

Prologue

ONE PERFECT MORNING, WITH JACKALS

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Ngai is the creator of all things. He made the lion and the elephant, the vast savannah and the towering mountains, the Kikuyu and the Maasai and the Wakamba.

Thus, it was only reasonable for my father's father and his father's father to believe that Ngai was all-powerful. Then the Europeans came, and they killed all the animals, and they covered the savannahs with their factories and the mountains with their cities, and they assimilated the Maasai and the Wakamba, and one day all that was left of what Ngai had created was the Kikuyu.

And it was among the Kikuyu that Ngai waged His final battle against the god of the Europeans.

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My former son lowered his head as he stepped into my hut.

"Jambo, my father," he said, looking somewhat uncomfortable, as usual, in the close confines of the rounded walls.

"Jambo, Edward," I replied.

He stood before me, not quite knowing what to do with his hands. Finally he placed them in the pockets of his elegantly tailored silk suit.

"I have come to drive you to the spaceport," he said at last.

I nodded, and slowly got to my feet. "It is time."

"Where is your luggage?" he asked.

"I am wearing it," I said, indicating my dull red kikoi.

"You're not taking anything else?" he said, surprised.

"There is nothing else I care to take," I replied.

He paused and shifted his weight uncomfortably, as he always seemed to do in my presence. "Shall we go outside?" he suggested at last, walking to the door of my hut. "It's very hot in here, and the flies are murderous."

"You must learn to ignore them."

"I do not have to ignore them," he replied, almost defensively. "There are no flies where I live."

"I know. They have all been killed."

"You say that as if it were a sin rather than a blessing."

I shrugged and followed him outside, where two of my chickens were pecking diligently at the dry red earth.

"It's a beautiful morning, is it not?" he said. "I was afraid it might be as warm as yesterday."

I looked out across the vast savannah, which had been turned into farmland. Wheat and corn seemed to sparkle in the morning sun.

"A perfect morning," I agreed. Then I turned and saw a splendid vehicle parked about thirty yards away, white and sleek and shining with chrome.

"Is it new?" I asked, indicating the car.

He nodded proudly. "I bought it last week."

"German?"

"British."

"Of course," I said.

The glow of pride vanished, and he shifted his weight again. "Are you ready?"

"I have been ready for a long time," I answered, opening the door and easing myself into the passenger's seat.

"I never saw you do that before," he remarked, entering the car and starting the ignition.

"Do what?"

"Use your safety harness."

"I have never had so many reasons not to die in a car crash," I replied.

He forced a smile to his lips and began again. "I have a surprise for you," he said as the car pulled away and I looked back at my boma for the very last time.

"Oh?"

He nodded. "We will see it on the way to the spaceport."

"What is it?" I asked.

"If I told you, it wouldn't be a surprise."

I shrugged and remained silent.

"We'll have to take some of the back roads to reach what I want to show you," he continued. "You'll be able to take a last look at your country along the way."

"This is not my country."

"You're not going to start that again, are you?"

"My country teems with life," I said adamantly. "This country has been smothered by concrete and steel, or covered by row upon row of European crops."

"My father," he said wearily as we sped past a huge wheat field, "the last elephant and lion were killed before you were born. You have never seen Kenya teeming with wildlife."

"Yes I have," I answered him.

"When?"

I pointed to my head. "In here."

"It doesn't make any sense," he said, and I could tell that he was trying to control his temper.

"What doesn't?"

"That you can turn your back on Kenya and go live on some terraformed planetoid, just because you want to wake up to the sight of a handful of animals grazing."

"I did not turn my back on Kenya, Edward," I said patiently. "Kenya turned its back on me."

"That simply isn't so," he said. "The President and most of his cabinet are Kikuyu. You know that."

"They call themselves Kikuyu," I said. "That does not make them Kikuyu."

"They are Kikuyu!" he insisted.

"The Kikuyu do not live in cities that were built by Europeans," I replied. "They do not dress as Europeans. They do not worship the Europeans' god. And they do not drive European machines," I added pointedly. "Your vaunted President is still a kehee—a boy who has not undergone the circumcision ritual."

"If he is a boy, then he is a fifty-seven-year-old boy."

"His age is unimportant."

"But his accomplishments are. He is responsible for the Turkana Pipeline, which has brought irrigation to the entire Northern Frontier District."

"He is a kehee who brings water to the Turkana and the Rendille and the Samburu," I agreed. "What is that to the Kikuyu?"

"Why do you persist in speaking like an ignorant old savage?" he demanded irritably. "You were schooled in Europe and America. You know what our President has accomplished."

"I speak the way I speak because I have been schooled in Europe and America. I have seen Nairobi grow into a second London, with all of that city's congestion and pollution, and Mombasa into another Miami, with all of that city's attendant dangers and diseases. I have seen our people forget what it means to be a Kikuyu, and speak proudly about being Kenyans, as if Kenya was anything more than an arbitrary set of lines drawn on a European map."

"Those lines have been there for almost three centuries," he pointed out.

I sighed. "As long as you have known me, you have never understood me, Edward."

"Understanding is a two-way street," he said with sudden bitterness. "When did you ever make an effort to understand me?"

"I raised you."

"But to this day you don't know me," he said, driving dangerously fast on the bumpy road. "Did we ever

talk as father and son? Did you ever discuss anything but the Kikuyu with me?" He paused. "I was the only Kikuyu to play on the national basketball team, and yet you never once came to watch me."

"It is a European game."

"In point of fact, it is an American game."

I shrugged. "They are the same."

"And now it is an African game as well. I played on the only Kenyan team ever to defeat the Americans. I had hoped that would make you proud of me, but you never even mentioned it."

"I heard many stories of an Edward Kimante who played basketball against the Europeans and the Americans," I said. "But I knew that this could not be my son, for I gave my son the name Koriba."

"And my mother gave me the middle name of Edward," he said. "And since she spoke to me and shared my burdens, and you did not, I took the name she gave me."

"That is your right."

"I don't give a damn about my rights!" He paused. "It didn't have to be this way."

"I remained true to my convictions," I said. "It is you who tried to become a Kenyan rather than a Kikuyu."

"I am a Kenyan," he said. "I live here, I work here, I love my country. All of it, not just one tiny segment."

I sighed deeply. "You are truly your mother's son."

"You have not asked about her," he noted.

"If she were not well, you would have told me."

"And that's all you have to say about the woman you lived with for seventeen years?" he demanded.

"It was she who left to live in the city of the Europeans, not I," I replied.

He laughed humorlessly. "Nakuru is not a European city. It has two million Kenyans and less than twenty thousand whites."

"Any city is, by definition, European. The Kikuyu do not live in cities."

"Look around you," he said in exasperation. "More than ninety-five percent of them do live in cities."

"Then they are no longer Kikuyu," I said placidly.

He squeezed the steering wheel until his knuckles turned ash-gray.

"I do not wish to argue with you," he said, struggling to control his emotions. "It seems that is all we ever do anymore. You are my father, and despite all that has come between us, I love you—and I had hoped to make my peace with you today, since we shall never see each other again."

"I have no objection to that," I said. "I do not enjoy arguing."

"For a man who doesn't enjoy it, you managed to argue for twelve long years to get the government to sponsor this new world of yours."

"I did not enjoy the arguments, only the results," I replied.

"Have they decided what to name it yet?"

"Kirinyaga."

"Kirinyaga?" he repeated, surprised.

I nodded. "Does not Ngai sit upon His golden throne atop Kirinyaga?"

"Nothing sits atop Mount Kenya except a city."

"You see?" I said with a smile. "Even the name of the holy mountain has been corrupted by Europeans. It is time that we give Ngai a new Kirinyaga from which to rule the universe."

"Perhaps it is fitting, at that," he said. "There has been precious little room for Ngai in today's Kenya."

Suddenly he began slowing down, and a moment later we turned off the road and across a recently harvested field, driving very carefully so as not to damage his new car.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"I told you: I have a surprise for you."

"What kind of surprise can there be in the middle of an empty field?" I asked.

"You will see."

Suddenly he came to a stop about twenty yards from a clump of thorn bushes, and turned off the ignition.

"Look carefully," he whispered.

I stared at the bushes for a moment without seeing anything. Then there was a brief movement, and suddenly the whole picture came into view, and I could see two jackals standing behind the foliage, staring timidly at us.

"There have been no animals here in more than two decades," I whispered.

"They seem to have wandered in after the last rains," he replied softly. "I suppose they must be living off the rodents and birds."

"How did you find them?"

"I didn't," he answered. "A friend of mine in the Game Department told me they were here." He paused. "They'll be captured and relocated to a game park sometime next week, before they can do any lasting damage."

They seemed totally misplaced, hunting in tracks made by huge threshing and harvesting machines, searching for the safety of a savannah that had not existed for more than a century, hiding from cars rather than other predators. I felt a certain kinship to them.

We watched them in total silence for perhaps five minutes. Then Edward checked his timepiece and decided that we had to continue to the spaceport.

"Did you enjoy it?" he asked as we drove back onto the road.

"Very much," I said.

"I had hoped you would."

"They are being moved to a game park, you said?"

He nodded his head. "A few hundred miles to the north, I believe."

"The jackal walked this land long before the farmers arrived," I noted.

"But they are an anachronism," he replied. "They don't belong here anymore."

I nodded my head. "It is fitting."

"That the jackals go to a game park?" he asked.

"That the Kikuyu, who were here before the Kenyans, leave for a new world," I answered. "For we, too, are an anachronism that no longer belongs here."

He increased his speed, and soon we had passed through the farming area and entered the outskirts of Nairobi.

"What will you do on Kirinyaga?" he asked, breaking a long silence.

"We shall live as the Kikuyu were meant to live."

"I mean you, personally."

I smiled, anticipating his reaction. "I am to be the mundumugu."

"The witch doctor?" he repeated incredulously.

"That is correct."

"I can't believe it!" he continued. "You are an educated man. How can you sit cross-legged in the dirt and roll bones and read omens?"

"The mundumugu is also a teacher, and the custodian of the tribal customs," I said. "It is an honorable profession."

He shook his head in disbelief. "So I am to explain to people that my father has become a witch doctor."

"You need fear no embarrassment," I said. "You need only tell them that Kirinyaga's mundumugu is named Koriba."

"That is my name!"

"A new world requires a new name," I said. "You cast it aside to take a European name. Now I will take it back and put it to good use."

"You're serious about this, aren't you?" he said as we pulled into the spaceport.

"From this day forward, my name is Koriba."

The car came to a stop.

"I hope you will bring more honor to it than I did, my father," he said as a final gesture of conciliation.

"You have brought honor to the name you chose," I said. "That is quite enough for one lifetime."

"Do you really mean that?" he asked.

"Of course."

"Then why did you never say so before now?"

"Haven't I?" I asked, surprised.

We got out of the car and he accompanied me to the departure area. Finally he came to a stop.

"This is as far as I am permitted to go."

"I thank you for the ride," I said.

He nodded.

"And for the jackals," I added. "It was truly a perfect morning."

"I will miss you, my father," he said.

"I know."

He seemed to be waiting for me to say something, but I could think of nothing further to say.

For a moment I thought he was going to place his arms around me and hug me, but instead he reached out, shook my hand, muttered another farewell, and turned on his heel and left.

I thought he would go directly to his car, but when I looked through a porthole of the ship that would take us to Kirinyaga, I saw him standing at a huge, plate-glass window, waving his hand, while his other hand held a handkerchief.

That was the last sight I saw before the ship took off. But the image I held in my mind was of the two jackals, watching alien sights in a land that had itself become foreign to them. I hoped that they would adjust to their new life in the game park that had been artificially created for them.

Something told me that I soon would know.