiful; she was, in fact, rather short and plump and very dark in complexion – not like the skinny brown beauties of the city nightclubs. Perhaps, he mused, it was the frankness in her face which appealed to him. Her unusually wide eyes seemed to declare: 'I speak the truth – and I expect you to do the same.' He also noticed a firmness in the lines of her mouth and the tone of her voice – a firmness which was restrained and entirely different from the domineering spirit of the fat market mamas. Daniel admired her for her refusal to marry a non-Christian. Her mature faith struck him as something wonderfully precious, and he determined to make Rebekah his wife.

He married her two and a half years later. Negotiations between their two families were long and difficult. Rebekah's parents increased the bride-price on three occasions and, when they heard that Daniel was about to give up agricultural work and enter Mashariki Theological College to train for the church's ministry, they tried to call the whole thing off. They didn't want their daughter to be the wife of a penniless pastor. However, they met such united determination from Daniel's family, as well as from Rebekah herself, that they once more agreed – on the condition that the price of another cow was added to the bride-wealth.

They were married in Etiak parish church where Daniel was later to serve, and then they returned together to the college, which was at the capital city of Byelo, four hundred kilometres to the south.

At the college, Rebekah had continued her home-skill of hand-weaving in order to supplement her husband's small student grant. They enjoyed their time at the college, although at first Rebekah found everything – especially the busy streets of Byelo –
strange and disturbing. Daniel's fellow-students mocked him good-naturedly for marrying a relatively uneducated girl, but he felt secure in the love that he had found in his young wife. He had no regrets over Rebekah then, and now, eight years later, he still felt certain that he had married the right girl.

Daniel placed his left hand over his wife's belly. 'How's the little one inside?'

'He's doing well.' His wife stressed the pronoun 'he'.

'You foolish woman,' he said tenderly. 'How can you know it's a boy?'

'You foolish man,' she replied in the same tone, 'we women have ways of knowing these things. You men are ignorant.'

In spite of his 'scientific' education, Daniel believed that women could know such things, and he hoped – more deeply than he would ever admit to anyone, even his wife – he hoped that she was right about the gender of their next child. He would

rejoice to have a son. Their first child born in his final year at the theological college, had been a son. They had called him Samsoni, because of the struggle he had made when leaving the womb; but the child was weak from birth and died before three months had passed. Two daughters had followed, first Sarah and two years later Margereta, and they had brought much joy to their parents. Daniel did not want a large number of children but secretly he longed for a son. Rebekah knew this; of course, what husband does not desire a son? And now she felt genuinely assured that the baby in her womb was male. But Daniel wondered whether this was only wishful thinking.

'Well, perhaps you do know, my dear. Boys are a blessing to their fathers. To fathers who are still alive to watch them grow up.' Daniel's tone had lost his playfulness and become tired and weak.His normally handsome, youthful features were heavy with the weariness of the morning.

'Tell me, Lanebi.'

'I'll tell you a little, wife. You know I was called after the shooting?'

'I was told. In Empotang?'

'Yes. Apwulo...and his eldest son... and his brother, Okoria... all dead. The women were wailing, of course. But the children—it was the children who took nearly all words from my mouth. They had already cried all the tears from their eyes. They tried to imitate their mothers' lamenting, but they had no energy left. So they sat around, totally bewildered, first looking at their mothers, then at their fathers' bodies, unable to grasp why their fathers no longer moved or answered their call.'

'You have visited bereaved families before.'

'I know. But this seemed so different.' He looked at his wife with tired eyes, and added softy: 'I should not be telling you this, Rebekah.'

'We have always shared, Daniel.'

He nodded. It was true that throughout their marriage they had shared most of their secret thoughts. Rebekah had been Daniel's partner, not his property, and they had never

regretted the mutual honesty which this had brought to their relationship.

'There is little more to say. The womenfolk stopped weeping for a minute or two – maybe five minutes, I can't recall – to let me speak my comfortless clichés. Then they resumed their crying. Rachel – you remember?...the girl who was baptised in December – she was silent, quite composed, but I could see tears on her cheeks.

'The police came around mid-morning. They came in a big Land Rover. They put the bodies in the back. I went with them –first to the village for Okoria's body. Then to the town mortuary. There will have to be an official identification. The police asked me a few questions: quite pointless. I fixed the funeral service for Monday morning. Then I came home.' Daniel rubbed his forehead and lids. 'You know, those women have put a great drum in my head.'

'But why – why?'

'Because they were crying so loudly.' Daniel attempted a smile.

'I mean, why these killings? What is it all about?'

'Rebekah, I *could* give you an answer, but I shall not. Because I do not know for sure myself. And because it is best you do not know about such things.

'Lanebi–'

'No, wife. In this matter I am firm. Please do not ask questions. You are a pastor's wife.'

'And you are a pastor,' Rebekah replied reproachfully.

'I know – and that is why I, myself, do not ask many questions.'

'You are afraid?'

'Yes... I am, a little. But at this present moment I am more hungry than afraid. My belly is calling for its millet and sweet potatoes. Must I prepare them myself?'

Chapter Three

The following morning, the congregation at St. Thomas' Church, Etiak was larger than usual. Daniel noticed this as soon as he passed from the vestry into the main body of the church. He followed the choir to the front of the church, becoming more and more aware that the pews were unusually full for the beginning of a service. Normally, a third of his congregation arrived ten minutes or more late, but the church seemed already three-quarters filled.

At the front, Daniel turned and briefly surveyed the hundred and fifty or more faces looking towards him. He recognised a few faces which he had rarely, if ever, seen in the church before: the faces of Mr. Izakiro, owner of Empotang First Class Traders, and his family; the face of the ADC of Etiak district; the face of Yosiah Ekwullo, a grey-haired veteran of the Second World War; and in the front, looking intently at the pastor, the face of Boaz Erasu.

'We shall begin our worship,' announced Daniel in Anjeri, 'with Hymn No 241 *Through all the changing scenes of life*'. The pianist played through the opening bars. The congregation, already standing, leafed through their hymn books, looked expectantly towards the choir and began to sing:

'Through all the changing scenes of life,
In trouble and in joy
The praises of my God shall still
My heart and tongue employ....'

One could guess a lot from the different ways that people sang. Some, barely opening their mouths and apparently uninterested in the proceedings, droned the tune weakly so that no one else, not even those standing near to them could hear their voices. Some, including many of those who rarely attended St. Thomas' Church, sang occasional lines of the hymn and, during the remaining lines, looked round at other people with vague or vacant expressions. Some sang dutifully but without enthusiasm. There were others,

however, who sang with great vigour, undefeated by some of the women ending each verse of every hymn off-key.

...'How bless'd are they, and only they
Who in his truth confide...'

These were the so-called 'revived' members of the congregation. They spoke of Christ as a living person, a friend who guided them day by day in all the decisions they had to take. Their witness to their fellow churchgoers and their friends, who never came to church, was always frank and urgent and, as Daniel had told them, sometimes tactless. They replied that Jesus hadn't always been tactful. And Daniel agreed that it is better to be a clumsy-handed youth than a stiff-fingered corpse. Not that the 'brethren' were young. In fact, most of them were past middle-age or old, and their younger members were often put off by the strict rules they imposed. Daniel identified himself with the beliefs of the 'revived brethren', though he did not always follow their methods. Both he and his wife had come to know Christ as Saviour through evangelistic missions organised by such people. Moreover, it was the revival wind which had blown on the barely warm ashes of the Church of Mashariki soon after Independence that brought the fire of new life to many congregations in the land. Cautious, nominal Christianity had been found coldly inadequate and was challenged by the great revival which spread across the country. There had been a rediscovery of the love and unity which Christians of different tribes should share, but the political and tribal pressures on the church leaders had made them hold back from demonstrating this unity publicly. The insights of the revival had thus been mainly restricted to individuals and local congregations.

'Fear Him, ye saints, and you will then
Have nothing else to fear...'

Daniel, like most pastors who had experienced the spiritual benefits on the revival, regarded his job as serving God through preaching, prayer and practical service for the local community. Such a vocation, he believed, could keep a man of God busy and contented for a lifetime and more.

'Make you his service your delight
Your wants shall be his care...'

It was a deep trust in the reliability of God that had led Daniel to give up his career as an agriculturalist with a growing salary to become a 'poor pastor.' And it was his conviction that God's reliability could only be proved by those who had committed their lives to God. That was why he preached – despite the disapproval of the Bishop of North Anjeri – that people, even regular church-goers, need be saved or converted.

...'Be glory, as it was ,is now,
And shall be evermore.'

The hymn ended. The congregation sat down, while several late comers squeezed into the back pews or walked down the central aisle looking for unoccupied seats. A baby started wailing and the mother, unbuttoning the top of her dress, began to feed her; the baby coughed, gurgled and continued sucking quietly. More late comers entered the church. Daniel waited, unwilling to start the prayers with so much movement going on. Of course, he knew it was impossible to have all the congregation in their seats by the start of a service. 'Keeping African time' the white missionaries had called it. As a busy time-conscious pastor, Daniel could now sympathise with the complaint. Previously he had regarded promptness merely as 'European culture'; even now he accepted the fact that some things could not be politely hurried. But he always started his church services on time.

When everyone was seated and fairly quiet, Daniel led the people in prayer and the morning service proceeded almost normally. Late comers continued to arrive; by the time the hymn before the sermon was being sung, the church was as full as on a Christmas Day, with people standing at the back and at the sides.

Daniel felt uneasy as he took his place in the slightly raised pulpit. Surely the people realised the bishop was coming to Etiak next Sunday, not today. Or perhaps – and here Daniel believed lay the reason – the shootings of Friday night had troubled them so much that they were seeking security in religion. What

did they expect to find here? he wondered. Did they wish to receive an assurance from God that they would not be shot as Apwulo had been? Such immunity could not be promised. It was true that, since becoming pastor at Etiak, Daniel had earned a reputation for being a reconciler and a man of peace – and justly too, for anyone could see those old rivals Odong and Kyocho sitting together in church every Sunday. But he had no power to close the barrels of guns. And he had no intention of referring to the shootings in his sermon. He believed that pastors and church leaders should not get entangled in politics; their task was to preach the good news of Jesus Christ and, as far as was practicable, to live at peace with all men. In these difficult times, he knew politics often meant tribalism, and tribalism within the Church neutralised the power of the gospel message. It was wise to keep silent on those dangerous issues, and to concentrate on evangelism and pastoring. To support his attitude, Daniel sometimes quoted the Anjeri saying: 'Let every man cultivate his own shamba', but the confidence with which he spoke these word concealed unconfessed doubt in his conscience.

The hymn came to an end and the people sat down. Daniel sensed an unaccustomed tension as he faced his congregation. The expectant silence seemed strange. He feared that his words would prove an anti-climax, for he had nothing new to say: the Gospel did not change overnight or even over 2000 years. He did not possess a prophet's insight – not even a village diviner's bones – to peer into the future and predict peace and prosperity for Etiak.

Daniel read out his text from the large Anjeri Bible in the pulpit: 'Jesus answered: "My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world:" John, 18:36.' Daniel paused and then continued: 'Jesus said these words to Pontius Pilate after his arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, shortly before he was nailed to the Cross.

'Some of his accusers had stated that he was an evildoer. Some said he was a political threat because he had claimed to be a king and therefore a rival to the Emperor. Of course, there

cannot be two rulers in one country. Just as there cannot be two fathers over one household.' Daniel was looking straight ahead, with hardly any reference to his notes. The people he was addressing were nearly all of his own tribe. Those who did not understand Anjeri – Europeans and Achwala tradesmen, for example – would attend the English service in the evening if they wished to attend church at all. The people present now were his fellow-Anjeri and he felt the unseen bond of kinship, even though he acknowledged a higher kinship in Christ. When he preached in Anjeri he spoke in a simple, straightforward manner, often making use of proverbs and traditional wisdom; he could not transfer the eloquence he had acquired in preaching in English, to his own tongue. Some people complained that his Anjeri sermons failed to stir the emotions, but no one ever said that they could not be easily understood.

'So Pilate spoke to Jesus to find out if he was a king and, if so, what sort of king. When he saw Jesus, he found no shield, no sword, no weapons – and no army following him. Indeed, you may remember how Peter used his sword on the high priest's servant and cut off his ear. Jesus rebuked Peter and healed the unfortunate servant.

'So it was clear that Jesus was a man of peace and had no sympathy for those who used the sword – or the gun.'

Daniel paused, wondering how many would notice the anachronism, which had slipped out before he realised it.

An old lady was squeezing her way through the close-packed congregation at the back of the church, distracting their attention. Daniel continued more loudly than before, winning back their attention by his directness: 'Jesus was setting a pattern of conduct for his disciples, his followers. And that includes you and me, if we recognise him as our Saviour and Master.

'The big question is: do you recognise Jesus, the Prince of Peace, as Master? Is he your own chief or the leader of a distant clan? If it is the former, we should pay attention to what he said. To Peter, full of fear and violence, a bloodstained sword in his hand, Jesus said: "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?"

'In fact, Peter was obstructing the foreordained role of the Messiah. Jesus' role on earth was to die on the cross and to bear our sins. It was role of suffering. And sometimes Christians have to suffer like their Master. Jesus said we must take up our cross of Calvary, for the wood of that cross has long ago rotted. So what is 'a cross'?

'It is an experience of suffering – underserved suffering for the sake of Jesus Christ. It's a place where you can look at your tormentors and say, "Forgive them, Father, for they don't know what they're doing."'

Daniel recalled the grief and bitterness of the bereaved families of Empotang, and now he thought how easy it was to speak these words, how difficult to fulfil them when cruelty crushes your ability or desire to forgive.

He felt suddenly weary. He glanced down at his notes but his eyes wouldn't focus. He would have liked to end the sermon at that point and pronounce the blessing. He looked up and was staring into a lake of blurred faces. The words 'It is enough' passed through his mind, and he wondered why.

Then his eyes were focusing again and his voice was speaking. 'I don't have much to say in my talk this morning. As you know, only a man who has come to borrow speaks ten words when one is enough. But let me remind you that to recognise Jesus' spiritual authority is not to deny the temporal authority of our national and local rulers. Jesus himself said that we should give to God what is God's and to Caesar what is Caesar's.

'I am now speaking to you directly as my neighbours and fellow Anjeri. There has been much loose talk in recent days. I don't mean the backbiting and gossip about other people's misconduct in moral matters, although this too is wicked. I mean careless talk about fighting – about war.' Daniel's heart was already thumping against his ribs. He wasn't referring at all to his notes, because he hadn't planned to say this. But it was too late to turn back now; he had to speak out what was lying heavily on his mind.

'As Christians we should avoid such talk. It is unwise. It is like a poison to human relationship, especially between people

who are of different tribes. It makes a good thing bad, and bad thing foul. A wrong word, at the wrong time, can make the tongue your worst enemy.

'Do not let men who desire trouble move you to think that a servant of Jesus can take a sword or a gun in his hand and kill a fellow countryman in the name of God. Jesus said "all who take up the sword will perish by the sword." If a Christian finds that he must suffer for his faith, so be it. God will strengthen him in the time of need. But let no Christian expect God's support if he suffers for wickedness—for murder or revenge, for example.

'We are urged in Scripture to strive for peace with all men but perhaps some of us haven't even tried the way of peace. And so our hearts are full of hate and bitterness.'

Daniel could not guess the reaction of the people by their serious, intent expressions. He did notice, however, that Boaz Erasu was looking straight ahead, frowning, teeth clenched.

'I shall end with these words from St. Paul's letter to the Romans,' continued Daniel, flicking over the pages in the pulpit Bible. 'We would all do well to take St. Paul's advice: "Let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual understanding."

'And now let us bow our heads in prayer.'

The congregation bowed their heads. Except for Erasu, who continued looking wide-eyed towards the front of the church, where the holy table was set.

Chapter Four

The following Wednesday, two days after the burial of the three men shot in Empotang, Daniel Lanebi drove twenty kilometres to a small village named Eginzau, which lay on the edge of the Wor forest to the west of Etiak. There was no pastor in the village, not even a proper church. The catechist had written to Daniel about two families in the village, who were recently converted from animism and who had requested Christian baptism. The catechist had instructed them as best he could, but he felt he had failed in his task; the families had become less and less interested in his teaching and their forthcoming baptism. The catechist had detected something of fear in the recent reluctance of these fellow villagers to receive him in their homes. They had told him they wished to speak to a 'priest.' So Joseph, the catechist, had written to Etiak, requesting Daniel to pay a visit and now, two weeks later, he had found time to respond to the invitation.

The forest that lay behind the village was called 'Night' by the local people. Beneath the dense canopy of lofty trees was a gloomy twilight world where, according to Anjeri tradition, spirits of wicked ancestors lurked, awaiting their summons by practitioners of black medicine throughout the east Anjeri region. The British colonial administration, with the sweat of hundreds of Achwala and a few audacious Anjeri, had cleared a sinuous road through this once impenetrable forest. Forty kilometres of thick tropical forest had been cut through, a thousand metres down to the valley of the Wor river and a thousand metres up again to the less wooded country beyond, where the Achwala lived. It was said by some elders of the Anjeri that the ten workmen who died during the road making were slain by the ancestral spirits jealously guarding the forest. The official report stated they had died from sleeping-sickness. One thing was certain: the construction of the road in 1950 created a more direct link between Etiak and the capital, Port Thomson, than the old one which went via Ong'ok in the east, and, moreover, broke the spell hitherto cast by the forest. Anjeri drove along the road

without looking nervously over their shoulders. More villages had been established on the fringes of the forest. But the heart of Wor had not been inhabited. Its only habitants were the rodents, the forest duikers, the chimpanzees and also, it was alleged, the guerrillas of the APA.

Daniel left his car at the catechist's house and together they walked to the homes of the baptism candidates, which lay a kilometre away across a small tributary of the Wor river.

When they returned two hours later, the path was muddy and the vegetation dripping with the rain that had flooded down from the sky.

'We were lucky to have reached their homes when the storm broke,' remarked Joseph.

'Yes,' Daniel agreed absently; then added, 'I'm sorry, but it seems I have also failed to clear away these people's problems. They are plainly not ready for baptism.'

'No, they are not. It is sad.'

'So you must stop blaming yourself, Joseph. You have done all that could be expected.'

'It is *fear* – did you notice?'

'They did seem afraid. But they would not say why. Do you know?'

'When I sent for you I wasn't sure. But now I am sure. It is because of those guerrillas in the forest.'

Daniel slipped on the muddy path and steadied himself.

'So it's true?'

'They have sent scouts to ask us to supply them with food. They have even tried to recruit some of our young men.'

'Have you seen them?'

'No, but I have heard this. And I have seen soldiers near our village, searching the undergrowth, holding their rifles ready to shoot.'

'So why do these people refuse baptism?'

'It is not safe to move from house to house or receive many visitors or to do something new and strange. It is better to keep still, make no movement. You know, reverend, fear is like the

sap of the *awola* tree. It makes you a stiff corpse before you are dead.'

They were now walking along the edge of a maize shamba, not far from the forest backcloth. On the far side of the shamba, three thatched roofs could be seen, and from that direction came the sobbing of a woman and a harsh rebuke in Kiswahili. It did not sound like an Anjeri voice.

The pastor and catechist stopped to listen. The cool breeze still seemed to bear the echo of stifled sobs.

'Shall we go and see what it is about, reverend?'

Although an intuition of danger quivered around his heart, and he would gladly have said 'no, it is not our business', Daniel heard himself replying: 'Yes, I think we ought to.'

They walked through the shoulder-high maize and came to a large compound, bounded on three sides by two huts and a grain store. Two soldiers, wearing camouflaged combat dress, were standing in front of the central hut; in the middle of the compound were two young men, wearing tattered shirts and shorts, wearily digging a trench. They stopped digging when they heard Daniel approaching. All four men stared at the two strangers.

'Who are you?' called one of the soldiers in Kiswahili, pointing his rifle at Daniel's stomach.

'I am Lanebi, pastor from Etiak.'

The soldier paused, as if to absorb the information. Then he shifted his gaze and yelled at the two youths: 'You, go on with your digging! No one told you to stop!' They were panting, and small streamlets of perspiration covered their faces; but they raised their hoes in the air and continued their exhausting job. The second soldier trained his gun on them, while the first addressed Daniel.

'A pastor you say?'

'Yes.'

'That is good. You have come at a good time. Come nearer.' Lanebi and his companion approached, watching the barrel of the soldier's rifle.

'And who is this?'

'He is also a pastor,' replied Daniel.

The soldier grinned knowingly. 'But you are the chief, eh? You have the right type of collar – the wrong way round!' He laughed hoarsely and the other soldier, without taking his eye off the two diggers, joined in.

'So-you-are-a-pastor!' Each word came with emphasis – the awkward emphasis of someone who had drunk too much. 'Can you say good prayers, reverend?'

'I can pray,' replied Daniel, keeping his Kiswahili simple and brief. He could hear the suppressed weeping of a woman in the hut behind the soldier.

'Good. You will pray for these two. Soon. Very soon.'

'What – what are they doing?' Daniel felt his legs wobbling beneath him.

The soldier considered how to reply and then, grinning, he announced loudly: 'They are digging a latrine.'

The laughter from the other soldier had him shaking so much that he couldn't have fired accurately even if the two prisoners had tried to run away. The sobbing inside the house grew into a wail and the leading soldier kicked the door and shouted savagely. 'Shut up, damn you, or I'll make you eat your own shit!'

Now it was quiet again, apart from the thump of hoes against the hard clay soil and the whacking of loose earth against a heap near the trench. One of the prisoners paused to wipe the sweat from his brow. He looked up from where he stood, waist-deep in the trench.

'May we rest for a while?'

The two soldiers converged on the pit which was about two and half metres long and a metre wide. They surveyed it with a professional air.

'Yes, you've done very well,' said one. 'We shall allow you to rest – for as long as you could possibly wish.'

One of the soldiers released the safety catch on his weapon and began to move back a pace or two. The first soldier intervened: 'Wait, my friend, you are forgetting the prayers. Even guerrillas must have a prayer at their funeral.' He turned his fierce eyes

towards Daniel. 'Come forward, pastor. Say a prayer for them. And be quick about it.'

What Daniel had half-guessed was true. He had walked into an on-the-spot execution. It was like suddenly finding himself at the climax of a nightmare which he could not awaken from.

The next few minutes bypassed the logical, remembering part of his brain. He felt horror and revulsion at the situation. He felt an awful sickness at his own helplessness.

These were the strongest impressions that he took with him into the future. Only very vaguely could he recall, later on, how he had feebly protested at the 'lack of a trial', how he had knelt by the grave and made a simple prayer, how the fear-filled bulging eyes of the victims had looked up at him in silent appeal, before he was pushed roughly away from the graveside. Only very vaguely could he recall stumbling across the compound, holding the hand of Joseph, and hearing scornful words shouted at him. Then came the shots, single reports, four or five – very loud.

And Daniel could recall, very clearly, the laughter of the two soldiers and, as he looked back briefly, the sight of the soldiers urinating into the grave.

Chapter Five

A visit by the Bishop of Northern Anjeri was always a special occasion. His visit to Etiak the following Sunday was no exception. The church was cleaned and polished and decorated with an abundance of flowers. New clothes were worn and shown off for the first time, and the building was packed and overflowing at the services. A feast was held in the church compound in the early afternoon, and small mountains of meat, millet and potatoes were quickly cleared by the hundred or more hungry guests. Hymns and choruses, accompanied by drumming and clapping, were sung. Presents were given to the bishop. The joy of fellowship gave the people a relief from their anxiety. Today's happiness is not to be scorned because of tomorrow's uncertainty.

The Right Reverend Eli Onkoro enjoyed himself at such occasions, although he never showed his excitement. He sat quietly throughout the celebration, eating moderately and talking gently with whoever went up to greet him. He was a tall, lean man, with grey hair and a face which conveyed both firmness and gentleness. He had the dignified air of a patriarch, and was accorded the loyalty and respect that a chief might enjoy in a secular context. The love of his Christian flock was precious to him but he was saddened by the lack of young people in all the churches in his diocese. The youth seemed to be deserting the faith as soon as they emerged from childhood. Education had made the young arrogant, aggressively independent of the wisdom of their fathers. The younger generation could not recall – and perhaps did not care about – the bishop's forty years of faithful service to the church – first as a church teacher in the 1930s, later as a parish priest and for the past fifteen years as a bishop. His loyalty to his Church had been absolute. The traditions and forms of worship passed on by the European missionaries were to him almost as binding as Gospel truth. He had banned guitars from his cathedral at Ong'ok but was pressing ahead with plans to build a bell tower. For most of the older Anjeri Christians, his age, experience, his intimate knowledge of the

past gave him an authority that was not to be challenged. But some Christians did challenge it. The revived brethren regarded him as being chained to the past, needing to be released from bondage by the Holy Spirit; a few village evangelists had even prophesied eternal fire for the bishop unless he repented. The younger generation of Christians, especially the teenagers, grudgingly respected the bishop's experience but were annoyed by his conservatism: they wanted the church to come alive but, in their view, the bishop was ensuring that the church would not outlive his own generation.

Apart from a few children, most of the people at the feast were over the age of thirty; and most of the members of the church's young slipped away, having eaten their fill, before the closing speeches.

For several minutes, Daniel Lanebi stood at the edge of the crowd, looking absently towards the Chwak mountains, paying no attention to anyone. Whether Daniel's expression was one of boredom, irritation or worry, the old bishop could not decide, but he studied the figure of the young pastor with growing disappointment. He gave a deep sigh of resignation, and thought to himself: 'Even this young man who seemed to hold so much promise for the future is becoming a failure. What future has the church with pastors who behave thus when their bishop visits their parish?' He thought sadly of the small number of young people present and concluded that it must be because Reverend Lanebi preached about 'being saved' and other ideas which discouraged young Christians. This was surely what was driving the young people away from the Church. 'I must have a serious talk with him before I leave,' the bishop decided.

It was not until five o'clock that the last of the speeches was over and Bishop Onkoro pronounced the blessing. The men began to disperse, while many of the women converged on the Lanebis' kitchen to wash up the utensils and, no doubt, to gossip away another hour.

The farewells to the bishop went on for a long time after the final prayer. Daniel stood near the bishop and made polite conversation when necessary. He realised that he was continually

clearing his throat, a nervous habit which he thought he had completely lost before he had left school. The impatience inside him felt like a rapidly swelling tumour. His efforts to speak privately with the bishop earlier in the day had been useless, and he knew he had failed to hide his frustration during the long hours of the feast.

At last, the bishop and Daniel were standing alone, while some laymen were loading the boot of the bishop's car with the many presents he had been given.

'Bishop – may I speak with you?'

The old man looked at Daniel paternally, nodding with approval. 'Yes, yes, I think that is a good idea.'

They made their way to the vestry and sat down, fact to face. It was the bishop who spoke first.

'You have worn a troubled look today, Lanebi.'

'That is so, bishop, I am a troubled man. I hope you will not be angry if I speak my mind to you.'

The old man smiled benignly.

'That is what a bishop is for. And then I hope you will let me speak my mind to you.'

'Thank you, Bishop. I am in need of guidance. First, I wish to tell you what I saw on Wednesday at Eginzau, a village on the edge of Wor forest. I have told no one of this until now. Not even my wife knows of it, and that is something unusual. But since you are bishop of this diocese, it is right you should know.'

'Well, Lanebi, I am listening.'

'I went to interview two families who wished to be baptised. You know, there is no pastor at Eginzau but the catechist there is very diligent. On our return from the homes of the baptism candidates, we heard sobbing and approached the house from where the crying seemed to come. In the centre of the compound two young men were digging a sort of pit. And watching them, with rifles at the ready, were two soldiers.'

At the sound of the word 'soldiers', the bishop's expression lost its softness and his eyes narrowed under a frowning forehead. Daniel did not wait for the bishop to comment.

'When the pit was finished to the satisfaction of the soldiers, they ordered me to approach and say a prayer for them. They called the young men "guerrillas". They were eighteen years old – probably less. They were almost paralysed with fear as they stood in the grave they had dug for themselves. I tried to pray. But my mind seemd to be scattered far from my body. I said a prayer. A simple prayer asking God to receive their souls. Whether the two victims understood or even said amen, I cannot be sure. I was pushed back with the butt of a rifle. I heard one of the soldiers telling the two boys to lie down.' Daniel was looking hard at the bishop, but the latter was looking down, shaking his head from side to side, and sucking through his teeth. Daniel continued speaking, as more details of his experience came to his mind.

'I remember one of the soldiers shouting at me to go away and not to look back because "priests' stomachs are not strong enough". But I did look back once. After the shots had been fired.'

'What did you see?'

'I saw the soldiers...standing by the pit. The two victims were not visible. But I had no doubt they were dead.'

'Have you checked?'

'The catechist sent a message the following day. The men – or should I call them boys – were dead. And the house is now empty. The family has fled. I have no more information. Now you know why – or partly why – I have been sad today and have not shared much in today's celebrations. It is not because I am reluctant to welcome you to my church, bishop.'

The bishop fingered the large ornate cross hanging from his neck. The frown had been smoothed over by an assumed calmness, but the quaver in his voice betrayed the tension in the old man's mind.

'You have had a bad experience, a terrible experience. I do not blame you for showing sadness. These are days of mourning for many families in Anjeri. Do not think I am unaware of the killings. I know the army is being severe with the *Asekeri pa Anjeri*.'

'And against innocent people who may only look like guerrillas.'

'We do not know this for sure,' continued the old man sharply, irritated by the interruption. 'What I wish to tell you is this. We must pray for peace and look forward to the time when all the people of this nation can live with each other without recourse to violence. This is the role of the Church in these difficult times. It is not for the Church to ally itself with one tribe or another, or to parcel out blame in a spirit of judgement. Judge not, lest ye be judged!'

Daniel felt the tumour of rage swelling inside him. He felt rage against this old man speaking in his sermonic monotone – this pillar of the Church who seemed content to wait and hope and pray. He felt rage against himself, too, for his own inability to do anything except wait and hope and pray.

The bishop's sermon in the morning had concentrated on the need for peace and brotherly love. It had sounded similar in content to many of Daniel's own sermons: peace... reconciliation...suffering...love for one's neighbour. The words had sounded so theoretical, so unrelated to the real situation outside the walls of the church. Daniel had asked himself: 'Is this how I was preaching until a week ago? Do I sound as irrelevant?' But he dared not give himself an answer. The bishop's sermon had also dwelt on the material progress of the country, praising God for the enlightened government of President Gwino, who was likened to the young King David after he had succeeded the corrupt King Saul. Daniel was sure he had never said things like that in his sermons.

He recalled the eyes of the young 'guerrillas'. His rage subsided, leaving a weary sickness of soul.

'I do not wish to judge, bishop,' he said very weakly. 'And I know we must pray. But we must *do* something as well.'

'Do what?' replied the old man quickly. 'Would you have me mention this from the pulpit of Ong'ok cathedral? Perhaps you would wish me to tell the president to control his soldiers more effectively?'

'Yes, I would,' replied Daniel evenly, despite the mocking tone of the bishop's question.

The old man laughed dryly and shook his head .

'You young clergy are all the same: too hasty, too quickly fired by events. You would turn the Church into a political party if you had the chance.'

'No – not that.'

'What then?'

'Perhaps we would like to see the Church rediscover its prophetic role in society.'

'Aaah! I see!' The bishop smiled and there was a sly look of understanding in his eyes. 'You want to have prophets in the Church—and you, Lanebi, would like to be the first of the new prophets.' The bishop was punning on the word 'lanebi', which meant 'prophet' in Anjeri.

'I do not wish anything for myself, Bishop, but I wish the Church would do something, or say something—not in support of the guerrillas, but in support of justice and fair treatment—and against tribal oppression. Are we only permitted to mention the good things done by our rulers?'

'I see. I see.' The bishop nodded with calm assurance. 'So full of haste and fire, young people. But I do not wish to judge, for I know the Church is in need of the young. However, I wish to tell you something from my own experience, which may help you to understand.'

'Thank you Bishop.'

'Good. I became bishop fifteen years ago—that was seven years before our nation's Independence. I was only the second African bishop in this country and the first outside Achwala region.

'In my third year as bishop—it might have been the fourth, I can't be sure—the pressures on the British colonial government to grant the country full independence were building up very quickly. The younger generation especially were becoming excited—and too impatient. There was a lot of loose talk about a popular uprising.

'One day I was approached by a young hopeful politician who was a leader in the now defunct Democratic Unity Party. Possibly you do not remember it. He spoke eloquently of the country's needs; every pressure, he said, must be put on the British so that *Uhuru* could be hastened.

'I asked him how this concerned me. He said very bluntly—like you have spoken to me today—that I should condemn the British from the pulpit for their oppression. He quoted the Old Testament: "Let my people go" and so on. He said the church should identify itself with the struggle for freedom, or else, it would later be cast away like rotten fruit by the people.

'I then told him I would certainly not comply with his wishes. The Church is not a tool for the politicians, I said, and would not be used to foster strife between races. I assured him that, with patience and a spirit of love, Independence would be achieved quietly and without bitterness. And I was proved right: three years after that conversation I led my flock in an Independence service of thanksgiving at Ong'ok. And the cathedral was full and overflowing! The advice I gave then I also give now. Be calm and unjudging. And wait patiently...'

'What are we waiting for this time, Bishop? Can we be independent of our brother Africans?'

The bishop stood up and eyed the young pastor with barely concealed irritation.

'You will see that I am right. Two years from now, perhaps less, there will be peace throughout Anjeri and the whole country. And you will thank me for the wise advice I gave you.

'Thank you, Bishop. You have been patient with me.'

'Patience, Reverend Lanebi, is a quality which God grants to us gradually—as we grow older and as we see the years slowly bring solutions to our problems.'

Daniel said 'Yes' and silently accompanied the bishop to his car, which was already loaded and surrounded by a group of smiling men. Farewell handshakes and goodbyes followed in rapid succession.

Just before he drove off, the bishop leant out of the car window and gave Lanebi a warm, fatherly smile.

'Two years, remember? Then you will smile again!' he called. He waved his right hand and drove away.

As soon as the car had left the compound, Daniel returned to the church. He went to the front and knelt by the holy table, beneath the big wooden cross on the wall. He remained in that position, in complete silence, for ten minutes.

When at last he rose, he knew that he could not wait for two years—perhaps not even two months—for something to happen. He didn't know what was to be done—or whether he could do anything himself, but he now felt convinced that the church could no longer be a spectator. He remembered a verse which said 'those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength'. Yes. Waiting for the Lord made sense. But the Lord didn't need two years to take action. And the Lord didn't take action in a vacuum; he used his people, if they were willing.

Daniel made his way out of the church with new hope in his mind.

Chapter Six

Yosiah Ekwullo was a veteran of the Second World War. He had been in Ethiopia with the King's African Rifles. He had been in Addis Ababa in May 1941 when the emperor, Haile Selassie, had returned to the city in triumph.

It was said that he had killed may Italians, that he had distinguished himself in battle and earned the praise of the British commander. But he brought back no medals or official letters, and some people said that he had never risen above the status of cook or officer's orderly.

He neither admitted nor denied the legends that hearsay had endowed him with. Normally, he never spoke of this experience in the colonial army. He had returned from Ethiopia still a young man, but terribly changed. He was not scarred or maimed, it is true, except for a shattered ear-drum, the only physical evidence that he had been near to the fighting; but Ekwullo also brought back a shattered mind. He remembered nothing of his home and could hardly speak intelligibly. He seemed as incurably mad as the old naked woman who walked the streets of Etiak in those days.

His family took him back. They lived a few miles from Etiak, not far from the home of Lanebi's parents. Peaceful, inactive months worked a remarkable recovery in Ekwullo. Within a year he seemed to be entirely normal; he built himself a hut, cleared the bush and planted his own shamba. The lines of strain disappeared from his face. He found happiness in working his land and, later, in his marriage to a young widow. He was known to be a simple, gentle man—one who rarely spoke and who never referred to his experiences of war expect, that is, on the few occasions when his old madness returned to him.

The madness took a strange form. The local people called it 'the spirit of war.' It was as though he was in the army again and the many years of peace and of his own increasing age had dropped off him like a snake's slough. When the spirit of war was upon him — and this might happen only two or three times

a year—he would march through his neighbours' compounds, with a staff over his left shoulder, saluting anyone in any kind of uniform and shouting commands in a debased military English. For hours, sometimes a full day, he acted out a ludicrous parody of an active soldier, ignored by adults, mocked and mimicked by children, and totally absorbed in the imagined role which had possessed him. He never indicated by the smallest sign that he was joking. He believed he was a soldier again and could only understand those who addressed him as such. He would march for miles —sometimes into Etiak, and then out again—finally collapsing from exhaustion kilometres from his home. His grown-up sons would carry him back home, amazed at the strength and endurance the old man found during his 'attacks'. After a long sleep, Ekwullo would wake up the following afternoon and recall nothing of what he had done the previous day.

He was now over fifty years old but kept up a sturdily independent life, even though his wife had died five years before. Frequently he cycled the seven miles to Etiak and back. He had known Daniel Lanebi since the latter was a boy. He enjoyed his preaching and occasionally attended a service in Etiak church. When the war madness was upon him, he would seek out Daniel at the church or elsewhere in town. Having found him, he would salute the young pastor and jabber away in a mixture of English and Anjeri, as though speaking to a commanding officer. It seemed that Ekwullo liked the priest's 'uniform'— the collar, the black cassock—and, if Daniel wasn't wearing anything distinctly priestly, the old man would march away in disappointment. Some people said that Ekwullo had acted as orderly for an army chaplain in Ethiopia and perhaps he subconsciously identified Daniel with this chaplain. But this was just one more attempt to explain the oddities of Yosiah Ekwullo, a man who would never be explained or understood.

In the week following the bishop's visit to Etiak, Ekwullo had one of his 'attacks'. He marched down the main street of Etiak, having walked all the way from his home, and puffed out the words 'Left-right, left-right' to the swing of his legs. He shouted

orders at two policemen on a street corner. They laughed and shouted back an insult. Children playing on the pavement began to strut round in imitation of the old man. Ekwullo took no notice. He marched to the next crossroads, turned left and headed for the church.

Daniel was standing with his wife beside their small shamba which lay to one side of the house. The young shoots of millet and maize were a rich green, and beyond them could be seen the fleshy leaves of sweet potatoes. The Lanebis enjoyed working their small plot in their spare time; it was their private boast that they grew more food here than most people produced from a shamba twice the size. Daniel had not forgotten his training as an agriculturalist.

'You see, Rebekah,' he was saying. 'I told you the millet would growth well in that part.'

'Then, since you knew, you didn't need my advice. But I still say we could have planted cassava instead.'

Daniel made a distasteful expression. 'Yes— and you would have had to eat it all alone! You know I never liked—' He broke off his sentence as rhythmic footsteps, accompanied by the rasping 'Left-right' of Ekwullo's panting voice, reached his ears.

'It's Yosiah Ekwullo,' whispered Daniel to his wife, 'and it seems as though he's back in the army.'

'He frightens me when he's like that. He is so nice when he is normal.'

'He's not dangerous. But go back to the house; I'll speak with him here.'

Rebekah hurried round the back of the house to the kitchen door, while Daniel hailed his visitor. 'Ho! Ekwullo! I am here.'

Ekwullo halted, made a neat right turn and marched towards the shamba. He halted again, a few metres away from Lanebi, and his face dropped in disappointment. Daniel was not wearing his collar.

'Whar be offisa Lanebi?' Ekwullo cried in distorted English, restraining a salute.

'I am here, Yosiah.'

'No. not you. I want to see captain Lanebi,' continued the old man, more in Anjeri than in English.

Daniel paused before replying. 'I will see him soon. You give me the message.'

Now Ekwullo paused, eyeing the other suspiciously.

'Top secret orders—from headquarters.'

'That's all right. I am Captain Lanebi's private messenger. You can tell me and I will tell him. Then you may dismiss.'

Ekwullo approached Lanebi uncertainly. There was a look of deep insecurity in his features, which Daniel's frank expression could not remove. Something was not quite as it should be, but the path of logic was too hard for Ekwullo's errant mind to find. He came alongside Lanebi and said in loud whisper.

'Call the men to arms. We attack the enemy at dawn. No mercy, no prisoners, no retreat! For God and for the Empire!'

The words came so fluently that Daniel wondered if Yosiah had ever heard such orders being given.

'I will pass on the message,' he said. 'Now you can retire.'

'Retire?' The old man seemed perplexed, and Daniel felt a deep pity for him and sorrow over his own deception.

'Yes—return to barracks!' Ekwullo cried suddenly. He turned about, without saluting, and marched away towards the main street of the town and, perhaps, towards Etiak barracks.

Daniel watched him go, shaking his head slowly and repeating the old man's message under his breath.

When he went indoors, Rebekah asked him what Ekwullo had told him. He repeated the message as well as he could remember. His wife laughed, and said it was madness. Daniel agreed, but he did not laugh.

Chapter Seven

The weeks advanced, while the long rains continued with increasing vigour. The savannah put on its greenest coat in response to the daily drenching. Tracks were washed away and earth roads became winding quagmires. The 'all-weather' gravel roads were breached by swollen streams. Sandy beds had become water courses again, and the rivers which had survived the siege of the dry season now swelled and raged, scaling their own banks and flooding the adjacent land.

Most of the rain fell in the morning and, by evening, the storms had usually retreated beyond the horizon; or sometimes they roared menacingly from the Chawak mountains to the east. The soil of the savannah quickly dried in the afternoon heat and earth roads declared impassable could be firm and hard again if two days passed without rain.

Daniel Lanebi was motoring north from Etiak along such a road. It led to the Amak hills, a cluster of forested volcanic remnants rising high above the Etiak plains. The Anjeri clans that had settled among the hills had relied upon the humid upper slopes to keep their cattle alive during the fierce dry seasons. But it wasn't as cattle farmers that they had become famous through countless Anjeri generations. The Amak hills contained large iron deposits and, for as long as anyone would dare to guess, the local smelters had fashioned the axes and hunting spears of the Anjeri people. Their craft, less in demand during the colonial period, was now being revived by tourism, and their fine metalwork fetched high prices for the dealers in Byelo and other major towns.

Daniel was going to Amak-torung, the main village and trading post of the hills, not in order to buy any of the local wares; he was visiting the pastor of the Amak Hills, the Reverend Ogwong, an ageing, white-haired man born at the turn of the twentieth century. Word had reached Etiak a few days before that the old man was dying and that he wished to see Lanebi before he died. The question was, how was he to get to Amak-

torung during the height of the rains, when the only road had been declared impassable even to four-wheel drive vehicles. Daniel waited impatiently, praying that he would be able to see Mzee Ogwong before he died. Then there was a break in the daily cycle of storm clouds blanketing the northern Etiak plains; for two days the horizon stayed transparently clear. But the police told him that his Volkswagen would never get across the streams even if the road was fairly dry. He took the risk and set out on a Thursday morning towards the Amak hills. The road was rough and furrowed by heavy tracks, but it was mostly dry and even the fords across the seasonal streams were shallow and stony. He had reached the halfway point — twenty five kilometres out of Etiak — within an hour and a half.

Daniel stopped the car and switched off the engine. He sat still for a minute, looking ahead at the sharp outlines of the Amak hills in the distance. He thought of the old pastor he was going to see: one of the first of the people of the hills to be baptised at the CMS Mission established there in the 1920s; a clan chief's son, who had defied the curses of his father in order to train for the church's ministry; a pastor to the people of the hills for over thirty years. He had never retired, in spite of the bishop's urging.

'Show me my replacement and maybe I will retire!' was his challenge to the bishop. No replacement was ever put forward, but the bishop never explained why. The Reverend Ogwong had seemed indestructible, as permanent as a volcanic rock. But in recent weeks, it had been said, his energy was fading; the rock of testimony was crumbling in sick, old age and the people of Amak were preparing themselves for mourning.

For reasons Daniel did not entirely understand, Reverend Ogwong had taken a special interest in his life. He had been present at his baptism and confirmation; he had written to him long letters about the need to surrender to Christ and to avoid being a 'comfortable Christian', and later had encouraged him to enter the ministry of the church. Of all the old people Daniel knew, Hezekiah Ogwong was the one he admired and respected most. He wondered why such a dynamic and experienced

churchman ha been content to remain a pastor in an obscure, up-country parish. At the same time, he knew that the old man's influence stretched far beyond the limits of the Amak hills. Now that pastor Ogwong was dying, Daniel realised more sharply than ever before how much he loved this old man and what an inexpressible loss his death would be to him personally.

As Daniel sat silently in his car, he also thought of the uncertain weeks that had passed since the bishop's visit to Etiak; nothing had been resolved in his own mind. He only knew more clearly than before his need of a new direction to his life as a pastor. He had been constantly on the look-out for clues that God might plant in his way, but nothing definite—no clear message—had come to him. The tempo of his days had returned to the steady, unhurried rhythm of his life before the shootings in Empotang. He watched his wife become heavier with child and looked forward with excitement to the birth. But his mind was never entirely at rest these days; it seemed that his own spirit was pregnant with a decision that was awaiting its birth into his conscious self.

He restarted the engine and continued cautiously on his way. He had seen no other traffic on the earth road but the deeply indented tyre-marks along and across the track must have been made during the pervious two days when the earth was still soft.

After another forty or fifty minutes, he noticed that the grass and bushes of the savannah were becoming thicker and more luxuriant; the road was climbing gently towards the base of the Amak hills, across which the thatched dwellings of Amak-torung were scattered. The road, although drier at the higher altitude, became more sinuous, and Daniel drove slowly round the many blind corners. Eventually he came to a narrow log bridge over a river, which had its source in the hills. He crosses this carefully, turned a corner and, to his surprise and fear, saw three soldiers standing in the middle of the road. They carried automatic rifles. A Landrover was parked under an acacia tree just off the road. Daniel stopped the car well short of the spiked planks lying across the road. One of the soldiers sauntered across to his car.

He looked vaguely menacing but he was chewing sugar cane in a casual manner. 'Turn back. No admittance. You should have known,' he rapped out in Kiswahili. 'Who are you anyway?'

'No one told me, I'm sorry,' replied Daniel as affably as possible.

The soldier opened the car-door and noticed that the driver wore a clerical collar.

'Ooh, you're a reverend, are you?' he said, in a softer tone.

'Yes, I'm a reverend,' echoed Daniel in Anjeri, realising the soldier's accent was that of a fellow-Anjeri. 'I have come to visit Mzee Ogwong who is very sick.'

'I know about that old man. Yes, I've heard he is dying. But I'm sorry. Orders are orders; no admittance to Amak.'

'For how long will the road be closed?'

'Don't know. Could be days. Military manoeuvres are being held.'

'Days? How many days? The old man might not live till then, and he had specially asked me to see him.' Daniel was almost pleading—but he wondered whether he was wise to say anything at all.

'It's difficult, you see,' replied the soldier, glancing at his two companions who could not hear the conversation.

Daniel thought that sounds like a request for a bribe. Surely he doesn't expect that from a pastor?

'It is not difficult if you and your friends let me through. You know I am a man of God and I have nothing to do with fighting or trouble.'

The soldier leant into the car and pretended to be examining the controls. He said softly. 'Those two aren't Anjeri. They might not like to help. I'll go and ask them. But no more urging, reverend.'

'Thank you, my friend. I shall hold my peace.'

The soldier strode back to his friends and began talking with them. Daniel sat in the car, worried and bewildered.

'Military manoeuvres? In the Amak hills? That surely means trouble!' The shooting at Empotang and Eginzau were still fresh in his memory.

The soldiers debated among themselves for five minutes. It always seemed that soldiers liked to keep people waiting. Daniel was getting ready to turn round and was looking for a suitable spot to reverse the car. Then, unexpectedly the Anjeri soldier waved him on while one of the others removed the spiked planks from the road. Daniel smiled and waved as he drove past them. A few seconds later, he could see in his rear view mirror that the spikes were back on the road while the soldiers leaned against their Landover, stroking their rifles.

There were no other soldiers along the remaining five kilometres to the village centre. The road ended in a wide circular compound edged with red euphorbia and hibiscus bushes. The two main hills sloped smoothly upwards on either side although, high up, rough rocky outcrops gave the hills a harsh, irregular profile.

It seemed unnaturally quiet. Daniel parked his car and walked towards the building that served as general stores and post office. The owner looked surprised and asked, 'You have just arrived?'

'Yes—from Etiak.'

'I thought there was a road-block.'

'There is. What's going on?'

'Nothing, reverend. Just military exercises.' The storekeeper looked nervous, and at the same time anxious to confide in someone. Daniel was resolved not to ask unnecessary questions: he had come as a pastor and this was the only reason he had got through the road-block.

'I see,' he said quite sharply. 'Anyway, I have come to see Mzee Ogwong. I am Lanebi, pastor of Etiak.'

The storekeeper's eyes widened and he hurried over to shake Daniel's hand. 'Yes, yes, reverend. I was asked to tell you this when you came. Mzee Ogwong is not at home. They have moved him to the dispensary sick-bay. He is very ill, you know. He didn't want to go, but they insisted. I can show you the way.'

'Thank you. I know the way.'

Daniel left the shop quickly, while the owner, frowning

somewhat, watched him walk across the compound towards a path between two huts.

* * *

Mzee Ogwong lay feebly on a bed in the corner of the village dispensary, his back propped up by threadbare pillows. His breath came in shuddering wheezes. As Daniel approached the bed the dying man gave no hint of awareness; his eyes were fixed intently upon the wall opposite and yet seemed to be seeing far more than was displayed by the yellowing wall charts or by the cracks in the plaster.

The old man's body was shrivelled and bony. His face was wrinkled like the skin of dry passion fruit. Fever was finishing off the work which old age had nearly completed. As Daniel sat down noiselessly on the chair by the bed, he marvelled at the intensity of the old man's stare, which seemed to belie the feebleness of the rest of the body.

'So you have come in time, Lanebi?' The words of the dying man came with surprising clarity: the eyes had not flicked for one moment from the wall opposite and Daniel found himself looking in the same direction, as though drawn by some invisible spectacle.

'Yes I have come, father Ogwong. In time to see you get better, I pray.'

The old man moved his head jerkily to his left, so that it faced the young pastor. A suggestion of scorn played on his lips. 'Aah, keep your women's words for women. I am dying.' The old man breathed in heavily, and he had to pause before continuing. 'You think I should fear death?'

'You should not. And I know you do not.'

'I do not. Let them rejoice at my funeral, for I go to Christ.' The old man's words became increasingly assured and the wheezing hesitations seemed to become less frequent. 'Do you know why I have called for you at this time?'

Daniel was not sure how to answer. 'You have helped me much in the past, Mzee.'

The old man was gazing at the wall again and seemed not to have heard Daniel's words. After a while he spoke, — with the same intensity that already burned in his eyes. 'Last week I had a dream—a vision. I do not understand it. But it reminded me of things in the past. And of you. So I sent word to you to come here—before I die.' The Reverend Ogwong laboured for more breath and Daniel said nothing.

'Do you know why you are called Lanebi?'

'Yes, naturally. It is the name of my father's father.'

'And do you know why he was Lanebi—"prophet"? It is an uncommon name.'

'My parents rarely spoke of him. And my father was only a child when his father left the home. I have been told...'

'Yes?'

'I have been told that he became mad, and this is why my parents never wished to speak of him'

'The people thought he was mad. That—that is why he was driven from his home.'

'And he came to the hills?'

'Yes. He came to the hills.' Ogwong had a distant look in his eyes, as if he was watching a film depicting the past. 'Were you told that I knew your grandfather – here in Amak-torung?'

'No, I was not told.'

'It is true, my son. I knew him, although I was hardly more than a child then. Perhaps I should have told you this before but it didn't seem necessary.'

'Tell me about him.'

'I can tell you he was not mad. But he had a spirit—a spirit of prophecy.'

There was silence in the room apart from the heavy breathing of the old man, and the footsteps of the medical assistant moving about in the dispensary. The old pastor had taken hold of Daniel's right hand and was gripping it with urgency.

'You see, he was not named Lanebi at birth. He was Ogutto, originally. But he was chased from his village. I am told that even his own wives rejoiced at his expulsion. He was called "lajok", wizard, because of the spirit which shook him and made

him declare strange fantasies as though they were truth. That is why he came to the hills. He was an outcast. It was we who name him Lanebi.'

Daniel had heard such stories from the mouths of story mongers but never from the mouth of one who had actually known his grandfather—someone, moreover, whose word could be trusted. He waited with growing interest, as the old man regained his breath before speaking again.

'We allowed him to stay with us for we did not know of his background. We thought, at first, he was a cattle-man from the north who had lost his herd. As I said, I was just a young man, hardly more than a child. It was several years before the missionaries came. He—your grandfather, I mean—built himself a hut among the rocks on the other side of this hill. How he lived, with no shamba to provide him with food, I do not know. But I do know he became "Lanebi" to us when he prophesied a landslide would come upon this village during the heavy rains of that first season after he had come. Many lives were saved because we believed him. After that we always took notice of him, even though he could be a terrifying figure and often we cold not understand his strange words. We even fed him. He became "of the hills", and he only returned to his fatherland to be buried.'

'This is more than I have ever been told,' Daniel said quietly. 'And you knew my grandfather?'

'Yes, I knew him.' The old man paused, his chest rising and falling heavily. His breath wheezed roughly. A minute passed before he could continue.

'He sometimes came to our home to eat—my father was a chief and he wished to monopolise Lanebi's prophecies! When the spirit of prophecy was upon him he became like a visitor from beyond the grave. He made prophecies of a terrible drought, of rain out of season, of the coming of white people and of many other things which we did not understand until they came to pass. He prophesied both wonderful and terrible things. Some things to this day I have not understood. It was the memory of one of his prophecies—about a dying and rising god—which

made me listen sympathetically to the strange stories about Jesus Christ in the mouths of the white missionaries.'

'What was the prophecy?'

'That is too long a tale.' The old man gripped Daniel's hand with gentle impatience. 'It is another prophecy I wish to tell you of. It was brought back to me in my dream.'

'Your vision?'

'Yes, my vision. Perhaps it is old age and a fading mind deluding me. But I will tell you — for this was why I called you here. Shortly before your grandfather died and was carried back to his fatherland, he began to speak of a great black man whose stature and strength surpassed even the giants who supposedly began our race. In his hand, this giant of the future held a huge panga too heavy to be lifted by a hundred smaller people. The metal for this great knife had exhausted all the mines of the hills. The giant went forth to slay the antelope in the plain. He flexed his muscles. He cried victoriously to the heavens that the land from horizon to horizon belonged to him and no other. He approached the teeming antelope, the blade of his great knife glinting in the sun. But then he stopped. He lifted his weapon— and lopped off his own left arm. And then he hacked at his legs and became a legless trunk. The savannah filled with blood but still the mutilated body hacked at itself, cutting off ears, nose, sexual organs, and finally was poised to take off the head.

'This was one of your grandfather's last prophecies. And I am sure I could not have now recalled it in such detail had I not dreamed it one night last week. For when I heard it as a child, I dismissed it as meaningless.'

The old man was exhausted and his breaths were coming in long sustained gasps. For a time, he could not speak further.

The foul image of self-mutilation disturbed Daniel. He felt deep sorrow for the old shepherd of souls who was to die with such visions upon his mind.

'How does this concern me?' he asked when Mzee Ogwong had begun breathing more steadily.

'As I dreamt,' the old man continued, 'the presence of your grandfather seemed to hover about the scene, but when this

presence became flesh and approached the giant, busy in its self-slaughter, I saw that it was you, and though you were small in comparison, you cried out in a voice of authority: "Stop this!" I knew it was you because the face and the voice were yours. And I felt as if my heart was bursting with pride. I cried out in my sleep—I awoke, and, so I did not see the end of the dream. But later I prayed to God about it. And God told me—"Tell young Lanebi this". That is what I have done.'

Daniel was trembling. The vision challenged his imagination like the primordial visions of the Old Testament, but this one was threatening to suck him into its own reality and make him a participant. He shook his head as if to deny any personal involvement.

'I do not say this to frighten you, Daniel,' the old man continued. 'You and I are Christians. We do not believe that an ancestral spirit can take over a living person's soul. Your grandfather is dead—heaven or hell, God is the judge. But I know some of his prophecies came true in the past—and perhaps we are seeing another one come true in these days. Listen to me.' His hand tightened its grip on Daniel's.

'You are Lanebi—God's lanebi. I have followed your progress with the concern of a father. Believe me, God's hand has been upon you. I have seen it. I have rejoiced at it. God will show you the meaning of that vision. He will show you what is to be done. When he shows you, don't listen to the doubters, the mockers, the ones who say "leave things as they are". Or those who say "leave it to someone else." I nearly gave way to such voices before I was ordained. But in the end I went ahead. I didn't wait for another. And God has blessed me beyond all imagining. And now I'm not reluctant to leave this world.'

The old man turned his head sideways towards Daniel.

'*You*, Lanebi! Don't wait for another! *You*, Lanebi...' His tired, cracked voice faded into rasping breaths. He had no more to say to his visitor.

His eyes were again fixed on the wall and the fragile body lay passively on the bed, shaken by great wheezes.

'I am now going, father,' whispered Daniel after a short while.

'God go with you, my son.' The eyes flashed momentarily to one side and then resumed their contemplation of the wall and the world he could see beyond the wall.

Daniel left the room without another word and walked back to his car in a state of extreme tension.

Chapter Eight

Daniel drove back to Etiak without delay. Storm clouds were approaching from the north and he didn't want to be overtaken by them. Also, he wished to get away from the hills quickly and find a suitable place and time to think about what the Reverend Ogwong has told him.

He met no soldiers on the way back. At the bend near the wooden bridge, he only saw the tracks or the army land-rover leading away from the road into the thickly shrubbed bush. He drove on feeling less anxious. Once he heard the distant clatter of rifle-fire from far across the savannah. There was no other disturbing sound apart from the hollow rumbling of thunder pursuing his car across the plain. It was raining lightly by the time he reached Etiak, but the centre of the storm was moving well to the north of the town.

In the main street he saw Rachel Apwulo hurrying home towards Empotang. He stopped the car and called to the girl, 'No use getting wet, Rachel. I'll drive you home.'

The girl got into the car, with a bulging shopping basket, and sat down beside Daniel.

'Thank you, reverend. This is kind of you.'

'It's nothing, Rachel. A few kilometres will make no difference today. Besides, I have been wishing to see your mother and the rest of the family.' He received no reply, so he asked, 'How are they now?' Again there was silence; he glanced at the girl and saw that her features were tense and she was frowning. 'Tell me, Rachel,' he urged gently.

'My mother does not want visitors, reverend. She has said so very plainly.'

'Not even a pastor?'

'No, not even a pastor. She feels bitter against God. She has even forbidden me to attend church.'

"I do not blame her, Rachel. These events are difficult to understand.'

'But it isn't God who is to blame,' the girl said in a protesting tone. 'And I *shall* come to church.'

Daniel stopped the car a few metres away from Apwulo's shop, now closed and barred. Empotang seemed asleep and completely inactive although the afternoon was not hot..

'You do as your mother desires for the time being. She will need your support. In time these bitter wounds will heal. Then you'll be able to come to church again and maybe I'll be permitted to visit her.'

Rachel Apwulo got out of the car and thanked Daniel again for the lift. The rain was persistent, but not heavy.

'Pass my greetings to your mother, will you? Now I'm here, I think I'll pay a visit to Boaz Erasu.'

Rachel shook her head vigorously. 'You can't, reverend. Look!' she pointed to Erasu's small shop at the corner of a side street. The door was closed and the windows boarded up.

'What happened?'

'No one is saying. He just left. A week or two ago.'

'Have you heard where he's gone?'

'I have not heard. The menfolk could tell you maybe.'

Daniel shook his head. 'It is no concern of mine. Good bye. Rachel.'

'Goodbye, reverend.'

Daniel drove back home, more uneasy than ever.

* * *

That night, he found that sleep eluded him. He tried to lie still, with his eyes closed, and thus allow Rebekah to sleep undisturbed. But she was a light sleeper and was soon aware of her husband's sleeplessness. His anxiety communicated itself to her through the tenseness of his body lying besides hers.

It was one o'clock in the morning. In the next room, Damali was dreaming aloud; otherwise it was very quiet and still. Rebekah propped her head on her right hand, her elbow resting on the pillow, and studied the dark outline of her husband's face against the white pillow, faintly illuminated by the moonlight filtering through the shutters.

'Lanebi,' she said. No reply. Daniel's heavy breathing did not change its steady rhythm. 'Lanebi,' she repeated, in a rebuking

tone. 'I know you are not sleeping. So why do you keep your eyes shut?'

He suddenly opened his eyes wide. 'To keep the darkness out,' he said teasingly.

'Or to keep me out?'

'To keep you asleep, my dear wife. But I see my plan has failed.' He sat up in bed and put an arm round his wife's shoulders.

'You didn't ask me what the doctor told me,' she said in a hurt tone.

'I forgot all about your visit. I'm sorry. What did he say?'

'He said everything is going well. He said that around September 20th will be the date of delivery.'

'That is good. Three months is not so long.' He put his other hand over his wife's belly and stretched it gently.

'Lanebi, you used not to forget such things. Your mind is burdened. Is it still the shootings?'

'No, not directly.'

'Then tell me.'

'You are an inquisitive wife.' Daniel's rebuke was a teasing one, for he knew that he was never happy keeping secrets from his wife.

'And you are a secretive husband.'

'Eeeh! I will send you to the village so you can ask the women there if their husbands tell them their secrets.'

'Is it because of your visit to pastor Ogwong?' his wife persisted.

'Very well, wife. I shall tell you. Yes, it is because of my visit to him.'

'But you knew he was dying before you went.'

'It was not because of his physical condition, although it made me feel very sad. It was what he told me. He described a prophecy which my grandfather Lanebi once declared when he lived in the hills. The image of this prophecy has become branded on my mind. That is why I can't sleep tonight.'

'What is this prophecy?'

'There is no need for you to know.'

'Tell me, Lanebi!'

'All right, I will tell you...The prophecy is of a giant who will go out to the plains to slay the antelope with his mighty knife; and this giant will turn aside from the antelope and begin to cut off his own limbs and thus try to destroy himself.'

'Does this mean anything?'

'I'm not sure, Rebekah.'

'Was there nothing more?'

Daniel's voice became almost as soft as a whisper. 'Pastor Ogwong told me that, in his own dream of this, he saw a man approach the giant and command it to stop its self-destruction. He said he recognised the man. It was me.'

Rebekah did not say a word in reply. She laid her face against her husband's cheek and began crying softly.

Chapter Nine

The following morning Daniel drove to the army barracks four kilometres to the northwest of Etiak. He was no stranger there for he had regularly led services in the chapel and in the open air, for the men of the Msharidi Mechanised Battalion. But he always needed a special pass to enter the outer gates and was scrutinised closely by a young N.C.O at the inner gate leading to the senior administration block.

'I've come to see Major Mutetsi about Sunday services,' explained Daniel in as calm a tone as he could muster. The next service he was going to conduct in the barracks was due in three weeks, but fortunately the corporal did not question him further. The explanation was plausible enough in the circumstances.

Five minutes later Daniel was shown into the major's office. The major did not hide the fact that he was preoccupied with more pressing matters than religion. Nevertheless he spoke politely to the pastor, apologising for being too busy to spare more than a minute or two. He told Daniel that religious services in the barracks, led by non-military personnel, were being suspended for the time being, owing to 'intensive seven-day-a-week training and full-scale exercises which involved the whole battalion. 'When things are back to normal,' explained the major, anticipating the pastor's disappointment, 'I'll contact you again. In the meantime, we will have visits from our army chaplains who can hold services at short notice, and if need be, on the battlefield!' He chuckled at his joke and Daniel smiled in response, murmuring 'I see.'

'Is that all, Reverend Lanebi?' The major's tone was still polite, but tinged with impatience.

'Yes—yes, thank you for your time, major.' They shook hands and Daniel began to leave the room. As if suddenly recalling some trivial matter, he turned at the door and said casually, 'By the way, Major, could I speak with Captain Obwolo for a moment? I have a book for him here.' He took out a slim volume from the pocket of his jacket and tapped it with his forefinger; at

the same time, he prayed silently, 'Lord forgive me for the lie.'

The major eyed him doubtfully, and for a fearful moment Daniel wondered whether the major had found out that the captain was his brother. How would he answer such a question as 'What do you wish to see your *brother* about?'

However, the Major replied without mistrust in his voice. 'Very well—you'll find him in his office at the end of the corridor. But please don't keep him long. Like me, he is very busy.'

'Thank you, Major. I'll be very quick.'

'I didn't know Captain Obwolo was becoming religious,' the major called as Daniel was half out of the room. 'That is almost a miracle!'

Daniel laughed dutifully, closed the door and walked down the corridor.

Lanebi and his elder brother, Reuben Obwolo, had followed very different paths since adolescence. Lanebi's had led him to secondary school, agricultural college, theological college and the job of a town pastor; Obwolo's had led him to the army, where he had stayed since joining at the age of eighteen. He had been recruited as a rank-and-file soldier, like hundreds of other lads who had failed to reach secondary school and who wished to see the world beyond the confines of their fathers' shambas; and now, twenty years later he had attained the rank of captain. During most of those years he had been stationed in the south of the country and his visits home had become increasingly infrequent until, after five years, he had become like a stranger to his own people. He and Daniel had rarely met in those twenty years. Before he had taken up his recent posting to Etiak Barracks with the Msharidi Battalion, he had written to his younger brother asking him not to visit him; nor to give out that they were related or that he had any relative in the area. Daniel agreed sadly to Reuben's demands. He knew of his brother's deep-seated contempt for the Church, but this hardly explained his policy of being a stranger to his own family. Perhaps Reuben's wife, an Achwala woman, had influenced him to cut his links with his people. And perhaps Reuben himself wished to forget

his Anjeri origins in an army that was dominated by people of another tribe.

Reluctantly Daniel had abided by his brother's wishes. Since Reuben's posting to Etiak, he had never paid a personal call, never addressed him as brother except in occasional letters (which were never answered) and never spoken about him to anyone, except Rebekah and his own parents. As Daniel knocked on the door of Captain Obwolo's office, his heart was beating heavily against his ribs. He thought: 'This is not the way brothers should be meeting.'

'Yes come in!' The voice from inside was deep and powerful.

Daniel entered and shut the door behind him. Then he looked directly into his brother's eyes. He was confronted by an expression of frank hostility, confirmed by Reuben's equally hostile tone: 'Why have you come here—after what we agreed?'

Daniel forced himself to be calm. 'I've brought you a book, Reuben.' He placed the paperback carefully on the large desk between himself and his brother. The title was, 'Your Baby and You.'

'Is that supposed to be a joke?'

'No, brother, I thought —well—it was my excuse for seeing you. I had to tell the major something, you see.'

Captain Obwolo glowered back, without replying.

'The book's for my wife. She has another child on the way. It will be our third. She claims to know that it's a boy.'

'Is it because of your wife's good fortune that you have interrupted my work?'

Daniel felt his brother's comments like slaps across the face, but he continued softly. 'No, Reuben. Something more important has forced me to break my promise to you.'

'Well?'

'May I sit down?'

'I suppose you had better, but for God's sake be brief. I've a lot of work to do...and rumours are quick to spread around this place.'

'Rumours are everywhere these days, Reuben. You can't stop people talking.'

'All right, brother. Say what you have to say.' He breathed out heavily as he sat down and leaned back on his chair, tilting it on its back legs. Compared to Daniel, he was a large man, with a broad chest and thick limbs. His hair was cut short and this together with his high forehead gave an impression of baldness. His facial features, unlike his brother's, were plump and rounded, falsely suggesting a lazy, comfort-loving man. By contrast his voice was sharp and rough, and his eyes bore the same intensity that could be seen in his brother's eyes. Daniel was small, slightly built compared to him; but he spoke firmly, unshaken by his elder brother's antagonism.

'People talk as though the government is against the Anjeri. They talk about the government using the army to squash and humiliate the tribe. Whether they are right or wrong, they believe it —and the result is mistrust, hatred. And sooner or later they begin to talk about resistance, even civil war. So the APA try to hit back and this in turn brings more trouble on their—'

'Since when have reverends pushed their fingers into other families' millet? Is it for you churchmen to interfere in matters of politics?'

'The Church should be concerned with every part of life. Not just so-called "religious" activities. That applies to pastors within the Church. So I too am concerned.'

'We have our army chaplains. They can deal with Christianity as it applies to the armed forces.'

'But it is we pastors outside who must bury the civilian dead.'

Reuben Obwolo looked genuinely puzzled. 'What do you mean?'

'Apwulo. He died in my parish.'

'That man was a fool. Gunrunning for the guerrillas.'

'And his son, Etumo—and the brother Okoria?'

'Why not, for God's sake? They must have known!'

'And what bout the two young men at Eginzau who were shot in my presence, without charge or trial?'

Reuben angrily thumped his fist on the table. 'Listen, brother! I am a soldier. I give orders. Obey orders. I don't question those

above me and I don't expect to be questioned by those under me. The army isn't a debating chamber with votes taken at the end of every motion. As for public opinion—even the opinion of respected churchmen like you—that is not our concern.'

'Then you have no conscience about—about what is happening in Anjeri region?'

Captain Obwolo lowered his voice and spoke with less assurance: 'Yes, of course it sometimes worries me. But I am only one member of the army.... I cannot march out of time with everyone else. You, Lanebi, you too are a member of a big organisation—the Church. Would you defy your superiors, the bishops and archbishops?'

'There is a higher authority—God.'

Obwolo laughed scornfully. 'That's a convenient excuse that I don't have. Just imagine: "Please, General, God told me to disobey you"!'

'You are mocking me, Reuben.'

'I am trying to show you that, even if I disapproved of current army operations—which I don't where the APA is concerned—I have no power or position to influence policy.'

'But you aren't a junior officer.'

'No, but I am an *Anjeri* officer,' Obwolo rested his forehead in the palms of his hands, as though suddenly overtaken by a deep weariness. 'I did not mean to say this, but I will now since you press me. But you must not repeat it to anyone, understand? Nowadays, Anjeris are in a small minority in the army—especially among the officers. We are not trusted much. And we don't have much chance to give important orders. Not these days. So what do we do? We remain efficient but, as far as possible, inconspicuous. What the British call keeping "a low profile". You understand?'

Daniel replied in a gentle, conciliating tone. 'I can see now why you have kept away from us since your return to Etiak. I see also how wrong I was to think you were even slightly responsible for what is happening in the villages. I ask your forgiveness.'

His brother sat upright and pointed an angry finger at Lanebi. 'I don't care a white man's curse for your apologies. I don't care what you or all the Christians of Etiak think of me. But if you care for your own safety, and the safety of your family and of your "flock", you'd do well to remember what I've told you. "Keep a low profile", okay? Stick to the peace-loving, hardship-enduring sermons which I'm told you preach in your church, and stop this interfering in other people's business. Follow the example of your dear old bishop at Ong'ok—he's a wise man, a wise religious leader, if such a thing is possible. Follow his quiet example and you'll live to see your grandchildren.'

'You're mocking me again.'

Obwolo's voice had no hint of scorn in it. It sounded tired and resigned. 'I've given up mockery, brother. It's a luxury I cannot afford nowadays. I am just telling you straight: stick to your religious duties and keep your mouth shut, your eyes closed, your ears sealed whenever a soldier, or a politician maybe, does anything that offends your conscience. Do you hear me?'

'I have heard.'

'I hope you will follow my advice too.'

'And you?'

'I am my own concern,' Obwolo replied fiercely—and then added more quietly, 'If I can get through the next year or two, perhaps things will settle down.'

'I'll be praying for you, Reuben.'

'Thanks—it might even help, if your God has any power left.'

'He has—but not the power of a gun.'

'Then he has no real power.' Captain Obwolo stood up and added, 'I hope you will repeat nothing of our conversation.'

'I will not, brother. Thank you for being frank with me.'

Reuben handed back the book to his brother. 'Thank you for the book. But I already have six children and I don't plan to have any more. Your wife needs this more than me.'

Daniel took the book and slipped it into his pocket. As he opened the door to leave, his brother remarked, 'I hope to see your new baby—your son—one day.'

'That is also my hope,' replied Daniel ambiguously, with the door half-open. Goodbye, Captain Obwolo.'

'Goodbye, Revered Lanebi.'

Chapter Ten

Daniel lifted his eyes from the mud caking his shoes, to the blue-grey profile of the eastern mountains, tinged with the rich pink shades of dusk. In the west the sun had left behind a mauve and scarlet sky. Between Etiak and the mountains lay sixty kilometers of green and brown savannah; beyond, the drier thorn bush country extended into the neighbouring state of Chabon. The atmosphere was fresh and clear, washed by the morning rain and dried by the afternoon sun. He was standing at the edge of his shamba, a hoe in one hand. He wished that his own thoughts had the lucid clarity of the scene he was gazing at.

Such evenings had often been for Daniel a time of delight in God's creation; often they had been times of fruitful meditation in preparation for sermons. In recent weeks they had become times of deep searching. Daniel had studied the landscape from every corner of the church compound, as if a new perspective might bring a solution to the problems burdening his mind. But he had found no intuition in the transparent air, no message in the mountains. Only one thing had become clear to him in the previous few weeks: he had to speak out. His visit to Etiak Barracks had made it obvious that he could not expect to be listened to by the army. The words of the bishop had effectively destroyed any hope that leaders of the Church would make a stand. His conversation with Reverend Ogwong had convinced him that it was no good waiting for another person to take the lead. There might not be another person . And even if there was someone else, his own conscience was urging *him* to do something. There wasn't much that a pastor could do practically, but he could at least speak the truth to the people who came to his church. The Old Testament prophets were people who dared to speak the truth and their message seemed to Daniel to be strangely up-to-date.

Before the brief twilight had darkened into night, Daniel returned to his house with a small decision made. The following Sunday morning, he would begin a series of sermons about the

Prophet Jeremiah. The prophet's message could make a lot of people, including himself, feel uncomfortable.

And the following Sunday, he started:

'My text this morning is from the book of Jeremiah, chapter 22 verse 3: "Thus says the Lord: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place."'

Daniel looked up from the large pulpit Bible and faced the congregation. 'Some weeks ago, at this service, I spoke to you on the kingship of Christ, saying that it is a spiritual kingship and not to be fought for with sword or guns. I also said that peace and co-operation should be the aims of every Christian. I do not intend now to contradict those points today.

'But peace doesn't always mean walking the same path as the rest of the people or even the leaders of the people.

'Jeremiah is a good example of this. When he looked hard at his own society, he saw many things which were wrong. From king down to peasant, the people had turned to idols for their security. So the laws of God were ignored, and this led to immorality—even among the priests and prophets and temple goers. Justice was neglected. Instead the weakest members of society—widows, orphans, the poor and simple — were trodden into the earth by those with power and influence. As for the so-called prophets, who were meant to declare God's will, they had become "yes-men", flattering the king with lies that deadened his ears to the harsh truth. If prophets and preachers become men-pleasers, then who will speak God's uncomfortable truth?

'Well, in those days, Jeremiah did. And for his effort, he was thrown into prison by his own king and people. Not because he was telling lies; but because the truth he was telling was unpleasant to hear. You know, a bearer of bad news is never rewarded for the sores on his feet. Jeremiah condemned the king for allowing injustice and corruption to thrive in Judah—he also prophesied the fall of Jerusalem to the invading armies from Babylon.

'The city of Jerusalem did fall, as Jeremiah had said. God's word was proved to be true. Why then did the king of Judah try to finish off the prophet? Perhaps by killing him, the king thought he could prove that Jeremiah was a liar and not speaking God's word but only his own foolish ideas.

'But we today, looking back into the history of that time, can see that Jeremiah was right in what he declared and would have been right, even if king Zedekiah had killed him.

'Jeremiah can speak to us today, I believe. But first of all, we must ask ourselves: what comes first in my life—obedience to God or keeping myself safe? An uncomfortable truth or a comfortable lie?'

Daniel had reached the critical point of his sermon. So far he had given a brief outline of a far-off situation, a piece of history two and a half thousand years old. He wondered how many of his listeners were already making comparison between the Judah of 600 B.C and Mashariki in the 1970s. Probably very few, but he would make it clear before he finished speaking.

The church was almost as full as it had been several weeks before, after the shootings in Empotang, although it was certainly not packed out as it had been for the bishop's visit. As he paused for a few seconds, Daniel's assurance in what he was doing seemed to desert him. A hot shiver crept up his body and when it reached his head he could feel the sweat drops gathering on his brow. In this moment of fevered uncertainty, Daniel remembered Mzee Ogwong, lying in bed, eyes blazing confidence and saying '*You*, Lanebi! *You*, Lanebi!' —and at once the panic was gone. The intuitive assurance that what he was doing was right—without the need of logical support or explanation—returned suddenly. He continued his sermon, clearly and unfaltering.

'Like Jeremiah and the true prophets of old, the Christians of today should be ready to speak the truth, whether it is pleasant or unpleasant to hear. It would be a terrible thing for our country if the men and women of God only said what others told them to say. It would be terrible if the Church closed its eyes to the

evil within our society and only opened them when something good was in view.

'How foolish it would sound to us if our church leaders announced that from next Sunday God would no longer exist because the National Assembly was about to pass a law declaring God was dead! Of course, we know neither our government nor our Church would do such a thing. But would it then seem foolish to you if a government killed innocent people, taking life without trial or justice, and the Church in that land announced it was God's will to shed innocent blood—or pretended that the killing was not taking place and kept resolutely silent? If a government oppressed a group of people living within its borders—just because it was different in language or customs or origin—would it seem foolish for the Church to raise its hand and pronounce God's blessing on the prejudice and oppression? Would it seem foolish to you, for the prophets and preachers of God never to raise their voices above the cheering crowds and never to say—not even on one small matter—"this should not be so; this is not God's will?"'

Daniel could tell that his congregation was listening to him intently. Some of the expressions on their faces seemed to say, 'This is a Lanebi we have not heard before.'

'I am not a politician. And it is not my job to run this country—nor even our region of Anjeri. But I am a servant of Jesus, who is the way, the truth and the life. Truth has many aspects. The greatest truth is that Jesus died to save us from sin and its results. But the world is full of smaller truths that need to be told. For example, here is a truth: people are being killed by soldiers in this region, and, whether they are innocent or guilty of any crime, we shall never know because they are shot without trial, without witness, without a judge and without the justice which every citizen has a right to. This is a truth. For the families of these victims, it is a big truth because it has left them without fathers or sons. For other people, it may be a small truth of little importance, because it has not closely affected their lives.

'My hope is that to our President and our government, it will be a big truth for they are the ones who have the care of this nation and its entire people, in their hands. I hope, too, that all of us in the Church, whether we are ministers or laymen, won't be afraid to tell the truth to those in authority over us, whether this truth be small or big. Perhaps then, we shall help to increase justice and righteousness in our land, because without these qualities all our singing and praying in church is meaningless. It becomes a pretence.

'I hope all of us are ready to take our Christian faith with us out of church today and put it into practice outside this building. If we are Christians only at church on Sundays, then God might say to us—as he said to the Jews through the prophet Amos—these words:

"Take away from me the noise of your songs;
to the melody of your harps I will not listen
but let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an overflowing stream."

And now let us kneel for prayer.'

When Daniel shook hands with the departing congregation five minutes later, there was little to show that he had preached anything unusual in his sermon. Two or three men walked off without shaking his hand, which was odd but not necessarily significant. The A.D.C regarded him with a solemn expression and shook his head, very gently, form side to side. And one young man—Daniel didn't know his name but thought he was related to the Apwulos of Empotang—shook his hand very warmly and said quietly, with barely suppressed enthusiasm: 'This is what we have long waited for from the church.'

The congregation dispersed and Daniel walked through the empty church to the vestry. The elation he had felt towards the end of his sermon had been replaced by a feeling of anti-climax, a sort of emptiness. He wondered how his sermon would be interpreted. Whether it would reach the ears of Achwala government officials. Whatever happened, he had declared

himself and he felt an enormous relief at the release given him by what he had preached. He bowed his head and thanked God for the step he had taken. He committed his life again into God's care and, refreshed through the prayer, he left the vestry and made his way across the compound to his house and family.

* * *

Daniel had expected some hostile response to his sermon during the week that followed. He had been quite prepared to receive an official note from the office of the District Commissioner; he had even imagined that the O.C of Etiak Barracks might send a group of military police to his house, with consequences he dared not think about. But he hadn't expected the total lack of official reaction. He began to wonder if his sermon was already forgotten; perhaps he was dramatising himself, exaggerating his importance in the eyes of the authorities. Anyway, his words were in no way dangerous—as an appeal to support the guerrillas would certainly have been. However, the silence disturbed Daniel and he looked for some definite response.

He wished his wife had attended the service, but she had been busy in the house at the time. He wondered whether anyone had spoken to her about his sermon.

'Rebekah!' Daniel called from the kitchen door, one morning later that week.

His wife appeared from one of the bedrooms.

'Rebekah, come and sit for a moment.' His eyes immediately told her of his mood and she sat on the nearest chair, quietly—almost submissively.

'What is it, Lanebi?'

'I wish to ask you—it's nothing important—but I wonder if your friends have spoken to you about last Sunday.'

'Last Sunday? You mean the terrible storm in the night?' Something in her tone convinced Daniel that she was being evasive—that she knew what he was referring to.

'I mean the sermon I preached...'

Rebekah remained sitting in silence, not looking at her husband.Then, she rose abruptly, with the words, 'I have to finish cleaning the bedrooms—'

'Rebekah!' The sudden fierceness of his voice pushed her back on the chair, and even Daniel himself felt surprised by his own anger. Very gently, he continued: 'Just tell me what they said.'

'They said very little—only a few things they remembered from your sermon. One of them—it was Mrs. Okoth, I think—said she was sorry.'

'What did she mean?' Daniel felt the anger about to burst out again. 'Sorry for the words I spoke?'

'Not sorry like that,' she replied softly.

'Well? —sorry for what?'

'Sorry—for me.'

He put no further questions. Even when his wife got up and went to finish the housework, he just sat still, staring silently in front of him, like someone suddenly reminded of something terribly important.

Chapter Eleven

On the Tuesday of the following week, Daniel received the first outside response to his sermon but from a completely unexpected source. It was about nine-thirty at night; Rebekah had just gone to bed and Daniel was about to follow, as soon as he had finished reading the latest diocesan newsletter—a task he did dutifully rather than joyfully. He found the constant appeals to boost the fund for building a bell-tower alongside Ong'ok cathedral very unmoving; even if he had money to spare he felt sure he wouldn't use it to construct a European-style bell-tower in Ong'ok. Possibly a drum-tower would be more suitable.

Daniel's musings about drums were disturbed by the regular banging of a door outside; it could only be the vestry door. 'That's odd. I thought I had shut that door,' he thought.

The moon was half-full and shed enough light for him to walk across the compound without a torch. The vestry door had stopped banging but he could see, in the white half-light, that it was ajar. The compound was quite deserted as he turned across to the church. Ten paces short of the door, he slowed down as a frightening intuition, that something was wrong, came into his mind. It felt like entering the area of electric storm when your whole body tingles with the static in the atmosphere. Very cautiously, he walked the remaining distance to the door, reached for the handle with his left hand had and the key ready in his right.

The door swung wide open just as he touched the handle. A man was standing silhouetted in the doorway. 'Reverend!' a voice said in a hoarse whisper.

The shock had momentarily paralysed Daniel. He could have put up no defence if an attack had followed.

The voice continued, in a tone of desperate appeal. 'Reverend! Please! Do not call out! There is no danger!'

Daniel replied at last, feeling his heart thumping inside him at twice its normal rate. 'Who are you?' The stranger's voice seemed familiar.

'I am Erasu— Boaz Erasu. I wish to talk. In private.'

Daniel's fright had gone but his caution had not. 'I am not coming in, Erasu. You must come out.'

Erasu's tone became more appealing. 'I am alone but it is too dangerous for me to be seen in the open. They are after me. Please reverend—let us speak in here. It is safe, I am unarmed.'

It seemed like an invitation to an ambush; but he had already been led outside by Erasu's slamming the vestry door, and the others in hiding—if there were any—could have easily overpowered him by now. Precautions seemed rather belated now but Daniel said firmly, 'Open the window-shutters and let me look in from outside.'

'You do not trust me? Very well...' The shadowy figure disappeared from the doorway and, a few moments later, the outer shutters and mosquito netting of the window swung open. Daniel peered inside. It was dark, but the moonlight revealed only one figure standing against the opposite wall. Others might be hiding in the church, but Daniel decided to take the risk.

He moved back to the doorway, entered the room cautiously and checked that everything was as it had seemed through the window.

'Well, Erasu—you have strange times to call on your pastor.' Daniel's sarcastic tone belied the fear quivering inside him.

'Reverend, please— shut the door. People may see.'

'People? You mean my family? People do not walk across this compound in the night.' Daniel was trying to talk naturally but his voice had taken on the same hushed coarseness of Erasu's voice.

'I ask you, pastor—because I am frightened.'

'Yes, you are frightened,' he thought. 'I can almost smell it.'

Daniel closed the door and stood facing Erasu.

Erasu moved towards the window, reaching out to shut it. 'You will leave that,' said Daniel sharply; it seemed that the knowledge of Erasu's fear had given him courage. The shadowy form moved back and sat down on a chair. The moonlight through the open window caught the whites of the man's eyes

and now Daniel could see the man's fear as well as hear it in his voice.

'Now, Erasu—what is it you want?'

'Good evening, reverend,' replied the other, as though a friendly conversation in normal circumstances was just beginning.

'Is it good when one meets a ghost?'

Erasu chuckled nervously. 'Eeeh! I am not a ghost, reverend. But I have come tonight because they are watching out for me.'

'They?' Daniel was resolved to let Erasu spell out exactly what he was doing and for what motives.

'You know, the soldiers and the authorities.'

'All I know is you disappeared from your home about three weeks ago.'

'Yes, it was because I was scared. I thought they might kill me like they killed Apwulo.'

'So you ran away?'

'Yes.' The monosyllable expressed a mixture of hope and regret. 'I am with the Asekeri pa Anjeri.'

'You were before, weren't you?' Daniel asked, recalling the nature of Erasu's conversation with him on the morning after the Empotang shootings.

'We are living in the forets—of course, I cannot tell you where,' continued Erasu ignoring the pastor's question.

'Why have you come all this way—and with such risk to yourself—to tell me this? Do you think me such a fool as to join you in the forest?'

The sharpness of Daniel's retort silenced Erasu, who seemed incapable of making a meaningful reply. His eyes cast around the darkened room, like a bad actor who has forgotten his lines.

'I did not come to —you are not expected—well we thought you could help us where you are.'

'Help? Me help guerrillas?'Daniel deliberately used the Anjeri nickname for guerrillas—a word which normally meant 'hunting dogs'. 'What could lead you to think I want to be of help to them?'

'We have heard about your sermon,' replied Erasu simply.

These words were enough to explain the melodramatic situation Daniel had suddenly found himself in. He guessed how, through a succession of increasingly garbled reports, the guerrillas' headquarters had heard that the reverend Lanebi had preached a sermon 'commending the APA for their resistance to government's tribal oppression *et cetera*'. He guessed how Erasu, as a former 'friend' of the reverend Lanebi, had been hastily dispatched to make contact and find out how the pastor could help them in the struggle. The situation would have been laughable if it was not so frightening; for if the guerrillas regarded him as a potential ally, how did the authorities—men who may also have received distorted reports of his sermon—regard him?

Daniel felt very scared and, even worse, very isolated. In the cold darkness of the silent room, it seemed he was terribly alone, with the nearest human habitation a thousand miles away. Outside, a gentle rustling in the grass could be heard—some small night prowler looking for food, he presumed.

Erasu stirred uneasily, peering at the silhouetted head in front of him. 'It was a good sermon.'

The broken silence did not disperse Daniel's sense of loneliness. He answered wearily: 'How can you know, Erasu? You were not there.'

'Eeeh, we have heard all about it—from friends.'

'Spies?'

Erasu chuckled nervously, pretending to take the comment as a joke. 'Friends—your friends too, reverend. They liked what you said. More than...'

'More than what?'

'...your sermon for peace after Apwulo's death.'

'You didn't like that, did you, Erasu? Preaching on peace? And what have they told you I'm now preaching on? —War?'

'You have called upon the Anjeri to resist oppression with all their powers.' Erasu tried to make it sound a statement, but the sentence ended in a questioning tone.

'I did not speak of resistance as you mean it. Can't you see, as a Christian, I desire justice—not a bullet for a bullet?'

Erasu couldn't see, and, sensing Lanebi was on the defensive, pressed home his point. 'Yes, reverend, we seek equal justice for everyone. That is what we are fighting for in the forest and along the border. And you have been braver than all the other pastors in demanding this justice. This is something new in your preaching, something that wasn't there before.'

Erasu was right, although he knew nothing of Daniel's bitter experience of seeing two suspected guerrillas shot in their self-dug graves. He could have no idea of the succession of experiences that were beginning to form a new pattern in the pastor's life. After a few seconds, he replied slowly: 'There *is* something new in my mind and therefore in my preaching. But it is not a thing I can explain to those who hide in forests, waiting to ambush their enemies.'

'You are a proud man, ' Erasu said accusingly, with growing confidence.

'And if I joined,' Daniel asked without seriousness, 'I would have to take the oath, wouldn't I?

'We do have an oath.'

'Is that when you received the lizard's tail you were wearing round your wrist the last time you visited me?'

Erasu nodded. 'You were observant, reverend. But it was a chameleon's.'

'And you expect me, a Christian minister, to take an oath in the name of all the gods of our ancestors?'

'You could take it in the name of Christ, I think.'

Daniel laughed scornfully and placed his hand on the door handle as though he was on the point of leaving. An evening breeze was rustling the maize leaves in his small shamba. 'You must go back to your fellow-rebels.'

'What am I to tell them?' Erasu's tone was again worried, edged with panic.

'Tell them— I am a proud man, if you wish.'

Erasu chuckled hoarsely, his panic increasing. 'I must have a message from you.'

'What if I refuse?'

The other man didn't reply, but Daniel could sense a new fear in Erasu—the fear of his present commanders.

'Very well, Erasu—you can tell your bosses this. I will not help them and I will not support them in any way—until they use righteousness rather than bullets to bring about this justice we are talking about.'

'Bullets are sometimes more effective than righteousness.'

'Perhaps in the short term. But in the long run...'

'We cannot wait that long, reverend.'

Daniel opened the door sharply, recalling with sudden dismay that he had used the same words himself to express his own feelings. 'You must go now, Erasu. I have nothing more to say.'

Erasu had got to his feet and was looking anxiously at the moonlit sky through the open window. 'I will go—after you have returned to the house. It will be safer.'

'All right, Erasu.'

'And, reverend: you will not speak of this meeting to anyone?' Erasu's tone had a suggestion of menace in it.

'If I do?'

'I do not know, reverend. But our leaders might declare that you are a member of the APA.'

'You would betray your own brother for a rifle.'

Erasu was grinning now. 'I have no need to. Look.' He reached down and took hold of a rifle that had been lying in the shadow under the table.

Daniel did not move, although his heart was again beating fast. 'I hope you never kill anyone with that.'

'If I do,' replied Erasu, no longer grinning, 'it will be with a bullet, not with righteousness.'

Daniel opened the door. 'I am going now.'

'Goodnight, reverend.'

Daniel walked out of the room without another word.

During the following days the memory of the night-time meeting with Erasu hovered menacingly over Daniel's thoughts; but his resolve to declare the truth and to urge a Christian solution, as he saw it, grew in him. It seemed to him that he

had found the role which his life till then had been leading up to. He could scarcely comprehend his own courage in speaking out so boldly. Occasionally, when he was on his own, he said to himself, 'You are a fool, Lanebi'. But the mood quickly passed. He grew more confident that God was equipping him for the task assigned to him.

The next Sunday he again based his sermon on the prophet Jeremiah, drawing specific parallels between the injustice of Jeroboam's reign and the inequalities of the Gwino government. But he also condemned the guerrillas for their methods, insisting that a just society could not be founded on the success of murderers and saboteurs. Daniel realised that his attitude was idealistic. But the people needed ideals—in place of the cynicism and fatalism which seemed to be choking all morality and all hope.

It was Daniel's condemnation of the APA which prevented, or rather delayed, his arrest. The authorities regarded his powerful anti-guerrilla preaching as an asset and for the time being his demands for social justice from the government were reluctantly overlooked. He did, however, receive a letter from the bishop commanding him to be restrained and respectful to the government and 'our great president.' The letter had been written at the prompting of the DC of North Anjeri, but the bishop was not unwilling to write it; for he was afraid that the hot-headed pastor Lanebi would irrevocably sour the good relationship between the Church and the government, established over many years before and since Independence.

Many Anjeri came to hear about Lanebi's preaching—even those who never attended church—and what they heard confused them. How could a man blame the government and condemn the opposers of that government almost in the same breath? It seemed illogical. It also savoured of anti-Anjeri loyalties. Tribal feeling among the Anjeri was running very high. Both in the towns and the rural areas there was general approval—usually unspoken—for the activities of the APA. They were, it was assumed, fighting for the survival of the Anjeri nation. Every bridge blown up and every ambushed army vehicle was a

triumph. The ruthless 'military manoeuvres' had not lessened the resolve of the guerrillas; the memory of their dead tribesmen—many of them innocent villagers with no direct involvement in the activities of the APA—hardened them for the campaign which, they predicted, lay ahead.

But Lanebi? He was a puzzle. Certainly he was a brave man, for who else had publicly demanded an end of tribal oppression—apart from exiles in their secure offices in London and New York? But a solution, without the strong arm of the freedom fighters, seemed a foolish dream. Very few Anjeri really believed that words could change the policies of President Gwino and his military government.

Daniel increasingly sensed his isolation. Anjeri nationalism was strong even among his church members; he had seen, with much shame, visiting Achwàla Christians cold-shouldered by his own congregation. They had pretended not to understand English or Kiswahili, and the visitors had been left standing alone like men under a curse. Daniel had sought them out, shaken their hands, told them they were welcome—but the damage had already been done. They would never attend Etiak church again. 'All one in Christ Jesus' was often quoted from the Bible; in practice this unity was being postponed until heaven, when presumably God would compel Achwala and Anjeri souls to worship together in mutual love, just as he would compel the Christians of different races in South Africa to sing praises together!

Daniel looked for support from his wife but instead he found an unfamiliar coldness. It seemed unfair that at this time of crisis his wife should withdraw into reticence and refuse to share with him her thoughts. He had tried to discuss with her his series of sermons on Jeremiah, but she had never given an opinion on them. Her silence was equivalent to disapproval in Daniel's eyes. He could not remember her ever being so silent or sullen. Their marriage relationship seemed to have lost its openness, but Daniel had been so preoccupied with other mattes that he had been slow to notice what was happening. But now

he could not help noticing with every new day a new strain, a new coldness between them.

One night he challenged Rebekah directly.

'Why do you keep so silent, wife?'

Rebekah sounded hurt. 'Me, silent?'

'Yes—you do not tell me your thoughts these days.'

'Nor do you tell me your thoughts—not even your deeds.'

'What do you mean?'

Rebekah looked at Daniel with fierce frankness. 'The night you went outside to shut the church door that was banging...'

'Yes?'

'Does it take twenty minutes to shut a door?'

'No, I had other things...'

'Like talking to guerrillas?'

Daniel's eyes widened in surprise. 'So you crept up to listen? You were very silent. I didn't realise you knew about it.'

'You mean you wished to keep me in ignorance?'

'That's not what I mean. How can I explain?'

Rebekah remained quiet but tears were beginning to fill her eyes.

'I told the man I would not help them. Did you hear that part of our conversation?' Daniel continued, earnestly.

'I heard; but it is enough you were speaking with guerrillas.'

Daniel's tone became more urgent. 'But look, my dear, I have preached loudly and clearly against these people's methods.'

'Yes, and you have also preached against the government!'

'Do you wish me to say only one half of the truth'

Both their voices were raised harshly and Rebekah's was beginning to crack into sobbing. 'I wish you to stay alive.'

'Don't you believe in what I am preaching? Don't you care for truth and justice?'

'Lanebi! These are words. I don't believe in words because I don't understand them!'

She broke down into weeping. Daniel sat helplessly until her tears had almost stopped. A month before, he would have put his arms around her and wiped away her tears. But now he just

sat where he was. Then he asked with forced calmness: 'What *do* you believe in then?'

The reply was equally calm. 'I believe in my child who will be born five weeks from now. I believe in his father who should be alive to welcome his son into the world.'

'I believe in our child too. But I also believe he deserves a better society to live in than the one we have now.'

'For me,' added his wife slowly, 'it is enough that he should live. And that my husband should live.'

'It is not enough for me, my dear.'

'That is because you are not a mother.... I tell you, Daniel, I cannot bear the strain, the uncertainty much longer...'

'Rebekah, forgive me. But please try to understand.'

'I *have* tried, but I say I am a mother. And I will not risk my child for an idea—even for my husband's idea.'

'You and the baby are not at risk surely?'

'We are. As long as I am here with you.'

Daniel's mind clouded with fear. When he spoke, his words were barely audible. 'What do you wish to do?'

Rebekah's words were clear. She had already made the decision. 'I and the children will go away and stay with my sister at Ong'ok. My son will be born there. I have already written to tell her that I'm coming.'

'You —you are leaving me?'

'Yes. Until this madness has left you, Lanebi. Then all of us will come back to you. If...if you are still here.'

'My God, Rebekah! You are too cruel. How can I—?'

Daniel could not complete his sentence; his eyes were already filling with tears. He would not cry in front of Rebekah. He rushed into their bedroom, flung himself on the bed and wept without restraint.

The following morning Rebekah and the children left the house. Daniel could not bear to see them go. He went out early to visit a family that had fallen sick. When he returned, there was nobody in the house. He went to the kitchen and began to cook himself a late breakfast.

Chapter Twelve

The announcement that President Gwino was to visit Anjeri province took many people by surprise. It was a measure of the confidence he placed in his army; the large-scale operations against guerrilla groups had apparently been very successful, even in the impenetrable forest where a majority of the APAs were said to lurk. The president was to use the road through the forest on his way to Etiak. It was at his own insistence. He wished to prove beyond any shadow of doubt that he ruled the whole country, including Anjeri region. His visit would be accompanied by a massive show of force. The impenetrable forest road would be patrolled by a thousand soldiers. A battalion was being transferred from the capital to the towns of Etiak and Ong'ok. The air-force would put on a display, skimming the rooftops of the two towns, and attacking dummy targets on the outskirts. There would be a parade of tanks and armoured vehicles. All the important Anjeri people would assemble in one of the two towns and would shake hands with the president. Hundreds of invitations were sent out by the President's Office; they did not have 'RSVP' on them because it was assumed everyone invited would be present. Even Daniel Lanebi received an invitation.

Lanebi's distress over the departure of his wife and children lingered on. He wondered whether his wife had betrayed him by leaving at a time when he most needed her; or whether he had betrayed his family by dragging them into such danger. His distress was increased by more sad news: Pastor Mzee Ogwong was dead. The old man had passed away at his home in Amaktorung during the last week of August. It was said by those at his bedside that his eyes remained bright with anticipation until the very last breath.

Lanebi recalled his last meeting with the old pastor, whose life had been a source of inspiration to so many people. Lanebi also recalled the image which Mzee Ogwong had bequeathed him: the giant of the savannah hacking himself to pieces and the blood spouting from the wounds and spreading like a tide

of death across the countryside; and the lonely voice in the wilderness calling to the giant to cease its self-destruction.

The visit of the president to Etiak was fixed for Wednesday, September 14th, a month after the time Rebekah had gone to her sister's at Ong'ok and just a few days before the expected date of delivery. During the days that followed the announcement, Etiak town remained quiet and tense. The police became more vigilant; uniformed soldiers were often seen in the streets. As the day drew nearer, certain people were closely questioned, others were arrested and a small number of citizens disappeared. Lanebi found himself in the first category. Because he was a pastor, and a respected man in the town, he was not hauled off to the police station; instead he received a terse note from the ADC on the last day of August. It said: 'Come to my office at 10. a.m. tomorrow. Do not be late.'

So Lanebi went and arrived five minutes early. He was kept waiting an hour before being called into the room. The ADC was flanked by his personal secretary and a Senior Police Inspector from the CID. He motioned Lanebi to sit down.

'Our president is visiting this town in less than three weeks, Reverend Lanebi,' the ADC said.

Get to the point, thought Daniel impatiently; but he said nothing.

'We wish the visit to be smooth and successful. With no unnecessary difficulties.'

Daniel's expression remained neutral.

'I hope, Reverend, you support our intentions,' continued the ADC, annoyed by Lanebi's refusal to speak.

'Why should I think differently?' Daniel replied tonelessly.

'You have a reputation for being—for being rather outspoken in your sermons. Some of the things you say are not complimentary to our president and government.'

'Nor to the Asekeri pa Anjeri,' Daniel put in.

'We are aware of that. And I think Detective Inspector Rutaho would agree that it is this which has kept you free up till now.' The inspector nodded but said nothing. 'But it may not

be enough to keep you free in future, especially in the coming two weeks.

'What must I do to ensure my freedom?'

The ADC continued bluntly. 'Stop speaking against the government. Concentrate on the good things that it has achieved for the nation. Urge your flock to receive the president warmly as a fellow Christian. Warn them that a lack of response could cause some problems...'

'Is that all?' asked Daniel ironically.

'I am asking you, like one reasonable man to another, to follow the example of the Jesus you preach. He preached love and peace, didn't he?'

'Yes, but he also preached the truth—however inconvenient. He called Herod a fox, for example.'

The ADC leaned forward on his desk. 'Why are you stubborn, Lanebi?'

'It is not my aim. But you urge me to follow Christ. Do you want me to condemn the Pharisees of this country?'

'I am not here to debate the Bible!' The ADC banged his fist on the table in his impatience. 'But I tell you this: unless you toe the line, it will be the army that interviews you next time. They might not be so reasonable as us. And maybe then you will follow Christ's example to the limit!

At this point the detective inspector spoke, in a slow, measured voice. 'Reverend Lanebi, I am in charge of civilian security in this town during the president's visit, but I warn you I have no authority over the armed forces if they decide, before I do, that you are a security risk. For your own safety, keep quiet in the coming weeks. I don't intend to arrest you at present. But I advise you to...'

'To "keep a low profile"?'

'Exactly.'

Inspector Rutaho seemed pleased at Lanebi's response, but his pleasure was short-lived.

'Thank you, Inspector. I appreciate your concern, but....'

'Well?'

'I cannot promise to abide by the demands you are making. If I betrayed myself now, I think I should hate myself. That would be worse than almost anything I can conceive.'

'Worse than death?'

'Even that. Though God forbid I should die.'

The ADC shrugged hopelessly. 'It is not up to God to forbid it. It is entirely in your own hands.'

'Am I free to go?' asked Daniel after a long silence.

The ADC looked at the police inspector, who let out a heavy sigh before replying: 'Yes, for the time being. There will be no further warning, remember. Think about what we have said.'

'I shall. Thank you for sparing your time.'

When Daniel arrived back at his house, he found his brother's wife waiting for him in the sitting-room. John—his temporary houseboy—whispered that she had turned up two hours earlier, looking very distressed. Daniel well knew that only something very urgent would bring his Achwala sister-in-law to his home. She had never been here before and, in fact, Lanebi had spoken to her on only three or four occasions in his whole life.

Daniel greeted her as warmly as he could, despite his anxiety over what had been said to him at the ADC's office. She was almost a stranger to him—a feeling accentuated by the need to converse in English rather than Anjeri.

'How is Reuben?' Daniel asked after greeting her.

Susan Obwolo looked down to hide her anguish and wiped nose with her handkerchief. Finally she said in the faintest of voices: 'He is not at home. I don't know where he is.'

With Rebekah's departure fresh in his mind, Daniel immediately assumed there had been a family quarrel and they had split up. Did she expect him to patch up their differences when his own marriage seemed to be falling apart?

But Daniel had made a false conclusion—as he realised when the woman handed him a note in her husband's handwriting. It was dated the previous Tuesday.

Susan: I have been called to take part in special manoeuvres in the impenetrable forest. So have all other Anjeri officers and N.C.O's It is rumoured we are going to be killed. I have had this from a

reliable friend. If you hear no word from me by next weekend, leave the barracks and go home to your parents.

If you can, tell my brother this. He is at Etiak parish church. Tell him—this is not a game and he must stop interfering before it is too late.

R.

Daniel looked up from the scribbled note and said, 'You have received no further word?'

The woman shook her head.

Daniel breathed out heavily. Troubles, like locusts, never came singly, he thought. At last, he said, 'Thank you for coming, Susan. I am grateful. You are on your way south now?'

'Yes. It is best for the children.'

'That is true. Perhaps you will receive news from Reuben when you arrive.'

Susan Obwolo looked at Daniel with dull eyes; her face seemed shrunk from worry; there was no optimism in her expression or in her reply. 'Perhaps I shall.' She got up suddenly and turned towards the door.

'I understand, sister-in-law, that you do not wish to delay here.'

'Please forgive me. I left the children and our luggage at the bus park.'

'That is all right. I am sorry you have had to wait for me. I wish you God's protection on your journey—and good news at the end of it.'

She smiled weakly, and then followed Daniel to the front door. As they shook hands, she asked: 'And where will you go?'

'I have nowhere to go, Susan. I will stay where God has put me.'

'Where is the family?'

'They have gone to relations for the time being. As you said, it is best for the children.'

His sister-in-law nodded absently. She seemed too full of sorrow for her own unhappiness to have any sorrow to spare for

others. Before she turned away, she shook Daniel's hand firmly and said, 'It is a shame we have to meet in such circumstances.'

'It is a shame, sister-in-law. These are not easy times.'

More words seemed pointless. Susan Obwolo turned from Daniel and walked away from the house.

It seemed like a final parting ending their first real meeting. She was his sister, but had been like a stranger. He was an Anjeri, she was an Achwala; as her figure moved further and further from the house, Daniel perceived the terrible distance which circumstances and men's mistrust of each other had put between the two tribes. Reconciliation would not come easily or quickly. Daniel watched from the door until Susan's figure was no longer visible. Then he went to the vestry and began writing a letter to his wife.

It was several weeks later that Captain Obwolo's decomposing corpse was found half-buried near the forest road. Like the other bodies found in the same pit, there were bullet holes in its skull.

Chapter Thirteen

Lanebi stood motionless in his shamba. The soil was moist; young banana shoots were unfolding their leaves; the leaves of sweet potatoes were growing firm and green; the maize was already taller than a man's waist. Behind him, the thick grass of the church compound had reclaimed the worn areas of bare soil. The jacaranda tree at one corner of his house had snowed countless violet blossoms onto the roof of the building. The flower plots around the house were also alive with colour—reds of hibiscus and poinsettia, violets of camel's foot and bougainvillea, the brief multicoloured beauty of passion flowers. But the house itself was empty. The houseboy had gone home for the afternoon and Lanebi was left alone on the compound.

He lifted his eyes towards the eastern mountains. Rain clouds, sparked by lightning, were clinging to the peaks; the lower peaks were mauve and grey, darkened by the shadow of the clouds above.

Daniel wondered vaguely if the cloud of God that brooded over Mount Sinai when Moses went up to receive the Ten Commandments had appeared as these mountains did now. He wished he could receive instructions from God as Moses did, written on stone with the finger of the Almighty. But he had to rely upon his understanding of Scripture and the convictions of his own conscience. The departure of Rebekah and the children had nearly crushed his spirit. He had considered renouncing his resolve to speak the truth, however inconvenient or dangerous. Once he had began a letter to his wife, promising to keep his preaching safe and uncontroversial and begging her to return and give birth to their child— their son—in Etiak. Before he had finished the letter, a terrible oppression began to weigh on his mind—much worse than the depression he felt at the absence of Rebekah. He tore up the incomplete letter and threw it in the litter basket. He felt some relief. If his conscience was any guide, then this was the hand of God leading him further along the dangerous path he had already begun to walk.

Footsteps from behind him disturbed Daniel's reverie. 'It is not good for a man to be alone,' said a familiar gentle voice. Daniel turned and found himself facing Yosiah Ekwullo.

'Yosiah, it is you!'

'Good afternoon, reverend,' Ekwullo continued in his 'normal' voice.

'Good afternoon, Yosiah,' replied Daniel, relieved that his visitor was not under the spirit of war and had not come for military orders. 'I am glad to see you.'

'I am glad also. I was passing here. I saw you standing alone. So I have come to greet you.'

'Yosiah, you are welcome. You don't need a reason to visit me. Let us go to the house. I will make you some tea.'

They walked slowly away from the shamba, Ekwullo shaking his head and whistling through his teeth. 'Eeeh, reverend, it is not good for a man to be alone, to make tea for visitors....'

'You have heard then?'

'Eeeh, reverend, it is a sad thing. And who has not heard in Etiak? But it is for a short time only.'

'Yes, a short time,' echoed Daniel quietly.

'And they will return and bring you new joy. When things are quieter...when there is more peace.'

'Yes, Yosiah—it is peace that we all have need of.'

They had reached the kitchen door; Daniel ushered the other in. 'Peace is the best way of life,' echoed Ekwullo gently.

'But not at any price surely?'

'Reverend?'

'I mean, if peace means permitting evil and hatred to rule over us, it is not true peace.'

Daniel's words were straining his visitor's powers of understanding. 'What is it if it is not peace?'

'It is a pretence. It is like a deaf and blind man walking amidst thunder and lightning. And do you know what he says?'

Ekwullo shook his head weakly.

'The man says there is no sound, no thunder; there is no sight, no lightning. He says, "How good it is to walk in peace".'

'But he does not know there is violence around him.'

Daniel's eyes widened. 'Yosiah, you are right. But what of a man who has good ears and good eyes who approaches a storm; and he ties a cloth around his eyes and seals his ears with wax; he walks through the storm and he says, "There is no noise, there is no fire from heaven. How good it is to walk in peace". What of such a man?'

Ekwullo took a cup of tea from Lanebi's outstretched hand and concentrated on the question for a whole minute. Finally, he said: 'Such a man deserves to be struck by lightning.'

Daniel smiled and there was deep gratitude in his heart. 'Thank you. Thank you, Yosiah. You have helped me.'

'I have done nothing, reverend.'

'You have given me a little peace—in my mind.'

'Peace is good.' Ekwullo smiled. 'War is very bad for everyone.'

'Even for you,' Daniel said mischievously, thinking of his friend's military 'possession.'

'I do not like war, reverend. It is terrible.' Ekwullo looked into the pastor's eyes, seeking agreement. 'I am a man of peace, reverend.'

Daniel smiled again. 'I believe you are, Yosiah,' he replied without sarcasm.

* * *

As the appointed day of President Gwino's visit drew near, the town of Etiak took on a festive appearance, even though the mood of the people remained tense and fearful. Shops were draped with the national flag; windows and walls were plastered with pictures of the president; cracked and peeling paint was covered over with fresh coats of paint; coloured lights were hung from the balconies; and at the entrance to the town, across the road leading from the impenetrable forest, an arch of triumph had been erected bearing the words, in huge red letters: 'Welcome to Etiak, our Beloved President, His Excellency David Byelo Gwino.'

Primary school children were being drilled by their teaches for the grand march-past in Etiak main square on the afternoon of the great day. Employees of the municipal council were

working harder than ever, cutting grass, washing the walls of the council offices, sweeping the streets, and in these duties they were encouraged by the presence of soldiers billeted in every part of the town. In the barracks, to the northwest of the town, three hundred soldiers from the south had been temporarily accommodated, including part of a mechanised division; the latter were busy preparing their armoured vehicles for the military parade.

Grand Etiak Hotel, built on a small knoll overlooking the town, was stocking up with vast quantities of food and, more important, beer for the coming celebrations. There was to be a great feast and dance at the hotel on the night of the fourteenth and all the local VIPs were to attend. As the President had written to the Etiak ADC: 'I want this to be a truly joyful occasion which all the people of Etiak and its neighbourhood may participate in and benefit from.'

Daniel Lanebi was awaiting the twentieth with deep anticipation. It was the expected date of the birth of his child—his son, if Rebekah's intuition was correct. In the two weeks since she had left Etiak for her sister's place near Ong'ok, he had received only one brief note, informing him that she and the children were safe and well and that they were praying for him each day. There was no mention of when they might return to Etiak. It would certainly be after the fourteenth, for two very important reasons: the visit of the President and the imminent birth of their third child.

Two Sundays before that day, September 4th, Daniel was due to preach again at the morning service at St. Thomas'. As he prepared the sermon he wondered sadly if it was to be his farewell sermon at the church. For a while he had considered following the ADC's advice—choosing a 'comfortable' text, preaching a safe message and enjoying the approving smiles of the authorities. He didn't consider this for long. He had promised his congregation a series on the prophet Jeremiah and he would stick to his promise. But this was a rationalising of a much deeper commitment he had made within him: he was no longer free to preach the people's opium that the government

expected of the clergy. The choice he had made of his own volition had become an imperative which he could not refuse. He did not feel proud of the role he had chosen. Sometimes he felt puzzled and, from time to time, frightened. But at other times he felt God had made him captive to His perfect plan and, as a Christian and a pastor, Daniel could not desire anything more than this. It had to be this way and no other.

The most difficult aspect of this commitment was the feeling of being alone. He needed the encouragement of others—others who were making a similar stand like his. If such people existed, he did not know of them. If only Rebekah has stayed by his side! If only pastor Ogwong were still alive and able to encourage him! He felt a bit like Elijah in the Old Testament, complaining bitterly to the Lord that he alone in Israel had not bowed his knees to the idols of Baal. Such thinking, Daniel realised, was an invitation to pride, and he rebuked himself, but he wished with all his soul for a message from God that there were in fact others in the country willing to condemn the government for its injustice, and at the same time unwilling to take the convenient alternative of tribalistic opposition.

Daniel thought frequently during these days of his grandfather, the alleged *'lajok'*, driven out of his village, a refugee in the hills around Amak-torung, and later the respected lanebi, yet remaining, till his death, a strange disturbing figure who seemed to belong more to the world of legend than to history. By comparison, Daniel regarded himself as a very ordinary down-to-earth person. And he was grateful to be so. If he was a prophet too, then he was not one of the Old Testament type. He received no apocalyptic visions of the future; no great marvels were performed at his house. The only vision which had deeply affected him had reached him third-hand, via his grandfather and pastor Ogwong. But the black giant of the plains hacking himself to pieces had become real to Daniel. He could see the scene in every detail, as though his own imagination had been the origin of the vision. The demented agony on the face of the giant was terrible and pathetic; it was a as though this great man did not understand why he was destroying himself; an implanted

drive, allowing no consideration or forethought, was urging him on in his bloody task. When Daniel dreamed of the scene, he yearned to rush forward and plead with the giant to stop, but he was scared by the huge swinging panga and he feared that the giant could no longer hear the voice of reason. Once, Daniel had woken up in sweat, and found himself wiping his hands and arms on his bedsheets, trying to wipe away the giant's spattered blood.

If he had not been a Christian, Daniel might have sought local 'medicine' to remove this evil dream from his mind—a dream which could be interpreted as the result of a curse. But the dream, he knew, was not a curse. It was God's vision of what the people of Mashariki were doing to each other. It was a moving symbol of what Daniel had already seen happening in the country. This vision of his grandfather had been preserved till the time of its fulfilment. Now it had been passed to him. And what could he, an ordinary pastor, do with it?

'I can warn, only warn,' he thought, as he sat in the church vestry making notes for his Sunday sermon. 'And that is what I will do.'

It was in such a mood that Daniel faced a packed congregation on the fourth of September, ten days before the visit of President Gwino.

Chapter Fourteen

There were many unfamiliar faces in that congregation. Faces that in other years had appeared in church only at Christmas and Easter; faces of people from other parishes who were visiting Etiak; faces of officials, cool and unsmiling, mostly at the back of the church. Daniel was soon able to pick out the A.D.C and others from his office; the detective inspector was there too, sitting next to the A.D.C. Daniel could also see several faces that were Achwala in their features. He had noticed earlier an army Landover in the church car park and he wondered if these Achwalas had been the passengers. It was unrealistic, Daniel knew, to expect the army to be indifferent to what he was saying in church, so shortly before the president's visit.

As he stepped into the pulpit, Daniel opened the big Bible at Jeremiah, Chapter 23 and placed his notes on the open page. His hands gripped the edges of the Bible. He recalled the words of the ADC to him at the end of the 'interview' a few days before: 'It isn't up to God to forbid it. It is entirely in your own hands.' Daniel gripped the cover of the Bible more firmly and reflected that the ADC had been right in what he had said but not in the way he meant it.

'This morning,' began Daniel, after he had prayed and the congregation had sat down, 'we are concluding our studies in the prophecies of Jeremiah. The text for my sermon is from Chapter 23, verses 23 and 24.

> "Am I a God at hand, says the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? says he Lord."

'Jeremiah here was proclaiming God's message to King Zedekiah and the people of Judah. These particular words are not hard for us to understand, even though they were not originally spoken to us in this church nor to any other members of our nation. Two simple questions are being asked by God. First, God asks, am I near to you or in the far distance? Second, can a man's deeds be hidden from me—presumably his evil deeds,

since most men are anxious to parade their good deeds in front of God's approving eye.

'If the Lord was a territorial god—a tribal god, such as our ancestors worshipped and many people today still believe in—then maybe his eyesight would grow weaker the further a man went from Jerusalem. And certainly his power would gradually give way to the tribal gods of neighbouring nations. But the Lord God is not such a god. His power is universal. His presence is everywhere. And the darkest corner in the Wor Forest or in the offices of Byelo city is not dark enough to keep out the spirit of God.'

A few men in the congregation muttered in agreement; there was a muted 'amen' from one of the 'revived' brethren, but otherwise there was a tense stillness facing Daniel. He did not look down at his notes.

'The questions which God put to his people were not answered. At least, no answer is written in the verse following the ones I read out. But, the answer is written in black and white on every page of the Bible; the answer was shown again and again in the Jews' experience of God— I mean, the way he sent them prophets to condemn their wickedness (which God had not failed to notice), and urge them to repent so that they could be restored again. The answers were so obvious that they hardly seem worth stating. Perhaps because they were so obvious, they weren't stated often enough and truth was forgotten. It is the obvious things we soonest forget. We search the horizon for strangers and miss the visitor at our door.

'God forbid that we should forget what he is like. So let us remind ourselves of those obvious answers. The first is: God is *at hand* and not a long way off. The second is: no one can hide a single act, word or thought from the knowledge of God. Even the thoughts you are thinking now are known to him.'

In the back pew, the ADC crossed his legs and whispered to the police inspector on his right: 'This man knows how to preach.'

'I hope he knows how to stop preaching at the right time,' replied the policeman, keeping his stare fixed on Lanebi.

Daniel was unaware of the exchange of comments. The message was taking possession of his mind. He felt his body pulsing with what he had to say. He was excited and thrilled—not because he felt he was giving a good performance, but because the thrill of discovering God's will was renewing itself as he passed on to others what had already been disclosed to him. It was more a discovery, or an act of creation, than a performance.

'Let us be very sure of the nature of God. Let us be certain of what our God is NOT, because there are people in our country of Mashariki—as there were in Judah in Jeremiah's time— who are active in trying to prove that God is not what he says he is. So I am reminding you now of what he is not. And I do so not on my own theories but on the authority of God's Word.

'God is not a rubberstamp for political decisions. That is the first of my negative definitions.'

The ADC touched his companion's hand and said, 'Now is the time when he should stop, eh?'

'Yes—but he will not, because he is a fool,' replied the inspector. 'Listen to him and see how he tightens the noose he has put round his own neck.'

'The paid prophets of the regime of King Zedekiah— and of the other kings of Jeremiah's time—were well-trained in dreaming up lies to please the ears of their royal employer. Listen to these words:

> *"How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart, who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams which they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot my name for Baal? Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my words speak my word faithfully."*

Jeremiah thus declared God's rejection of the official "prophets" of the day. Such prophets were used as political advisers, expected to say encouraging words to the king in the name of the Lord. Even in their religious duties, they set a bad example by their extravagance and moral looseness.

'God's word should not rest on dreams—certainly not on false dreams designed to gain the favour of powerful people.'

The image of the bleeding giant of the savannah flickered across Daniel's mind. This surely was not a false dream? Nor one that would earn praise from those in power? Daniel deeply wished to share this vision with his congregation, so that perhaps some of the responsibility could be lifted from his shoulders. Perhaps someone would be able to give a clear interpretation. But Daniel did not refer to it; this was not the right moment and there were more definite things he had determined to speak about.

'In ten days' time our President will be visiting this town. Already a lot of time and effort has been spent on the preparations. It is my prayer that the visit will proceed peacefully and... fruitfully.'

'I wonder what he means by that?'said the ADC to the Chief Inspector.

'He would have been wiser to have stopped at "peacefully". You see how our friends from the army have pricked up their ears.'

On the other side of the aisle, three civilian-clothed Achwala were sitting with their heads close together. The one in the middle, his stern expression emphasised by the initiation scars on his forehead, was translating the sermon in a heavy whisper to his colleagues. All three of them fixed Lanebi with an unfaltering stare.

'Are they from the barracks?' the ADC asked Inspector Rutaho.

'I'm not sure. But that army Landrover outside—that's what they arrived in.'

'If only Lanebi knew about them...'

'I expect he does,' replied the inspector placidly, speaking out of the side of his mouth. 'It wouldn't make any difference either way. After all, we did warn him at the interview.'

'Perhaps you should have taken him into custody?'

'I thought Lanebi would see sense and tone down his preaching. But it seems he is a victim of religious mania. He has decided to become a martyr. It's not up to me to stop him.'

A large woman in the pew in front turned round in obvious annoyance at the continued whispering from behind. When she saw the ADC she quickly faced the front again, her expression suddenly changed to one of serene contentment.

The two men at the back, however, kept silent now, in order to follow the latter half of the sermon.

'...questions which I hope our president will be willing to answer. If there are answers which agree with justice and truth, we should be glad to listen and accept them thankfully. If there are not, we should ask what steps are to be taken to restore justice and truth to our land.

'My first question is about the rule of law. The citizens of this country of all tribes inherited a legal system which, despite many faults, guarantees certain rights. These rights include the assumption of a man's innocence till proved guilty and that guilt must be established by a trial before punishment may be carried out. But what do we find? On the slightest suspicion of being involved with guerrillas, the menfolk of a family are shot, and sometimes the women are shamefully treated. The innocent are punished together with the guilty. And there is no formal charge, no witnesses for the defence, or prosecution, there is no judge or jury—and no justice.'

The ADC shook his head and said under his breath, 'My God, the man's mad. He's getting worse with every sermon.'

The three Achwalas were leaning forward, looking fiercer than before.

'If an objector should reply that in war there is no time for the niceties of legal procedure, I should then ask: "when was war declared? Between who and who?" If the war is against the guerrillas, let the army fight these people. But if such a war extends to all the Anjeri people, what has happened to our "One Nation, one Future"? And how can peace and stability be assured in a situation which breeds hatred?

'My second big question which I would like to put to His Excellency is connected with the first—tribalism. Fears have been expressed by many people in private that the near monopoly of government posts by our southern brothers has made it impossible for the feelings of other tribes to be clearly heard. This fear has been increased by recent appointments to the highest posts in our land, and also in the allocation of new farming land in the south of Anjeri region. If such decisions, such appointment are based purely on merit, then it seems we in the north must acknowledge our innate inferiority and backwardness.

'But that I cannot do. It's logically silly. It's obviously untrue. I am also a Christian: "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, between Anjeri and Achwala; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him." We might add that God bestows his riches upon the unjust as well as the just. And there are both types of people, just and unjust, in every nation, every tribe, every family; only a fool believse that his own family has a monopoly of virtue.

'As a Christian, my chief sorrow is that the Church has rarely set a good example in this matter. We Christians have remained tribalists at heart: pointing the accusing finger—no doubt justly—at the other group, but forgetting to look at ourselves in the mirror. And if we looked, what would we find?'

Daniel paused, partly to give his listeners a chance to answer the question in their minds, partly to wipe his face. He was sweating. Although the words were coming to his mouth fluently, they seemed to be demanding enormous energy. Physically and emotionally, he felt as though he was being sapped of inner strength.

'What would we find?' he repeated. 'We would find the same sort of tribalism which we've been pointing out in other people. It's no good for a woman covered in soot and ash blaming her man for having cow dung on his feet. It is no wonder that churchmen have often been suspected of supporting separatist movements throughout this continent, for there is still a lot of tribalism within our national Church. I have even seen it occur in our own church of St. Thomas.'

The Inspector nudged his companion. 'If he confined himself to blaming his own flock, people outside wouldn't mind.'

'Except his bishop, because there would be a smaller congregation and less money in the collection,' replied the ADC cynically. The two men smiled at the joke.

Daniel was continuing: 'There is a third question which I earnestly wish President Gwino to answer. It is this: why is our expanding economy benefiting the ordinary citizen so little? If you go into the villages around Etiak or Ong'ok, you will find people less able to afford things like flour or salt than they were five years ago. Someone might say to me: "This is economics which can only be understood by economists. You should stick to the Bible." I would reply that, while it's true I'm not an economist, the Bible has much to say about the topic of economics. Listen to this, from Isaiah:

"Is not this the fast that I choose...
...to share your bread with the hungry
and bring the homeless poor into your house,
when you see the naked to cover him
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?'

'The early disciples shared everything. Those least able to care for themselves—like widows—were specially catered for. But what do we find today in our country? The minority become richer and the majority become relatively poorer. That is something I learned about as an agriculturalist—poverty. I once worked in an area to the north of Ong'ok. The rains had failed and the people were facing a situation close to famine. In the same area a huge, mechanised textile milk was being built with foreign aid. The builders of the mill were well fed by the company, of course. I was glad about the mill: it would be a help in later years. It would supply a few, not many, but a few jobs. But I was an agricultural adviser and I told myself that the mill was no business of mine. What I felt more deeply was sorrow: sorrow for the suffering of the local people who had no one to help them survive.

'Poverty may not quite kill the body. But it kills the spirit. Is there no money to alleviate such situations? Surely there must

be more benefit for the ordinary people from the aid this country receives from abroad? Because it's the people who matter...if you degrade the people, you degrade the country. Even if you can keep it a secret from foreigners, the problems are still present, and the people have to face them somehow...'

* * *

Four hundred kilometres away, in the centre of the capital city, Byelo, President Gwino was making a speech. He was bidding farewell to a high ranking trade delegation from western Europe. Five thousand citizens had gathered at the Freedom Stadium and from a great dais erected beneath the canopy of the "President's Pavilion", the Life President of Mashariki was broadcasting the skills of his speech-writers.

'In your brief stay in our lovely country, gentlemen, you have seen something of the natural heritage bestowed on us by God—I refer of course to our mountains and plains, our lakes and rivers, our abundant wildlife. You have also witnessed ample evidence of the great social, economic and educational expansion of our resources. When I say "resources", I do not mean principally the mineral and agricultural wealth our land is endowed with, although these are precious to us. Rather, I mean the human resources within our people. Our future lies, above all else, in the diligence, determination and unity of our people, for it is the people, and only the people, who can make a nation strong and great.'

The President stretched out his hands towards the listening thousands. A tremendous roar of approval arose from the crowd. The delegation sitting on the dais clapped enthusiastically.

President Gwino had never felt securer. The military operations in Anjeri province had achieved remarkable results: hundreds of guerrillas had been killed or captured, and the stubborn independent spirit of the northerners was being melted in the heat of the government's passionate belief in unity. His triumphant journey through the Wor Forest to Etiak and Ong'ok would be a fitting climax to his efforts to subdue Anjeri resistance. Thus assured of complete control over every part of

the country, he could afford to be more gentle and forgiving. He would reveal a more human face (and how hard it had been for him to resist this temptation in earlier months!), making generous government grants for the development of northern districts, perhaps granting a free pardon to certain offenders. For the present, he relied on his army commander, Suleiman Sekio, to project a less benevolent face.

'Honourable visitors,' the president continued, more loudly than before, after the cheering had died down. The agreement we signed yesterday is a seal upon the well established amity and spirit of co-operation between our nations. The aid you have offered us is not, I know you will agree, charity offered to beggars; nor is it a way of politically influencing the future course of our country, for we reject neo-colonialism as strongly as we rejected colonialism. We have no time for pre-packaged, imported political ideologies.

'The aid you have given is to be regarded as an expression of the responsibility you rightly feel for the developing countries of the world, and specifically for the Republic of Mashariki. You are assisting us in realising the full potential of our land. As has been said before, give us the tools and we shall finish off the work.

'The work to be done is great and varied. Educating our young, developing agriculture, exploiting mineral deposits, marketing our cash-crops, establishing new industries. Great strides have already been taken. In future strides will seem too faltering for us. In future it will not be strides—' at this point, the president's hands were poised above the handrail in front of him—'it will be giant leaps that we shall be taking!' The hands were slowly raised to the sky, the crowd roared ecstatically, the delegation clapped approvingly and the President's face shone with the radiance of a messiah.

* * *

'The message of Jeremiah to us today is a positive one. It's a reminder that a nation can expect prosperity, security and peace only when its people seek the will of God not just on Sundays,

not just in church, but each day of the year, in every social context and at every level of human society.

'But let his message take root first of all with us—here in church on the Lord's day. And let us not be afraid of declaring the truth...'

Daniel deliberately directed his gaze to the anonymous group of watchers in the back row, whom he was now convinced were army personnel. 'As we face the uncertainties of tomorrow—perhaps of later today—let's remember the words of Jesus to his followers: "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world".'

Daniel stopped speaking. He became aware of the intense silence of the congregation. 'Where are all the babies?' he wondered. He looked straight ahead but his eyes refused to focus the mass of blurred faces. He felt so tired that he just wished to sit down. And if he could do so, he felt sure he would begin to weep. He couldn't understand why but he just wished to weep, there in church, but he did not do so. He closed the big Bible, announced the final hymn and slowly stepped out of the pulpit.

Outside the church, after the service, he bade farewell to the hurriedly departing congregation. The three strangers waited patiently in their Landrover. When the church compound was almost deserted, one of these men—not the one who had translated for his colleagues in church—strode purposefully towards Daniel. He spoke roughly in English: 'You are Reverend Lanebi?'

'That is my name,' Daniel replied and he thought: 'What is it to be?'

'You are to come with me in my Landrover.'

'For what reason?'

'I am Major Morajol of Military Intelligence.' He held out an identification card, framed in a leather wallet.

'And I am Reverend Lanebi of the Christian church.'

The soldier turned angrily and shouted to his companions. 'You two, come here and bring him.'

'It's all right, Major,' said Daniel, regretting his foolish reply. 'I am coming. There will be no fuss. May I know where your are taking me?'

'No.'

'May I know why you are arresting me?'

'No.'

'May I take a Bible with me?'

The other two now stood menacingly around Lanebi, as though on the point of grabbing him. 'Sergeant,' the major said to one, 'bring a Bible from the Church.'

'Sir?'

'Bring a Bible—are you deaf?'

'Thank you,' said Daniel quietly, as the other soldier turned into the church.

Then the major spoke to his other companion. 'Put those handcuffs on him.'

Daniel did not thank him this time.

A minute later, all four were seated in the Landrover, Daniel and the major in the back. They waited a further five minutes. Nothing was said to Daniel. Then another Landorover roared into the empty compound and came to a brake-squealing stop beside theirs. In it were six or seven uniformed soldiers. The major shouted through the window: 'Search the house and the church thoroughly. Bring anything that appears suspicious. Okay?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Good. Now we can go.' He tapped his driver on the shoulder. As the vehicle moved off, he turned to Daniel and said in a neutral voice: 'We won't be keeping you long, reverend.'

'I don't suppose you will,' Lanebi replied, holding the Bible between his handcuffed hands.

Chapter Fifteen

The cell that Daniel Lanebi was put in was underground, the flat metal roof being level with the ground. The 'door' of the cell was in the roof. Daniel had been pushed through this on his arrival but it was no great drop to the floor. When he stood up, his head could just touch the roof. On the wall beneath the hatch-like door was a crude wooden ladder to assist the prisoner getting out.

The floor and walls were of pounded earth. The cell was really a rectangular pit in the earth, three metres long by two metres wide, with a rusting metal cover over the top; the roof sloped slightly to one side, where there was a shallow drain dug in the earth. Inside the cell along one wall was a rough wooden bed. There was no other furniture except a small three-legged table. In one corner, Daniel found a bucket — dried faeces stuck to its bottom and sides. The smell of the floor was rich and sickly. The air was warm, but a similarly enclosed space above the ground would have been unbearably hot. The metal roof was hot to the touch; the air seemed appreciably hotter near the top of the cell. The floor was the coolest, and smelliest, place. Daniel lay on the bed using his cassock as a pillow, and gazed up at the cracks of light around the edges of the roof and of the 'door'. The light was sufficient to reveal the cramped dimensions of the room, but it was not enough to read by. Daniel's Bible lay on the rough wooden table at the side of the bed.

Daniel wondered whether there were other cells dug into the ground next to his own; whether the dividing walls might carry vibrations from one side to the other. He thumped on each of the walls in turn. The rough surface cut his fist. The walls absorbed his thuds as though they were solid hillsides. He put his ear to each wall in turn; there was no sound but the faint crackling of disturbed termites. He was alone, like a man buried in a grave in the middle of the bush.

Flies and mosquitoes multiplied as the afternoon heat spread downwards from the sun-scorched roof. There was no ventilation apart from slits around the metal and a small metal pipe leading

from one wall up to the surface. Daniel could only lie still, sticky with perspiration, listening to the buzz and whine of insects. He longed for the coolness of night , when perhaps someone might bring him some water; that was assuming he was still alive by then. From time to time booted footsteps and muffled conversation passed overhead. Daniel followed the sounds with staring eyes, each time expecting them to stop above his cell. But nobody opened the cell until the early evening when the light from the cracks around the roof had lost its intensity. The cell was flooded with sudden light as the door was lifted. 'Come up!' a voice ordered. 'Major Morajol is ready for you now!'

Covering his eyes with one hand Daniel reached for the wall ladder and climbed up to ground level. He prayed urgently for courage to face whatever was to follow.

He was returned to his cell two to three hours later. He found a mug of cold unsweetened tea and a plate of equally cold millet on the table. He gave thanks and slowly consumed his first prison meal. As he lay on his bed later that night, he reflected on what had happened to him since morning, when he had been driven away from his church. Ten hours or more had elapsed. It seemed like two or three days, without any intervening sleep. Once outside Etiak town, the Landrover in which Daniel was sitting handcuffed had sped noisily towards the barracks. The major had blindfolded Daniel as soon as they had left the centre of town but it was easy for him to guess where they were heading. However, he could not guess in which part of the barracks he was being detained. The buildings around his underground cell were quite unfamiliar to him. He had expected rough handling but so far the soldiers had been restrained in their treatment of him. He had not been beaten up either before or during the first interrogation. His cell was no worse than many village lock-ups used by local chiefs for petty offenders.

Major Morajol, however, was not pleasant towards Daniel. He made it clear from the start that he suspected the pastor of being in league with the guerrillas and would squeeze the required information out of him, using whatever methods he thought necessary. On his desk, the major had placed various

items removed from Lanebi's house: files, sermon-notes, letters. The questioning was fierce and precise. The sharp-eyed Major was thorough in his work; he had already read through Daniel's sermon notes and referred to them frequently in his questions. Lanebi's answers were brief and truthful, but the major was obviously not satisfied. He questioned the pastor about his work in Etiak, his visiting, his preaching, his family. He asked why his wife had left him and for once Daniel has no clear answer to give. He asked why he was preaching against the government, and Daniel tried to explain that he was only preaching against tribalism and corruption. Somehow, Daniel's explanation came out muddled and faltering; the fears and fatigue of the previous hours had shaken him and he couldn't give lucid explanations. It was very different from giving a sermon after three hours or more of quiet preparation. The major seemed unimpressed by his prisoner's words. But he failed to make Lanebi incriminate himself or to produce evidence that the prisoner was a member of the APA. 'You priests are all the same,' he sneered. 'You're all liars and hypocrites.'

'I've told no lie,' Daniel replied firmly.

'If you have, be sure I'll find out,' the major countered.

At the end of the first interrogation, the major gave him a pencil and piece of paper. 'Write down the name of your leader and of any other associates in your organisation.'

The following morning, when light began filtering around the roof of his cell, Daniel wrote on the paper the words 'Jesus Christ' and underneath the names of Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles. The major was not amused when he read it. Daniel was beaten this time. He nearly lost consciousness as two soldiers held him against the wall and a third punched him in the solar plexus. Later they stamped on his feet; the metal studs on their boots bit into his skin. The major continued questioning him till late into the night. Daniel's vision was blurred and there was a whistling in his ears. He found it hard to understand the words of his interrogator. From time to time, verses from the Bible came into his mind, the words sounding like real whispers in his ears, and he found in these verses encouragement and

strength to maintain his innocence. At the end of the second 'interview' the major said wearily, 'You're a fool, Lanebi.'

'If I am, it is for Christ's sake.'

'You deserve to die.'

'I am ready.'

The major laughed. 'That would be too convenient. First stop, heaven, eh? No, I shall keep you for a while longer.' After that, Daniel, too weak and bruised to walk without support, was carried from the room back to the cell. In spite of the throbbing from his bruises, he slept the rest of the night and most of the following day.

During the days that followed, Daniel slowly grew accustomed to his new surroundings and the limitations they imposed upon him. A basic routine established itself during the first few days. Soon after sunrise a bowl of maize porridge was brought. That was his only food until evening. After the second day he was given a jug of water and this relieved his thirst. He drowsed throughout the long hot afternoons. Before dusk, he was allowed to leave his cell in order to empty the bucket in a pit nearby. When he returned he was given unsweetened tea and cassava, his second and final meal of the day.

With the cool of the hours of darkness, Daniel's spirit was revived. This was the time when he could concentrate his mind on prayer and meditation. He wrapped himself in his cassock, partly to keep warm and partly to keep the mosquitoes off his skin, and, sitting on the edge of his bed, called to mind every situation and every person he was acquainted with: persons he knew very well and members of his congregation, Bishop Onkoro, Yosiah Ekwullo, his brother Obwolo and Susan his sister-in-law. Most of all he remembered his wife Rebekah and the children. He wondered what she was doing. Had she heard of his arrest? Would she think he was dead? And had she given birth yet? No, the baby wasn't due for at least another week. As each question, however painfully uncertain, came to his mind, he committed the answer to God in a brief prayer, spoken aloud.

Later in the night, he prepared in his mind sermons which he had little hope of ever preaching. He held his Bible in his hands

and opened at the place where he guessed his text would be found. In this way he gave another series of talks on Jeremiah and found to his pleasure that he could remember many sections of the book. The cell was his church, the table his pulpit and the insects his congregation. When the darkness was lightening into dawn, Daniel sang a hymn of praise and he stretched out again on the bed, dozing fitfully. He then remembered pastor Ogwong, whose soul was now with Christ, and thanked God for the old man's inspiring life. When Daniel thought of him, he also remembered the dream of the giant of the savannah. He wished to forget the terrible image. It reminded him of death and Daniel knew that he himself was close to death as he lay waiting in his grave-shaped cell.

Perhaps the conclusion of he old man's unfinished dream was about to be revealed—the bloody panga of the giant swinging down on the head of the lonely figure who raised his voice against the self-destruction. Daniel shivered when he thought about this. He was not afraid of death itself but the experience of dying could be slow and humiliating. He prayed for courage and faith when the moment to die arrived. If it was to be here in Etiak barracks he hoped it would be soon and without long drawn-out pain. The suffering of Jesus on the Cross became for Daniel a more terrible and wonderful fact than he had ever before perceived.

But the days dragged on. He saw nothing of Major Morajol for several days. A week passed. There were no further interrogations, no further beatings. When he asked his guards what was happening, they shrugged their shoulders and said nothing. When he dared to ask for an interview with the major, they told him that he was busy with 'more important fish'—presumably meaning captured suspects. After that, Daniel made no further requests, except to ask for pills to relieve the malaria he was suffering from. He began to scratch marks on the wall in order to keep count of the days. It was Monday again. Eight days after his arrest. He heard, late in the afternoon, a prisoner being led away from interrogation; the man was moaning and protesting he didn't mean any harm, that it was

all a misunderstanding. To Daniel the voice sounded familiar; he couldn't identify it at first but later he realised that it was the voice of Boaz Erasu. He did not hear the voice again and he wondered what had happened to Erasu.

The day of the President's visit to Etiak arrived, but to Daniel it was no different from any other day of that week except for the distant rumbling of tanks and armoured cars and the screaming of fighter planes overhead. Daniel wondered whether all this was primarily a military display or a show of strength to the people of Anjeri province.

The next day Daniel received three meals, hot and tasty, and the guards who brought the meals seemed unusually cheerful.

'Why the special food?' queried Daniel. The guard looked offended and said, 'Normal prison diet' and quickly shut the cell door. Daniel thought darkly: 'Am I being fattened for execution? Or are they celebrating the success of the President's visit?'

'The following day, after a breakfast of porridge and coffee, Daniel left his cell for good. He was told to bring all his belongings, so he picked up his Bible and cassock and climbed up from the dark into the light of the morning. So many days had passed since his arrest that Daniel no longer felt prepared for death, as he had been then. He wondered why he had been kept waiting so long.

He stood briefly in the morning sunlight, his clothes dirty and rumpled, the Bible in his right hand and his dusty cassock over his other arm. All his limbs ached from their cramped confinement. Three soldiers guarded him. After a short while, he saw major Morajol striding towards him.

'What's it to be then?' Daniel thought.

The Major walked up to Lanebi and looked, with a suggestion of a smile on his lips, into the other's face.

'Did you think I had forgotten about you, reverend?'

'Perhaps you had others to attend to.' Daniel's voice was flat and toneless.

'Yes, you are right. *Real* guerrillas, not just misguided priests! Nasty creatures, like a fellow called Erasu.'

Daniel could not stop his eyes widening.

'You knew him, reverend?' asked the major, watching Lanebi closely.

'Yes—he...came to my church occasionally.'

'In private, from what he told me.'

Daniel swallowed and felt a hot wave spreading across his body.

'Shall I tell you what else he told me?'

'You might as well,' replied Daniel weakly.

'He said you had refused to join the guerrillas. Refused quite rudely.'

'And you believed him?'

The major smiled knowingly. 'Oh yes, he was telling the truth. You see, he was—under pressure at the time. He was so frightened that he stank. A very unpleasant creature.'

Daniel remained silent, his heart thumping against his ribs. Finally, he said, 'He is a man, not a creature, major.'

'*Was*, you should say.'

'What do you mean?'

'Nothing that is your business, reverend. Except that he won't be coming to your church in future.' Then the Major changed his tone to that of formal speech-making: 'Reverend Lanebi, under the provisions of the amnesty, announced two days ago by His Excellency, towards certain categories of political detainees, I am to tell you that there is no necessity for keeping you any longer in military custody.'

Daniel could not say a word. He hardly dared believe what he had heard. Surely he must have misunderstood.

'You are free to go,' explained the major, thinking that the pastor's imprisonment had affected his powers of understanding. He turned to the soldiers standing on either side of the prisoner and said, 'Take him to the main gate.'

Then he left Lanebi without another word.

Chapter Sixteen

Daniel had to walk the four kilometres from the barracks to the town. His progress was slow and painful, for his feet had been stamped on by a soldier during the questioning and all his limbs felt cramped and stiff. But he felt glad that the major hadn't arranged transport for him. The slow walk to town was a time to thank God for his release and to accustom himself again to the simple privileges of freedom before he began meeting people. A damp breeze was blowing across the road. A storm was shifting across the savannah to his left and above him, low grey clouds were moving ponderously. To Daniel the storm clouds seemed bright and glorious compared to the dark metal plate which had been his sky for nearly two weeks. In the east, far beyond the low profile of Etiak town, and high above the shrouded shape of the Chwak mountains, the sun was breaking through the clouds; the patch of surrounding blue sky seemed to grow every minute as Daniel slowly drew nearer the town.

Daniel's ears, accustomed to the dead silence of his cell, picked out various sounds which he would hardly have noticed before his imprisonment: the different noises made by flying insects, the tap-tapping of a woodpecker in an old baobab tree, distant drumming from a village to the right of the road. The atmosphere smelt clean and fresh unlike the fetid heat of his cell. If a storm had broken above Daniel's head, he would have rejoiced at the provision of a bath; he was growing more and more aware of his dirty unwashed condition. But the rain had fallen earlier in the morning; blue sky was spreading out from the east.

Nobody passed him on the road. A single Landrover overtook him and sped on towards the town without slowing down. Army activity had been greatly reduced since the feverish days before and during the president's visit to Etiak. Many of the troops and equipment would have moved on to Ong'ok for the President's visit there and later would return directly to the south of the country. Daniel did not feel much concern for the movements of the army, nor for the president's travels; at this time, he was

only concerned to see his family again—and that would mean traveling to Ong'ok later in the day; unless, perhaps, they had returned to Etiak.

On the outskirts of the town, the gravel road widened into tarmac. Daniel sat on a large stone at the roadside. He placed his rolled-up cassock on the ground and put his Anjeri Bible on top of it. It was strange how the presence of that book had been a comfort to him, even in a cell where it was too dark to read. Now there was plenty of light. Daniel opened the Bible at Psalms and turned the pages until he reached a favourite of Rebekah's, number 121. The verses were very familiar:

'I lift up my eyes to the hills.
From whence does my help come?
My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth...'

When he had finished reading and had prayed for physical and mental strength, he remained sitting for a while, his hands under his chin, and stared absently across the road towards the northern horizon. The clouds seemed to be lifting everywhere. The grey cone-shapes of the Amak hills were now visible in the far distance. Daniel strained his eyes, trying to identify the position of Amak-torung, but it was still too dark. He spoke aloud the words: 'Grandfather Lanebi—Hezekiah Ogwong—Amak hills— a bleeding giant.' He repeated the words more loudly, and then shook his head slowly from side to side. 'I just do not understand,' he said under his breath, and then added, as an afterthought —yet.'

Daniel stood up and wearily continued on his way, skirting the perimeter of the town to avoid the crowded centre. He did not feel prepared to meet a lot of folk and answer a thousand questions. He wanted a bath, a meal and a rest. Above all, he wanted to see his wife and children. Then he would be happy to talk to other people.

Daniel did not escape detection. When he was within sight of St Thomas' Church, approaching it along a little used path between a rusted water tank and a rubbish tip, a woman noticed

him, stared for several seconds in disbelief and then let out a piercing scream. She dropped her bag of maize cobs and ran into the nearest compound, yelling: 'The pastor has returned! Eeii! Lanebi has returned!'

Daniel kept walking steadily towards the church, trying to stay calm and unmoved. Soon people were leaving their houses and converging on him. Other women were screaming excitedly as the news spread out from house to house, from shop to shop. A small crowd gathered round him, walking at his slow pace towards the church. Daniel knew all these faces—men, women and children. Although he would have preferred a quiet, unannounced homecoming, he was moved by their happiness and the warmth of their welcome. Children squabbled for the privilege of carrying his Bible and his grubby cassock. His hand was shaken again and again. Thirty people accompanied him across the church compound towards his house.

'We feared you were dead, reverend,' said one.

'Nobody seemed to know where they had taken you,' interrupted another.

'The church has been very sad since you were taken away.'

'Many other people were arrested.'

'Thank heavens for the President's amnesty.'

'Thank God for your release, reverend.'

'Yes—thank God. And thank you all for your prayers.'

So it went on until they were approaching the front door of the house. Then the door opened and, standing in the doorway, was Daniel's wife.

'Rebekah!' Daniel's heart was too full for 'correct' behaviour. He rushed towards her and, for the first time in his life, embraced her in public.

The women in the crowd would have gladly followed the pastor and his wife into the house to share their joy, but the men present could see that this was not the right time. They persuaded everyone to disperse and return at a later hour, when the pastor would have rested. Reluctantly, the crowd departed, still chattering excitedly; they promised to come back in the evening with more friends. Daniel and Rebekah waved goodbye

to them. Then they went inside to the sitting room. Daniel had immediately noticed that his wife was no longer pregnant and yet the baby had not been expected until the end of the week. His fears were soon forgotten. On the sofa, wrapped snugly in a soft, white blanket, was a tiny brown-faced baby. Daniel picked up the living bundle and cradled it in his arms. He stared into the tiny screwed-up face, wondering whether it was a boy or a girl. It did not seem to matter much. His joy was already full.

'Ten days old,' Rebekah said.

'It looks like you,' he said quietly.

'No, it looks like you, Lanebi. After all, it is a son.'

'A son? So you were right.'

'That is the only thing I have been right about.' Rebekah took the baby gently from Daniel's arms and sat down on the sofa. She unbuttoned the top of her dress and held the baby's mouth to the nipple of a breast. Daniel sat beside her and watched the baby suckling milk for a few moments. Finally he asked, 'What do you mean by that, Rebekah?'

'I was wrong to go, Daniel. Foolishly wrong.'

'Well, you are back. That is the main thing.'

'No. Let me finish. I did much thinking while I was away Now I must tell you.'

'I am listening.'

'When I arrived at my sister's house, I felt safe and secure at first. But Sarah and Margereta were crying for you, and my sister's husband did not really welcome us.'

'Where are the girls now?'

'I left them there, at Ong'ok. Now I know you are safe I can collect them. Anyway, things went from bad to worse. My conscience told me I had been wrong to leave you but I was too proud to return. Besides, I was so heavy and tired by that time. Then I heard news of your disappearance. I felt sick with worry. I fell into labour – nearly two weeks before the expected time. It was not an easy delivery. I was still sure it was a son, but I had lost interest, because I feared you were dead. I would have exchanged the life of the new born child for yours, Daniel.'

'You are wrong to say that.'

'Maybe – but, during my time in hospital, I saw that my place was here, with you. I have been selfish. You married a very stubborn woman, Lanebi. Please forgive me.'

'Without your stubborn nature, we would never have married in the first place, my dear. But I forgive you for whatever may have been done in the wrong way. Perhaps it is me who needs the greater forgiveness.'

Rebekah had rebuttoned her blouse and laid the baby on her lap. Now she studied her husband closely, noticing how thin his face looked and how dirty his whole appearance was.

'They treated you badly, husband?'

'Not so badly. I will tell you everything a little later. But first —.'

'First some hot tea?'

'No, that will come second. And a bath third. First, we'll go into the church to pray. Bring the little one. If a man cannot give thanks on the day he gains a son and regains his wife and freedom, then there is no gratitude in his heart at all.'

* * *

Visitors arrived throughout the afternoon. Most stayed just a few minutes to see the reverned and say how pleased they were to see him back. Others stayed to chat and drink tea; the women cooed over the Lanebis' baby. In the evening, shortly before sundown, fifty people converged on the house; these include the men and women who had first welcomed Daniel outside the church. They crowded into the sitting room and were soon singing hymns. They were expecting a talk from their pastor, but Daniel explained that he was too tired to preach or to describe his stay in prison. He thanked them for their love and concern and promised he would be preaching to them again on the following Sunday in St Thomas' Church.

However, Daniel was unable to keep his promise.

The following morning, he went to the post office and collected his mail. There were only three letters— most of his mail must have been removed and read by the authorities. One of the three letters in his post-box was from his bishop:

Bishop's House
St. Mathew's Cathedral
P.O. Box 393, Ong'ok
September 15

Dear Reverend Lanebi,
I was much relieved to learn from the OC of Etiak barracks that you are alive and well and due to be released, following the amnesty announced by His Excellency the President. I thank God for your safe deliverance, as I'm sure you and your family do. The President is also to be thanked for the restraint and mercy he has displayed.

Following a talk with the District Commissioner yesterday, I have decided that a smaller and quieter parish would be more appropriate to your spiritual qualities than your present parish of Etiak town. I believe a period of upcountry service will be for you a time of most valuable growth and reassessment. The death of the beloved Reverend Ogwong has left the parish of the Amak hills without a pastor. Your acquaintance with the late Ogwong and the place where he lived were important factors in my decision over your transfer. I am therefore appointing you as vicar to that parish and I would ask you to make arrangements for your transfer as soon as is conveniently possible. Your new appointment takes effect from the date of this letter.

I wish you God's richest blessing in your new parish.

Yours sincerely, in Christ
J.Eli Onkoro
Bishop of Northern Anjeri

When Daniel had finished reading the letter in the sitting-room of his house, he immediately called his wife.

'What is it, Lanebi?' she asked seeing the look of amazement on her husband's face.

'Try to guess.'

'It seems too serious for guessing.'

'Then I'll tell you. I am being banished. Read the letter.'

When she had read it, she cried out, 'How can they do this to you!' She seemed more angry with the bishop for his letter than she had ever been with her husband for his sermons. Daniel remained calm and firmly quietened her down.

'I hope you're going to fight this decision?' she said more quietly.

'With what? Guns and bullets?'

'Don't mock me, Daniel. Why should they push you around like this?'

'Because I won't keep my mouth shut. As you once asked me to do.'

Rebekah was silent for a while.

'I spoke as a frightened wife then. But surely the church can see you were speaking the truth?'

'Listen, dear; I am not blaming anyone for this decision. And I can even see reasons why I should be removed from Etiak and sent to Amak.'

'Yes— human reasons.'

'Not only human reasons. Perhaps I can see the faint light of God's reasons too.'

'How can you believe this is God's will?'

Daniel took his wife's hands in his. He quietly reminded her of the way in which the Amak hills had influenced the course of his life. He reminded her of his grandfather the 'lajok' who became 'lanebi' in the hills and who passed on his title to the grandson he never knew; of the influence of Pastor Ogwong on his life, especially in his decision to become a minister of the church; of the strange, prophetic dream of the black giant of the savannah—a dream that somehow linked the lives of the first Lanebi, Reverend Ogwong and Daniel himself.

'So you see, Rebekah,' he went on, 'I can accept that this *is* God's will. Of course, I cannot say how things will work out. I believe I will discover more of myself—and more of God in the Amak hills.'

'But it seems so far from anywhere.'

'Are you reluctant to accompany me?'

without giving time for proper farewells. Daniel could only reply that he was obeying those in authority.

'I know this is no explanation,' he said. 'But at least it is an answer. As for me, I am willing to serve God anywhere, Etiak or Amak-torung. But I shall miss you all a great deal.'

* * *

The day of the Lanebis' departure, from St Thomas' Church, arrived. A pickup loaded with furniture and packing cases set off for the Amak hills in the early morning.

Daniel, his wife and their three children were to follow soon after in his old Volkswagen, which fortunately the soldiers had not taken away or damaged. There were over two hundred people gathered in the church compound to say goodbye to their pastor and his family. So many presents of food and clothing were given that they could not be squeezed into the remaining space in his car. Someone offered to hire a taxi to take the remaining gifts to Amak-torung. Daniel felt overwhelmed by all the kindness shown to him. Rebekah wept, and Daniel could scarcely keep his voice steady for the final prayer.

Now the people stood around his car in a thick crowd. The handshaking was almost finished. The chatter quietened to a murmur as Daniel opened the car door to let his wife and children get in. Then from the perimeter of the crowd a voice was raised, rough and anguished: 'Where is Captain Lanebi! I must see him! Let me through!' A stick was being waved in the air above the heads of the people.

The rest of the crowd became quieter.

Daniel knew who it was as soon as he heard the voice. He said loudly: 'Let him through. It's all right.'

A passage through the crowd was formed. Yosiah Ekwullo stamped his way through to the centre, where Daniel was standing silently by his car. Daniel was wearing his clerical collar. Ekwullo, smiling, halted two paces in front of him, saluted and shouldered his make-believe rifle. The old man was perspiring, his wrinkled face alive with anticipation.

Someone began sniggering in the crowd. Daniel looked angrily in their direction and the sniggers stopped.

Another person murmured, 'Get the old man away from here.' Daniel looked even more sternly in the direction of the voice, but he didn't say anything.

An extraordinary hush had come upon the crowd. They watched the two men in the centre as if a tragic drama was being enacted.

Daniel said gently; 'What is it, Yosiah?'

'Offisal Lanebi?'

'Yes, I am here.'

'You are advancing on the enemy today?'

Daniel wondered whether the news of his departure from Etiak had become strangely mixed up with the idea of military manoeuvres in the old man's soldiering mind.

'Yes. I am advancing, but not on the enemy.'

Ekwullo looked puzzled and there were titters from youngsters among the crowd.

At last, the old man said, 'I will come with you. Advance for God and Anjeri!'

'Yosiah, the war is over.'

'War over?'

'Yes—it is finished.'

'Who won?' Ekwullo's voice was pathetically feeble.

'Nobody won. But some people died.'

Ekwullo was lost for words. His forehead was furrowed in bewilderment. If the war was over, what was he to do?

Daniel continued in a calm, serious voice: 'The war is over, and the army is being demobilised. You are no longer a soldier. Hand over your weapon and return home. Your family is waiting for you.'

The old man did not move.

'Hand over your weapon,' Daniel said more sternly.

Weakly, the old man put his stick into Daniel's outstretched hands.

'No more fighting?' he asked in a rough whisper.

'The war is over. Your duty is at home.'

'Home?'

'Yes, your family are expecting you.'

Ekwullo saluted feebly and turned about. All the fighting spirit had left his face and limbs. His imaginary world of war and fighting was retreating from his mind, but he could not yet rediscover the real world in which he spent most of his days. His eyes searched the faces of the onlookers for clues. He looked what he was—an old man in shorts and old boots and a dirty beret. He began to shuffle away, looking lost and muddled.

Daniel asked if anyone present lived near Ekwullo's home. A hand was raised.

'Please take him back to his home. He will feel better soon.' The old man was gently led away. He began moaning softly, 'Take me to my family.' After a while, his voice could no longer be heard by the crowd who were staring at the old man's diminishing figure.

'It seems you have cured him of his war-madness, reverend,' said someone near Daniel.

'I hope so. But Yosiah has always been a man of peace in his heart. It is the real men of war who need curing. And that is something no man has power to do.'

Daniel took Ekwullo's stick in both hands and broke it fiercely across one knee. The two pieces fell to the ground.

'You can't destroy war and hatred like that,' he said. Then he looked into the many faces around him and said in a loud, clear voice: 'Goodbye, my dear friends—and God bless you all.'

The tense silence imposed by Ekwullo's appearance was broken. The people shouted their farewells and waved their hands in the air. It became a noisy and cheerful send-off.

Daniel got into his car beside his wife and started the engine. He waved his right hand and slowly drove off.

Behind him the church of St Thomas, Etiak, slipped gradually into the distance. Far in front, not yet visible to him but soon to fill his vision, the hills of Amak were awaiting Lanebi's arrival.