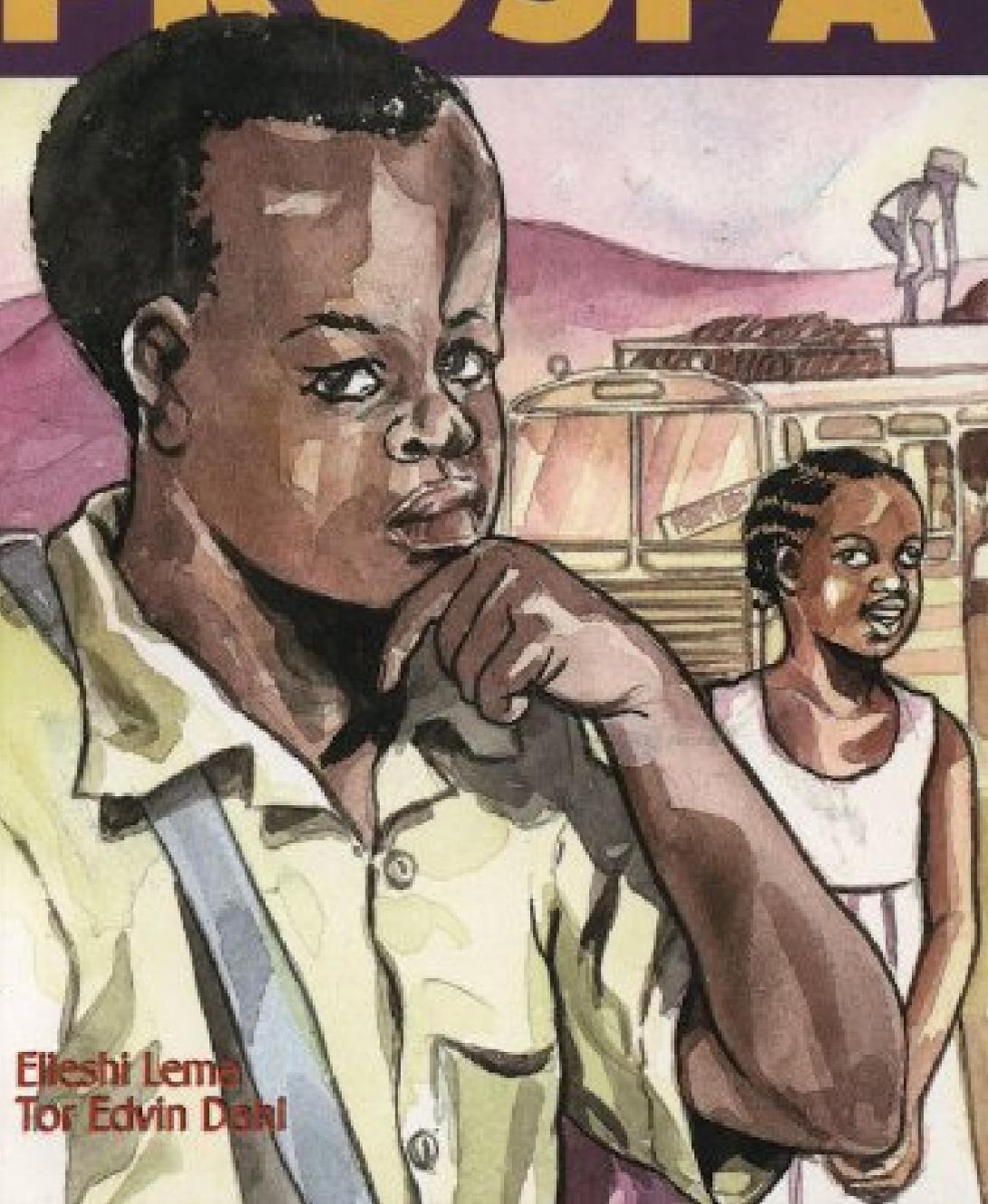


SAFARI YA PROSPA



Elleshi Lema
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PROSPA'S JOURNEY

Elieshi Lema and Tor Edvin Dahl
English translation by Matthew J. Quinn

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PREFACE

Story, story...

Prosper's Journey is a story of courage and investigation. This story has been written in two languages: in Norwegian by Mr. Tor Edvin Dahl, and in Swahili by Ms. Elieshi Lema.

These two authors have worked together, they prepared the names of the characters together and agreed on the flow of events. After that, each one composed their story.

NORAD sponsored the start of this work. In this edition, Siham Ahmed has explained various cultural aspects of Zanzibar. Magdalena Ng'maryo showed the authors around TPC.

Now for the story...

CHAPTER ONE

Prospa heard a little voice like that of a child's calling him. It sounded like it came from afar: "Pro, Prospaaa..."

He didn't respond. The football game he was playing with his companions was going well. They had divided themselves into two sides. They played by dribbling and throwing the ball. The game didn't have a winner, but it still very much excited them. One side showed skill at passing, and they were filled with happiness and laughter for making the other side look foolish for not knowing how to play ball.

Prospa and his companions were playing ball on the TPC golf course. This course was in the middle of two kinds of quarters. The western side was where the quarters for boys and sugarcane workers were. On

the eastern side, closer to the course, were the officers' homes.

The ditches of water polluted by the factory went up to the middle of the golf course, the boys' quarters, and those of the sugarcane workers. Sometimes this water was used to water the corn fields nearby.

After some time, Prospa again heard the voice calling his name. When it paused, he stopped playing in order to listen better, so as to hear where the voice was coming from.

"Play first Prospa. Now you have lost the ball. Agh," his teammate complained.

"I hear a person calling me," Prospa said.

"You all are starting to lose," the teammates from the other side said. They showed added grace in passing the ball.

"Play man. Time is running out man. Or if you don't want to play again, say so," complained a teammate.

Prospa ignored the voice and continued to play ball. He told himself that Merisho, his sister's child, finished eating, therefore it couldn't possibly be him crying out in hunger. Prospa abandoned Merisho and the neighbors' children of his age when he went to the course to play ball.

Even so, the time for using the golf course was over. The children were never permitted to play games at all, let alone ball, on this course. The course was studiously cared for by workers with experience in this type of work. The course was used by the high-ranking officers of TPC for playing golf.

During the game, in the final minutes, Prospa said, "I'm tired. I'm going to my place."

"Prospa, what are you? It's nearly the end of the game and you're leaving? Are you stupid?" his teammates sneered.

He didn't respond. He left so as to escape, and after awhile headed for the boys' and sugarcane workers' quarters. These homes were known as quarter #3. He jumped over the ditches of dirty water without looking. Prospa's feet knew the environment of TPC well. He followed the thin road by foot through the middle of the farm, and after a short time, he was arriving at home.

He didn't see Merisho in a small group of children who were playing outside the house.

"Merisho, Merisho," Prospa called. He didn't hear an answer. The children continued to play. Prospa threw open the door to the house and entered inside. He thought that Merisho had gone to sleep or maybe he was licking sugar. Merisho loved to lick sugar. Sister Josefina was keeping for herself an old tin of biscuits that she then hid under the bed. But Merisho had already discovered this secret.

"Merisho," Prospa called out again to his nephew. He was standing on the porch. There was a small, short table in the middle. A white cloth embroidered with purple flowers had been laid out on the table. Atop it was a tiny iron can with nylon flowers. To the right of where he stood was the bed in which Merisho slept. His sister slept in the second room.

"Merisho, if you're eating sugar again you will get

it from me," Prospa threatened.

He slowly opened the door and entered into his sister's room. His eyes took a brief time to adjust to the darkness. He bent down to look under the bed. He didn't see the child.

Leaving quickly, he forgot to close both doors behind him.

Behind their house was a playground. Several children were playing here. Prospa ran over to them to ask, "Where is Merisho? Have you all seen Merisho?" His heart was beating forcefully in his chest.

One child replied, "Merisho followed you to the golf course."

"When? Where did he follow me to?" Prospa asked.

"To the golf course. You went there to play ball," another child said without looking at Prospa.

"Why didn't I see him?" Prospa asked himself. He went over to the child who had answered without looking at him, then took hold of his shirt and pulled him close so as to make him listen closely.

"You better be telling me the truth man," Prospa said as he pulled him close.

This child, named Mustafa, stood up, looked at Prospa, then said, "Do not tear my shirt." He sat back down, then continued his work of making a cart from metal and tires that he had cut from the soles of some worn-out sandals.

"Mustafa tell me. Tell me the truth," Prospa coaxed him.

"Look for him at the range," Mustafa said.

Prospa felt angry, and along with his anger he felt like crying. But he composed himself, for Mustafa would laugh at him.

“Mustafa friend. Tell me,” Prospa urged.

Mustafa continued to carve circular tires out of the sandals in order to cut and place them on his cart that he was preparing.

“Don’t annoy me,” Mustafa complained, but he said, “A mama came over there, where Merisho and his friends whre playing. This mama called to Merisho, then pulled him by the hand and told him to show her where you were playing.”

“Which mama?” Prospa asked.

“I don’t know myself,” Mustafa said.

“Who was it? Did you see her well? Maybe it was Mama Sofia?” Prospa asked.

“I don’t know,” Mustafa said.

“Where did they go? Tell me Mustafa, where did this mama go?” Prospa urged.

Mustafa started to cut his tires into small pieces with a razor. He did this work attentively, and therefore didn’t respond. A small child who was watching Mustafa’s craftsmanship pointed a finger at Prospa. She indicated to the northern part of the golf course, towards the Indians’ quarters.

Prospa dashed away and ran towards the Indians’ quarters. That part of the golf course was void of people. A ways away in the direction of the officers’ houses could be heard, here and there, music from the radio along with the sounds of children playing.

Prospa couldn’t bring himself to stop again. He

turned right. He asked every person he came across, "Have you seen Merisho?" Those who didn't know Merisho asked, "Who?"

Prospa answered, "He's my sister's child. I don't know where he has gone."

One mama who was weeding her vegetable garden told him, "Why did Merisho pass by here a short time ago? He was following a mama wearing a dress. Merisho was eating a pastry. I myself was not concerned, I thought she was a friend of your sister."

"Now where have they gone?" Prospa asked hopelessly.

The mama continued to explain, "Indeed, she was wearing a red dress with blue trainers like those worn by schoolchildren. How terrible this is! Now run quickly and call for Teacher Josefina at school. The child can't be found by another student. Run."

CHAPTER TWO

TPC is located in a valley, flat like a plate, south of the town of Moshi.

It appears in a slanting color of green as one looks at it while standing in the elevated village of Tela, above the village of Kiboriloni, to the north of Moshi.

There is only a single entrance gate to TPC. All parts are surrounded by large fields of sugarcane. To the south is savannah, and further away, on the horizon, blue mountains can be seen.

This one gate is guarded by security at all times. The main way to travel from the town of Moshi to and from TPC is by bus, with the most prominent among these buses being *Black Rhino* and *Black Cat*. Another way is by bicycle. Many TPC workers use a bike. It's not easy for visitors to go TPC by foot, for their

buildings are far from the main gate. Their sugarcane is indeed a sight to behold, left and right: ripened sugarcane, sugarcane that isn't yet ripe, sugarcane that has grown but not yet ripened, and areas of land from which the sugarcane has already been harvested.

The first station, in a half-acre area, is the sugarcane loading station. Here, cut sugarcane is loaded onto train cars joined together in a long line. These cars full of sugarcane are pulled by a tractor in front, on rails leading to the collection station near the extraction machine.

Before harvest, the whole sugarcane farm is lit on fire. This fire is extinguished by poisonous insects, when all goes well. The grass is also lit on fire.

The sugarcane is cut with a short blade, which is curved at the top like the short tail of a goat. This blade is called a *Honda*. Each sugarcane cutter has his own honda.

Before arriving at the sugarcane collection station, the workers' quarters appear on the left. The farm supervisors' homes are also right here. After this, the road forks in two.

The road on the left goes to the Indians' and officers' quarters. The other road goes straight to the administrative center. Here there is a guard station, office building, the main bus station, a post office, and the sugarcane workers' union building and their cafeteria. The sugarcane extraction factory is behind the guard station.

CHAPTER THREE

Teacher Josefina arrived at the administrative station out of breath. Her eyes were filled with fear.

She didn't pass through the main gate. The school at which she taught, school number eight, was west of the administrative area. Thus she walked quickly through the corn fields and sugarcane workers' quarters, then went directly to the security station for help.

"Security, my child has gone missing. Help me," said Teacher Josefina hurriedly and without an explanation.

"Security, do you not believe me? My child is missing, he's nowhere to be seen."

"You just sit here quietly. Sit here in this chair," one guard said, then he left. Another guard took out

a large, wide notebook from the drawer of his desk, and opened it to a blank page. He opened the drawer again to get a pen.

At this time Prospa entered, accompanied by the woman who said she had seen Merisho being carried by a woman wearing a red dress.

"Stay outside," a guard told them as they entered loudly.

"This is my younger brother," Teacher Josefina said hastily. "He has been staying with the child at home."

"Stay outside," the guard repeated forcefully. "You explain well, what about this lost child?"

Prospa went back inside and stepped forward in order to give an explanation.

"Quiet. Your sister first," the guard said to Prospa, then he began to ask:

"Name?"

"Josefina Tadeo Ringo."

"Your profession?"

"Teacher."

"Where do you live?"

"Quarter #3."

"Age?"

"Twenty-six years old."

"How many children do you have?"

"One."

"The child's name?"

"Merisho."

"His age?"

"Four years."

“Your husband’s name?”

“I don’t have a husband.”

“At what time did the child go missing?”

“Prospa has come to tell me just now. I was at school.”

“You don’t know anything else?”

“I don’t.”

“Is the child used to walking or playing by himself?”

“No. Often, when Prospa isn’t home, I leave him with my friend,” Josefina explained.

“What’s the name of this friend of yours?”

“Sofia. Sofia Mohamed.”

“Where does she live?”

“She’s a neighbor of mine, there in quarter #3 along with the sugarcane cutters.”

“Have you already gone to see if the child is there?”

“Yes. Prospa has found the home closed up. Sofia isn’t home,” Josefina replied.

“What kind of work does this Sofia do?”

“She doesn’t work. She’s a house mama.”

“How many children does she have?”

“She doesn’t have a child.”

“Alright,” the guard said. “Boy, come,” the guard called to Prospa.

Prospa was asked his name, age, school at which he studied, and where the child went missing.

Prospa answered, “My friends came to get me to play ball at the golf course. I left Merisho playing with the neighbors’ children.”

“Did you find out when the child went missing?”

Prosopa recounted Mustafa's explanation and the words of the mama who had accompanied him.

"You, mama. Come here," the guard called to her.

"Friend, I don't understand this situation well. I don't understand it at all. I can't be a witness for a matter I know nothing about," the mama said defensively.

"What's your name mama?" the guard asked her without paying attention to her words.

"Why are you so serious, I don't know anything about this child," the mama said.

"Mama, what is your name?" the guard asked in a fierce tone.

The mama looked directly in his eyes, her eyes devoid of emotion, and told the guard, "I don't anything at all."

"You know nothing at all?" the guard asked.

"You told me that you saw Merisho," Prosopa started to protest.

The mama swung around and said, "You, child, did you meet anyone on the road who knew a single thing? Let me go. Guard, I swear I know nothing at all."

"Alright mama, you can go," the guard told her, then proceeded to draw several lines in his notebook. After some time, the guard said, "It seems absolutely apparent that your child has been stolen."

"Yes," the guard replied. "It appears that the child was stolen by someone who knew him well. It also seems that the mama did not want to report that she recognized the thief."

Josefina said, “My poor child.” She began to weep.

“We will get him mama, don’t worry,” the guard comforted her as he retrieved his walkie-talkie. He contacted his coworkers at the gate and told them, “A child has been stolen here in TPC. The child is with a young woman and is four years old. Everyone leaving TPC with a child under the age of ten is to be removed from their car and searched. A photo of the child will be brought to you soon.”

Prospa and his sister left the station and went home to wait for an update from the guards.

The waited until 10pm without any update at all to give them hope.

CHAPTER FOUR

Prospa aided the guard in his investigation.

They searched every area in which Merisho played.

They spoke with the children, asking them many questions. The children said very little when asked. Sometimes they shook their heads only to agree or disagree, or remained absolutely silent.

Prospa and the guard went to speak with Mustafa. The guard started to ask Mustafa questions; “You’re Mustafa right? Explain to us what you saw the day Merisho disappeared.”

“I’ve already explained to Prospa,” Mustafa replied.

“I’m not aware of what you said to Prospa,” the guard replied. “Repeat to me what you explained to him.”

Mustafa was silent. He looked at the guard with

disdain. But the guard didn't lose hope. He said, "We feel that Merisho has been stolen, therefore we must make every effort we can for him."

Mustafa laughed. His friends playing nearby laughed as well.

"Mustafa, this is not a joke," the guard said severely. He recognized at once Mustafa's stubborn nature, and decided to conduct his investigation with greater force.

Mustafa looked the guard in his eyes and asked him, "Like that, a person can be stolen?" His friends laughed again.

The guard replied to him, "Of course. Children can be stolen by adults for various reasons."

Mustafa asked the guard, "Which reasons?"

At this the guard became angry. His investigation was going nowhere at all. The guard said, "Stop your stubbornness you child. Who else is asking questions? You can't ask me any question at all. I can bring you in even though you're just like an animal. Ala! First of all, who is your father?"

Mustafa and his friends didn't laugh. All of the children, along with Prospa who until then had been silent, looked at Mustafa.

"My father is a sugarcane cutter. A brave sugarcane cutter. He sleeps with his *honda* under his pillow," Mustafa told the guard.

The guard looked at Mustafa for a long while, then left. Necessarily, Prospa followed him. Before leaving, Prospa looked at Mustafa with eyes that said: "I'm coming back for you."

They went to see Sofia Mohamed, Josefina's friend.

They asked her many questions: Where are you and your husband from? Where were you the day of the child's disappearance? What business did you have in the city? Why did you return late at night?

Many questions: Do you love staying with Merisho when his mother isn't here? Do you love Merisho? Why? Why have you not yet had a child? Would you love Merisho as your own child?

Finally Sofia asked, "What are you suspecting me of? Why are you asking me all of these questions?"

The guard replied to her, "We are just conducting a routine investigation. Please come to the station tomorrow morning. We have a few more questions that we'd like to ask you."

Afterwards, Prospa accompanied the guard back to the station. The guard asked Prospa many questions about Sofia and her sister. Other questions concerned Sofia and Merisho. The guard wanted to get more information about Mustafa, his father, his mother, his friends, and so on. The guard asked about Mohamed, Sofia's husband. The guard asked many questions about many people. Afterwards he allowed Prospa to leave.

Prospa left the station discontentedly. Merisho had not yet been seen. The guard was just asking questions. How much longer will he ask these questions? Prospa thought.

That night he listened to his sister Josefina cry in her room. Prospa himself felt anguished. He saw himself as the one to blame. If he hadn't gone to play ball at the golf course, Merisho wouldn't have been

stolen.

That night he thought hard. Prospa decided to conduct his own investigation, one more active than the guard's. He decided to search for Merisho until he found him. But where should he start?

One time a Masai woman attempted to persuade a small child from the neighborhood to go with her, but she didn't succeed. Is it possible that the mama seen with Merisho is the Masai woman disguised in a cotton dress? And then there's the fact that the Masai don't pass through the gate, they come from the grasslands and return there. Maybe that's the reason why Merisho wasn't seen at the gate? Is he lost out there in the grasslands? Prospa wondered. What kind of person would want to take Merisho? And why?

It must just be Sofia, Prospa told himself over and over. It's her that loves Merisho so much, giving him gifts all the time as if he's her child. Undoubtedly she wishes he was her child since she has none of her own. It must be her. Although Mama Sofia usually wore a black veil whenever she left the house, it's possible she wore dresses so that people wouldn't recognize her.

At dawn, Prospa went to see Mustafa. Mustafa wanted to know how the investigation was going.

Prospa told him, "There's nothing at all. The guard is still just asking questions."

"That's careless of him," Mustafa said.

Prospa told him, "Just now I decided to conduct my own investigation. You'll help me, right Mustafa?"

Mustafa said nothing.

Prospa continued, "Hey tell me Mustafa, what about this woman's face? Did you see her well?"

"I didn't look at her, but she seemed like a grandmother. Elderly and small."

Mustafa continued, "They passed through on the road by foot. She asked the children there, where is Josefina Ringo? One child showed her by pointing. Another called out to Merisho."

"Uh-huh."

"I don't know what he said to Merisho, but the mama and Merisho left together," Mustafa explained.

Prospa asked him, "Did you hear if Merisho called my name?"

"No. Did you hear him call for you?" Mustafa asked.

Prospa didn't reply. He grabbed Mustafa by the hand and they walked far from their houses, far from any other people. Prospa said to Mustafa, "I've decided to go to Dar es Salaam."

"Why? What's there?" Mustafa asked with surprise.

Prospa said, "Now let me explain to you. Several times I heard Mohamed say to Sofia that she should take Merisho to Dar. That she should go with him to Dar. In my thoughts I remember that these words weren't a joke."

"So?" Mustafa asked.

"I'm going to Dar to look for Merisho and Mohamed," Prospa said.

"You will get lost. Do you know where they're

staying?" Mustafa asked.

"I'll just find out. I've heard Mama Sofia telling Sister Josefina that their place is in Magomeni," Prospa said.

"Prospa, you don't know anything about that place," Mustafa warned his friend.

"There are many relatives of mine in Dar. I'll find them first. There's Brother Petro who lives in Manzese, then there's an uncle also. I must go," Prospa assured Mustafa.

"What about fares? Isn't it a lot of money?" Mustafa asked, still doubting the success of a trip like this. Mustafa was silent for a few minutes as he contemplated. Finally he said, "OK, go ahead and try. I'll provide fifty shillings. I don't have more money than that."

Prospa thanked Mustafa profusely. Afterwards he said, "I'm leaving tomorrow. Now as for you, tomorrow tell Sister Josefina that I've gone to Dar to find Merisho. I won't be able to explain anything myself today. Then, Mustafa, carefully follow the guard around."

"Agh, that guard is a foolish man," Mustafa said.

"Just follow him around," Prospa urged. "Tell him that you want to help with the investigation, then listen to his goings-on. Don't say anything until he asks a question."

"I shall see," Mustafa said.

They gave each other their word and shook hands goodbye.

CHAPTER FIVE

The night before leaving on his journey, Prospa slept fitfully. He rose earlier than usual, lit the Chinese kerosene stove, and put tea and water on the burner. Every day, Prospa did this before preparing to go to school. His sister would wake up to find tea on the table, along with the maandazi that had been prepared the night before.

After bathing and brushing his teeth, Prospa would awaken Merisho and wash his face. But this morning Merisho wasn't here.

His sister woke up and asked Prospa, "Why are you up so early today?"

Prospa greeted his sister but said nothing more. Conversation between them had lessened ever since Merisho was taken. Prospa felt that his sister resented

him for leaving Merisho by himself before he was taken.

When they finished dressing, they sat down to drink tea. They didn't speak to each other. Both of them felt lonely due to Merisho's absence. Usually when they sat down to eat like this, Merisho would be very noisy. He would refuse tea, he would want all the maandazi for himself, he would refuse to sit in his chair, he would want his mother to cool the tea down, and he would ask many questions. This morning, the silence and solitude among them took the place of Merisho's chaos.

After tea, Prospa stalled around, busying himself with small, unnecessary tasks. His sister asked him, "You aren't going to school?"

Prospa replied that he was going to school after he finished washing the dishes from tea. He thought: it would be better to just leave, his sister would think nothing of it, so after taking his notebook he left. Prospa knew the road his sister would take. He knew his sister took this particular road every day, because it was a shortcut. Therefore, he set out on a different road. He walked slowly along the road for a while until he was certain that his sister had already arrived at school, then returned home.

Prospa took the keys from the secret hiding place in which they were always placed, then opened the door and stepped inside. He quickly took out his wooden chest from under the bed and removed a few items of clothing. He took one pair of pants, two shirts and a sweater. He also took his catapult that

he had made himself.

He and Mustafa made this catapult in order to hunt birds in the grasslands bordering TPC to the south. Hunting birds was their game, but they couldn't manage to catch one until they built the catapult. They rejoiced when they were able to aim at the top of a tree with many branches and watch how the startled birds reacted with shrieks and noise. Furthermore, only him and Mustafa were skilled at making and using the catapult. Their game of hunting birds was well known in the usual group of children of quarter #3, and their abilities gave them high status in the group.

Prospa changed out of his school uniform, put on shorts and a shirt, then donned the new sneakers given to him as a gift by his uncle.

Now how to carry his clothes? He took a small travel bag that belonged to his sister. Prosopa felt guilty about doing this. He knew that his sister valued this bag and she didn't want it to be used carelessly.

Even so, he placed his clothes in the bag, pushed his trunk back under the bed, and placed his money inside the pocket of his shorts. He went outside, closed the door and returned the keys to the place from which he had taken them, then left.

Prosopa took the shortcut until he arrived at the bus station. There wasn't a bus in sight. He thought fast; he couldn't stand at the station for too long, he could be seen by anyone who knew him, or by the guard, who would want to ask him questions.

He passed quickly through an open area of the

administrative center and kept going until he reached the post office. He saw two mamas buying stamps there. He went a little further to the sugarcane cutters' cafeteria, from which much noise emanated. Propsa didn't look inside. He focused on heading towards the sugarcane fields and beyond that, the gate.

Propsa thought, "I will ask for a lift from the people who are coming to cut the cattle's grass and carrying it by pick-up truck. I'll only get a lift. What will I say? I'll say I'm going to Moshi. No. I'm going to greet my grandmother. No. What'll I say? I'll say that my grandmother is ill, so I'm bringing medicine to her. I bet someone will feel sorry for me if they hear that my grandmother is sick." He recited, "My grandmother is sick so I'm bringing her medicine. My grandmother..."

He walked quickly. In front of him he saw a pick-up loading grass, so he ran to catch it before it could leave. He arrived to see a well-dressed driver in the company of two dirty youth.

The youth were ready to leave, and had already gotten in the back of the truck. Propsa approached the well-dressed driver and greeted him.

"What?" the driver asked him instead of returning his greeting.

"I beg you for a lift brother," Propsa said respectfully. His heart started to beat quickly.

"The truck is full of grass, don't you see?" the driver said. He started the truck and put it in gear.

"My grandmother is ill brother, so I'm bringing her..." Propsa started to recite hastily.

“Child, do you not see how the grass has been loaded up? There isn’t any space,” the driver said impatiently.

“Grandmother is sick, I’m bringing her medicine,” Prospa insisted as he held onto the truck so as to prevent it from leaving. I will leave here! I’m leaving her, I will be rescued, Prospa told himself silently.

The driver started the truck. Prospa held onto the truck, insisting “Brother...”

“If that’s what you want, get in,” the driver said as he stopped the truck.

Prospa threw his travel bag into the pile of grass inside the truck, then jumped inside as the waiting truck started to leave.

He settled into the grass, lying down for a few minutes. He couldn’t believe his luck! At one point he heard someone ask, “Where are you going?” He was unprepared for this question. He struggled for a few minutes, thinking: where am I going? Aha, I’m bringing medicine to grandmother...

“Kiboriloni,” he said loudly so that the driver could hear him.

“We’re not going there,” the driver replied.

“Then I’ll get out anywhere,” Prospa said.

“Anywhere at all? OK then, get out here,” the driver said, then pressed the brakes to stop the truck.

Lo! they had stopped near the gate where the guards were, two of them.

They will recognize me, then ask questions. No, no! Prospa remained silent in the back of the truck without saying or doing anything. He prayed. Sud-

denly the driver put the truck in gear again and quickly drove off.

They weren't stopped at the gate. The guard who saw them approach gave them the signal to pass. The driver quickly drove through the neighborhoods of Moshi. When they arrived at the road leading to Arusha, before reaching the traffic circle with the statue of the soldier, Prospa was told to get out.

At exactly 10am, Prospa arrived at Moshi's bus station.

Now Prospa felt content to be among many people: youth, children, elders, men and women. He walked among the collection of small booths which were selling a mix of merchandise. He found some small youth who had come from the same village in Old Moshi. These youth were in the business of selling sweets, biscuits, and other things. They were hawking their goods in baskets and boxes that were easy to carry. They could easily walk around town by foot, but often they wandered around the bus station where many people were gathered together. Prospa was filled with happiness to be mixed in with this noisy crowd of people walking here and there, talking every minute, buying and selling things all the time.

For the several hours that he was there, Prospa forgout about his trip to Dar and its importance. He walked around the station without becoming tired, observing the people, the store items, the many buses constantly coming and going. Prospa was surprised at the way things in town had changed. It had been a long time since he had walked around town, and

back then the shops didn't have all of these things. The children doing business had been fewer. Prospa watched them and thought: Do these youth not go to school?

He remembered his money that he'd placed in his bag when he left home. He quickly rummaged through the bag to ensure that it was still there. Seven hundred and fifty shillings, he told himself silently. This money had been slowly collected each time he had been given a gift by visitors to Sister Josefina and been told to buy biscuits or sweets with Merisho. He had intended to buy shoes or maybe a shirt to wear at Christmas when going to their home in Old Moshi. Now he wished to buy a few delicious things at one of the stands. Maybe chocolate. But he felt that chocolate was going to be expensive. The more he thought about the chocolate, the more he wanted to buy it. He had tasted a piece of chocolate once, in the home of a TPC official. Aah, how fine it tasted, delicious... He salivated at the thought. He felt hungry, his stomach growling as if lions from Manyara had settled there. His desire for chocolate was so great that it was giving him issues with his stomach.

He went up to a youth selling chocolate to ask him, "How much for chocolate?"

"Two hundred and fifty."

"Jesus! Why so expensive?" Prospa asked, surprised. The youth left Prospa where he stood.

Prospa shot the boy an angry look, then approached another one who looked tired and asked, "What's the price for chocolate?"

“Two hundred and fifty,” came the response. Prospa kept his composure, withholding his surprise for a little while. “Biscuits?” he asked.

“Seventy.” Prospa very much desired the chocolate but knew the biscuits were a good deal. Especially since a package of biscuits contained more than a package of chocolate. He retrieved a hundred shilling note out of his bag, gave it to the youth, then took a box of biscuits.

He opened the box right there and began to eat. His change was returned to him, which he placed inside his bag.

Prospa continued to wander around the station. He hung his travel bag of clothes on his shoulder while eating his biscuits. After awhile, he tired of walking. He sought out the office for the buses going to Dar so that he'd have a ticket when his time came to leave.

Suddenly he was face to face with an elder from their village in Old Moshi. They greeted each other, asking each other about their conditions and those of the people in each other's homes. Prospa's heart beat quickly. Will he know that he'd escaped from home? But the man didn't appear concerned. He continued the conversation with explanations of many village matters. He also explained that he came to the city often in order to buy supplies for his small shop in the village. Finally he asked, “Are you all running away from sugarcane or what? The day before yesterday I saw Merisho with a girl from your place, walking quickly. Today I see you, right here at the station.”

Prospa's heart soared! Lo! He felt alright! Merisho

had been taken to Dar! And who was this girl? A girl from work? Maybe a friend of Sofia's?

What did she look like? Was she small or big? A grown woman? Prospa's head swam with questions that he didn't dare ask the elder.

Finally Prospa said, "This girl from work is truly stubborn. Did she greet you?"

"She just looked at me, then looked away and spoke with my grandson. The bus came and went without a sight of Teacher Josefina," the elder explained

Prospa acknowledged this.

After the elder had left, Prospa felt newly strong. He went quickly to the *Safari Trans* office and asked, "How many shillings is the fee to go to Dar?"

"One thousand eight hundred. There are two seats left in the back," he was told.

Prospa was shocked. One thousand eight hundred! He rushed outside, thinking, "Where I will get money to pay for such a high fare!" A thought came to him: the train! Train fare would be a better deal than bus fare. He would go by train, Prospa decided. He asked a youth for the time at which the train to Dar would leave. The youth looked at him with surprise, then laughed and told him sarcastically, "Go sleep in the station until Sunday, the train leaves then," then walked away.

What would he do? He couldn't return to TPC for awhile. "I can't. I can't. I must leave today," Prospa reminded himself.

Now all happiness left him. The sun felt hotter.

He tried to think, to devise a plan to get money, but his wits failed him. They failed to work at all.

After some time he decided to leave on any bus at all. He knew that he would need to do everything he could to enter the bus without being seen.

Prospa had made his decision, but he had no idea what plan he would use to succeed.

CHAPTER SIX

The buses going to Dar started to arrive at the station at 4pm. As soon as they entered, a scramble began. Everyone standing began to gather their luggage together, walk here and there, look for others to help with loading their baggage, and so on. Those who weren't going on a particular bus remained where they were, but with increased concern, since their baggage could be stolen. Sometimes two or three buses entered at once. When this occurred, there was chaos.

Amidst this scramble, Prospa saw a mama, who looked to be the same age as his sister, hurrying to board a bus along with her luggage and small children. Prospa noticed how anxious she was as she carried the bags while her children cried, and a thought came to him. He approached the mama and said to her, "Shall

I help with your baggage mama? I see that you're very stressed."

"I have no money," the mama said.

"I will help you for free," Prospa told her.

"Lo, thank you my brother. Watch my bags to ensure they aren't stolen," the mama said. "I better help my child here."

Prospa said to her, "No. You stay here with the children while I help with your bags.

Prospa quickly gave the mama his travel bag to look after, then started to busy himself with her luggage. He attempted to carry a small sack, and was surprised to find that it weighed as much as him. He tried to place it on his head but failed. He called out to someone nearby for assistance in giving the bag to the conductor. In this way, he was able to carry the sack and give it to the conductor. Prospa felt his neck twist, then felt sharp pains in the nerves of his neck. His legs felt weak, but he held steady. He finished with the bags, took the arm of one of the children, and walked onto the bus.

Prospa and the mama sat down in a tall chair at the back. The mama thanked Prospa and asked, "Where's your seat?"

Prospa replied, "I'm sitting right here."

Many passengers stayed outside while their bags were loaded. When they were all inside the bus, the driver started the engine.

At 6:30pm, *Rundugai Bus Service* left Moshi station for Dar with Prospa onboard.

Those passengers who had boarded in the final

minutes continued to search for a place to sit, for there were more people with tickets than seats, and it was thus necessary for some travellers to stand. Each person was talking, some loudly, so it was extremely loud inside the bus.

Prosapa felt incredibly happy with his victory in taking this successful big step on his bold journey. But he didn't show this happiness. He remained silent, looking outside. He noticed the way the bus moved so quickly that everything outside was soon behind them.

They arrived at a place called Uchira, where the bus stopped. Propsa understood from listening to the complaints of the mama with children that the bus was loading still more luggage.

Gradually darkness began to fall and cover the land like a veil.

The driver left Uchira and increased his speed. The passengers were still talking loudly, discussing various events. The bus passed through Kileo without stopping.

The conductor started to yell over everyone, "Alright, alright, alright, everyone get your tickets ready."

Prosapa was shocked. His heart beat quickly inside his chest. They're checking tickets after boarding the bus! It would be dark inside the bus, maybe he could hide under the seat, but when the lights were turned on, they would shine down on him as if it were noon on a summer day.

Prosapa looked out the window, and saw that he wouldn't die if he decided to jump out. Maybe they

would take pity on him and just let him go, he comforted himself.

All of a sudden a thought came to him, and he turned to the mama with children to say, "You know, my ticket was lost when I was loading your luggage. I'm looking for it in my bag but I don't see it." Prospa continued to feel around and search his bag with his hands.

"Really?" the mama said with surprise. "Why didn't I see any ticket fall out while I was watching you the whole time?"

"I don't know," Prospa said.

The conductor had arrived at the middle of the bus.

In his chest Prospa's heart beat *dum, dum, dum* like a drum. All of these issues were new to him but what else could he have done? It had been necessary to leave TPC in search of Merisho until he found him, therefore these problems would just keep happening to him. He was unable to think of a new way to get himself out of the ticket mess. The ticket has been lost, he told himself silently, over and over again. The ticket has been lost, the ticket has been lost.

He started to think about Merisho instead of the ticket. The beating of his heart slowed. When the conductor arrived at him his thoughts were far away.

"You young man, bring me your ticket," the conductor said.

Prospa began to shake as he searched his bag for the ticket while saying, "Ha! I don't see it. It fell out when I was loading bags onto the bus. It must have!"

"Quit your ridiculousness right now. Give me your ticket at once."

The mama with children said, "It's true brother. He was helping me load my baggage. His ticket undoubtedly fell out then."

"Pay for it then," the conductor said, then continued to check other passengers.

"Look for your ticket young man, we will be harsh to you without it," the conductor said to Prospa.

The driver listened to this exchange and said loudly, "Without a ticket you will be kicked out. Rungai is no sympathetic mother."

When the conductor returned for Prospa after checking everyone's tickets, Prospa had nothing to say except, "It's lost. It's really lost, I'm not lying. The ticket is lost..."

One passenger said, "Kick him out, he's one of those thieves who sneak into buses to steal from us."

At once a commotion sprang up. People again began to talk loudly all at once, everyone speaking their mind. People continued without listening to each other. Others started arguments.

One voice rose above the commotion to say, "We should all donate a little money for his fare."

Everyone continued to argue and discuss. Now the issue involved money. There wasn't a single person volunteering except the mama with children. She gave Prospa two hundred shillings. Prospa accepted. His eyes showed his appreciation, even though he said not a word.

One passenger said, "I would give him money but

I don't know where he's going."

Another asked, "Where are you going?"

"Dar es Salaam," Prospa replied.

"To do what?" another said.

"To find my sister's lost child," Prospa said miserably.

The entire bus laughed. Some for a long time. They immediately began conversing about the cleverness of today's youth. But the mama with children felt sympathy for him. She looked at Prospa as if seeing him for the first time. She asked him, "How did it happen?"

Prospa couldn't respond. He didn't want people to hear him and then start laughing again. He stared outside, his throat tight with pain that made him want to cry.

The mama with children said to him, "Don't worry. You'll get him back, the people who took him can't be far away."

Prospa looked at her but said nothing.

When they arrived at Kisangara, the driver stopped the bus and said, "Young man, we are kicking you out here. CCM will help you get to your brother in Dar."

Here and there inside the bus passengers complained and said that this was a travesty. One man stood to speak for awhile, insisting that it was completely impossible to leave a small child like this on the road, especially at night. That God would punish anyone who did such a thing. "Truly I say to you, God will not forgive this sin," the man finished.

The driver said, "Sir, with all due respect to you,

pay just one thousand shillings on the child's behalf. The rest we will forgive."

The man said, "I'm going to Dar es Salaam to meet my son Yosua. Don't you know him? When I arrive in Dar Yosua will pay one thousand."

The conductor lost his patience. He seized Prospa by the arm and roughly led him off the bus. Outside the bus, the conductor told him, "The CCM office is there." He pointed with his finger as he returned inside the bus. People continued to complain and curse, but the bus didn't stay any longer.

CHAPTER SEVEN

At 8:30 at night Prospa found himself in a completely unknown place without relatives, friends, or neighbors. Mwanga Kisangara. He stood there for a long time watching the bus disappear into the darkness.

His feet felt tired. Fatigue weighed on his whole body. He looked here and there in search of a place to sit. Beside him, on his right he saw some barrels that had been piled up in one place on the pavement. He walked over slowly, prepared one of the barrels so that it wouldn't roll, and sat on it. In front of him, on the other side of the road he saw the CCM office. It was a small building painted white, with its doors and windows closed up. On his right was a small hotel. Outside the hotel, a youth his age was roasting kebabs.

Prospa sat atop the barrel for a long time. His throat felt like a dry lump. He tried hard to think of what to do, but each time his mind reminded him that he had already decided to look for Merisho until he got him back. Agh, the dry lump in his throat was starting to hurt him. He tried to swallow so as to relieve the pain. It worked. When it seemed like he was about to cry, he told himself very quietly, "I won't cry, I won't be afraid, I won't cry, I won't be afraid..."

In the darkened areas, those parts not illuminated by weak lamp light, Prospa saw shapes that surprised and frightened him. He stopped looking into the darkness and focused instead on the illuminated areas.

The good scent of roasted meat was carried to him by the wind, filling his nose. It reminded him of his thoughts about the scary shapes in the darkness; he began to think about food instead. He felt extremely hungry, his stomach rumbling.

Suddenly three men appeared to his left. Prospa considered that they would hit him or chase him away. He was afraid. He again told himself quietly, "I won't be afraid, I won't be afraid, I won't be afraid." His heart beat so hard in his chest that he could hear it in his ears.

The man passed right by him without paying him any mind. Maybe they hadn't seen him. They entered the hotel. When Prospa saw this he stopped worrying, knowing that there was no one who cared to ask why he was outside at this hour of the night and what he was doing there.

"I'm feeling hungry," Prospa told himself. He started to talk to himself, then was startled to be doing this as if he was talking with someone next to him. "I will eat at the hotel there, then look for a place to sleep."

He slung his bag over his shoulder and walked towards the hotel. He very much desired the meat being roasted there, but he hadn't yet asked for its price. He entered the hotel, staying near the door. The three men were there talking with each other in loud voices.

Beef ugali 100 shillings

Rice and beef 150 shillings

Ugali and beans 75 shillings

Prospa read the board hanging from the wall like those in the classrooms at TPC. Beef ugali? Ah, if Mustafa were here we would be laughing for sure.

He ordered rice with meat.

A youth brought him his food, rice in one hand and sauce in the other. He had his thumb in the sauce, and placed the food on the table for him without welcoming him. Prospa would do this, and sister Josefina would hit him hard and tell him he was dirty and lacked manners. He didn't complain. He ate his food without a word. He ate quickly. He wasn't full, but he was afraid to ask for more. He wanted very much to stay there in the hotel and listen to the men as they conversed, even though he understood little of their language.

When he was outside, Prospa didn't know where he should go. With whom should he talk to ask for

a place to sleep? The child who had been roasting kebabs had already left. In what direction should he walk? He was afraid of getting lost in the dark, that he would end up in an even stranger place, far from the road that would take him to Dar.

Prospa returned to the barrels on the pavement, and sat down. He said, "Merisho, Merisho, we will meet." He tried to talk, but the issue of talking was finished in his mind. Sometimes his mind refused to do that which he wanted it to do.

He felt more tired than usual. He saw a space between two barrels hidden among three. He crawled into this space, placed his bag on the ground at the end of the hiding place, then laid himself down in the dust. He placed his head on his bag, using it as a pillow. The place was nice and warm. After a short time, Prospa fell sound asleep.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Prosopa was awoken by the morning cold. When he opened his eyes, the town was still sleeping. He saw no one, nor heard a sound. He felt lazy and exhausted, and he wanted to continue sleeping, but when he remembered where he was he rose quickly. He wiped the dust off himself, then wiped the dust off his bag and slung it over his shoulder. What time is it? he asked himself. He wiped his face so as to clear the dirt from his eyes, then walked towards the road.

He decided to walk. He told himself that Dar couldn't be very far. In the morning, when the sun wasn't yet hot, he would run. He used to participate in races at his school in Old Moshi before he moved to TPC to live with his sister.

Prosopa walked in the middle of the road. Before

long he saw the lights of a vehicle in front of him, so he let it pass before continuing to walk in the road. Then he heard a horn behind him, and he again left the road. He realized that this road was trafficked at all hours, so he walked alongside the road instead.

He believed that Dar couldn't be far away. This faith gave him strength, and he began running, cheering himself on the way radio announcers do during games. After running for some time, he no longer saw any homes. Every area around the road was bare, lacking even trees. Bushes could be seen here and there. He ran faster. Even though the land was illuminated, Prospa began to worry. Why hadn't he seen anyone at all? Was there no one who lived here?

"Merisho. Why did you disappear?" he asked loudly. He wanted to hear the sounds of humanity. He was happy when he saw a vehicle on the road, he hoped it would slow down for him. Maybe he would ask for a lift. He started to see a sisal farm, and knew that there must be people farming this sisal. If he saw people, he wouldn't be afraid. He walked for a long time seeing only sisal on both sides of the road.

He was already breathing hard and sweating when he spotted someone's residence. He saw tiny clay houses covered with dried grass. Other houses were surrounded by fences of bamboo saplings.

He slowed down, no longer running. He hoped to see someone, especially a child his age who would talk with him, but he didn't see anyone at all.

As he continued to walk, the landscape changed; it was greener, with more plants. He started to see

mango trees. The area to the left was hilly, the people working their land in the steep slopes of the hills. Here and there, Prospa saw clumps of banana and maize plants.

On the right side of the road, the valley was getting deeper. The empty valley was devoid of plants except shrubs, indicating a drought. Here and there, far from the road, two or three houses could be seen. They were grouped together like children who had been left out in the morning cold.

Prospa started to get tired. Why hadn't he arrived? Where was Dar? Where was Merisho? Once again he heard Merisho calling, "Proo. Prospa, come and see." In his mind he saw Merisho showing him a worm, laughing and saying to him, "Hey, look how it moves."

He picked up his pace. A song popped into his head, and he started to sing while running to its rhythm.

Mirror, mirror
Who has broken it
I don't know, I don't know
May they eventually be arrested
And imprisoned
Heeeeeee.

When he sang "Heee" he ran harder as if to avoid being arrested himself. He continued to sing this song many times until he ran out of energy.

Prospa stopped when he saw three boys his age. They weren't far from the road. They were burning charcoal. He headed over towards them. When he

reached them, he stopped to watch them work. When they saw him standing there silently, they stopped their work and stood to look at him. They started to speak with Prospa in Kipare.

Although Prospa understood a little, he said, "I don't know Kipare."

They looked at each other and laughed, then talked amongst themselves.

"What are you all doing?" Prospa asked them.

They looked at each other again. One of them said, "Don't you see?"

Another said, "We're burning charcoal."

Prospa was silent for some time. He wished he could speak Kipare like Mama Joni of TPC. Mama Joni was a Pare from Same. She was friends with Sister Josefina and every day tried to teach her Kipare.

"I'm going to Dar," Prospa said suddenly. "My sister's child was taken, I'm going to search for him and bring him back home."

The children looked at each other again. They speak with each other in Kipare, then one of them spoke up. "Where are you from?"

"Moshi," Prospa replied, thinking, "If I understood Kipare, I would really get to know them well."

"Moshi?" they asked with surprise. They spoke with each other in Kipare for a long time. Then they started to argue. Finally, one of them said, "You can't reach Darisalam."

"Why?" Prospa asked.

One of the others who had been conversing told his friend, "You don't know, you don't know Dar."

"I know, I know, I know," said the child who had spoken first.

Prospa said, "I would like some food. I feel hungry," then sat down in the grass.

All three of them paused. Prospa stared at them. The sun was hot. Prospa's feet were extremely hot, so he took off the sneakers that he was wearing. The three youth looked at Prospa's sneakers enviously. Prospa put them back on again, and they laughed.

They started to talk amongst themselves in Kipare again, as if Prospa wasn't there. Prospa stayed there, looking at them for a long time. He felt very thirsty and hungry. It was unbearable to think about his thirst and hunger, in fact doing so only made it worse. He said, "I would like some water. The sun is very hot."

One of them said, "We don't have water here, we'd need to go home."

"I'll go with you all," Prospa said.

The youth continued to talk amongst themselves in Kipare as if Prospa wasn't there. Vehicles passed quickly on the road. Some headed towards Dar and others towards towards Moshi.

After seeing that he wouldn't be successful in getting water or food, Prospa stood up and headed towards the road to continue his journey.

He was sweating profusely. His hair and skin were covered in dust, and it was in his eyes too, preventing him from seeing well. He wanted to sit in the shade of a tree, but he didn't see a single tree near the road. Feeling overwhelmed, he saw that it'd be better to ask

for help. He began to flag down vehicles by signaling with his hand, but the vehicles passed him by *vyup* at great speed. What should he do? He would just ask for water, even if only a single glass, and he'd feel better.

He started to feel dizzy, so he slowed down. Ahead of him, just a little ways away, he saw two people herding cattle and goats. He was heartened by this, and intended to ask them for water until they agreed. Prospa started to sing as he walked, stepping to the beat of this song:

*My children
I am your father now
I'm no longer strong enough
To calm the lion
He killed your mother
He killed your father
Come to me children.*

He found himself running to escape the lion, and the way he repeated the song was indeed so fast as to make him forget his thirst and hunger. His dizziness evaporated. Then he changed some words, singing:

*My Merisho
I'm your uncle
I'm no longer strong enough
To kill the lion
He killed mother
He killed father
My Merisho*

He was startled when he reached the people herding cattle. They were two young women. Prospa

was surprised to see young women herding. When he reached them he discovered that one was young and the other older.

He greeted the older one, "Shikamoo, sister."

She didn't respond. Prospa couldn't think of anything to say for a few moments, then said, "Sister, I would like some water. I feel very thirsty."

The sister responded in Kipare.

Prospa told her, "I don't know Kipare. I'm from Moshi."

"Where are you going now?" the sister asked.

"Dar," Prospa replied.

"You're going to Dar by foot?" the sister asked. She looked shocked.

"Is it far?" Prospa replied.

"Very, maybe thousand of miles. Our brother lives there. What are you going to do there?"

"I'm going to look for my sister's child. He's named Merisho. He's been taken."

"Liar," the sister said.

"I'm telling the truth," Prospa insisted.

"Why aren't you going by car?" the younger sister asked.

"My ticket got lost, so the driver threw me out on the road," Prospa told them.

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that," the older sister said.

"I beg you for some water," Prospa said as he pretended to collapse. He fell to the ground suddenly, breathing hard in hopes that one of the sisters would take pity on him. He told the younger to fetch some water from a well so it wouldn't be hot.

Prospa drank the water eagerly, finishing off the whole bottle.

"Stay with us until you've regained your strength," the older sister said.

Prospa said, "Thank you sister."

He remained with the girls until evening, when they headed the herd home. When they told him that they were leaving, Prospa said, "I want to go with you."

The older sister said, "We will be scolded."

Prospa didn't argue with them. He knew that they wouldn't take him to their home even if he tried to persuade them. He decided to follow them silently, walking a little ways behind them until they arrived in the village of Dagau. Then he followed them to their home.

The girls had already noticed that Prospa was following them. When they arrived home, they explained to their mother how Prospa had asked for water and that he was going to Dar on foot.

"You're going to Dar on foot?!" their mother exclaimed. "He doesn't know what he's doing, poor boy," their mother said as she beckoned to Prospa, who was standing a little ways away from their home, afraid of being chased away.

Prospa greeted the girls' parents, and they welcomed him to stay as their guest until the next day.

In the evening they ate ugali with cassava and spinach. Prospa told them what had happened, and they felt very sorry for him. They saw that he was a brave youth for daring to begin such a journey in

search of his nephew.

"They asked him, "What did your sister do about this matter?"

Prospa replied, "My sister was stricken with fear and grief. She sent our elders the news, then waited for the results of the police investigation. The police asked many questions, but the child wasn't found."

They asked if he had informed the radio and newspapers.

Prospa said, "No. Why would the radio and newspapers look for Merisho?"

The younger sister who had been herding cattle laughed, "You don't know? If you announce it on the radio everyone in Tanzania will hear. Then you send in a photo to the newspapers. Maybe someone will see him and return him home."

Prospa didn't believe her.

All of the children rose early in the morning and prepared tea, swept the floor and cleaned the dishes. They fetched water and poured it into barrels. After drinking tea with cassava, everyone dispersed.

The father picked up a blade, the mother a hoe. Before their father left, he said to Prospa, "Now, you child, are not to leave until we find a good way to get you to Dar. Do you hear?"

Prospa was afraid to argue with him. He had planned to leave this very morning. The father noted Prospa's silence, and told him, "If you leave here you will have many problems on the road. Dar is not reachable on foot young man. And there are many fierce animals that eat people travelling on the road.

This journey is no laughing matter. You are not to leave.“

Prospa said, ”Yes, father.“

The younger sister was told to remain with Prospa at home. The two of them were told to fetch water, then to wash their dirty clothes.

Prospa told the girl that at his place, boys don't fetch water, they only fetch water when their girlfriends are not around. The girl laughed, saying, ”That's not true.“

Prospa didn't argue with her, but said, ”You go fetch water, and I'll wash the clothes.“

The girl agreed, which pleased Prospa.

Right after the girl left, Prospa took the boiled cassava that had been set aside for their lunch, then wrapped it up in a banana leaf that he had smoothed out with a flame. Prospa placed the food in his bag to save for when he got hungry on the road. Then he left quickly without saying goodbye.

He walked quickly while the morning sun was still low in the sky. The environment changed a little more as he continued his journey. He started to see mango trees and bushes of banana plants. Here and there, he saw signs for farms. He also saw people fixing the road. Foreigners were supervising as Africans drove large machines around, making fearsome noises. Some spread dirt around, others were pressing down gravel, and others cut into the ground like an angry cat. Lo! Prospa was awed. He stood for a long time watching the way they drove those machines.

A little ways away, on a hill on the horizon, Prospa

saw another machine scooping up soil. This soil was being loaded into big trucks and poured into a very large pile near the road.

Prospa wanted to remain there all day and watch them build the road. But he had to continue his journey.

Before doing so, he encountered the girls who had been herding goats. Prospa had already familiarized himself with his surroundings, so he waved to them and carried on.

Evening arrived, the sun disappearing behind the hills to the west at the place where they touched the sky. Darkness fell. Prospa walked in the middle of the road, running to the side each time he saw the lights of a vehicle. He wasn't afraid, for here and there, whenever the lights of a vehicle illuminated the road, he saw other people who were walking alongside without worry. Others were standing right next to the road, talking with each other.

Prospa got the urge to run for awhile. He sang so that he could run to the rhythm of a song. He also forgot about the length of his journey and his body's fatigue. He felt as if he was with his friends, playing together with them. Loneliness left him and even his fear evaporated. He ran while singing:

*I'm going
to Dar es Salaam
To greet him
My friend*

He hesitated, then stopped and said, "No," beginning again:

*I'm going
to Dar es Salaam
To search for him
My Merisho
I will meet him
I will take him by the hand
eh friend*

This song gave him the courage and strength to continue without feeling tired. When he sang "I will give him my hand, eh friend" he extended his hand as if he had truly seen Merisho. He shook and twisted his hips the way players do in a game. He knew that his hips weren't as flexible as those of a girl, but he didn't care.

He started to see many lights grouped together, and realized that he was approaching a town. He didn't know which town, until he entered and read the sign telling him that he had arrived at Same.

CHAPTER NINE

Prosopa was beginning to understand that there were differences between a town and a village. In a village, people would see him alone with no place to go and they would ask him, who are your parents? They would want to know where he was going, or had he gotten lost? If he said that he'd come from another village, they would continue to question him and ask him if he had just come to greet someone, or if he had other business being there. They would want to know about his family members in his village, so as to search their memories to see if any of his family had ancestors in their own village.

In town, there was no one who asked him about these things. If someone doesn't know you they pass right by you, no questions asked. If someone doesn't

know you, they don't pay any attention to you. It's as if you can't be seen. This affected Prospa; he felt indignant when he was in town. But he no longer cared whether people acknowledged him or not. He realized that he could walk anywhere at all and not meet anyone who would be able to tell that he wasn't living in Same. For this reason, Prospa walked around the town of Same with greater confidence than he had done in Msangara. The town of Same had more lights, and many more people walked along the road at night.

Prospa looked around for a little hotel where he could get some food. Music was being played so loudly that his ears hurt. There were many people in the hotel. People were conversing loudly so as to be heard over the noise of the music. Others were eating quickly and silently as if they were being hurried away. Prospa sat down in a corner where it was somewhat dark.

After eating ugali with beans, the cheapest meal on the menu, Prospa walked around Same again. He walked without a destination in mind. When he passed through the road he saw youth his age playing here and there. He saw a shop with a large veranda, and told himself that he would sleep there later. It was brightly lit, but he didn't mind. Prospa continued to walk as he waited for more people to leave the road and return to their homes. He had no idea what time it was. In fact, he didn't need to know what time it was, since night and afternoon were his cues to continue his journey.

Prospa laid down on a clear spot on the veranda. He didn't care whether anyone saw him or not. The

cold of the night crept up on him; he looked like a small bundle of clothes. The floor of the veranda was colder than the ground, Prospa realized. He awoke very early. Each of his joints was tired, as if he had worked hard carrying luggage the night before.

Prospa bathed using a faucet at a gas station. Afterwards, he remained there idly, waiting for the town to awake. In front of him and to the left he saw *Same Guest and Bar* whose employees were already busy. He decided to go see if he could get some tea without paying for it.

He hadn't yet left when he saw a young girl headed for Same Guest and Bar herself. The girl had wrapped a cotton cloth around her chest to cover her breasts. Atop her head she was carrying a calf that had just been slaughtered, the blood not drained.

"Jesus!" Prospa exclaimed; he wanted to run away. His jaw dropped in shock.

The girl stopped and looked at Prospa, then began laughing hard.

"My God," Prospa exclaimed, growing even more shocked, his face betraying his astonishment and even fear.

The girl, smiling humorously, asked him, "What?"

Prospa didn't reply. He continued to be astonished at this girl, whose left eye was bad. The pupil looked like it had been punctured and lost its color; it was white as milk. As if that weren't enough, the eye was bigger than her right one. Drops of blood from the calf had fallen onto her face and stuck there. But when she laughed, her smile filled her whole face and

transformed it wonderfully.

"Let's go have thome thoup," the girl said to him.

Prospa nodded his head in agreement but didn't follow her.

He watched her until she entered inside *Same Guest and Bar*.

The girl came back out immediately, washed her face in the same place Prospa had, then went up to him and grabbed his hand. Prospa was afraid.

"Come to our place," the girl said to him.

"I can't. I'm going to Dar," Prospa replied.

"Really? I altho want to go to Dar eth Thalam," the girl said. "Let'th go together. I've alwayth wanted to walk to Dar. I want to thudy at univethity."

"I'm going there to look for my sister's child, he was taken from my home at TPC," Prospa told her.

The girl stared at Prospa. Her bad eye looked as if it was just floating in its socket. Then she said, "Alright, I know where thith child hath gone. I will help you find him."

Prospa was worried. He didn't believe this girl, but he didn't tell her so.

The girl said, "Lithen, I'm going home to get thome clotheth. Wait for me here. Don't leave. If you leave I will juth find you again." She laughed happily, her right eye shining brightly. Then she ran off, headed towards a hill.

Prospa was dumbfounded. "This girl is a witch, or the child of a witch," Prospa thought. "Her face is frightening but she herself isn't threatening! And why didn't he refuse or run away when she said that she'd

come with him to Dar? And what was this about her knowing where Merisho is without even having met him?"

Prospa decided to wait and see more about this girl with the strange face.

The girl came running back. She was wearing a gown. In her hand was a very small bundle.

"What is this?" Prospa asked worriedly.

"A drethth. Put it in your bag," the girl commanded.

Prospa hesitated. He wanted to tell her to unfold it and shake it out so that he could be sure that nothing evil was wrapped inside.

The girl lost her patience. She said, "Agh, hey," then took Prospa's bag that he'd slung over his shoulder, opened the zipper, then stuffed in her dress without looking inside. She closed the zipper and slung the bag back over Prospa's shoulder. Then she said, "Now let'th have thoup."

Prospa followed her without a word. He thought and told himself, "I will escape from this girl. I'm just going to have some soup, then I'll run and she'll never see me again."

They entered inside *Same Guest and Bar*, where the girl went directly to the kitchen. She returned with two bowls of soup. They sat and drank them down. The soup contained many chili peppers, which made Prospa cough until tears came to his eyes. The girl laughed at him, pounding the table happily while saying, "You're a child, you're still just a little child."

This made Prospa angry. He set down his soup

without finishing it, even though it was delicious.

When they had left, Prospa said to her, "I have no money for bus tickets."

"You don't? How did you get to Thame?"

Before Prospa could reply, the girl said, "Fine, don't worry. I, good girl Edithon, will atkh for a lift." She turned and bowed ostentatiously.

"Your name is Edison?" Prospa asked.

"Yeah, don't you know? My name is Thara Edithon. The king's daughter."

"Edison is a boy's name," Prospa said. "And these days there is no king."

Sara laughed, running away playfully while saying, "Who thayth, who thayth."

Prospa stood where he was. "Jesus Christ, this Sara is insane. She's already lost it."

Sara had gone far. She stopped and turned, calling enthusiastically to Prospa. "Come, run. Come tho I can tell you a thecret."

Prospa ran after her without hesitation. Sara took him by the hand. She pulled him along as she ran, both of them following the road.

Prospa didn't like being pulled. "Sara stop," he said angrily.

"My name is Edithon," Sara corrected him.

"Stop," Prospa replied.

"Call me Edithon and I'll call you Maiko," Sara insisted.

"I don't want that. My name is Prospa. I don't want to be called Maiko."

"Oho. Prothpa, Prothpa, cheater, cheater

with a neck like a bottle,”

Sara sang happily. At this both of them laughed.

They walked along the road without a plan. Prospa asked Sara, "How old are you?"

"The same age as you," Sara said.

Prospa said, "Liar, you're older. I'm only twelve, I haven't even been blessed yet."

Sara stopped suddenly, then turned to Prospa and asked him sweetly, "Prothpa, tell me, do you like me?"

Prospa was surprised. He looked at Sara, then said, "Your eye is scary."

Sara said, "It's nothing," then walked away quickly.

It was already morning, the sun was up but not yet hot. Prospa ran until he was out of breath, but he couldn't catch up with Sara. Finally Prospa called to her, telling her to wait for him. When he reached Sara, he told her, "You said you would ask for a lift."

Sara laughed, dancing away from him while singing:

"Prothpa Prothpa,"

lover of liftth,

his hipth are ath wide ath a chair.

Prospa became angry. He stomped his feet as he said, "Sara, Sara, evil, evil. I don't want you to follow me." But Sara continued to sing and laugh and race ahead of him.

Eventually Prospa ran to catch up with her; when he did, he saw that Sara was trying to flag down a car.

Many vehicles sped past them, leaving them in the dust. After trying for a long time, someone stopped his car. Sara grabbed Prospa and told him, "Leave

me to athk by mythelf. Don't thay anything."

"If you fail you'll get it from me," Prospa threatened her.

Sara said to the driver, "Father, me and my little brother are walking to Dar eth Thalaam. Please help us."

"You all are walking? Are you running away from home?" the driver asked.

One of Sara's hands pinched Prospa to remind him to keep quiet.

Sara said, "No. Our father ith in Dar, now our mother hath run away from uth to follow him. There ith no food at our home."

"Lo! Are you children telling the truth?" the driver asked.

Prospa turned to say, "Yes sir, it's completely true."

"Get in," the driver said, opening the door for them. Then he told them, "Do you know how dangerous your journey is? Here, between Same and Makanya, the savannah is filled with fierce animals. Darkness would have fallen before you would have reached anywhere, you could have been eaten by a lion."

Both of them were silent. The driver drove fast. Prospa and Sara held tightly on to their seats so that they wouldn't slam into each other. At one point the driver shook his head as if he was thinking of something disappointing, then said, "These plains are very dangerous. See how absolutely no one lives here."

Prospa and Sara looked all around. They saw not

even a single home.

The sun had set by the time they arrived in Makanya. The driver said to them, "I am dropping you off here so you can find another vehicle to take you to Dar. I work here in Makanya, at the Railroad Company. Many vehicles pass through here at night."

Prospa said, "We don't have money for the bus fare."

"I don't have any money myself," the driver said. But when Prospa and Sara got out of the car, he gave them five hundred shillings.

"I have no money," he said again and drove off.

Prospa and Sara hung around Makanya waiting for overnight vehicles going to Dar. They saw nothing out of the ordinary, except for the way dirt had been piled together in preparation for laying down train tracks.

They didn't stray far from the road.

Sara said to Prospa, "Do you know that my eye can see inside myself?"

"What caused it?" Prospa asked.

Sara said, "I don't know. I was very ill when I was an infant. But now I can see everything inside."

Prospa said nothing, looking at her sympathetically. He took out the 500 shilling note they had been given earlier and handed it to Sara.

"I don't want money," Sara said.

"Why?" Prospa asked.

Sara said, "Edithon discovered electricity. Don't you know?"

Prospa returned the money to his bag, then said,

"You don't know anything."

Sara laughed hard, then said, "Edithon dithcovered electricity, and Prothpa dithcovered ignorance, then when he loht a child, he farted *pfu, pfu*." Sara kept on laughing.

Prospa picked up some sand and threw it at Sara as he said, "Sara, I don't want your jokes."

Sara asked, "Will you call me Edithon?"

Prospa refused.

Sara looked sad. Prospa asked her, "Where did you find this out about Edison?"

Sara said, "I read about it in a book."

"You're a liar. You can't read English. I do, but I've never read anything about Edison," Prospa said.

Sara said, "Hey, hey Prothpa. Clothe one of your eyeth. Do you thtill thee?"

"Yes," Prospa said.

Sara said, "When I clothe one of my eyeth, I thee darkneth. Tho I don't clothe it until I go to thleep. Thith one theeth everything, and thith one theeth inthide me, it theeth my dreamth."

Prospa felt pity for her. He told her, "Alright this is what we'll do; if you help me get Merisho back, I'll call you Edison forever. Alright?"

"Alright," Sara said.

Many vehicles passed through Makanya without stopping. The night was cold but they remained strong. They didn't sleep, for they were afraid of what might happen. They stood on the left side of the road, on the outskirts of a sisal farm, and they waited.

After a very long time, they saw a large vehicle off in the distance and grew hopeful. The vehicle stopped before it reached them.

Sara tugged on Prospa, and they began to run, holding each other's hand. "Let's go now, let's go try," Sara said to Prospa quietly. They ran hunched over, through the sisal farm, until they arrived next to the vehicle.

Several men were urinating right next to the road. The women were gathered on the other side. Prospa and Sara waited until the men went back in the vehicle, then bolted out of the sisal farm and up into the vehicle. The women followed right behind them.

They walked back to the last row of seats, then stood with those who were holding on to the backs of the seats.

"Ready?" the driver asked.

"Ready," people said.

The driver put the bus in gear and drove. They sat down on the dusty floor, quiet as a mute.

CHAPTER TEN

Lo! Dar es Salaam is a jungle of buildings and every kind of thing. New and run-down buildings, apartments and the usual. Dar es Salaam is a melting pot! Many people: men and women, children and youth, everyone and their affairs! Wouldn't they agree?

Prospa and Sara knew they had arrived in Dar when the driver announced: Manzese. People had started to get out at Kibaha, then again at the Mbezi hospital, Kimara, Ubungo, and then Manzese.

Prospa whispered to Sara, "We should get off here."

"Here?" Sara asked.

"Yes. Brother Petro lives at a place called Manzese. It must be here," Prospa told Sara.

They quickly got out of the bus. As soon as their

feet touched the ground in Manzese, the bus drove off.

They stood there for a long while, taking it all in. Everywhere they looked, there were people walking and talking, people arguing with each other, people selling to anyone who happened to be in front of them. Everyone was going somewhere. Where?

People crossed the road every which way constantly. Vehicles crammed into the station. Where had all these vehicles come from, and where were they going?

Some people climbed aboard the vehicles, others got out of them.

Some people sold clothes, others sold oranges and peanuts. Some went this way and others went that way.

"Jesus Christ. Hey Sara look how many buses are lined up!" Prospa said with awe and worry. Sara looked but said nothing. She took Prospa by the hand, and quickly looked around as if she was getting ready to run from danger.

Suddenly Sara said, "Let'th go," pulling Prospa behind her.

Prospa refused to leave. With shock and fear he asked, "Where should we go?"

"Let'th jutht go," Sara said.

Prospa refused. "I'm not going. I'm not, I'm not," he said angrily. But Sara didn't listen to Prospa. She didn't recognize that fear had taken hold of her friend.

Sara left, crossing the road at a run. She didn't glance behind her; she thought Prospa was follow-

ing her. She walked towards an area where people were selling used clothing. There were others selling oranges, tangerines, bananas, tangerines, and many other items.

Prosipa called out to Sara fearfully, "Saraa!"

Not a single person turned to see the reason for his fear. No one reproached Sara for her mischief or for leaving her companion on his own. No one even looked at them!

Sara went back to Prosipa and said to him gently, "Prothpa, let'th go drink thome tea."

"You, Sara, where did you go? I thought you were lost," Prosipa said to her. He remained worried, but he took Sara's hand and followed her without a word. She will look at me, she will look at me, Prosipa told himself silently. He felt angry at Sara for her indifference. He was angry with her for knowing what was the matter yet doing something that made him appear nervous anyway.

They looked for a place where they could drink tea, but found none.

They saw people heading every which way. Finally Sara said, "Let'th crothth the road now Prothpa."

Then they saw a man wearing white clothing helping schoolchildren wearing ties cross the road. But the man kept returning to the other side of the road. Cars were constantly streaming by. Who would help them cross?

They went back to where they had started and stood next to the road. People were jostling them here and there as they hustled and bustled about.

They tried to follow two people who were crossing the road, but a rapidly oncoming car came so close to hitting them that the driver had to slam on his breaks. They trembled and cried out, "Mama!" In the midst of this confusion they lost hold of each other's hands. Sara had run over to the other side while Prospa had retreated.

Now fear gripped both of them. Prospa looked at Sara standing there on the other side of the road, his heart beating fast. What if he lost her? Would he find her again? Prospa looked left, then right, the cars passing by endlessly. He was afraid to cross the road, but he was even more afraid of remaining there by himself without Sara. When he looked again to the other side, he didn't see Sara. A big, tall bus had stopped next to the place Sara had been standing.

"Sara, Sara!" Prospa called out worriedly. He started to shake, and decided to cross the road. "So what if I get hit by a car," Prospa said.

He darted into the road from where he was standing. He dodged through traffic with the skill of someone who was experienced at it. He heard a horn, but he didn't care. When he reached the other side he was out of breath, his heart was beating irregularly and his feet were tired. Despite this, Prospa laughed happily. He looked around in search of Sara.

He didn't see her.

"Where has she gone?" Prospa said aloud. "Sara, Saraa," he called out.

Prospa darted around looking for Sara. He crossed a ditch filled with dirty water and headed towards

some buildings. He thought: where is this girl? He wanted to ask one of the many people walking along the road if they had seen Sara. Then he heard a guy's voice calling him.

"Hey you, Prospa."

Prospa turned, but he didn't recognize anyone around him.

"Are you not Prospa Ringo?"

Prospa was dumbfounded. He looked with wonder at the youth standing in front of him. He was tall and rail-thin. His hair was messy, his pants were dirty, and not even one of the buttons on his blue shirt had been buttoned. The shoes on his feet were worn out. The youth laughed as if he had just insulted Prospa, and instantly Prospa's eyes were opened.

"Brother Petro!" Prospa exclaimed, "I didn't recognize you!"

"Out with it then," Petro alisema. "What are you doing in Dar."

"We just arrived. By bus. Lo! Friend, I can't believe this luck! I was planning to ask around for your address. I've come to look for Merisho." Prospa said everything quickly, so happy was he to see Petro.

"Ha, you're coming to ask someone in the city here? You think this is Kiboriloni?" Petro said, as he looked around here and there. Prospa stared at Brother Petro in shock, as if he still couldn't believe his eyes were telling him the truth.

"What's the latest in Moshi?" Petros asked.

Prospa's mind was preoccupied with the news of Merisho's vanishing, so he replied "He's been taken,

I've come here to look for him."

"Ah, yes. I read about it in the *Freedom* newspaper; if they hadn't written the name 'Ringo', I wouldn't have believed it," Petro said. "He hasn't yet turned up."

"What! Notice was sent to the newspaper?" Prospa exclaimed.

"Ay, where have you been? Why didn't you report it to the police?" Petro asked.

"The police just asked questions," Prospa said.

Brother Petro laughed, "That's indeed their job. What did you expect?" Petro looked here and there, as if he was worried about something, as if someone was chasing after him. "Now?" he asked, then continued, "I have plans to be somewhere right now. Stay right here, I'll come back to get you."

"Here?" Prospa was overcome with anxiety. The chaos of Manzese showed no signs of diminishing. He saw nowhere safe to stay behind.

"I have things to do, I say," Petros said, then started to leave.

"Where are you living now brother? Send me to your home, I beg you," Prospa urged his brother. He grabbed his hand as if to prevent him from leaving.

"You want to come to my place?" Petro asked.

"I originally wanted... you to send me to Uncle Feliksi," Prospa urged.

"I can't deal with this problem," Petro complained.

"Brother Petro friend," Prospa said in despair.

"Agh! Curse this," Petro complained, growing angry. "Let's go then," he said furiously. They left

together and headed for an alley among the many homes grouped together.

They hadn't gone far when they heard the voice of a girl calling them as she ran after them.

"Prothpa, in a thop over there I thaw a newthpa-per with a picture of Meritho. Come and see," Sara beckoned.

Petro stopped and looked at Sara with surprise. "Who is this?" he asked Prospa.

Before Prospa could respond, Sara looked at Petro and said, "My name is Thara Edithon. What's your name?"

Prospa watched as Petro and Sara stared at each other. Sara craned her neck so her good eye could see Petro well. Prospa didn't say a word.

Petro didn't reply to Sara. He looked at Prospa and asked him a second time, "Who is this?"

"Her name is Sara," Prospa replied uncertainly. "We have come together to look for Merisho," he explained.

"This is a big problem. I can't handle this man," Petro said angrily as he held his head in his hands. He looked at Sara for some time, unable to say anything. Prospa looked at Petro fearfully. He stayed quiet. Sara looked at Petro, then at Prospa, then back at Petro again. Then she said, "Now what? Let's go. Why are you two still standing around?"

Sara started to walk away. Petro and Prospa followed her. Then Petro took the lead to show them the way to his place.

Petro ushered them into his home, in a recessed

area at the end of an alley. He showed them into one of the house's many rooms. The room was dark and hot. There was a single bunkbed and a cotton mattress covered in many years of sweat stains. It didn't have any sheets. There was a single window, and the stench in the heavy air filled their noses when they entered. The room had a small cabinet for dishes and two folding chairs. Sara and Prospa stood in the room and looked around without saying a word.

Petro told them, "Stay here until I return." Then he left.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Petro returned at 10pm. He found Prospa and Sara had slept without bathing or eating. Petro awoke them and said, "Go wash. I've kept water for you in two buckets in the bathroom. Sara first."

He showed them where to bathe, gave them a piece of ostrich soap, then said, "I'm going out to get some food."

When Petro returned, he found Prospa and Sara had already finished bathing and had changed their clothes. He had brought them fried potatoes along with a few pieces of roasted meat. The food was wrapped up in newspaper.

When they had finished eating, Prospa explained to Petro the situation at hand. How Merisho had been taken, and how saddened Sister Josefina was by

this event.

Petro said, "This person who abducted a small child like Merisho, what is he trying to accomplish? This isn't simple theft by someone living without working."

They all sat there silently as if searching for an answer.

"Do you think maybe he's already turned up?" Sara asked.

"I haven't heard anything," Petro replied. "We'd probably know through the grapevine if he'd been found."

"He must turn up. I know Merisho hasn't died yet. I know it," Prospa said.

"I know where he is," Sara said.

"Where is he?" Petro asked.

"I know," Sara said again.

"Say it then. Are we playing around here?" Petro said.

"He's right here in Dar eth Thalam. Him and his mother both," Sara said.

"Ah, drop this nonsense man. Are you saying his mother isn't my sister Josefina who's teaching at TPC? I left her at home when I came here," Prospa explained.

Petro didn't want to argue with Sara, nor did he want to look at her face. Just looking at Sara's bad eye made him uncomfortable. He asked, "Who do you two think took Merisho?"

"Sister has a friend named Sofia and her husband is named Mohamed. They very much love Merisho.

I just know it was them who ran away with him," Prospa explained.

"What makes you so sure it was them?" Petro asked.

"The day Merisho went missing, Mama Sofia wasn't home," Prospa explained. "When the police asked her where she was, she said she went to Moshi to buy cloth for a dress. When the police told her to bring the cloth, she said she didn't have it. I just know that this was a cover-up."

Petro said, "Why do you think that Sofia took the child? It isn't enough to say that she couldn't produce the cloth that she bought in Moshi. It's possible that she had some other business that she didn't want the police to know about. Not having the cloth isn't enough to implicate her, Pro."

Prospa started to stammer in confusion. "She doesn't have a child, and she very much loved Merisho," he insisted.

"That isn't enough," Petro said. "You all pretending to be clever is useless, you're just wasting time when you pretend to be investigators. As if someone steals a child just because they love them!" Petro laughed derisively.

Sara asked, "You don't want a child brother Petro?"

"For what? I'm searching for wealth man. I'm looking for *money*. You hear?" Petro said.

The whole time Prospa had been contemplating. Finally he said, "No matter what you explain to me, no matter what you tell me, I must look for Merisho until I get him back. And I just know that if I follow

these people carefully, I will get Merisho back. I just know.“

Petro was silent for awhile, then said, ”Tomorrow I will ask around about these people, then I’ll call on them.“

That night, Sara slept on the bed. Petro and Prospa slept on the mat on the floor. In the morning Sara and Prospa awoke to find that Petro had already left. He had left for them four pieces of bread on a plate above the cabinet. Petro didn’t return again until night. When he returned he told them, ”I’ve got some news.“

”Tell uth,“ Sara said anxiously.

”Say it then brother,“ Prospa said.

Petro was silent. It was as if he had a problem on his mind. Then he said, ”You all need to leave here. I have many things to deal with.“

”Tell uth the newth firtht,“ Sara coaxed him as she stamped her feet on the ground.

”What kind of news have you heard?“

Petro said, ”Now listen you two. I’ve received news that Mohamed has a brother here in Magomeni.“

”Now what?“ Sara asked.

”Ehe,“ Prospa encouraged.

Petro continued, ”Maybe this brother will have some news about the child. We will need to plan some way to approach him. Maybe we should get the police involved.“

They were quiet for some time as they thought.

Sara said, ”I’ll be a worker from Mohamed’t h houthe. Prothpa will be Meritho’t h brother. We’ll

they we've been sent to come greet the child."

Petro and Prosra laughed, hard.

"Wait, wait," Sara continued. "We'll they that Mohamed ith Meritho'th father."

"Drop this stupid joke," Petro said.

"It'th not a joke," Sara said. "If hith brother thinkth that Meritho is Mohamed'th child, he'll tell uth where he ith. Don't you thee?"

"We shouldn't get the police involved, it will be useless," Prosra said.

"One of you says we shouldn't go to the police. Another says we should get on stage and start acting. Go do these things and suffer the consequences yourselves," Petro said angrily.

Prosra and Sara looked at Petro with worry.

Sara said, "We'll go ourthelveth Prothpa. I'm not afraid to go."

"This is completely insane, you two have wasted all of my energy," Petro said. "Either you want to get this child, or you don't. First of all, Prosra you should be sent to a juvenile prison. You've abandoned your sister, then you've gone and taken this girl from her people, her parents have no idea where she is, and on top of that you're pretending to be an investigator! Do you think your sister is stupid for leaving this matter to the police? And this girl herself is half crazy and half witch! Agh, I'm leaving to sleep by myself." Petro went outside, leaving the door open, and went on his way.

"Where will you sleep?" Prosra asked after him.

Petro didn't respond.

CHAPTER TWELVE

They awoke in the morning to find that maandazi and tea had been placed on the mat in one corner of the room. They didn't know what time Petro had returned, or how he had come in without them hearing anything. Nor did they know whether he had returned sometime in the night or that morning. And why hadn't he awoken them?

They pounced on the maandazi and tea without even brushing their teeth. They were incredibly hungry as they hadn't eaten dinner the night before. They talked as they chewed until Sara started choking.

"Ha, you're eating as if you're being chased?" Prospra scolded Sara.

"And what about yourthelf?" Sara asked him. They both started to eat slowly. Sara was sitting

in a chair, Prospa on the bed.

"Now how about today?" Sara asked.

Prospa looked at Sara without answering. He was chewing maandazi and drinking tea non-stop without giving himself a chance to speak. He chewed quickly as if he was late for some other important matter.

Sara continued, "Do you remember? Today I'll be one of Mohamed'th employeeth. Who will you be Prothpa?"

"The police," Prospa said as gulped down tea.

"Then what will you do?" Sara asked.

"You're the one who knows everything. You tell me what I'll do," Prospa said. His thoughts weren't on the work they had to do that day. He got up from the bed and went over to the tea kettle, tipping it over only to find it empty. He didn't believe it. He removed the lid to be sure the tea was finished. "Lo, this was really good tea," he said.

Sara hadn't yet finished her tea and maandazi. Prospa looked at her with hungry eyes.

Sara said, "I won't give it to you. Not even if you cry."

Prospa said nothing but continued to watch as Sara put the maandazi in her mouth, as she chewed slowly, and as she swallowed.

Sara pretended as if she didn't see Prospa's hunger and said, "Prothpa who will you be? Today we have to get Meritho back."

"I don't know anything today. I'm not feeling well and my head is hurting me," Prospa said. He got back up on the bed.

"You're greedy, which it's indeed the reason your head is hurting; you're being a glutton," Sara said to Prospera scornfully.

Prospera was silent. Sara finished her tea, broke off a small piece of maandazi and gave it to Prospera, then slowly chewed the piece that remained. She then returned her cup to its place above the cabinet.

"Let it go," Sara said.

"Where?" Prospera asked.

"Just come on and you'll see for yourself," Sara said.

"We should plan first. This is Dar, quit playing around," Prospera said.

Sara opened the door and walked out.

"Sara, Sara come here first. Hey Sara..." Prospera called after her. He knew that Sara was stubborn, that she wouldn't come back. He became angry. Why didn't she listen to him? Was there something wrong with her head? But he left up from the bed and hurried after her, finding her outside as she turned a corner to enter an alleyway.

They walked without speaking to each other. They turned many corners, passing through one alley after another. Prospera was all mixed up. Everywhere they went they found the same businesses. Every seller looked alike. People selling peanuts, ripe bananas, oranges, hawking new clothes, second-hand clothes; they all looked alike. Their words blended together. "Clean clothes, yes mama, completely clean clothes here; fresh oranges mama..." Everyone carried two bags, and their feet were covered in dust. Everyone

swelled of sweat. Prospa recalled the children in their village during the dry season. The dust coating their feet looked like shoes. Prospa's attention was drawn to the people selling peanuts as they jingled their loose change skillfully in one hand and carried a small basket of peanuts in the other. How come they weren't being robbed of their money? Moreover they had so much of it! And if the coins happened to fall from their hands, they would scatter every which way, and everyone would run to claim their share...!

Manzese laughed at them. It welcomed them with a rainbow of colors from all kinds of things. People of every type. Laughter, arguments, and noise all mixed together until it was difficult to tell them apart.

They walked without any idea of where they were going. Manzese exhilarated them, so much so that they didn't want to focus on anything except simply walking.

Eventually they found themselves at the market. It was huge, stretching out along the length of the road. The noise of the sellers filled the air, along with the scents of an array of goods. The smell of roasted fish mixed with that of ripe bananas, together with the scent of jackfruit, freshly cut and surrounded by many flies. Then there was the musk of second-hand clothes and the stench of dirty water passing through ditches with no beginning or end in sight.

Prospa and Sara walked among the groups of noisy people. No one paid them any mind. They held hands as they walked, stopping occasionally here and there.

They saw some people carrying bags, young men

with hard chests covered in sweat. These men were carrying entire sacks of corn or potatoes on their backs! They looked fierce and impatient. Without a doubt they were very strong, and probably were also argumentative and easily provoked. Prospa thought; then struck one of them with his fist..., then said suddenly, "Let's go, let's get out of here." He pulled Sara back in the direction they had come from. Sara didn't want to go back but followed Prospa without putting up a fight, then said, "You're thuch a coward."

Prospa said, "And how about you? If you aren't a coward go back then, by yourself."

"I don't want to," Sara said.

"Coward here," Prospa said loudly as he started to run.

Sara ran after him and soon grabbed him by his shirt, forcing him to a stop.

They looked at each other. Both of them were out of breath. Then they began laughing hard, as if they had just gotten away with something.

The sun was blazing hot. Sweat poured out of them and they were parched. They entered into a shop selling various kinds of goods: cooking oil, hair gel, kerosene, different types of soap, and beauty products like earrings, colorful bracelets, and so on.

Sara said, "We would like thome water brother."

An Arab youth replied without looking at her, "There's no water here, you can get some a little further down near the market. Or buy a cold soda from the second shop down."

"Water is being sold? Sara did you hear, did you

hear what that Arab guy said? Sara, they *sell* water here! At TPC if you sell water people will look at you like you're crazy."

"This isn't TPC," Sara replied. She was walking quickly. Sweat was flowing from her face. The sun was burning, roasting their skin as would a fire. When they arrived at the shop selling soda, Sara said to the shopkeeper, "Give me a thoda."

"What kind?" the shopkeeper asked.

"What kind? There'th none here," Sara said.

"Ehh, at my place they are, do you want a Mirinda, Pepsi, Coke, or soda water," the shopkeeper said impatiently.

"Give me a Mirinda," Sara said.

Prospa whispered to her, "Sara what are you going to buy for me?"

The shopkeeper said, "Pay first. Seventy shillings."

Prospa laughed bitterly, for he had already gotten his hopes up for a soda he had thought would have been cheap.

"Give me the thoda firtht. I'm no thief," Sara told the shopkeeper.

Sara and Prospa just looked at the shopkeeper.

Prospa grabbed Sara by the hand and they left.

Prospa gently asked Sara, "Do you have money?"

Sara reached her hand inside her dress, pulled out a small bundle of cloth, and opened it. She had two hundred shillings.

Later they bought two oranges and ate them. They then decided to return home to rest.

Petro came back at 7pm and found them sleeping.

"You two, hey you two, get up, get up quickly, I got ahold of them," Petro said happily.

Petro was carrying a small bundle inside a plastic bag. He placed it on a corner of the rug, then ran outside again. He returned after a short time carrying three sodas, which he placed atop the rug as well. He searched inside the cabinet for a large plate, then opened the bundle slowly. Prospa and Sara smelled the delicious scent of roasted chicken before they could even see it.

Petro continued to open the bundle slowly. The contents had been wrapped inside newspaper. They glimpsed three roasted bananas, then saw fried potatoes. The food gave off a delicious aroma, filling the room like incense. Finally, inside another bundle they saw roasted chicken that had been cut into small pieces.

Sara said, "I don't believe it."

"This is nothing yet. Today we will have a celebration."

Prospa asked, "Brother Petro, have you seen Merisho?"

"Wait. Have patience little man," Petro said.

Prospa was getting worried. Why was Petro doing all this? He asked again, "Did Merisho ask about me? Tell me brother. Tell me, have you seen him? Does he still remember me?"

Petro didn't reply to Prospa. He said, "We haven't yet washed." He went outside again carrying water in a plastic cup. Petro motioned for them to come wash their hands. After washing, he said, "Sara you sit in

the chair, Prospa and I will sit on the bed.“

They did as he instructed.

Petro said, "Help yourself to all this food; eat, fill up, be happy.“

Petro started to eat. Prospa and Sara just sat there, dumbfounded.

Sara asked, "Has Merisho grown any? Did you see him?“

Prospa asked, "Brother Petro, have you heard whether he's dead or not? Now you're just comforting us cleverly.“

"Ohoo, now you've gone too far. The chicken has made you anxious. Man, Merisho is completely fine. Fine. Now eat you two, then I'll explain to you the news I got today.“

Prospa and Sara ate reluctantly, even though they were hungry and the food was excellent.

Later Petro took out two pieces of paper from his pants pocket, spread them out on the table and said to them, "These are your passes. Tomorrow you two are getting on a ship to Zanzibar.“

"Passes?“ Prospa asked.

"Thanthibar?“ Sara asked excitedly.

"Now listen to me well you two. You can't go to the island of Zanzibar without a pass. Don't ask me why, I have no idea,“ Petro explained.

"What's in Zanzibar?“ Prospa asked.

"Good question, little man; Mohamed's parents are in Zanzibar. I received this news today. It's not well known, maybe Merisho is there, maybe's he not.“

"Who told you? Sara asked.“

"Explain to us well, brother Petro," Petro insisted. His heart started to beat fast again.

"Ehee. This morning I left here in search of this brother of Mohamed who's living in Magomeni. I found him, by my own means. Then I said to him, man, that child who's been written about in the Uhuru newspaper, the one who was taken from TPC - that's our child. He's a child of Mohamed's born to him out of wedlock by a secret young woman.

'Alaa,' Mohamed's brother said.

I was pleased with my story, and I insisted to him that all was truly as I had said. 'Now what?' he asked me.

I then told him that Mohamed's parents wanted to see their grandson. Now, the girl didn't want to leave the child with them. So Mohamed and his wife hatched a plan to take the child away. 'Alaa,' his brother said.

Now he also started to take an interest in the matter. I then told him that there are some youth here, employed by Mr. Mohamed to go and ensure the boy has arrived. But it's a complete secret since the police have yet to complete their investigation. So, we agreed that you two would leave as early as possible to go to the grandparents' place in Zanzibar. The two of us sought out these passes."

"Loo! You've made a huge mistake," Prospa said.

"What mistake?" Petro asked.

"Merisho was taken by a woman, so Mohamed couldn't possibly have been involved," Prospa said.

"What makes you so sure?" brother Petro asked,

becoming angry.

“My friend Mustafa saw her. One of the women in our neighborhood also saw her,” Prospa alisema.

“Those people lied to you. You’ve been deceived little man. At this rate you’ll keep getting tricked every day,” Petro said confidently.

“Thanthibar! Ithn’t Thanthibar a land of wonderth?” Sara asked.

“Go and see for yourselves,” Petro told them.

“We’ll go to Thanthibar Prothpa. Maybe thith thief of a woman wath following Momahed’th inthtructionth,” Sara said.

Petro told them, “Now, Mohamed’s parents are living in a place called Chuini. Chuini, you hear? When you get to Zanzibar, you are to ask where Chuini is, then go there. When you get to Chuini, ask for Mr. Mohamed Zinja.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

“The sea! The sea! Hey Sara look,” Prospa said in awe. What made it look like glass? Where did it end? Prospa looked at the boat and only became more awestruck. It was like a house floating in a giant bathtub! “Sara, the boat doesn’t look right, why is it swaying back and forth?!”

Prospa’s heart beat quickly, so concerned was he about the trip. Petro was busy; he had paid and given both of them their tickets. Then before they knew it, Prospa and Sara were taking in their surroundings, looking at the ships that had anchored out at sea.

Prospa asked Sara, “Can I stand on top of the water like a ship?”

Sara didn’t answer.

They had said goodbye to brother Petro, walked

down the stairs leading out of the ticket office, and headed towards the boat. A woman checked their tickets before they entered and showed them where to sit.

Prosopa and Sara sat together in two seats by the window so they could look out at the sea. Some foreigners were seated nearby, youth a few years their elder. They were speaking to each other in their language but Prosopa could see that this was also their first trip.

The area at the front of the boat was separate from the section in which they were seated. Here, people were watching a movie.

Sara wanted to go watch the movie as well. When she tried to enter she was told that this was first-class seating.

Suddenly they heard a thunder-like roar off in the distance.

They were both startled. But it was just the boat raising its anchor; the boat went backwards a little, then started straight ahead.

“Lo, Sara look. The world is being left behind and we’re going straight ahead, just like in a car,” Prosopa said.

Sara just looked without saying anything. Her good eye shined bright with curiosity. To her right she saw a harbor filled with ships bearing cranes, along with many tiny boats.

After going just a little ways, the boat stopped to yield to a ship entering the harbor. A few minutes later they once again headed towards Zanzibar.

They saw little sailboats on the sea. These boats looked small and light, swayed by even the ocean's smallest waves.

"They're fishing," Sara said. "They must be fearless," she added.

"Really fearless," Prospa agreed.

They knew they had gone far when they found themselves in the middle of the ocean and dry land was nowhere in sight. For awhile they saw only tiny little islands, and on the horizon they saw heavy clouds. The sun's light hit the surface of the ocean, giving it a metallic shine.

The boat swayed back and forth. As time went on, the waves got bigger and stronger. Heavy waves crashed against the boat, as if wanting to push it back to where it came from.

The waves danced on the water, in the same way that birds jump around and flap their wings ostentatiously, appearing as light as dry grass floating in the air. The boat sailed over the back of each wave as if to tell it: you all can't mess with me.

Prospa and Sara felt nauseous, but they didn't throw up.

The entire time they were on the boat, Prospa forgot about Merisho. At one point he forgot even Sara was present with him. Often, Sara tapped Prospa to show him this and that.

Prospa thought about the wonderous ocean. Where has it come from? Does it have an end? And if it does, what is it like and where is it? What kind of thing caused these waves? And why does the ocean

appear green or blue, when water itself isn't either of these colors?

Prospa thought hard. Does the ocean go all the way around the world? Where did all this water come from, and where is it all going?

They had been taught in school that ocean water comes from rivers. But was it really possible that all this water came from rivers alone?

They were surprised to see dry land appearing far ahead of them; then they realized that they were approaching Zanzibar. The boat decreased its speed, and the waves grew weaker. They reached the coast and the port, then passed among other ships until their boat dropped its anchor close to the beach. People began to get off the boat chaotically, some carrying children, others small handbags, and still others with bulky luggage.

Prospa said to Sara, "Let's do what everyone else is doing and when they leave, no question we'll arrive in town."

They followed the crowd of people off the boat to the immigration office, where they once again showed their passes.

They had no luggage, and thus walked quickly. They passed through the travellers looking for taxis. Residents of the island were selling their wares: fresh fish, chopped fish that had then been dried under the sun, roasted fish. Everywhere the air smelled of fish.

After having grown accustomed to the chaos of Manzese, its large groups of people, shops selling various goods, businesses everywhere and noise of

all kinds; its vehicles; its people; Prospa and Sara considered Zanzibar to be spacious and relaxed.

Majanini Road led them from the harbor towards town. Later the road became Forodha Road, which led them to Jamituri Gardens. Before reaching Jamituri they saw the Palace of Wonders which, in the days of Arabic colonial rule, was the mansion in which Sultan Seyyid Bharghash lived.

They roamed around Jamituri Gardens for a long time, looking out at the sea. A little ways away from where they were, they could see children swimming in the ocean, laughing and playing happily. In this area of the water they saw small boats with outboard motors. These boats were taking people on and sending them to small islands farther out to sea.

They asked some children relaxing under the shade of a tree, "Where are those people in the boats going?"

"They're going to the Chapwani and Changuu islands," one child replied.

"What are they going to do?" Prospa asked.

He didn't get an answer.

They walked aimlessly around the gardens, thinking about how to get to Chuini. Sara said, "Let's ask for directions."

"It's probably far away," Prospa said as he looked around. There was no one in their vicinity.

Without saying anything more, Sara spit into the palm of her left hand. With her right index finger she tapped the spit, *chap*. The spit flew out of her palm in the direction of the buildings on the other side of Forodhani Road.

Sara said, "Chuini is that way."

"How do you know?" Prospa asked her.

"I just know," Sara said.

Now Prospa spit into the palm of his hand and tapped it *chap* with his finger, but he had spit too little, and so it was difficult to know in which direction it had gone.

Prospa told Sara, "Hey, do it again."

Sara repeated it. This time the spit flew out towards the sea.

Prospa laughed hard, catching hold of himself only when his stomach began to hurt from laughing so much. Sara looked at him and pretended to be angry, but finally she laughed along with him until tears came to her eyes.

Later they took each other's hands and crossed the road together. When they reached the other side, Prospa asked Sara, "Ehe, local expert, where do we go now?"

This time neither of them laughed. Sara put one hand on her hips and the other on her head, then said, "There." She extended her finger directly ahead.

Indeed, directly ahead of them stood Stonetown. The buildings in this town were built with rock, coral stone, and hard, rocky soil. They are big buildings with thick walls. Stonetown's roads, which were built by the Arabs, are narrow and twisty. At that time there were no vehicles, so the roads were simply narrow. Stonetown captivated them immediately. When Sara said, "There," they entered the town without any disagreement.

Prosopa and Sara followed the road, entering Stonetown without knowing where they were going. They simply walked, like people diving into deep water.

Immediately their noses were filled with the scents of an array of spices: clove, cardamom, cinammon, black pepper... Lo! Every time they left one road and entered another, the scents followed them. Sometimes they caught a waft of good perfume, made from flowers like jasmine and ylang ylang. It was as if they had entered an entirely different world. Soft Taarab music could be heard here and there. Stonetown enshrouded them in all of its colors, scents, and sounds.

Bicycle bells startled them often. They had to dash to the side of the road and let them pass before continuing on their way.

After walking for a long time, they asked some people, "Where does this road lead to?"

"Where are you two going?" came the reply.

"We're going to Chuini," they answered.

"Chuini? Lo! You'll get lost going this way. Where are you coming from?"

"The mainland!"

"Ah, that makes sense!"

"Chuini? Go this way until you reach the market. After the market you'll reach Vikokotoni Road. On the lower side of the market there are some wooden carts going out to the farms that pass by Chuini. Go on."

They followed the road as had been explained to them. They had expected to reach the market without any problems. But the Stonetown roads were like a

drawing of a crossword puzzle.

“Excuse me sir, where is the market?”

“The market’s that way, right now you’re headed towards the ocean.”

The roads in Stonetown have no start or end. They meet each other, they leave other other. The shops on these roads all resemble each other. Clothing shops, spice shops, beauty supply shops. All of the parcel shops adorned in attractive decorations; shops selling food and others selling a little bit of everything.

Bicycle bells ringed at them repeatedly. Each time they had to move over and let them pass. From some of the buildings floated the delicious sent of bread being baked. From others came the scent of gum. In some darkened buildings up ahead they could hear the voices of small children reading. Their soft, light voices made it sound as if they were singing: *ALIFU BE TE THE GIM HE KHE DALI DHALI RE ZE SINI SHINI SWADI DHWADI TWE DHWE AINI AGHAINI FEI KAF KYAF LAM MIMI NUNI WAU KHE*

Prospa said, “It’s probably a girls’ school.”

Sara looked through the window and said, “There’s boys too.”

They continued to follow the road that would lead them to to the market in order to get on one of the vehicles going to the farms past Chuini. In one of the shops selling all kinds of spices, they saw a foreigner sitting at a small table. Prospa and Sara entered inside. An African girl came out from an inner room and stared at them.

“Thikamoo thithter,” Sara greeted her.

The girl said nothing. Prospa went over to the foreigner and said, “Chuini. We want to get to Chuini.”

The foreigner continue to write in her notebook. She shook her head in refusal, but she neither spoke to nor looked at Prospa. He and Sara left, walking dejectedly. After a long time, Prospa looked at Sara and said, “We should go back to the ocean by Jamituri Gardens and start over.”

Sara stopped and looked at Prospa without saying anything. Prospa said, “Sara, why aren’t your eyes shining? Are you tired?”

Sara started to cry. Prospa took her by the hand, and they started to walk again.

“Execuse me sir, how do we get to the market?”

“The market? You’re already close. Let’s go, I’ll show you.”

The person before them was a tired-looking, short, thin man. His hair was graying, and his eyes were droopy, as if he hadn’t slept for several days. The pants he was wearing had been folded so that they came halfway down his legs. His sandals were so worn-out that his heels touched the ground. This man walked very quickly; here and there he greeted some of the people he came across.

“How are you?” he asked often, continuing on his way without waiting for a reply. When they arrived he told Sara and Prospa, “Alright, here’s the market.”

“Thank you very much,” Prospa and Sara said; then, to ensure they wouldn’t get lost again, they asked him, “How do we get to Chuini?”

“Where exactly are you from?” the man asked.

“We’ve come from the mainland,” Prospa said.

“Alaa! The mainland! Which part?” the man asked.

Sara and Prospa looked at each other. Prospa replied, “Manzese.”

“Manzese? I’ve heard about Manzese before. But I’ve never been to the mainland,” the man said to them. “Chuini, who are you going to see in Chuini?” he asked.

“Mr. Mohamed Zinja,” Prospa said, turning quickly back towards the man.

“Mohamed Zinja?” the man cocked his head as he thought. “Zinja? Zinja?” he asked himself. “I don’t know him. But don’t you two worry, if you ask around you’ll be introduced to him. If you follow this Vikokotoni Road, Chuini is straight ahead. You can’t get lost.”

Vikokotoni Road is paved, turning neither left nor right. This gave Prospa and Sara hope that they would get to Chuini.

They decided to walk. They walked for a long time. The cars that continually passed them by were so full of people that they were hanging out of the doors. They wanted to get in one but they knew they didn’t have the fare. They saw many towering palm trees bearing coconuts, many small houses plastered with soil and roofed with dried palm leaves, and flourishing green trees and plants. They kept on walking. After going some distance they asked people walking by them, or those sitting in the small booths dotting the

side of the road, “Will this road get us to Chuini?”

Other times they asked, “Is Chuini nearby?”

Each time they were told, “Chuini? No, not yet. Go this way down the road, you’ll pass the ruins of Maruhubi, then keep going. Chuini isn’t far after that.”

When they arrived at the Maruhubi coconut and mango plantation, they dashed right and headed for the ruins of Sultan Barghash’s mansion. The sultan had built it as a place for relaxing, and for his ninety-nine concubines, whom he had chosen from among his contingent of female slaves.

Now Sara was happy, gaining the energy to run and laugh.

“Prothpa,” she called out. “Quick, come and thee! Prothpa come and see this amazing house!”

Sara got to the ruins and entered inside. It was glorious. They were ruins, but they were so clean! Prospa caught up and stood behind her, amazed.

“Sara, let’s go,” Prospa said.

Sara grabbed one of Prospa’s hands so he wouldn’t leave. They walked from room to room, saying nothing, as they held hands. Then they were startled by a voice saying, “Can I help you?”

Their hearts jumped and began to beat quickly; they would have run if an elderly man wearing a robe, sandals, and head covering hadn’t been standing in the doorway. The man asked once more, “Can I help you? Shall I explain to you the history of my friend Seyyid Barghash?”

“Who are you?” Prospa asked.

At the same time, a bewildered Sara asked, "Who is Theid Barghash?"

"Wait. Wait and I'll show you clearly," the man said.

He walked over to them. Prospa and Sara stepped backwards towards the middle of the room. They were surprised to see light in a place without windows. When they looked up, they saw a round ceiling shaped like a bowl. In the middle was a large hole which allowed sunlight to enter inside.

Once the man was near them, they realized that he couldn't see well.

The man began to explain at once. "Ehe, in this very place he lived and relaxed, surrounded by his ninety-nine concubines. Indeed. But he wouldn't be with all of them together at once. Of course not! Maybe five or six; fanning him, feeding him, and pleasuring him. My friend Seyyid Bhagarsh very much liked to relax. He built this Maruhubi mansion so that he could do so right by the ocean."

The man smiled as if he knew much about this sultan. "He planted mango and coconut gardens, and dug swimming pools, to make this resting place as peaceful as possible."

Sara asked, "Who were hith concubineth?"

The man smiled again. He looked charming when he was smiling, lifting his eyes to the sky as if in search of the light.

Prospa and Sara looked at him. Silently. Then Sara, thinking maybe he'd forgotten the question, started again, "The concubineth..."

The man raised his hand to stop her. “Sultan Barghash’s concubines were beautiful women whom he loved. He had ninety-nine. All of them beautiful. All of them loved.”

Sara started again, “Where did this man come from?”

“And these beautiful women of his, were they Arabs?” Prospa asked.

Sara looked at Prospa and smiled. Then she quickly asked, “Were they all really that beautiful?”

The man laughed happily. The question tickled and delighted him. “The sultan’s concubines? Lord!” he exclaimed.

“Fine, let me explain. Their beauty was reknowned worldwide! Worldwide! The sultan chose them carefully, the same way a farmer chooses seeds. Those with blemishes are left behind, since a blemish can lead to bigger problems. Small seeds, those without hope for a healthy life, are abandoned. Aaa, health is the most important thing in life; health attracts eyes especially, and brings happiness. The farmer looks closely at seeds, my children, choosing just the best young ones, those that haven’t yet been marred by pesty insects or dried out.

These women shined like the moon; they had neither scars nor disabilities. Those who were thin sagged like a coconut in the wind, but the thick ones were most attractive; for they were built just right, as if by a sculptor hit by a wave of love.”

“But sir, did you see these women? Were you here?” Sara asked him.

“Aha, my child, eyes can see the past and the present as well. The eyes see, the mind remembers. Then tomorrow, that which was preserved by the mind yesterday will be seen again, I tell you.”

Prospa wasn't listening to the man; he wanted to leave. He took Sara by the hand and gave her a tug. But Sara didn't want to leave; she was interested by the man's explanations. “Did they have any children?” she asked.

To this the man said, “Come with me I'll show you.” He took them to the bathrooms, then said, “Every woman had her own bath and servants to wash her. They bathed in stimulating water infused with salts to soften their skin and imbue them with a pleasant scent.

Servants rubbed perfumed oils on them and combed their hair, which went all the way down to their legs.”

“What kind of work did they do?” Prospa asked.

“Work was done by the servants and female slaves. The concubines sang and some told stories.”

“So they were lazy,” Prospa said as he went outside.

A light breeze was blowing. The ocean had calmed. There were no waves. The color of the water filtering through the coconut trees appeared as a soothing blue.

Sara and the man stayed inside conversing. Prospa wandered around the ruins, eventually coming to the circular pools filled with dirty water that had been sitting there for a long time. Inside these pools water-dwelling plants had sprung up. All kinds of insects were swimming among the roots of the plants.

“They must have swam here whenever the sun was hot,” Prospa thought. He wandered around the rest of the mansion and saw places that hadn’t yet been renovated. He continued to wander until he found a small hut that had been built with poles and soil and covered with dried palm leaves.

“Ah, this is the old man’s mansion,” Prospa said to himself silently as he smiled.

Sara, holding the man’s hand, found Prospa peering inside the hut trying to see what was inside.

“You,” Sara scolded him.

Prospa was startled; “I didn’t see anything,” Prospa said defensively.

The man said, “You can enter, go on, I didn’t lock the door.”

They went inside. A single window faced the sea, letting in the evening light along with the breeze. There was a bed made from woven tree limbs and rope, a single chair, a small table and a large notebook with a pen inside. The man opened the notebook and said to them, “Alright, write your names along with a message.”

“Why?” Prospa asked.

“History. History, my child,” said the man.

Prospa wrote his name but didn’t leave a message.

Sara’s message said: “I will return.”

It was already 4pm by the time they left the Maruhubi ruins and continued on towards Chuini.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

At last they arrived at a place filled with tiny shop stalls right next to the road, where many tables had been set out. These small tables had been arranged haphazardly so that it was difficult to wander around. Various items had been laid out on these tables: small packets of salt, curry powder, tiny dried fish, all kinds of spices, dried chili pepper, crushed chili powder, black pepper, fresh ginger, and more. Prospa approached a man seated in a folding chair, greeted him, then asked, “Is Chuini far from here?”

Sara remained by the road, expecting to silently laugh at Prospa when he came back to tell her that Chuini was still far away.

The man looked at Prospa and asked him, “Where are you two coming from?”

Prospa hesitated slightly, unsure of how to respond. Sara walked over to them.

“From Moshi,” Prospa said. He looked over at Sara, who gave him a nod of agreement.

“Moshi! So that’s why! You’re already at Chuini,” the man replied. His mood became lively. He wanted to know which part of Moshi they had come from, and was this their first time on the island? How had they traveled here from Moshi?

Prospa answered all of his questions, then said, “We are looking for a Mr. Mohamed Zinja on behalf of his son, who is working at TPC.”

Unexpectedly, Prospa’s heart quickened. The possibility of finally seeing Merisho was in sight. This had to be the place where they’d hide him, being so far away from TPC. Prospa told himself silently, “I’m coming, I’m coming Merisho.” His eyes betrayed his anxiety.

The man looked at him and asked, “In peace?”

“Yes?” Prospa alisema. He didn’t understand what he’d been asked.

The man shook his head and rose from his chair, leaving without putting on the sandals that were beside it.

“Let’s go,” he directed.

They passed through a narrow alley among houses that all looked alike. These houses had been separated by big mango, coconut, and jackfruit trees. They walked until they arrived at a house surrounded by big, tall mango and jackfruit trees.

“Mr. Mohamed, Mrs. Mohamed,” the man called

out. He was standing in a small area in front of the house. Peeled cassava was hanging from a string that had been tied up between two small posts. The cassava had already started to lose the white color it has after being peeled. Now its color was beginning to resemble dry dirt. Prospa looked at the cassava. Sara looked at a young girl who had come out from a neighboring home and was looking at Sara, laughing. Prospa and Sara snapped to attention when they heard the voice of an elderly woman saying, "Who's that? Eh, is that you Abdula?"

Prospa and Sara turned, looked around for the source of the voice, and then saw who had been speaking. As they did so Abdula said, "Yes Madame Fatuma. Shikamoo. You have guests here."

"My guests?" Madame Fatuma asked, approaching Sara and Prospa for a closer look.

"I've grown old children. Elderly minds, they're so forgetful. Where are you coming from?"

"The mainland," Prospa said.

"Thikamoo ma'am," Sara greeted her.

Madame Fatuma continued to think. She didn't reply to Sara's greeting, asking instead, "The mainland?" Then she called out, "Mohamed, Mohamed, ee. Come and listen to this."

"And you Abdula, where did you find them?" Madame Fatuma asked.

She hurried inside, without waiting for Abdula's response, and came back with two stools which she placed on the home's narrow front porch. "Sit here children, come and sit."

Prosapa and Sara sat. Prosapa waited for Merisho to appear. Maybe he was somewhere inside the house? Or maybe sleeping?

No, he wouldn't be sleeping at this hour. He spotted the faces of small children, some of whom were being carried on their sisters' backs. The news of youth visiting Mr. Mohamed from the mainland had spread, and people had come to see them. Some boys were driving their toy cars around, making engine sounds based on the type of vehicle they had. Prosapa saw one that resembled Mustafa's back at TPC. He smiled. He wanted to ask that boy if he could drive it for a little bit.

"What are your names? Who are your parents?" Madame Fatuma asked.

Prosapa replied quickly. His heart was beating quickly once more. Sara stayed silent.

Prosapa explained that Mohamed had placed a child in the care of his friend, a fellow sugarcane worker. The friend was to bring the child to his parents' house in Zanzibar. Since then, he hasn't heard any news that the child arrived safely, nor that his friend made it back to TPC. The matter has greatly worried Mr. Mohamed. He even wrote a letter to Mr. Zinja, but never received a response. "So Mohamed tasked us with finding out; just me actually, Sara is accompanying me. We've come to see if the child was brought here or whether there's a problem. He told me I should return with the child, because Mama Sofia is lonely without him."

Sara remained silent.

A few seconds of silence passed between them before Madame Fatuma said, "God Almighty! Mohamed, our son has a child. Great God. Are you hearing this Mohamed, Allah has answered my prayers."

Madame Fatuma paced around, invigorated with energy. Madame Fatuma is a short, thin woman. Her hair is a mix of white and black. Her teeth are completely white, with small gaps here and there. She looks younger than her age. Prospa watched her, feeling sympathetic. He liked her, and he felt bad for deceiving her. But he knew that without doing so, he wouldn't be able to get Merisho back.

"Hold on first. What kind of relationship do these children have with my son Mohamed?" Mr. Mohamed asked.

"Great God. My children, I say," Madame Fatuma continued. "Maybe now the jokes and nasty words will stop."

Mr. Mohamed tried to speak, wanting to understand how the matter at hand had come about.

Madame Fatuma didn't give him a chance. She continued to speak as if she didn't hear Mr. Mohamed. "I've grown tired of the jokes. Every day I pray to God. Every day I'm reminded that my only child is himself without a child," Madame Fatuma complained.

"Be quiet I say!" Mr. Mohamed commanded fiercely. When it became clear that Madame Fatuma wasn't going to listen to him no matter how angry he got, he decided to leave. He told Prospa, "You, boy, follow me."

Prospa got up and followed Mr. Mohamed Zinja.

The two of them entered the house next door to the one Madame Fatuma was in.

Prospa and Mr. Mohamed talked for a long time. The group of people who had gathered outside, waiting for them to come out, finally lost hope and left, one by one.

Madame Fatuma entered inside, talking with herself. "They have something to say, yet we have silenced them. Mohamed has a child, and a boy at that. We should listen to what you all have to say now."

Sara remained where she was, sitting by herself.

A mama who had been out and about returned to find Sara sitting there; she asked her, "Is what you all are saying true?" Sara just looked at her, saying nothing.

"I'm Tatu. Mr. Zinja's younger wife. Tell me, are you speaking truthfully?"

Madame Tatu was carrying a child on her side. The child tried to open the kanga that his mother was wearing so that he could breastfeed. When he failed to do so, he started to cry.

"Is what you've said about Mohamed having a child true?" Madame Tatu asked again.

"Yes," Sara replied.

"I know for sure that this child is not Sofia's," Tatu said.

Sara stared at her child. He was still trying to breastfeed; he eventually gave up and began crying even louder.

Sara said to Madame Tatu, "Your child is hungry."

"There's no milk," Madame Tatu said, but she

pulled out a breast from her kanga anyway. The child raised himself up and began to suckle.

“You’re just a child, you can’t understand, but me, I know. Something doesn’t add up. Sofia *doesn’t have* a child.”

Sara looked hard at Tatu. She was looking at Sara as if she was angry. Sara wanted to ask her why she was so upset.

Madame Tatu paced around anxiously outside. At one point she moved to go inside and speak with Madame Fatuma, but she changed her mind after reaching the door and went back.

Sara started to ask, “You are...”

Madame Tatu rushed back in at once and asked, “Which woman gave birth to this child?”

“I don’t know,” Sara replied.

Darkness fell suddenly. The trees cast dark shadows on the houses. Fireflies shimmered in the darkness, and the sounds of various insects could be heard. Finally Madame Tatu left.

After seeing Madame Tatu leave, Madame Fatuma called out from inside, “Sara, you child sitting outside. Come inside my grandchild. Come so we can cook.”

Sara went inside and sat down. Madame Fatuma gave her a sweet potato that had been roasting in the ashes of the fire, then told her, “Taste this potato, surely you must be starving.”

Sara accepted the potato, gave thanks and ate it silently. When the food was ready, Madame Fatuma served it. She took some of the food out to the house where Prospa and Mr. Zinja were. After some time

she returned, sat down on the rug, and ate. Cassava cooked in thick coconut milk.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

“Did you two talk?” Prospa asked Sara when they met the following morning.

“Only a little,” Sara replied.

“Madame Fatuma didn’t ask you any questions? I thought she was going to ask you many. I was worried,” Prospa said.

“Why? I can’t answer questionth?”

“You don’t know Merisho, nor Madame Fatuma’s son Mohamed. I was worried,” Prospa said to Sara.

“You think I’m stupid?” Sara asked.

“Alright, alright, I know you’re smart. Really smart,” Prospa said as he left, sick of Sara’s arrogance.

Sara asked, “Where are you going?”

Prospa replied, “You’re smart, you’ll figure it out.” But Prospa had no idea where he was going. He

felt restless. He thought that he'd seek out some rumors of places where Merisho could have been hidden, but he wasn't even a little bit successful. Mr. Mohamed was looking into some things himself, but they had nothing to do with finding Merisho.

Prospa walked along the road passing through the village. He was full. That morning Madame Fatuma had given them milk tea and boiled cassava. Now he was just walking around the village of Chuini. Maybe he would come across Merisho?

Maybe they had hidden him in the home of a neighbor or relative, or they hadn't taken him any further and left him with an uncle or aunt? Prospa encountered many children who stared at him. They knew he was from somewhere else. Prospa stared back at them. His mind was filled with thoughts of Merisho: memories of Merisho as an infant, crawling around and eating mud and anything he could grab ahold of and put in his mouth. Prospa was bombarded with sharp pangs of love for Merisho.

Where could he be now?

He recalled the sound of Merisho crying. Merisho loved to cry, especially when he wanted something from Prospa and didn't get it. Merisho would cry without shedding a single tear. Sometimes Prospa didn't show him any sympathy.

Maybe Merisho had died? No. Impossible, Prospa told himself quickly as if to chase away these thoughts. He felt something gripping his throat tight. Prospa felt anguished. Tears filled his eyes and began to fall. He quickly wiped them away. He didn't want

the children playing nearby to see him crying. Sister Josefina had told him that men don't cry. But he felt better after crying, and the pain in his throat lessened.

Prosopa crossed paths with a girl carrying a pot of water on her head. "What's your name?" she asked him.

Prosopa said nothing.

"Where are you going around here?" she asked. Water spilled out and soaked her face. She licked it up with her tongue.

Prosopa didn't answer her. He just stared.

The girl left Prosopa and continued on her way. When she had gone a little ways ahead she turned, saw that Prosopa was still looking at her, then said, "Up ahead there's a large snake, you shouldn't go there."

Prosopa stood stock still as he watched the girl until she disappeared from sight. He didn't believe her, but he also didn't want to risk losing his life to a dangerous snake. When he was sure that the girl was far away, Prosopa decided to return to Madame Fatuma's home. There he found Sara being taught how to weave strips of palm tree leaves.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Chuini. Chuini is a big village. The people of this village are hospitable; they like visitors, they want to get to know them and converse with them.

Far away, very far away, many miles from Mr. Mohamed Zinja's home, there lives another man named Ali.

They passed many homes, malking among tall fruit trees and big bunches of bananas. They left for Mr. Ali's early in the morning, before the sun had risen. The land was cold. The tops of the rustling trees were shrouded in darkness.

When they reached a small clay house covered in grass, Madame Fatume called out, "Babu."

Mr. Mohamed coughed for a spell, then they all stood silently in front of the house.

The sun hadn't yet come out, wasn't yet in the sky. The land was cold. The world felt peacefully calm. The rustling of the trees grew louder.

Mr. Ali opened the door of his home slowly. Prospa was freezing, so much so that his teeth were chattering.

Mr. Ali went back inside without saying anything. He didn't give any indication that he had seen his visitors. Nor had he welcomed them inside. He closed the door behind him. The cold had so thoroughly engulfed Prospa that it was beginning to feel normal. Now he was afraid. He wanted to run, but his feet were heavy. Heavy like boulders.

The sun hadn't yet opened its eyes, still hadn't risen in the sky. The sounds of the rustling trees grew louder still.

After some time, Mr. Ali called to them. Whose name did he call? Prospa heard, but forgot immediately. Madame Fatuma and Mr. Mohamed entered inside. Prospa followed them unhappily. He didn't merely walk. His feet were like wings, they didn't even touch the ground. Prospa felt like flying high, to any place above the cold. Prospa flew like a bird; before he knew it, he was inside.

Darkness. It was pitch black inside Mr. Ali's house. It wasn't until a little while later that faint light, like that of a lamp running out of kerosene, filtered into the home.

Mr. Ali's voice sounded ancient. Worn out and extremely thin, like the worn out threads of old clothes.

"Tell me Madame Fatuma," the voice said dis-

tantly. Prospa couldn't see Mr. Ali. He wanted to, but Mr. Ali just wasn't visible.

"Babu, I need your help. My grandchild has gone missing. I am searching for him."

Prospa was freezing again. It was bitterly cold, so cold he could feel it in the bones of his head, his face, his feet, his chest, his hands. Prospa wasn't shivering, but he still felt frigid. He closed his eyes, trying to calm himself but failing. He was overcome by heavy exhaustion, but he didn't sleep. Prospa saw dark shadows cast inside the home. The darkness spread over them, enshrouding everyone in Mr. Ali's home. Then Prospa heard dishes banging, flying, and spinning around. Afterwards, silence. Complete silence.

"You don't know him," Mr. Ali said finally. "He's far away," he continued.

The whole house was silent again. Completely silent.

Weak light, like that of a lamp running out of kerosene, began to appear. It began to push the darkness aside. Slowly, the inside of the house became faintly visible.

Time passed. The silence remained, as though it were a visitor just like them. Aaa, Prospa's heart lept as if to leave his chest, beating no longer. The fear left him. He felt light-headed, his head like a dry leaf. His whole body felt light, floating in the air like a leaf, just like a dry leaf floating through the air. More time passed. Slight darkness fell once more when a shadow was cast upon them.

The noise of falling dishes wasn't heard again. Now, Prospa heard what sounded like ocean waves: it was the wind, trying to knock down some bananas, fell some trees, or take off the roof of the house. The light didn't return. The shadow remained with them as a visitor.

"Hard work," Mr. Ali's voice could be heard saying. His voice sounded far away and thin like threadbare cloth.

"Hard work," the voice said again.

Silence. Complete silence. Gradually, faint light began to return.

Prospa's heart returned to his chest, beating once more. He started to worry, feeling cold once more.

"Bring some of his clothing, or some of his hair, or a toenail clipping from his right foot," Mr. Ali said.

The cold left Prospa. Madame Fatuma produced an item from inside her clothing, wrapped up in a small bundle. She placed it in a basket next to her. Then she just stood there. Mr. Mohamed and Prospa did the same. Finally they went outside, one by one, without speaking to each other.

They walked among the tall fruit trees and big bundles of bananas. The sun had finally risen, its head just visible on the horizon. A thin film of red could be seen, out there at the edge of the world.

Mr. Mohamed coughed. He walked quickly as if in a rush. Madame Fatuma wore her black veil well. She said not a word, nor did she cough like Mr. Mohamed. She walked as if staring at the ground. Sometimes she whispered. Prospa didn't hear her; he was far

behind. Mr. Mohamed was in the lead and Madame Fatuma in the middle, with Prospa following last. The shadows were behind him. The sunlight grabbed hold of them, one by one, as they left them behind.

Prospa glanced at the tree tops, and at the bunches of bananas. He didn't see the shadows any longer.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Sara and Prospa stayed with Madame Fatuma and Mr. Mohamed for five days. Sara learned how to color palm leaves. Madame Fatuma explained to her that she hadn't enough money to buy palm tree coloring from town, so she made it herself. They walked around Madame Fatuma's land, where Madame Fatuma showed her a suitable tree, then showed her how to take a piece of its bark. She then showed her a plant called turmeric, similar to ginger and curry powder, and showed her how to obtain its roots.

First the tree bark is ground up, then put into a pot of water along with some ashes. This mixture is boiled over a small fire for an entire day. The tree bark gives the mixture a color like that of ripe oranges or saffron. The turmeric roots add yellow. Madame

Fatuma showed her how to boil the mixture until it turned the proper color. Then Sara learned how to weave a multi-colored rug. Madame Fatuma was an expert at weaving.

Prosopa learned how to climb tall trees. He knew how to knock down big jackfruits, and how to cut them open and eat them. They tasted sweet like sugar.

Before they departed, Madame Fatuma called on Prosopa in the house he was staying in. She sat him down alongside Sara, and told them, "My children, you know the nature of the matter before us. Our child is somewhere. God has put him in a safe place. He's here, Prosopa. You heard what Mr. Ali said.

Now, we need some of his clothes, hair, and toenail. We must get one or two pieces."

Madame Fatuma was wrapped in two kangas: one around her breasts, the other around her waist. She wasn't wearing shoes; the heels of her feet had been decorated with beautifully designed henna. She looked at Prosopa and Sara with a mix of happiness and sadness. She said, "God will grant you safe passage, and he will see that you come right back. Don't be afraid. We will get our child back."

Madame Fatuma reached inside her kanga and between her breasts, pulling out money to give to Sara and Prosopa. She had wrapped for them a small bundle of tasty cardamon maandazi that smelled delicious. They thanked her. They packed up what little belongings they had and were accompanied to the side of the road. Then they were on their way back to Dar

es Salaam.

This time they climbed aboard a vehicle leaving the farmland and heading towards town. They had money. But Prospa was unhappy. He said to Sara, “What we just did was pointless.”

Sara looked at Prospa; she wanted to say something but stopped herself.

Prospa said, “If Merisho isn’t in Dar and isn’t in Zanzibar, where is he?”

Sara said, “He’th in Mothhi, or in Dar.”

Prospa said, “Everything is a joke to you Sara. Do you now have the information you’ve been missing this whole time? Do you finally have it? You think I’m playing around. You forget that there’s a child who’s gone missing.”

“Prothpa, I know you’re worried. But I’m telling you, I know where Merisho is. He’s in Dar.”

“Ehe, now say, who told you that? God or a witch doctor?” Prospa said derisively.

People in the car were looking at them. Prospa and Sara became quiet and didn’t speak to each other again until they reached the market.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Their trip from Zanzibar back to Dar wasn't an exciting new experience for them this time. The conditions at sea were the same as they had been when they had travelled to Zanzibar.

Inside the boat, people drank soda and ate maandazi, chapati, fish, and all kinds of fruit. Prospa and Sara took out the cardamon maandazi that had been prepared by Madame Fatuma, and ate it. Many people were talking energetically and making noise. People wandered around the inside of the boat. Sitting next to a window were two Hindi women, looking out at the ocean anxiously. The whole time they spoke to each other quietly in Hindi. At one point a Hindi youth went over to speak with them, apparently to comfort them, then left. When the boat was halfway

through the passage, in the middle of the ocean where the waves were big, the women took out paper bags like those in which sugar is bought from the store. They began to throw up inside them.

Sara said in a low voice, "Look at thothe foreignerth, they're throwing up!"

"Sara!" Prospa said disapprovingly.

"Now. Look at thothe foolth, they mutht never have travelled by thea before," Sara said.

The Hindi women looked at Prospa and Sara, but couldn't bring themselves to stop vomiting.

Prospa said, "You're the fool. First of all, those aren't foreigners. They're Indians."

"How do you know?" Sara asked.

"I just know," Prospa said.

"No you don't," Sara said.

"I know, I know," Prospa said. "I know some Hindi people in Moshi who have stores in town. And there are some at TPC, where we live. You don't know, I do," Prospa insisted.

Sara said nothing. She stared at the women, watching them intently.

After some time the sea grew calm, as did the swaying of the boat.

Eventually dry land came into view, and they realized that they had arrived in Dar. The boat weighed anchor at the same place it had departed from. The people in first class began to disembark; they were followed by the people in coach. People fought their way through the door in order to leave first, as if they were being chased. Prospa and Sara waited until only

a few people remained inside the boat, then left slowly. They followed the crowd to the road, where they once again found themselves alone, with nothing to do and no idea where they should go.

Prospa was carrying the bag that he'd brought with him from Moshi. Inside was a pair of shorts, a shirt, and Sara's dress. Sara carried a small basket made from white and blue colored palm leaves that Madame Fatuma had given her. Inside the basket were five pieces of maandazi and two fresh mangoes.

Sara asked Prospa, "Now what? Are we going to Manzethe?"

Prospa didn't respond as he watched the cars passing by on the road.

Sara dashed away from where they were standing and crossed the road at a run. There were few people on the other side. She sat down on the narrow veranda of a tall building. Prospa looked at her from the other side of the road. He was afraid to cross, but he kept a straight face so he wouldn't look like a coward.

"Prothpa. Cross," Sara encouraged him from the other side of the road. Prospa looked at Sara, then approached a youth selling ripe oranges and mangoes along with chili peppers. He asked him, "Brother, where's Manzese?"

The youth was expertly peeling an orange. He continued to do without raising his eyes, as if he hadn't heard Prospa's question.

"Brother, I'd like to ask you a question. Which direction is Manzese?" Prospa tried again.

"I don't know," the youth replied as he peeled the

orange. Prospa said nothing, waiting for him to finish before asking his question once more. "Brother..."

"Agh. What's wrong with you? Manzese, Manzese. Take a bus that's going to Manzese. You'll get there eventually."

Prospa turned to leave; he wanted to ask him where he could find a bus going to Manzese, but decided against it. He sensed that the boy didn't want to help him. He watched the vehicles passing by without slowing down. When he spotted a break in the traffic he ran across the road, clutching his bag to his chest. He walked past Sara and headed towards a building from which the clamor of children emanated.

Sara stood up and followed after him, then asked, "Prospa, what did that perthon thay to you?"

"Who?" Prospa asked.

"That perthon you were thpeaking with," Sara said.

Prospa stopped and asked Sara, "Do you know how to get to Brother Petro's place in Manzese?"

"I don't know. What'd that perthon thay to you? Ee, what'd he thay?" Sara asked eagerly.

"He said we should get on a bus going to Manzese," Prospa said.

"Where Prothpa? Did you athk him where we can get a buth?" Sara asked.

"I don't know. He doesn't want to speak with me," Prospa said.

They walked, leaving the building full of noisy children behind, and turned left down another road. After walking for a while, having entered and left

various shops without asking for the price of anything or making a purchase, they found themselves at a clock tower. Nearby they discovered a garden with long concrete benches.

Maybe they were tired and had lost hope of getting to Manzese that day. Or maybe they felt they wouldn't see Brother Petro again. Without speaking to each other, without discussion or agreement, both of them laid out on a bench and went to sleep, using their bags as pillows.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

When Prospa and Sara awoke, the town was quieter and the sun's heat had relented. People had gone back to their homes, and all the stores had closed.

Sara awoke first, then awakened Prospa. Prospa turned and asked, "Has Brother Petro come back?" He had been dreaming that they'd returned to Petro's and found his wife at home. Petro had stepped out to retrieve Merisho.

Sara said, "Petro isn't here now. It's me, Thara."

Prospa awoke and rubbed his eyes. He was still half-asleep, waiting for Merisho.

"Why did you wake me up?" Prospa asked angrily.

"Why shouldn't I?" Sara asked.

"Brother Petro was going to get Merisho. If you hadn't awoken me I would have seen him," Prospa

complained.

Sara stood as if to leave. She said to Prospa, “Go back to sleep then so you can see him.”

Sara left Prospa, without knowing what to do next. She wandered around the gardens. She saw fruit peels and rinds, the carelessly littered remains of eaten food. She saw paper, torn plastic bags, and beer cans. Her mind was blank; she didn't know what to think, seeing as they now had no place to go and stay. When she reached the swings, she sat in one and started to slowly swing back and forth. She appeared deep in restless, unhappy thought. She wanted Prospa to follow her so they could walk together. She felt lonely and exhausted. Prospa continued to lie on the long bench, but he wasn't sleeping. He was thinking: Manzese, Merisho isn't here, and Brother Petro doesn't know where he is. We've gone to Zanzibar, and Merisho isn't there either. Now where should we go? Maybe back to Manzese, so we can ask for the way to Brother Petro's, but then what should we do? Will we actually meet him? On the day we left, he told me not to return. He explained to me that he'd already spent a lot of money on food and travel fares, and that when we left Zanzibar, we should go straight back to Moshi. I'm sure that if we arrive in Manzese, we won't see him again.

I can't go back to Moshi without Merisho. What will I say? What will I tell Sister Josefina? And the others at TPC, how will I tell them that I failed to get the child back? And the police, who I saw as being unable to do this work, that their job just involves

asking questions: what will I say to them? Mustafa will insult me, think I'm just a fool, a fool who failed to search for a child, who failed to use any trick possible until he'd been found! And the money he gave me will have been wasted. Then there's Merisho's friends, who are expecting me to return to TPC with him. How will they see me? Will they think that Merisho has died, then say that I'm responsible for his death? Where should I go to get Merisho? Who can help me?

Prospa thought for a long time, but his thoughts just ran together: "Where should I go? Where should I go? Where should I go?"

He felt something gripping his throat, along with a heavy sadness. Everywhere his body felt hot, and his chest began to swell. Sobs racked his body, causing sharp pains in his throat and chest. Prospa cried loudly, in utter anguish.

He could barely breathe, so strong were his sobs. Sara came running when she heard Prospa's cries. When she arrived she was shocked to see Prospa in such a state. She saw how Prospa was doubled over on the bench, his knees tucked under his chin, his hands gripping his stomach as if he was trying to prevent it from escaping. His crying prevented him from saying anything.

"What's wrong Pro," Sara asked. She approached him slowly as if she was afraid of him. When she reached him, she put her hand on him and said, "Why are you crying Pro? Why are you crying? Pro! Pro!"

Sara gently rocked him back and forth. She tried to lift him but he was heavy. Her heart was beating

fast and hard in her chest. Sara tried to comfort Prospa for awhile as he continued to cry.

Eventually Sara left Prospa alone and moved over to sit and ponder by herself. Tears streamed quietly down her face.

CHAPTER TWENTY

When the force of his crying subsided, Prospa felt tired. His mind was so fatigued he couldn't even think. His whole body was tired; he wanted to get up but hadn't the strength.

Soon enough, he was fast asleep once more. With no one to talk with, Sara also fell asleep alongside him.

When they awoke, the town was completely silent. Here and there streetlights shone, their light reaching into the garden.

Prospa opened his eyes, then slowly closed them again.

For a few moments, he was confused. Where was he? Why didn't he recognize this place? This wasn't the village of Moshi, because he didn't see banana

plants nor that peach tree that was near the house they used for cooking. Prospa loved that tree; when he was younger he would climb it and sit in its branches like a bird or a small baboon. He liked eating peaches, whether they were ripe or not.

Where was he?

He saw Sara, a little ways away from where he had been sleeping, at the end of the bench. Sara was sitting upright. Aaah. Now he remembered. He was in Dar es Salaam in a garden near the clock tower!

Prospa looked around for his bag which he had been laying his head upon, but didn't see it. He sprung up, startled. Where did he leave his bag?

He called Sara's name and asked her, "Have you seen my bag? Have you taken my bag?"

"I didn't take it," Sara replied.

"Where is it then?" Prospa asked, overcome with worry.

He started to look around for his bag. Sara went over to him and they searched together. Suddenly both of them saw that the two ripe mangos that had been in Sara's basket, along with the paper that the maandazi had been wrapped in, had been discarded in the grass.

"Ha! The bathket," Sara exclaimed angrily. The two of them realized they had been robbed. Prospa's bag had been taken along with Sara's basket, and with it their maandazi, shirt, catapult, dress, and sneakers.

"Those were good shoes," Prospa complained. "Now I have no other clothes except the ones I'm wearing."

Sara said, "The fare money. I had it wrapped up

in my drethth. Now we're broke."

As they said this, and as they considered what to do next, they spotted a group of three boys coming from the direction of Kitumbini. They entered the garden and walked straight towards Prospa and Sara. Sensing danger, the two of them instinctively grabbed each other's hand. They stood straight and tall, as if prepared to fight the boys when they arrived. The youth walked casually, without speaking to one another. Each had an empty Coke bottle in one hand. Upon reaching Sara and Prospa, they stopped in front of them. The boy in the middle, the tallest and strongest of the group, said, "You aren't allowed to sleep wherever you want like babies, you could be killed."

"Are you listening?" another said fiercely.

Prospa and Sara said nothing. Both groups just stared at each other. Unexpectedly, and without taking his eyes off Prospa and Sara, the boy in the middle shattered his bottle against the bench on which they had been sleeping. Prospa and Sara were startled. Sara wanted to run but Prospa tightened his grip on her hand and pulled on it to prevent her from doing so. Prospa stared at the boy with the sharp broken bottle, without looking away. The boy asked them once more, "Are you listening?"

Prospa said, "This is Sara. Sara's my sister, my younger sister. She's a mute, she can't speak."

"When did you two come to this town?" another youth asked.

"Yesterday. Today," Prospa replied. "We're search-

ing for Merisho. Merisho's my nephew, he's gone missing from TPC. Do you know the place called TPC? The sugar factory there? Now Merisho's not in Moshi, or in Manzese, or in Zanzibar, we've already been there." Prospa spoke quickly. Something inspired him to explain the story of their journey to these boys. He wanted them to feel sorry for him, so that they wouldn't hurt him and Sara.

"We've been robbed of all our belongingth. We have no money, we're broke," Sara said.

All three boys doubled over in uproarious laughter. Their leader affected a girl's voice like Sara's as he said while laughing, "We've been robbed of all our belongings. We used to be so rich, we were living in Masaki!"

The boys were bent over laughing, enjoying the worry and fear they had inspired. Prospa and Sara laughed as well, but nervously.

Another said as he slapped his friend on the shoulder, "This here is my sister, my mute sister who can talk! We've just come from Europe this morning!"

Sara and Prospa once again joined in the boys' laughter.

Their worries were just starting to abate when suddenly they boy in charge stopped laughing and said, "We are gangsters, children of the city, children of the streets. We sleep on the street, we wake up on the street. We're our own fathers and mothers; we raised ourselves. There will be no more crying and sleeping wherever you please. You left your mother at home when you came here to this city, now this city

will raise you. Are you listening?"

Prospa and Sara were silent.

He continued, "And once you enter a gang, you don't leave. Your gang will protect you. If you just leave, then you're on your own; you'll die, or you'll be robbed and beaten to death, or the police will take you to jail.

Now you Tofa, take Sara here, the mute who can talk, and deliver her to her sister. She will know what to do with her.

You Mansa, this one is yours. Give him a name if he doesn't have one," their leader commanded.

Prospa tried to argue. He attempted to pull Sara out of Tofa's grip. The boys' leader waved the piece of broken glass at Prospa and said, "You two don't know this city. This city has no sympathy; if we leave you here, you could be seriously hurt. We have already decided, you two are gangsters starting now. Girls have their business and we have our own. If you make a scene, we will hurt you."

Without saying anything more, and without argument from anyone, the boys' leader began to leave, and the whole group followed him. Prospa and Sara walked between them like captives. Two of the boys continued to carry their empty Coke bottles as they walked, while the leader still gripped the remnants of his shattered one.

They walked along Samora Road towards the guard tower. Sometimes they were noisy, other times they were silent. There was no one else on the road, except for those few people returning or going home to

sleep, walking along in pairs or in small groups. The gangsters were rulers of the city at night. This was their domain, which they oversaw without worry of it being invaded, or of them being chased away from it.

After walking for awhile, the boys' leader said, "It's almost midnight. Tofa you take Sara, then we'll go to sleep."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Prospa and his companions slept in an open area on the other side of a building named *Ridoch* selling vehicles. There they found five others who were already sleeping. All of them were boys, and all of them had gone to sleep fully dressed in their day clothes. They laid atop cardboard from cigarette boxes, the kind of big boxes in which large quantities of items are packed for shipment to the shops where they're sold. This kind of cardboard bed could be obtained in many different ways. The boys' leader said to Prospa, "Use your street smarts to get yourself a bed."

That night Prospa slept on the ground, in the dust.

They awoke at 5am the next morning. All of them rose at the same time, as if the same alarm clock had

gone off in all of their heads at once. They saved their cardboard beds in a tin hut, in which the guard for an Indian-owned store was sleeping. They washed their faces and feet in a faucet at a *Caltex* gas station nearby.

The boys' leader asked Tofa and Mansa, "What name have you given this one?"

"Mogul," Mansa answered immediately.

The leader said, "*Waa*," then continued, "Alright, you two show Mogul the work area, then let him go in the city. I'm leaving as I told you I would. I'll be back in a few months. Don't separate from each other."

They looked at him without replying. Then their leader went on his way without another word.

Prospa said to them, "I don't want to be called Mogul. My name is Prospa."

"Let's go," Mansa said as if he hadn't heard Prospa's complaint. He paid no mind to Prospa at all.

Prospa walked with Mansa and Tofa as they wandered around the city. The morning traffic hadn't yet begun, so the city was calm. Here and there, the night guards were starting to put away their sleeping pads.

Tofa said to Prospa, "At this hour the city hasn't yet woken up, work begins at 9am and continues from then."

The superiority and fierceness displayed by Tofa and Mansa yesterday was gone, as if it had disappeared overnight. Yesterday they had seemed important and fierce, trying to present themselves as cruel criminals. They had seemed like youth who didn't care about anything or anyone. But this morning they

were normal youth, just as susceptible to the difficulties of life as anyone else. The skin of their bodies was rough, and completely dry. Mansa had many small cuts and sores on his feet and hands. Tofa coughed all the time. They were so thin that you could count each breath they took by watching the rise and fall of their chests. Noticing this, it was impossible to be afraid of them again.

Prosapa even realized himself to be slightly stronger than them. He asked, "Now where are we going?"

Tofa said, "You, let's go."

Prosapa said, "I want to go to Manzese for Brother Petro."

"Manzese?" Mansa asked.

"Yes," Prosapa replied.

"To do what?" Mansa asked.

Tofa said, "Manzese isn't suitable for you. There are many people there, poor people at that. Be afraid of them, they will beat you to death."

Prosapa said, "I'm looking for Merisho. My brother Petro in Manzese will help me. Maybe he'll send me to my uncle Feliksi." Prosapa saw that it was better to stay with Petro than with this group of boys. Petro had a room and bed, an actual bed, and he could bring food home. Prosapa didn't know what kind of work he was doing to have these things, but being with Petro was still the better option.

"That's work for the police. Who among you is a policeman, you or this Petro?"

"Enough about this Merisho. Just let him be," Tofa said.

Prospa stopped abruptly. He said, "Merisho is my sister's child, I must get him back."

"Let's go man," Mansa said. "Let's show you the streets, then afterward we'll figure out how to find Merisho. It'll be easy."

They left the road leading to the guard station and entered the one leading towards the *Embassy* hotel. Mansa said, "We get food here alot, but you shouldn't go by yourself."

They continued walking. A little farther ahead they turned right. Mansa said, "This is Harvest House. Many cars and trucks here. This is a good place to work."

Prospa didn't understand what they were talking about. He was starting to lose patience; they were just wandering around aimlessly. "What kind of work are we going to do?" he asked.

"Everything," Tofa replied. They continued towards another road leading to the guard station, then crossed it to arrive at a store selling insurance.

"This is another place; many cars and people here."

"Now let's go to the Investment House," Mansa said. "Then we'll wander around until we reach the Kilimanjaro Hotel."

They continued towards the Investment House, and from there went to the Kilimanjaro Hotel. When they arrived at this big tourist hotel, Mansa said, "Sometimes we are chased away from here, so we need to be more cautious. And also, there are many taxis here; any place with a lot of taxis isn't good for

working.”

After the hotel, they returned once more to the guard tower, passing by the road leading to the ocean. They turned down Samora Road. Mansa said, “This road is good, but there are many police here. Sometimes we have to split up: some of us stay here, the rest go to the Investment House or insurance building.”

They followed Samora Road until they reached the garden by the clock tower. Prospa was surprised that it had been only yesterday that he and Sara had slept in that garden after coming back from Zanzibar. It felt like months had passed.

When they reached the clock tower they turned right down India Road. They walked straight until they reached Women’s Unity Road, which they crossed before entering A Coconut garden, then continued on towards Kariakoo.

“These parts are especially good places for getting food. Tea in the morning, food in the evening. And here they’ll put you to work sweeping the hotel or washing dishes; afterward you’ll get some food,” Mansa explained.

“If you beg here, you won’t get anything,” Tofa added.

“If you beg for what?” Prospa asked.

“Money. Like this: Help me mama, please give me some money for food mama. I’m hungry mama, I’ve had nothing to eat since yesterday... Like that,” Tofa demonstrated so that Prospa understood clearly.

They entered inside a small hotel run by an Arab, and found a man pouring water out on the floor in

order to mop it. The scent of maandazi being fried filled their noses and made them hungry. They wanted that maandazi, peering inside to see if they could get a glimpse of the people cooking it. The food seemed to be in the courtyard, from where the sounds of noisy conversations were emanating. Mansa greeted the man who was mopping the floor, then said, "Please give us some work so we can get some tea."

The man said without pausing his own work, "Go back outside, the owner isn't here yet." He was using a dirty rag to mop the floor. He wasn't wearing any shoes, and his pants, which were as dirty as the rag he was using to mop, had been folded up to his knees.

"Please sir. We've had nothing to eat for three days sir," Mansa said. He was the expert at this, so his companions just kept quiet.

"You all are liars," the man said, then straightened up, holding his back for support. He called out, "Rajabu, Rajabu. Hey, Rajabu."

"What?" a sharp voice asked from the courtyard.

"Make these gangsters fill some barrels up with water, then give them chai and yesterday's leftover maandazi," he ordered loudly.

"Tell them to come here," came the reply.

They fetched water from the faucet right there in the courtyard, filling up six barrels from the kitchen. The kitchen was a big room with four big charcoal stoves. Potato peelings, flour, bowls, pots small and large, plates, trays of garlic water and chopped garlic, tomatoes, and lots of other garbage were spread out on various plates. Heat surrounded everything in the

kitchen, like the inside of an oven.

The cooks weren't wearing shirts or shoes. They had folded their pants up to their knees, just like their coworker mopping the floor. Their chests glistened with sweat. Each time they filled a barrel with water, the black dirt floor became a muddy mess of charcoal mixed with several powdery substances. Their footprints criss-crossed the floor, looking like a map with no sense of direction.

After filling the barrels with water, they were given tea in big metal cups and maandazi on a tray. They sat outside in a place surrounded by homes in all directions. They ate without speaking to each other. Eventually Prospera said, "I don't know if Sara's had tea."

"Forget her," Mansa said.

Prospera put two pieces of maandazi in each pocket of his shorts, then continued to eat.

When they finished eating, they left and walked down Lumumba Road.

Mansa said, "Don't get used to using any one road. Sometimes you can get into trouble, so learn many."

They reached Morogoro Road, then turned down Women's Unity Road, crossed to enter the Kisutu bus station, past the small Indian market, then down Republic Road until arriving at the *Ridoch* store selling vehicles.

Prospera said to Tofa, "We should send some maandazi to Sara."

Tofa said, "Let this girl go man. They have their own work, they get food there."

“Sara is my sister. She accompanied me here to Dar to look for Merisho. I’ve gone with her to Zanzibar, I can’t just forget her,” Prospa complained.

Tofa and Mansa left, leaving Prospa alone as he complained.

“That’s her problem man,” he heard Mansa say as they walked quickly away. Prospa’s heart prodded him to look for Sara. He wanted to know where she was, and whether she really would get food as Mansa and Tofa said.

He tried to look for Sara. He went everywhere that looked like a place where homeless people slept at night. He hung around the city for a long time, turning down this road and leaving that one. He was unfamiliar with the streets of Dar, he had no idea where she could have gone. He just walked, believing that he’d encounter Sara somewhere in the city.

He saw no sign of Sara. Now where could she have gone, and with whom? Why did I agree for us to be separated. Now look, I’ve lost her too? Prospa chastised himself, his heart sank in disappointment. Every time he saw a girl walking along who looked like Sara, he ran up to her only to find it wasn’t Sara. He went this way and that.

After seeing that even if he did all this he still wouldn’t find Sara without his companions’ help, he started to look for them instead. Prospa first returned to the place they had started from that morning, then passed through the areas he had been shown that were good for working. It was already noon when he saw them washing a vehicle there at the *Agip* hotel near

the insurance building.

“Ehe, did you find her?” Mansa asked.

Prospra was silent. Tofa continued to wash the vehicle without stopping.

Prospra stood watching the way they washed the car. When they finished, he took out two pieces of maandazi from his pockets and gave one to each of his companions. He ate one himself, then kept the last one in his pocket for when he became hungry later.

On this day, Prospra learned how to direct cars parking in the city, he washed two cars, he carried people’s baggage, and although it was hard at first, he also learned how to beg.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Tofa and Mansa agreed to sit down and plan a way to find Merisho five days after first meeting Prospa. Prospa had been complaining every day, but he had discovered that gangsters were stubborn, that if they hadn't yet decided to do something, they wouldn't do it.

That day, Tofa was complaining that his chest hurt because of all his coughing. So Prospa and Mansa cleaned cars and told him to sit and beg for money from the rich people passing by. Prospa was discovering another thing about these street kids: they had love for the fellow members of their group. They stuck together through the problems of their uncertain lives. Prospa started to feel peaceful and safe when he was with them. He became unhappy when they left him

some place to go work elsewhere.

By 4pm, Tofa's begging and their work washing vehicles had gotten them 800 shillings. They rested in the shade of a pharmacy's front porch. Today they wouldn't go to bed hungry even if they weren't given any food at the hotel.

They struck up a conversation.

"Now explain to us, Merisho was taken by whom?" Mansa began.

"By a woman," Prospa said.

"How did you all know that?" Tofa asked.

"My friend Mustafa told me. He saw a woman who was wearing a dress following Merisho when he was out playing with his friends, then she left with him," Prospa said.

"Did Mustafa recognize this woman?" Mansa asked.

"Mustafa said that he didn't get a good glimpse of the woman, so he wasn't able to recognize her," Prospa explained to his companions.

"Alright, so she was a visitor," Mansa said.

"But...", Prospa began to explain, but before he could continue Tofa interrupted to say, "Ah, I can recognize my mother from far away, even when I can't see her well."

"Tofa has good eyes. Before his mama has even come close, he's already seen here. Then it's tough for her," Mansa explained.

"Ehe, yes," he agreed. "They never get hold of me."

"Your mama comes to look for you and you run

away!?” Prospa said, shocked.

“Ee, Tofa’s mama is also a beggar. Sometimes she doesn’t get anything, or she doesn’t get enough for her and her other child, Tofa’s younger sibling, so she comes looking for Tofa so he’ll give her some money,” Mansa explained.

Everyone was silent. Tofa started to cough again. Tofa was coughing every day because he hadn’t gone to the hospital. He said, “Hey tell us man, explain to us the story.”

Prospa said, “Mustafa told me that the woman was elderly. She came and asked where my sister was. Then she gave directions of some sort to Merisho while he was out playing.”

“Alright so she was a visitor,” Tofa repeated Mansa’s words. “I’m completely sure of it,” he added.

“Meaning this woman couldn’t have come from you all’s place, otherwise Mustafa would have recognized her easily,” Mansa added.

Prospa hesitated. He said, “I thought maybe it was a friend of my sister, someone who loved Merisho a lot and didn’t have a child of her own. That day she wasn’t home. She said she was in Moshi town buying cloth for making clothes.”

Tofa said, “So she would have taken Merisho and sent him where, and to live with whom?”

“Her husband, Mohamed, is from Zanzibar. So she could have sent him there,” Prospa explained.

“Meaning they planned to steal the child, this friend of your sister’s and her husband?” Tofa asked.

“That’s unlikely,” Mansa said. He was silent for

some time, then said, "My own father abandoned my mother in Mwanza, then went to work in Arusha. Now he lives there permanently. When he returned to Mwanza he found my mother had already given birth to me. My father rejected me, saying I didn't resemble him. He beat me every day until I escaped."

"It's impossible that one man would steal another man's child. Mr. Mohamed would've had his own child with your sister if he liked her's so much," Tofa said.

"Indeed. This is what would've happened. In Zanzibar they'd have noticed that Merisho didn't resemble Mr. Mohamed, then they would've asked Merisho for his father's name, and then Merisho would've said a different name," Tofa explained.

"Merisho doesn't know his father's name," Prospa said.

"Why?" Mansa asked.

"Because when he was baptized he was called Merisho Tadeo Ringo, which is our family's name. The child's father wasn't there." Prospa explained.

Tofa and Mansa laughed. "Impossible," they exclaimed at once.

Mansa said, still laughing, "So Merisho was taken by his own father."

"Or this man's wife, mama, or sister," Tofa added for him.

"His relatives don't know we live at TPC," Prospa explained. "I don't even know the man's relatives myself."

"Prospa you are really a fool," Mansa said. The

pair laughed.

“Let’s continue. Do you know this person’s name, the one who is Merisho’s father?” Mansa asked.

Prospa paused. “I don’t...I don’t know him,” he said.

“Impossible. He must have come once before to see the child. Even though my mother was deceiving my father, I still actually know him. Whenever he visited home, this was before when he still hadn’t moved back from Arusha, he brought food and gave my mom money, then they spoke secretly about things they didn’t want me to hear. One time he brought me clothes, and I just knew, this man is my father. I just knew.”

“True. My younger brother, he’s my mother’s child and he’s my brother even though we have different fathers. That’s just the way it is,” Tofa said.

“Alright now tell me, among the men who’ve come to visit your sister, which of them are relatives and which is Merisho’s father,” Mansa prodded.

Prospa thought. He recalled again Sister Josefina’s visitors, one by one, reviewing them in his mind. Who could be Merisho’s father?

Finally he said worriedly, “Maybe that man who brought Merisho good clothes and shoes. Sister cooked good food for him, then he left my sister and I at home and took Merisho to the canteen for a drink. That day I was jealous of Merisho because I didn’t get any presents... Maybe it’s him?”

“Definitely him. Did your sister ever mention his name?” Tofa asked.

“When he arrived at home my sister was out washing clothes, and she said to him, ”Matayo! Welcome. It’s been many days friend.“ Then she stopped washing clothes and they came inside,” Prospa explained.

“Matayo who? Do you know?” Tofa asked.

“I don’t,” Prospa said.

“What does he do for work?” Mansa asked.

“I don’t know,” Prospa replied.

“Does he have a wife or children?” Tofa asked.

“Maybe. I’ve never met them,” Prospa said.

“Where does this Matayo live?” Tofa asked.

“That day my sister asked him about the latest in Dar es Salaam.”

“Dar is huge,” Mansa said. He spun himself around on the floor, *virrrp*, then again, *virrrp*. Then he jumped up and sat back down again. “You’re really trying me. So what *do* you know?” Mansa complained.

“Would you recognize his face? We should find some way to work for him here in town,” Tofa asked.

“I don’t remember what he looks like,” Prospa said.

“Agh, what is wrong with you? You aren’t cut out for being a policeman,” Mansa said furiously, “but you’re pretending to do a policeman’s work. You’re incompetent, really.”

“Hey, you have a relative here in town don’t you? Forget this guy in Manzese, he won’t do for us,” Tofa said.

“Yes. Brother Petro is in Manzese, then there’s my uncle named Feliksi. I hear he’s rich and lives in

different places,” Prospa said.

“Aha, this is the one for us,” Mansa said happily. “He definitely has a car and a big house, probably in Msasani, or he’s a VIP who has rented a house there.”

“I don’t know,” Prospa said nervously.

“Uwi,” Mansa shouted. “These things I don’t know are killing me,” he said, frowning and looking as if he wanted to cry. But then his mood lightened again, he smiled, and said, “Alright then, alright, you step aside, leave this to us.”

Mansa looked happy. He asked, “Hey now, this uncle, what does he look like? Is he tall, thin or fat? Is he short, is he bald, is he black, is he white? What exactly does he look like?”

“Does he have a car?” Tofa interjected.

“Wait first,” Mansa said. “Just wait, first we need to recognize him.”

Prospa thought for some time, then said, “He has a small problem with one of his feet. When he walks he drags his foot a little. Not a lot, but you can see it.”

“Does he have a car?” Tofa asked again.

“What’s with you? All you can think about is his car,” Mansa exploded at Tofa.

“Ee. One year he came with it to our house for Christmas. It’s very long and wide like this,” Prospa explained as he demonstrated the width of the car. Mansa looked furious. He didn’t want his flood of questions to be interrupted. Nevertheless, he let Tofa continue.

“Is it tall?” Tofa asked eagerly.

"No. It's long like this," Prospa showed with his hands.

"Is it a Mercedes or what?" Mansa thought, then said out loud. "It's got to be a Mercedes," he said to himself. "What color is it?" he asked.

"Red," Prospa said. He remembered that car well. When his uncle had come with it to their house, Prospa had washed it, doing so gently as if it would feel him doing so and thank him. He remembered what it was like inside. Its seats were covered in soft, white cloth. Soft and clean, so much so that he was afraid to touch them lest he dirty them.

"What shade of red?" Tofa asked. Tofa loved cars. He dreamed of cars. He wanted to get one badly. He wanted to drive around town so that he could honk the horn, speed around, cut around corners fast and hit the breaks so hard they squealed. He wanted to drive the way actors did in movies.

Prospa pondered. What shade of red was that car?

"Like a very ripe tomato or like the flowers on a Christmas tree?" Tofa suggested.

Prospa wasn't sure. "I remember it was completely red, and I believe it was like a very ripe tomato," he said.

"Like a very ripe tomato," Tofa and Mansa repeated.

Tofa said, "First we need to find out how many Mercedes there are in town that're colored red like a ripe tomato."

They wandered around the whole week. This time

they didn't walk and work all together in the same place. Each of them went to a separate area. Prospa was hopeful. The fear of being by himself was gone now that his wandering had a purpose. The three of them had one goal: Find the Mercedes colored red like a ripe tomato.

Each morning after taking tea, they said their goodbyes. They reminded each other: a red Mercedes, and a man with a slight limp, tall, thick but not fat. Light brown skin.

They walked around every area where people parked their cars in Dar. They walked, and they walked some more. They weren't tired. Their desire to find a bright tomato red Mercedes spurred them on. Everyone agreed to let the others know once they'd found it.

After seven days, Mansa and Tofa had some news. The two of them had seen a red Mercedes in two different places. Mansa in Tazara, Tofa in Feri. The drivers didn't seem to have a limp, nor were they tall or light-skinned.

Now what?

Tofa said, "Maybe Uncle Feliksi doesn't have a red Mercedes. Maybe he borrowed the car from a friend before coming to your place. Or his car is a different color."

Mansa said, "Maybe we saw two different Mercedes, or it was the same one. Maybe the people driving were hired drivers and we haven't yet seen the car's actual owners."

"It's not that simple," Tofa alisema. "I wouldn't

leave my car for my driver to drive when I'm not around. It's not that simple."

Mansa said, "Let's rest for a week. We won't look for the car at all, but we'll keep an eye out for it. If we see a man limping we should follow him, even if he doesn't have a car."

"Most disabled people don't have cars," Tofa said.

"We should relax for a week. Then we'll start again," Mansa insisted.

Prosapa was disheartened to hear this, but he already knew that his companions were shrewder than him. He had begun to respect their judgement.

During their week of rest they resumed walking together.

All of them were intent on getting Merisho back. To get him back was their secret goal. It was a thirst they needed to quench. Everyone agreed that they needed to get ahold of Uncle Feliksi. Uncle Feliksi would know about Merisho's father. And once they had gotten ahold of Merisho's father, they'd know what to do. All of them believed this.

Now all of them called Feliksi uncle. They all loved him. They talked about him, made jokes about his lame foot, made up stories about him, sang songs about him. They talked and thought about Uncle Feliksi all the time.

Then one day they saw a red Mercedes in a parking lot of the Kilimanjaro Hotel. The three of them sat there and waited for the driver to come out. After more than two hours, a tall man in good health, with a big beard and mustache, appeared. His hair had

already started to turn a little white. He was talking with another person, apparently trying to persuade him of something. Gradually they approached the red car. A few more steps, then the other person said goodbye and got into his white car.

Mansa said, "It's him, I saw the way he dragged his foot."

"It's not him, my uncle doesn't have a mustache," Prospa said.

They said nothing as they stared at him. Then the man reached his car and took the keys out of his pocket.

"Go now Prospa. Don't worry, even if it's not actually him. Go and check up close, we'll follow you," Mansa encouraged him.

Prospa darted over to the mustachioed man and greeted him, "Shikamoo Uncle."

Mustafa and Tofa stood and began to approach them.

The man looked at Prospa, his face darkening with suspicion, and asked him, "Who are you?"

"I'm Prospa Ringo; Mr. Tadeo's son. Have you forgotten me? You came to our house for Christmas and I washed your car, this one right here," Prospa said. He thought: this man's voice sounds like his uncle, his eyes are familiar too, and something about his face bears a striking resemblance to Uncle Feliksi.

The man stared at Prospa, then said, "So you street kids think you're being clever, don't you? Get out of here."

Prospa looked at him in despair and said, "I'm

telling the truth.”

The man began to think; instead of opening the car door, he paced around as if inspecting something. Once Prospa saw how he dragged one of his feet, he was certain that this was his Uncle Feliksi. He had become older and had grown a mustache.

Prospa continued to say, “I’m staying with Sister Josefina at TPC. You know Sister Josefina, a teacher at TPC? That day when you came, you took her to church in your car.”

The man stared at Prospa some more. Then he said, “Aa, it’s you, the little boy who cried over my car, then I gave him some money and he stopped! Where have you come from?”

“Yes, yes it’s me,” Prospa said happily. He called his companions to come over, then said to his uncle, “These are my friends. This is Tofa and this is Mansa. We’ve all been looking for you, for many days now.”

Uncle Feliksi asked, “You’re looking for me? What for? And these are your friends? When did you arrive here in the city?”

Uncle Feliksi was asking questions one after the other, for after recognizing Prospa, he was overcome with worry. How had one of his relatives gotten mixed up with street kids?

“Sister Josefina’s child has gone missing, so now I’ve come to look for him.”

“We haven’t gotten him back yet,” Prospa explained.

“The child’s gone missing? When? This is a surprise to me. Let’s go home so you can bathe first

and then explain this to me well,” Uncle Feliksi said. He opened the door and said, “Alright get in, just you. Not these others.”

But without saying anything, Tofa and Mansa climbed into the car after Prospa.

“What did I just say?” Uncle Feliksi exploded, but the youth didn’t budge and said nothing.

“They’re my friends Uncle,” Prospa explained in their defense. “I’m living with them.”

“You’re living with them? Where?”

Everyone was silent for some time, then Prospa said, “Right here in town.”

Uncle Feliksi said something in English, then started the car and began to drive.

They drove down roads they hadn’t gone down before. After passing the lights of Salanda Bridge and reaching the lights of the road going to Kinondoni, they turned right to drive along the ocean. They passed the *Oystebay* Hotel, then continued straight past the police station, and kept going until they passed another hotel called *Casanova*. They continued until they reached an unpaved road, then turned left. Uncle Feliksi drove a little ways until he reached a faded red driveway gate, then honked his horn.

Immediately the door opened for them, and Uncle Feliksi drove in to a pretty courtyard filled with trees and flowers.

Then a man who was busy tending to the garden came running up to take a small package Uncle Feliksi was carrying, greeting him respectfully.

The sound of the front door opening could be

heard. Prospa, Mansa, and Tofa got out of the car, in awe of their surroundings.

The girl who had opened the front door said, "Shikamoo Mr. Ringo. Who are these people?"

One of them is my sister's son, the others are his friends. Make sure they bathe and eat well." After saying this, he went inside, climbing up the stairs to the first floor.

The girl looked them up and down, then asked, "Which one of you is Mr. Ringo's relative?"

Mansa tapped Prospa and said, "Him."

The girl looked at them again as if she couldn't decide whether to let them in or chase them away. She notice how they were staring at her, then said, "You're looking at me evilly as if I'm the one who made you sleep in the dirt?" She took a deep breath. "If you all bathe, what will you wear?" she complained. "Alright come in," she said finally. The girl showed them where to bathe, then left.

Mansa called out, "Sister..."

"Don't call me sister. I'm not your sister. My name is Uzuri," Uzuri said sharply.

"Yes Sister Uzuri," Mansa said.

"Stay here while I bring you clothes and soap," Uzuri said.

She left, and after half an hour returned with soap along with clothes for them to change into: pants and a shirt for each of them. These were clothes that had been left by the children of one of Feliksi's relatives, who would occasionally come to stay with him for some time and then leave.

The pants were short, but the shirts fit. Even so, they didn't care. When they finished bathing and dressing, they sat in the guest room and began to tour the house with their eyes: tiles on the ground so that the floor shone brighter than a dinner plate, a stereo, a big radio, a large fridge.

Mansa said in a whisper, "Prosapa, I told you, your uncle is a big deal."

Tofa said, "I'm really hungry." All of them laughed quietly.

The food was brought out, then placed on the table. Plates, spoons, then knives. They looked at each other.

"Today!" Tofa said happily. They were welcomed to the table to eat, then Uzuri left them alone.

They attacked the food without caring to use knives or spoons; within five minutes they had finished and gone outside.

"Lo! You children, have you already eaten?" Uzuri asked when she saw them outside from the window of her room. They didn't reply.

They struck up a conversation with Mateo, an elderly man who tended to the garden. Mr. Mateo was a kind, hard-working man. He took from them the clothes they had been wearing earlier and washed them as he told them about his family: his adolescent children living with their mother, his first wife, here in Mbinga.

Mansa asked Mr. Mateo, "Do you know anyone named Matayo? Maybe he's come to greet Uncle Feliski at some point."

"Matayo? What's his last name?" Mr. Mateo asked.

Mansa shrugged.

"You should probably ask Uzuri. I don't have much to do with guests," Mr. Mateo advised them.

They went inside to look for Uzuri. They found her in the kitchen washing dishes.

"Should we help you Sister Uzuri?" Prospa asked.

No need. You all just sit, don't worry," Uzuri said to them.

"I say sister, Sister Uzuri, do you know a man by the name of Matayo?" Mansa asked gently.

"Yes. I know a man by this name. What's his last name? The one I'm referring to is our neighbor; one of his workers is my boyfriend," Uzuri explained.

"You'll show us their place tomorrow; now it's already dark now, we probably won't recognize the place well," Mansa said.

"I have a letter for them from Moshi," Prospa added quickly.

"How do you know that this is the Matayo you're looking for?"

"He's the one. Sister Josefina told me that he's a neighbor of Uncle Feliksi's," Prospa added quickly.

"Bring me the letter, I'll give it to them," Uzuri said.

"No. I was also given a long speech to say, concerning their household," Prospa said.

"You all are ridiculous," Uzuri said. "What respectable person would send someone to deliver a lecture to this man. Get out of here!"

Uzuri finished washing the dishes, then tidied up the kitchen and left. She told them, "I'm going somewhere right now, I'll be right back to prepare dinner. Mr. Ringo told me he'll speak with you all tomorrow morning."

They sat down and discussed their plans for the next day. Then they went out and talked with Mr. Mateo in the worker's quarters, where he and his wife lived with their infant child.

Before they went to bed, they agreed with each other that even if Uzuri was above helping them, getting Merisho back was their business. Others would surely assist them.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Uncle Feliksi was ready to speak with them at 9am. They rose at their usual time of 5am. They felt out of place, for they were not used to a life of certainty, a life in which everything is available: a bed with sheets to sleep in, water and soap for washing in the morning, tea... So, they stayed in their rooms and reviewed once more their plans for the day. At 7am they drank tea and ate bread, along with delicious butter and jam; they finished everything that was placed on the table.

Prosopa explained to his uncle how Merisho became lost, how he'd left home to look for him, and about his trip to Zanzibar and back to Dar. He didn't talk about how he came to be living on the streets. And he mentioned nothing about Mr. Matayo.

Uncle Feliksi listened intently, then said, "You are very tough. But this isn't work for a young child. This is a serious matter to be dealt with by adults."

Prospa said, "Yes Uncle."

"And this Sara you've mentioned, where is she?" Uncle Feliksi asked.

Mansa replied quickly, "She's in town. We'll bring her this afternoon so you can meet her."

"Do her parents know where she is?" Uncle Feliksi asked.

"Yes," Prospa lied. Uncle Feliksi looked straight into his eyes. Prospa said, "It's completely true Uncle. Her parents know that she's in Dar."

"Lo! In Zanzibar you left those elders believing they have a grandson. Who has taught you this indecency?" Uncle Feliksi said woefully. "You children don't understand, not even a little, how much hurt you're causing."

Prospa was silent.

"This is work for the police. They are the ones skilled in doing investigations like this. You're just adding more problems. The child has been missing for awhile, and you're here just roaming around, destroying the lives of people who have no answers for you," Uncle Feliksi said.

Prospa looked at the ground and said nothing.

"Your sister knows nothing about your condition now. Her child is missing and now her younger brother is missing! She must be crazy by now, right?" Uncle Feliksi continued mournfully.

Prospa said, "My sister knows I'm in Dar. I told

my friend Mustafa to explain to her.”

“She knows? Does she know you’re wandering the streets? Does she know you’re behaving like a disgraceful child, a useless dog who doesn’t comb his hair nor bathe nor wash the clothes he wears? Does your sister know this?” Uncle Feliksi said angrily.

All of them remained silent.

Uncle Feliksi sighed heavily and said, “In two or three days’ time, we’re going to Moshi. Me and you. I want to understand this matter well before I take it to the police.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

After the conversation between Prospa and Uncle Feliksi, they all realized the need to adjust their plans immediately. They went back to the room in which they had slept and closed the door.

Mansa said, “First of all no one should know what we want to do! Uncle Feliksi shouldn’t know, nor Uzuri or Mr. Mateo.”

Prospa said, “But we need to know where Mr. Matayo lives. If Uzuri brings us and I’m seen there, everything will go up in flames. Someone there could recognize me.”

Tofa said, “Yes. We need to know who Mr. Matayo is without being sent by Uzuri. With Uzuri’s complaining she may say something that gives us away.”

Mansa said, “We need Sara to come and talk with

Uzuri so that she'll bring her to Mr. Matayo's."

"Yes. Sara can do it," Prospa said. He was elated to know that it'd be possible to see Sara again.

Tofa said, "We don't have much time. Prospa and his uncle will go to Moshi the day after tomorrow if we haven't figured this out ourselves."

Mansa said, "We must get Merisho, by our own efforts. Now no more discussion. Tofa you go and bring Sara. Go with Prospa. Explain to those girls that we need Sara today. Say that Sara herself must come, not some other girl. I'll stay here and talk with Mr. Mateo."

"We don't have fare money," Prospa said.

"It's too far to walk to town from here," Tofa began to complain. He had been coughing a lot the previous night; he looked weak, but they had grown accustomed to seeing him like this.

Mansa said, "Tofa, you go for Uzuri, and Prospa you go for Mateo. We should use our street skills to get fare money. I'll look around inside for some."

Mansa's instructions were final, and they followed them without much argument. He was the one who had been left with leadership of the group, who had taken responsibility for the safety and prosperity of the group members' lives. They left the room, each of them doing as he had instructed. Tofa began coughing violently, then asked Uzuri for money to purchase medicine. He was skilled at begging. His body's weak condition made people feel sorry for him; he knew this, and he used it to his advantage. Prospa went to Mateo and explained to him the close relationship he

had with Mateo's boss, and how much he loved him. Then he started in on a story about the instructions his uncle had left him regarding things to buy for their trip to Moshi. But he had forgotten to ask him for money to get to town and obtain these things. Now he could buy just a few of them. Mateo was assured that his money would be returned, without a doubt.

"I've no money until the end of the month," Mr. Mateo said sadly. He wanted to help his boss' relative, but all the money he had left was needed for food until the end of the month.

Prospa said, "Even for bus fare sir? Just help me so I can get to town and reach my uncle in his office."

When they gathered in the room once more after half an hour, all of them together had 1,300 shillings.

Mansa gave 300 shillings to Tofa and Prospa. He said, "These 1,000 shillings I'm setting aside for us to use later."

Prospa and Tofa left and headed for town.

They passed among the big buildings of Masaki, eventually arriving at the international school. From here they walked quickly down Chole Street until they reached *St. Peters* Church. There they boarded a bus into town.

They found Sara in a group of four girls behind Makunganya Street in a small hotel. They were working in this hotel every day; peeling potatoes, garlic, bananas, grinding up flour for bread and chapati. They were paid in food: breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Then they would go out into the streets.

Tofa and Prospa explained their problem to the

girls' leader, then left immediately with Sara.

It was already 4pm when they arrived in Masaki. Uncle Feliksi hadn't yet returned from work. They went straight to their room, quietly passing by Uzuri who was in her own room resting.

Without wasting anytime, Mansa explained to Sara the situation that confronted them, saying, "Listen Sara, you'll speak with Uzuri until you know about this boyfriend of hers that's working for Mr. Matayo. We think Matayo is in fact Merisho's father and that Merisho is there. You shouldn't ask many questions, you will understand more later."

See that you don't mention Merisho's name, and that they don't know about anything we want," Prospa added.

"Use any means necessary to get to Uzuri's boyfriend's place. Carefully inspect outside and inside, and note especially the people who're inside. Talk with the adults, but do so carefully. Look around for the children that're there, and learn the names of each of them. Listen to everything they discuss and remember anything that's important. This is indeed a job for you: it's a big one, and care must be taken. The day after tomorrow Prospa leaves for Moshi. We must have Merisho back by then," Mansa said.

Sara agreed to take on this job. They recited the instructions once more, then left the room and went to find Uzuri.

Uzuri was not happy to see that the group had grown in size. "Ha! who is this one! You all are using Mr. Ringo's house as a dormitory for street kids?!"

Prosopa said, "Her name is Sara. Uncle wanted to see her, so we went to get her from town."

"Ha! Alright. I have no idea what Mr. Ringo would want with her. But this isn't my business," Uzuri said, disgruntled but not angry.

They left, leaving Sara with Uzuri.

Sara and Uzuri said nothing to each other. Sara was contemplating a way to approach Uzuri without angering her. Uzuri was preparing spinach. She had already decided that she wasn't going to cook more food than she had planned. She didn't want this girl to stay in the kitchen with her; she'd only get in her way and delay her work. Finally she asked Sara, "What are you still doing here? Go and stay with your street friends."

Sara smiled. The possibility for conversation had been opened, she told herself silently. She smiled, her whole face shining brightly. Her teeth were white like unripe corn.

Uzuri looked at her, intrigued by her smile; before Uzuri could say a word, Sara said, "You're pretty like a lute."

Uzuri asked, "What are you saying?"

"You're pretty like a lute," Sara repeated.

Uzuri laughed. She went back to preparing spinach, but still amused, she began to laugh again. "Child, you have a problem," she said.

"You're laughing like crazy," Sara managed to get out, as she laughed along with her.

"He! This roaming around in the sun is turning your brains to mush," Uzuri said. She was upbeat

once again, caught up in this girl's spirit. She joked with Sara, "Hm, sister, that eye of yours is scary. Get out of here, go hang out with your brothers."

Aa, sister Uzuri, how pretty

Those brothers are a mess

If you laugh sister Uzuri

My eye will be healed."

Sara sang in a soft voice.

"Hm, what kind of song is this? God, I have no idea where they got you from," Uzuri said in a complaining tone. Even so, she laughed and said, "There are crazies all over the world, truly."

Now both of them laughed. Uzuri said to Sara, "You can help me prepare the spinach."

Sara agreed at once. Then she said to Uzuri, "Afterwardth I'll braid your hair."

"Uzuri asked, "You know how to braid hair?"

"Yes. I braid my sister's hair all the time," Sara said. Uzuri was excited to hear this. She told Sara that she had been planning to pay to get her hair braided; she had gone to a friend's so she could do it, but she was busy working. The weave had been left there.

Sara said, "We'll go and get it. I'll come with you."

Uzuri said, "Lo, that's even better my sister. I don't what kind of luck has brought you here. Those friends of yours certainly don't have any."

Sara asked, "Is your friend living far away?"

Uzuri replied, "Not at all; she's just nearby. She works for Mama Mchau. There's a lot of people at

her home like there is here. She's cooking or washing at all hours. I couldn't manage it myself."

Sara asked, "Does Mama Mchau have many children?"

Uzuri didn't answer. She was busy measuring out rice and placing it in a strainer.

Before she could answer Sara said, "I mean if she doesn't have a husband, how does she have so many children?"

"Who's spreading this lie? What childishness. Is it those brothers of yours? What a bunch of liars!" Uzuri said. She continued, "Mama has a husband, actually. Matayo Mchau is the elder of the house and a good husband."

Sara asked, "So, you said there's a lot of people in this house?"

Uzuri said, "Both relatives and children that have been taken in. Mama herself has four children. All of them girls."

"She doesn't have even one boy? Poor woman," Sara said sympathetically.

"He! poor woman? Poor for what?" Uzuri burst out in anger.

Sara said nothing. She didn't want to anger Uzuri.

"Well, Mr. Mchau's sister, her name is Awaichi Mchau, she thinks the same as you," Uzuri explained to Sara. She stopped washing the rice, put her hands on her hips, and looked at Sara angrily, then said, "This Awaichi, an elderly woman, abducted a child from some people in Moshi: her brother's child. He's an only son. Then she brought him here to her brother

for him to have, because his wife has no son of her own.”

“Really?” Sara asked, pretending to be surprised.

“Why did she do this?” Sara asked.

“Pay attention!” Uzuri admonished her.

Sara smiled.

Uzuri went back to washing the rice as she said, “That’s their business. Now the police are looking for the child. News of it has been announced in many newspapers. They’re really scared. The child has been hidden away behind the fences of their home; he’s not seen until ten at night, when they all sit down at the table to eat.”

Sara said, “Some people are just looking for trouble. Let’s go and get our thread, and quickly, before it gets dark.”

Uzuri said, “Alright, but you’ll braid my hair later tonight. The two of us will sleep in my room.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

At five in the morning, Sara got out of bed quietly and went outside. It was completely silent. She circled the house until she got to a window of the guest room where the boys were sleeping, then tapped it slowly. A small voice asked, "Sara?"

"Open the door," Sara said softly. She went back inside through the kitchen door, which she had left open on her way out. She entered the boys' room, then slowly closed the door.

All of them had already risen and gotten dressed.

"Tell us Sara. You heard Uncle last night. Prospa's taking a flight to Moshi tomorrow morning. If we fail today, that's it," Mansa said.

"Why didn't you come yesterday like we agreed?" Prospa asked.

"We waited for you until 11pm," Mansa added.

"I had to braid Uthuri's hair, and afterwards she talked a lot before she went to sleep," Sara explained. She continued, "But everything is fine. I'm familiar with the house, both inside and outside. It's a two-story house, painted white. On the first floor there's a front room, a kitchen, an area for praying, and a guest room. There are two doors leading outside, the front door and the courtyard door. We'll use the courtyard door. If you enter through the front, someone in the kitchen will see you."

"Aha, this way Prospa won't be seen," Mansa said quickly.

"There's trees outside between the main house and the small house. There's some darkness for cover, but there's also lights," Sara explained.

"Did you see Merisho," Prospa asked. "Did you recognize him?"

"I didn't see him," Sara replied. She continued to say, "He's not visible at all. He's staying with his grandmother in the courtyard house."

Now, the front door of the courtyard house looks out on the courtyard door of the main house. So, someone who comes to the courtyard door is visible everywhere."

"So we'll go to the courtyard then?" Tofa asked.

"Wait for Sara to finish," Mansa scolded. "Hey Sara continue." But then he asked, "When do they eat?"

"My friend Uzuri said that they eat at 10pm, because no guests are around then. They don't eat any

earlier than that, they're afraid," Sara assured them.

"You've done well," Mansa said to Sara. "Here's the plan friends: at 8:30, all of us will be in bed; that is, we'll already be here in the room."

"What if dinner is late?" Tofa asked.

"Then you'll sleep without eating," Mansa said, then continued, "At 9 Sara will shake off Uzuri, and Prospa and I will leave with her."

Sara asked, "At 9? How will I leave without Uzuri knowing?"

Tofa asked, "Where will I be?"

Prospa said to Sara, "I'll call you. I'll ask you something, you'll leave then."

Mansa signaled his agreement with Prospa's plan about calling Sara, then said to Tofa, "You'll stay here. At 10:15 you'll wake Uncle Feliksi up. Tell him that there's trouble at Mr. Mchau's place and that he's needed there quickly."

"I don't know this man's place," Tofa protested.

"Uncle himself will lead you there. He knows the place, you'll just follow behind him," Mansa explained to Tofa.

They were quiet for a bit. When they heard the clattering of dishes in the kitchen, they knew Uzuri had risen. They lowered their voices even more.

"So I'll ask to enter as if I've been sent. Then what?" Sara asked.

"When they open the door for you, Prospa will enter. He'll recognize Merisho at once, and there'll be pandemonium. During all this, Tofa will come with Uncle Feliksi," Mansa explained.

“What if he isn’t back in time?” Tofa asked.

“You need to get some other adult. Look around for neighbors, or Mr. Mateo,” Mansa said.

Everyone except Tofa laughed.

“What will you do?” Tofa asked Mansa.

Mansa replied, “I’ll guard the courtyard house. I’ll make sure they don’t run back out with Merisho in a panic.”

They were silent as they thought. Mansa said, “You should go now Sara. I don’t know where you’ll say you’ve been if Uzuri asks.”

Sara opened the door slowly and left.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

The big day. Everything was different. The tea Uzuri had prepared with Sara's help was different. The bread they ate along with it tasted different. Each of them had their own observations and thoughts. Their fear of failing made them suspicious. Why did she do this? Why did he do that?

They were deeply worried and gripped by doubt. They didn't trust each other, but they didn't say this to each other; they couldn't bring themselves to talk about this secret. So, each of them kept an eye out on another without knowing that they were all doing this. Mansa, Tofa, and Prospa all did this. When one of them left, his friends followed him; when one walked away, the others weren't far behind. If one of them fell silent the others would ask, "What's up, what are

you thinking about? Why aren't you talking?" They all looked after one another except for Sara, who was with Uzuri. All of them harbored deep suspicions about Sara. Frequently they would call Sara over and interrogate her: "What's up, what are you doing inside?" or, "Sara is the food ready?" or, "Sara, why are you laughing so much with Uzuri? What are you two talking about?"

By 11am, Sara was tired of all the questions. She said to them, "You all are stressing me out. Go to town, come back at 4pm."

All of them were elated at the thought of going to town. They now had something to do. They left at once without argument, and decided to walk. When they reached the road, Mansa said, "I don't trust Sara. She could tell Uzuri everything, and then our efforts will be wasted."

Prosapa said, "Sara's not talking. She's very clever, she's not going to reveal anything."

Tofa said, "You can't trust the girl completely. She could slip up. I don't know about those two."

Prosapa said, "Sara's the one who helped us find Mr. Matayo's house. Why hasn't she said anything to Uzuri yet? Sara's very smart. I left Same with her, we went to Zanzibar together - she's been with me this whole time."

They were silent. They stood around contemplating: Would Sara betray us? Sara...

Tofa said, "Let's go man. If Sara goes rogue that's her decision. We already know what we need to do."

Prosapa said, "Sara won't go rogue. You two will

see. She just won't do it."

They started to walk again, unhurriedly and without a destination in mind. Here and there they stopped to look at this and that. They came upon some people constructing a building and stopped for awhile, watching the laborers install iron stairs and test them to be certain that they wouldn't give out. They looked on as other workers passed basins of mixed sand, cement, and gravel from the ground up to the floor being constructed. No one spoke until Tofa said, "Let's beg for some money for food."

Mansa alisema, "These guys have nothing to give us."

Prospa said nothing.

Tofa said, "I'm going anyway."

He left. His friends stayed where they were, watching Tofa as he went off to beg the workers pouring concrete for some money to buy food. When Tofa was near he hesitated a little, for there wasn't a single person looking at him. All of them continued to work without even glancing aside at him.

Tofa approached them and said in a weak voice, "Please give me money for food. I need just a little money for food. I haven't eaten sir, please give me a little money so I can have some food." He repeated this several times, until finally one of the workers used a spade to scoop up some concrete mix, which he then gave to Tofa as he said, "Here take that."

Another worker said, "This concrete will provide for you."

Another said as he laughed loudly, "This concrete

will provide for your children.”

The first worker retrieved his spade and scooped up some concrete mix before throwing it back in the tub as he said, “Go beg from those mamas selling food by the road over there. Or are you owed something here?”

The first worker who had given a spade full of concrete to Tofa said nothing. He picked up his tub and went back to work. Tofa left quietly and returned to his companions. They said nothing.

They resumed walking, without speaking to one another. Each one was afraid to say what was on his mind.

Prospa thought, “If Merisho isn’t at Mr. Matayo’s, then what? Do I go home without him? What’ll I do?”

Mansa thought, “Lo! If Merisho is found tomorrow we’ll be victorious. Maybe this rich uncle will give some kind of reward. Maybe. But he’ll have to give us *something*. Lo, it will really be a big accomplishment.”

Tofa thought, “They’ve given me a difficult task, then given themselves easy work. What if Mr. Feliksi refuses to get up? If he refuses what do I do? Mateo is old and weak, he won’t be able to say anything if I bring him. Agh, I’ll just tell them I don’t want to do the task they’ve given me. But I’ll wait and just tell Mansa. No, I’ll tell Prospa, then he’ll explain to Mansa.”

They walked without speaking until they reached the city. They arrived at the Insurance building, then sat down in a square and leaned themselves against

the wall of a house. Many people passed through the square; many others parked their cars there. Their desire to work had lessened, so they didn't stand up to do anything.

Prosapa asked Mansa, "Should we discuss the plan again?"

Mansa said, "Let's go to Ujenzi for food," then stood up. The others stood and followed after him. When they got there they found many people had already finished eating and abandoned their leftover food. They went in the back door, and Mansa begged for some food. They were given ugali, burnt rice, and bananas. On top of this mix, they were given sauce with beans.

They ate quickly. When they had finished they wandered around a little. They headed for the coast, then walked along the beach towards the ferry. No one spoke. Each of them was afraid to say what was on their minds. When they reached Feri they sat and watched the ferryboats as they left the loading dock, with people and vehicles lining their decks.

Tofa said, "Let's go to the loading dock."

Mansa said angrily, "What's with you? Why do you want to go to the loading dock, don't you know we have a mission?"

"I was just suggesting it," Tofa said defensively.

"I was just suggesting it," Mansa mimicked him derisively.

Prosapa said, "We should go over the plan again, so we can remind ourselves."

Tofa said, "I don't want to stay at home, I want

to go with you all.”

“Then who will stay back to bring Mr. Feliksi?” Mansa asked. “Now who, tell me,” Mansa said angrily. Mansa stood over Tofa and said forcefully, “Tell me now, because I’m beginning to suspect you’re going to betray us. Tell me!”

Tofa protested in his defense, “What if Mr. Feliksi doesn’t come home? Or if he refuses to get up, what will I do; you all will have already left.”

Mansa chastised Tofa, “Now listen, we can’t have any self-doubt or fear. You hear? We are getting Merisho back, we must. Now listen: Tofa you will stay home. You will remain in your room. Your ears should be on alert. Follow everyone at home with your ears, especially Mr. Feliksi and that liar Uzuri. Don’t lose track of them, not even for a minute! At 10:15 exactly, start making a lot of noise. Run around crazily so as to stir up a commotion, wake up Uncle Feliksi and tell him, out of breath and coughing, that there’s a problem at Mr. Matayo’s. An accident has happened, or tell him the house caught fire. Take the clock that’s on the kitchen wall and keep it with you in your room. You hear?”

Tofa nodded his head in agreement, saying nothing.

Mansa was out of breath as he continued, “Prospa, you and me will leave the house together with Sara at 9pm.”

“9pm is really early,” Prospa objected. “If they eat at 10pm, what will we be doing until then?”

“We’ll check out the area. We’ll encircle the area

around the house,” Mansa said.

“I’m worried. If we mess this up, we’re done, we’re not getting Merisho back,” Prospa said.

“There’s no worry or fear. Let’s remember that. Now come on, let’s go,” Mansa said.

They left quickly to return to Masaki.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Mr. Feliksi was late coming home. At 8:30pm Sara started to worry.

“Should we serve the food now Sister Uzuri?” Sara asked.

“What’s with you today? These past two hours you’ve been starving? I don’t serve dinner before Mr. Feliksi has arrived,” Uzuri said.

8:45pm. Sara went to the room to find Prospa. He had spread himself out on the bed as if he had fallen there.

“Now what? Are you all looking at me! It’s 9pm now,” Sara said.

None of them said anything. They looked at Mansa. Before Mansa knew what to say, they heard the sound of Uncle Feliksi’s car arriving.

Mansa flew up as if he'd been shocked with electricity. He said quietly, "No need to worry. Now listen. We have one hour to work." He nervously racked his brain in a hurry. Their plans had started off on the wrong foot.

"Now, now..." Mansa continued.

They heard the voice of Uncle Feliksi asking, "Those kids, where are they?" Uzuri's voice replied, but they couldn't make out what she said.

"Shhh, here's the plan: Prospa and I won't eat. We ate this afternoon, so we'll leave to follow the plan," Mansa said.

"Uncle will ask questions; Prospa needs to stay with him," Sara said.

"True," Tofa said.

Uncle Feliksi asked again, this time loudly and sharply, "Where are they? Prospaa," he called out.

This startled them. Sara said, "Let's go and greet Uncle. You all return immediately; I'll be in the kitchen with Uzuri."

They ran out quickly, as if being chased by a dangerous animal.

All of them together, except for Sara who had gone straight to the kitchen, greeted Uncle Feliksi.

"What's so interesting up there in your room?" Uncle Feliksi asked without replying to their greeting. He seemed unhappy.

All of them said nothing and looked at the floor.

He picked up a package that he'd placed on the floor next to the couch, gave it to Prospa and said, "Wear some of these clothes tomorrow and take the

rest with you. Leave what you're wearing now here.”

Prospa thanked him.

“I'll hold on to your airline ticket,” Mr. Feliksi said. “We'll leave early tomorrow. The flight leaves at 6am, so you need to be up in time.”

“Yes Uncle,” Prospa agreed.

After a short time, dinner was ready.

When they finally sat down to eat dinner, the clock on the kitchen wall said 9:40pm.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Prosapa ate a little food, then said, "I should go to bed early, I don't want to wake up late tomorrow. May I please leave the table Uncle?"

"Are you full?" his uncle asked.

"I ate a lot this afternoon," Prosapa answered as he started to stand.

"Uzuri will wake you at 5am tomorrow. Go on," Uncle Feliksi nodded.

Prosapa entered his room and sat down on the bed. "I must get Merisho back, without doing this I can't go home," he said to himself. "If this child who's at Mr. Matayo's isn't Merisho, I'll run away tonight." He leaned over and held his head in his hands.

"Why isn't Mansa coming? Agh!" Prosapa continued to say to himself.

Prosopa stood up from the bed and went to go look around and listen to what was going on. Then Mansa appeared with Sara right behind him.

“What’s going on now?” Prosopa asked.

“Sara said she’s come to say goodbye because you two won’t see each other tomorrow morning,” Mansa explained loudly for everyone in the house to hear. Then he said quietly, “Tofa’s talking with Uncle.”

“I can’t leave, it’s too late,” Sara whispered. “But we don’t know the way to Matayo’s house,” Prosopa said. He was becoming nervous, pacing around the room.

“We need a plan for leaving,” Mansa said.

“Wait,” Sara said. She left to stand outside the door to the room and called out loudly, “Tofa, Tofa e, please help Sister Uzuri wash the dishes. I’m writing a letter for Prosopa to take with him.”

“Alright,” Tofa replied.

“It’s not a problem, just go on and write the letter,” Uzuri said.

Before Uzuri could return to the kitchen, Sara, Prosopa, and Mansa sprinted through the kitchen to escape.

When they got outside, Mansa went around the house, found Mateo and told him, “It’s just us opening the gate sir, don’t worry, we’re going straight to the store.”

They ran without making any sound, not even a little, until they were outside the gate. Sara said, “Afterwards I’ll go straight back to help Tofa, we shouldn’t give Uncle a reason to worry.”

“Alright let’s go,” Prospa said.

Sara led the way to Mr. Matayo’s. They were used to walking at night, and so were not afraid. They arrived at Mr. Matayo’s and opened the gate slowly; it hadn’t been locked up yet. They circled the house quickly, each of them quiet as a mute.

They leaned against a wall of the house. They said to Sara, “Go and look around.”

Sara left to creep around. A strong wind was blowing, waving the grass and the branches of the trees near the home.

There was no one in the kitchen, but the lights were on. They have to be eating now, Sara thought. She crept forward again, circling the house until they reached the front room. The people there were eating dinner, but no children were among them.

Sara returned straight away to deliver the news. She whispered, “They’re at the table, but they’re just finishing dinner. And I didn’t see a child.”

Prospa’s heart skipped a beat.

“Merisho’s not there?” Prospa asked anxiously.

Mansa said, “Shhh. Calm down. Hey Sara, who did you see?”

Sara said, “The grandmother’s there, then there’s Mr. Matayo’s wife, a house employee, and one of their daughters.”

“That’s it?” Prospa asked.

“That’s it,” Sara replied.

Prospa said, “Wait, I’m going to see for myself,” and left.

Mansa grabbed him, preventing him from leaving

and possibly ruining their plans.

“Let go of me,” Prospa said, yanking his hands away from Mansa forcefully.

Mansa grabbed him again, harder this time and said, “Don’t ruin this now Prospa. You stay here, I should go instead. If I’m unlucky enough to be seen, they won’t recognize me. Wait and I’ll go look.”

Mansa left, with Prospa tailing him. Sara began to inspect the courtyard house, taking in every nook and cranny. Because of the heat, all of the curtains were closed.

In one of the rooms a light was on, and she could see two children lying asleep in bed. She couldn’t make out whether the children were girls or boys.

Sara crept quickly back towards Mansa and Prospa. “Hey you two, I saw two children in the courtyard house,” Sara said softly.

“Where?” Mansa and Prospa asked in unison.

They left without saying another word.

The girl washing dishes in the kitchen peered through the window and asked the people in the front room, “Who let the dogs in?”

Someone in the front room replied, “The dogs haven’t been let in yet. Why do you ask?”

“I thought I heard the dogs roaming around,” she answered.

“Is their food ready?” the same person asked. “That security guard is useless, he hasn’t come for work yet again today,” she complained.

The girl in the kitchen didn’t reply, but continued to wash the dishes. During their conversation, Prospa,

Mansa and Sara had been standing stock still and silent. Completely silent. Another gust of wind blew by. The residents didn't speak of the dogs again, so they gave each other the signal to keep going. When they got to the door of the courtyard house, they stopped. Each of them was overcome with worry. Each of them prayed to God for assistance.

Mansa took hold of the doorknob and turned it quietly. His hands were trembling. Slowly, he tried to open the door. Slowly. The door was stuck, and he had to use more force. Then it opened, and they went inside and closed it behind them. They stood there, looking at each other.

Sara showed them the room where the children were sleeping. She waved her hand towards it instead of speaking. Just then, before they had taken a step in the direction Sara had indicated, they heard someone leave the big house and approach the courtyard house. Mansa ran like a bolt of lightning to lock the door from the inside. Prospa thought he must have gone crazy. The person began fiddling with the door, as if they couldn't see how to get in. Then suddenly they began to stir up a commotion, crying and shouting like nothing else.

None of them knew who among them opened the door to the room. Shouts of "Merisho, Merisho, my God..." could be heard amidst the screams coming from outside, "You can't, you can't, they've locked me out..., you can't..."

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

At 11pm, there was a loud commotion at Mr. Mchau's. The neighbors didn't understand what was going on, for several people were involved, and each of them was saying something different.

One neighbor living close by left his house to see what was going on at his friend's. What he found shocked him. All the noise was coming from just two people. The grandmother, that is Mr. Matayo's sister, and a young girl were fighting over a small child just four years of age.

Mr. Matayo hadn't yet returned home, but he would arrive soon. Another man, a relative of his, Mr. Feliksi Ringo, was furiously asking, "What is this brother? What is this?"

He found a group of children belonging to Mr.

Mchau and his wife standing in the front room, struck with confusion. Their house girl was leaning against the kitchen door. Feliksi Ringo, after seeing that no one was injured, glanced down and saw Prospa clutching the child. Both Prospa and the child were crying. He asked, "You Prospa, where did you come from? Why was I told that you all had gone to the store to buy medicine? And you Sara?"

No one answered him.

Grandma Awaichi had her hands on her head, crying with grief. "I'm going to kill myself, really, *Uuwi*.

You children can't do this to me. This child is mine. My child, not yours. If you take him from me, I'll really kill myself, *uuwi*.

She left to go outside, crying uncontrollably. Before Uncle Feliksi could follow her and bring her back, he heard someone tell her, "Go back inside quickly. Go back." Grandma Awaichi went back inside sobbing even harder. She said, "The police are outside. These children have called the police on me brother. Drop this or I'll die."

Uncle Feliksi went over to calm her down, told her to sit, and urged her to be quieter so as not to wake any more neighbors.

The neighbor who was already there asked, "What's the matter here? What's happened, why don't I understand?"

But there was no one who gave him an answer.

A little while later, Mr. Matayo Mchau returned home. He found his home filled with people. Mansa

and Tofa were already inside, along with Uzuri who had gone to see what all the noise was about later. Uncle Feliksi had exchanged words with Mr. Matayo's wife and explained to her what had happened.

"What is this mess?" Mchau said. "What a disaster my sister has brought to my household," he complained.

They talked for awhile on the topic of girls and boys.

Uncle Feliksi said, "I myself only have one child, a girl. She lives with her mother. But I believe completely that if the parents don't live together, a child belongs to the parent who raises him or her. Also, there is no difference between a boy and a girl."

Mr. and Mrs. Mchau agreed with him.

Grandma Awaichi said, "Don't you all try to tell me this craziness. Really, don't. And you brother, what's wrong with you? Have you been bewitched? You really must have been bewitched."

After a long conversation, and after seeing that no one was on her side, Grandma Awaichi tried to curse everyone who was there. "You all will disappear, everyone who's responsible for doing this. You all will disappear completely without being seen. Really I tell you, you all will die somewhere out there in the bush, never to be seen again. You'll see." She was crying, but later she was silent, refusing to say anything even if questioned.

Before everyone left, Uncle Feliksi said he'd go to Moshi and return with the family elders so everyone could discuss what had happened and make peace

offerings.

Prospa adamantly refused to be separated from Merisho. So, it was agreed that he'd stay back with the Mchaus until the elders arrived from Moshi to reunite Dada Josefina with her child.

Sara, Mansa, and Tofa said goodbye to Prospa. They exchanged signs of victory. Sara's eyes glistened. Then they left with Uncle Feliksi and Uzuri.

"Until tomorrow," they said to Prospa.

Merisho was soon fast asleep, his thumb in his mouth, as Prospa held him like a newborn child.

CHAPTER THIRTY

The case of what happened was discussed. A goat was slaughtered by the elders, and a little blood was let out onto the ground as special peace offering words were recited. The goat meat was boiled, and everyone involved was given a portion.

When it was time to issue a judgement, Awaichi Mchau was deemed to have made a grave mistake by taking Merisho without the permission of his mother Josefina. She was advised that it was better to solve problems together, rather than taking matters into her own hands. And it was explained that she must change her primitive way of thinking about today's life, that women and men both contribute to the progress of family and society. Bibi Awaichi said nothing in response.

Mr. Mchau was found to have erred in keeping Merisho at his home without notifying his relatives or the police. He was fined heavily for doing so. He was told to hand over 100,000 shillings, then go to the police to report that the child was back with his family and that his mother had gotten him back. It was decided that these 100,000 shillings would be set aside for Mansa, Tofa, and Sara when they got older.

Uncle told them they would consider giving them this money when they were old enough to drive, and that he and Mr. Mchau would often give them advice that they should follow. Additionally, Uncle added, "I will add more money, but I will only give it to you all after seeing that you've become hard workers."

"We're hard workers now," Sara said. Everyone laughed.

The child's mother, Teacher Josefina, was advised that before returning home, she and her friend Sofia and Merisho should all go to Zanzibar to meet with Grandma Fatuma. The elders felt that the way she was told of the abducted child was hurtful, and that she deserved an explanation.

Mr. Matayo agreed to continue providing for the child, but he was admonished to do so more conscientiously than the way he'd done so up to now.

Josefina's child was finally returned to her. People expressed their sympathies for the suffering and pain she had had to endure during this difficult period. Awaichi was fined two milk-bearing heifers and a bull, which were awarded to Josephina.

Prosipa was criticized for putting his life in danger

during his journey away from home, but in the next breath he and his friends were given much praise and respect for their unequalled bravery. "Children, if you continue to display this kind of courage, you will rescue our family from many troubles," the elders told them.

Sara said, "Yes, that's the truth elders." Everyone laughed again.

When Prospa was asked what he'd like as a reward, he pondered for a long time. He thought hard, then said, "I want a bicycle to get me to school, and for when I'm sent to town." But Prospa was actually thinking about Mustafa. He thought: Merisho has been found, and now if I get a bicycle for succeeding, Mustafa will respect me more. He'll see me as a big deal for sure. No doubt Mustafa will ask to ride it immediately. And I'll let him, because he's my friend and he helped me when I first set out on this journey to find Merisho.

Mr. Mchau agreed to buy a bicycle for Prospa. Prospa was elated. He said, "Now I'll go back to TPC and continue with school."

Uncle Feliksi said, "I'm volunteering to provide for Mansa, Sara, and Tofa's education, if they are willing." They refused. They said they had quit school a long time ago, and that they wouldn't be able to go back to study or sit for the exams. But they said they'd think about a goal to work towards, starting right away.

Mansa said, "If we can get a business up and running, we'll get enough money to buy food and

other needs, and we'll be able to move out of the street."

Tofa said, "We'll build ourselves a house. My mother will come and live with us."

Prosopa tried to persuade Sara to return to Moshi with everyone, pleading with her to come live with them at Sister Josefina's. But Sara refused, saying, "I'll stay right here with Mansa and Tofa. One day I'll go to Zanzibar to greet Grandma Fatuma and Mr. Zinja."

Prosopa said goodbye to his friends, sad to see them go.