

TWO SHORT STORIES

By

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THE POLYGAMIST

I received this letter on 20 January, 1959.

"Dear Bime,

Our son is getting married on January 23rd at the Kumba Town church. Don't fail to come as you'll be the one to hand over your son in marriage.

I prepared at once to leave.

I had met Susana twenty-three years before when I was working as a clerk for the C.D.C. in Tko. We were just enjoying ourselves when the baby came. I gave him my own name - Johnson Bime. Even after this accident, I did not marry Susana. She loved to float and flirt with other men, and I raced and roved after other women. However, we kept in touch as the boy grew, looking clearly cut in my own image. His mother always said, "this is your father," whenever he came to visit me or whenever we met. When Johnson was eight, he came to stay with me. By then I was at Ekona. After a year he went back to his mother, who had settled in Kumba. He visited me regularly.

Thirteen years ago I resigned from the C.D.C. and came home to be employed at court clerk in Kumbo, Nao. As a good Christian, I decided to marry a single woman in church. I told my wife about Johnson and his mother. She forgave me; it was a mistake of the promiscuous and imperfect past. Johnson kept coming to me right here bringing presents for my wife and children. He became a bus driver when he left primary school. In two years he bought his own bus with the help of his magnanimous mother, whose bar business in Kumba was flourishing. Now at twenty-three he was getting married. That is why the letter came.

Fortunately I was on leave and could leave at once for Kumba. The invitation also gave me a real excuse to be away from my wife and have some variety. There is nothing like variety to make life light, easy and interesting, and nothing like monotony to make it boring and burdensome. I left Kumbo Town for Bamenda that day, and that evening I was rocking with Rosaline in Ring Road Club. My fair and faithful wife was left behind in Kumbo.

"Na very long time!" she said.

"Yes", I sighed.

"Nobi we go stay like one moon or two?"

"I de go for Kumba for some business tomorrow before I come back".

By seven o'clock the next day I was already sitting in a lorry bound for Kumba. I was going for my son's wedding, I thought as I sat among the chattering passengers. Yet my son by my real wife was only twelve years old. Was I a polygamist? No! no! no! I was married to one wife and I was a good, practising Christian. But why had I children by other women? I remembered I had a daughter eighteen years ago when I was in Victoria. I should already have taken

the bride price! Her mother named her Rita Enanga. The last time I saw Rita she was only nine months old. If I saw her again, I would not recognize her. But if she had grown up to be as beautiful as her mother, she could surely attract a multitude of suitors. If only I had kept her, I would have evaded a fortune out of her looks giving her to the highest bidder, of course. Some of my age mates at home had several sons-in-law, but there was I with a daughter of marriageable age whom I could recognize no more than a blind man could see if sixty suns shone before his eyes. As for her mother, her picture was perfectly printed in my mind. I could still feel kisses from her lips if we met. She was still a pretty, light, young lady of eighteen when I left her - Rita being her first child...

I remembered I had another son fifteen years ago with a Bayangi girl whom I met at Ekona. Her name was Anna Egbe. An attractive lass she was! She was the reputed dancer of the town. Whenever she danced, she twisted herself so flexibly that people said she could perform well wherever you took her. They were right. When I took her, she performed like a professional acrobat. After many such performances, the child came - uninvited, of course. She sent him home when he was only a year old. What became of the lad only heaven knows. I was sure I had other children I could not remember or did not know. Not to know your own children!

It was certain that if I counted all the women with whom I had had children, they would number more than ten. And if I counted all my children, they would be more than the number my grandfather had. He was a polygamist and lived in one compound with his five wives and his twenty-five children. He was like a chief in his palace and ruled with benevolent authority. His village of women and children worked in his coffee farms and took care of his goats, pigs and poultry. People thought him a wealthy, happy and powerful man, but above all (now that I come to think of it), he enjoyed the luxury of variety without having to move from one town to the other. One thing: my grandfather did not have much to do for his children and women. The women were almost self-sufficient. He distributed oil, salt and meat occasionally, and clothes for Christmas. For the rest, the women farmed their food crops and sold some of the produce to buy extras. The children were not sent to school. As the boys grew into manhood, he helped them to build their own compounds and to marry their own wives. He gave his grownup daughters into marriage, accepting the usual bride price. Nowadays we have to send our children to school and college if we want to hold up our heads in society.

It then occurred to me that it was the present economic and social conditions which make us evade the responsibility for our children. To find favour with the faithful and the church, we get one woman recognized by the public; then we have others scattered all over the towns. We tag these with the term 'prostitutes', and label their children 'bastards'. Funny, it also occurred to me that rich, honest, sincere men nowadays, who can afford the luxury of bringing up their children by several women, usually bring these women together and are themselves tagged with the term 'polygamist'. If they had been Christians before taking this sincere decision, the church refuses them the right to the sacraments and teaches that riches are the very thing to drive people away from the straight, steep, strenuous and narrow road to heaven. But the church accepts any gifts which these rich, sincere polygamists make. I remembered that during the fund-raising bazaar conducted by our church last year, Mr. Nyuki donated £300, which was more than all the other donations put together. Yet he had been banned from the holy sacraments five years before on taking a second wife. Funny.

I must have dozed off as I sat in the lorry (having spent a sleepless night in Bamenda). When I awoke, the lorry was standing at Mile Twelve, Mamfe road. The passengers went out to straighten their legs and ease themselves. As the hawkers rushed up to them, I saw Anna Egbe. No need to tell you of our excitement. She was selling cooked meat at three pence a piece. Late two pieces and gave her ten shillings. She was all joy.

"Which time you de return back from Kumba?" She asked.

"For Saturday".

"I de wait you. Nobi we go stay small before you go up?"

"Yes", I said decidedly.

"All right, I de wait you".

When we started off again, we went only a few yards and the engine cut out. Mechanics tried in vain for two hours to get it going. As the passengers gathered around to express their disappointment, I prayed that we might spend the night. After another hour, the chief mechanic announced that we could only move the next day. I made the sign of the cross and moved off to Anna's room. We went to her house where we were welcomed by our son. I was surprised at the striking resemblance.

"Tembe, na your papa this," Anna said. The youth smiled shyly as we shook hands. "Tembe dey for Standard Six this year. I no know where I go take money for send ye for college. I delighted to help her pay his fees if he gained admission into college. The youth was very delighted to hear this. He told me how many times he had fought with his playmates because they called him a bastard. He had always asked his mother but was told that I was somewhere."

"Yes, I am at Nao."

"Shall I visit you during the holidays, papa?"

"Yes"

The boy was excited. Before bedtime he had introduced me to more than ten of his mates. That night I was rocking with Anna. She was still the acrobat of fifteen years ago, only this time she performed more gracefully.

As we drove off the next day in the "mummy wagon", my former meditation returned freshly to me. Was I simply not a polygamist because my women were scattered all over — one in Nao (legal, social wife), two in Bamenda, one in Mamfe, two in Kumba, three in Tiko, two in Ekona, one in Busa and three in Victoria? Sitting there in the lorry, I made mental visits to all my women, enjoying them in fantasy. I remembered the episode of two years ago, when I fell in love with a smart girl of about seventeen. I met her in a bar, and it did not take long for my experienced eyes to realize that she was free. When I greeted her, she answered eagerly (as if she had been waiting for the greeting) and continued directly to ask me how I felt. I said I felt well but would certainly feel better in her company. She smiled and sat by me. I ordered half a crate of Guinness. As we emptied the bottles, my excitement was mounting. It was not very often that an old cow had fresh grass to chew. She caressed me lightly behind my neck and slowly up to my ear. I was burning.

We decided to go to her house since I could not take her home to my uncle's. As we fumbled along in the dark, narrow Tiko streets, I greedily plucked several kisses from her lips. I was reminded of the nights of courtship with my wife. She was only a young village virgin when I met her. When I made my regular night visits to her parents, the often followed to see me off. I never failed to kiss her under the kolamut trees. The first time she remarked that my greeting between film stars in the films I had seen. I found it remarkably refreshing. She soon did the same because I told her. Poor obedient woman! I decided that I should load her with a lot of presents when I returned. Yes, that would make up for my marvellous times with smart town girls and other women.

"My new-found-land" and I arrived at her house towards ten p. m. I was eager to "explore" her. As we entered the house, there were several, noisy people drinking palm wine in the parlour. "Mama, this is Mr. John. I just meet ye for bar", the girl said to a woman who was no doubt, her mother. I could not see her clearly in the bush lamp light. She came nearer.

"Welcome, Mr. John, John! Ha!" The lady stared at me. I wiped my eyes so, as to see better. Were my eyes deceiving me? No. She was the one.

"Mama, he done buy me plenty beer".

"Web, John!" The lady called again.

There was silence in the room. All eyes were on us. She moved closer to me.

"John? where you come from?"

"Mama" I meet ye for Jolly Bar. He done be good for me. So I take ye my make we..."

"John Bina!" The mother called again and fell on me. The daughter ran up to us as she thought her mother was fighting me. When she realized that her mother was embracing me. She stood back amazed.

"Picken," said the mother at her excitement was a little over.

"Mary, this no one of your Papa. Meand ye been dey for Ekona king, long time ago. Web! Picken, you done do well as you bring one of you papa so."

"Mama?"

"Mary, no talk. Bina, na my picken this — Mary. That time we been dey for Ekona she been be with my mama for country. She been be only one year and a hap.

Nobi I been tell you say I get picken for country? You no mimba? Nobi I been tell you?"

"Yes" I answered reluctantly. The truth was bitter.

I surely dozed off again like the previous day, for when I awoke, we were already driving into Kumba motor park. I arrived in Suzanne's house to find a lot of merry company. She too was all joy. We talked endlessly about our past life; how I fought with a boy who was rivaling me in her love; how she jumped through the window the day I caught her red-handed; how I once became her "brother" when we met the white manager of C.D.C. and decided to trick him for some money; how she sometimes pretended to be sick so that I would leave her for the night, making way for a new lover. We wished the clock would turn back so that we might live through these happy times once more. However, our child of accident had become our joy — her only joy, being the only child.

The bride-to-be was already there, and instead of being shy, bashful and reticent as convention dictates, she glided around the house like a shadow. The girl, still in her teens (about seventeen or eighteen) looked like a fragment of heaven. She was of average height and size: not tiny like the "wasps" we sometimes see wandering stealthily in the street, nor huge like the "elephants" that move heavily about and will almost pull you down when all you want is a handshake. She had the complexion of a ripening banana, straight legs, proportionate buttocks (not the protruding type that often remind one of a big letter S). She was blessed with trim, plump, provocative breasts and a sweet countenance which was sweeter when she smiled for, then, she displayed the middle opening in her upper teeth. Perfect symmetry! I thought, God must have designed her for my son after much practice. Yes; she was the perfection of a process — all the girls that were made before her being results of mere practice towards fashioning her. Each sound she uttered was like the note of a sweet, sentimental song which struck the strings of my warm heart. As I looked at her, I knew there was a whole generation between us; yet the sight of her generated had in me, I felt frightfully jealous. The girl reminded me faintly of some women I had known. I swallowed my lust in many a cup of beer.

For sometime I was left alone with Johnson, and we had a short conversation.

"Your girl is very attractive my son; so young, so beautiful".

"Yes papa; she's only about seventeen or eighteen".

"Just eighteen! But why did you decide to marry at this age, my son? You are very young — just twenty-three. When I was your age, I wasn't thinking about marriage though your mother already had you."

"That's the thing, papa. If you had actually married my mother, it would have been at my age or earlier".

"Yes, earlier. I was only twenty-two when you were born".

"And one thing urged me on, papa : the girl swore never to let me see her nakedness until we were married. I corrupted her with gifts : tempted her with all the sweet words the devil could put in my mouth, but she was constant. I feigned anger, pretended that I would not marry her. She was sad, very sad, but constant. Very strange for a girl who has grown up in town !"

"Very strange, my son".

"Strange indeed, father, but it urged me on".

"So it did and you are marrying tomorrow. Well, prepare to enjoy the fruit of heaven".

Next morning the intended couple dressed, and we drove to church. At the church door a great number of people were hurrying in. I went in with the rest, but the couple sang a sweet soft song. The couple walked in ceremoniously and sat separately in front. The choir would be led to sit together at the altar before the ceremonies began. I felt highly elated by the role I was to play as I carefully rehearsed it in my mind. The couple were to richly dressed : my son was younger and more handsome in his well tailored, black suit. His bride was the queen of white angels (the black ones are in Hell, of course) in her long, white, wedding gown, white hand gloves, white shoes, and sparkling white crown sitting on a white veil. A man next to me whispered, "They must be wallowing in wealth !" I smiled.

The Priest moved up to the altar, and the song ceased. There was such, sudden silence that you could hear a little needle drop. He looked at the congregation with the detachment of God, and we stared at him with the impatience of anxiety.

"Before we begin the ceremonies", the Reverend man said, "we now want Mr. Johnson's father and Miss Rita Enanga's mother to bring their son and daughter to this pew at the altar, thereby handing them in for marriage". I thought I did not hear well, but Lord ! Lord ! I saw Rita's mother come out of the other row into the central aisle and proudly move up to her daughter. So that was my Rita ? Why had I not asked the girl's name before ? I was merely lost in admiration. If only her mother could keep quiet ! Johnson was already looking round impatiently as his beautiful bride was being led up to the altar. Not knowing where I was going, nor what I was doing, I led Johnson up.

"Bime !" Rita's mother started as she saw me. She looked as if she were haunted by an evil spirit. The Priest was about to order us back to our seats so that the ceremonies could begin, but his attention was arrested.

"Please, please, Father. Oh, Father !" said Rita's mother almost in tears.

"Yes, what is it ?"

"Please, Father, this is my son and this is my daughter," I said.

"What ? You mean your daughter-in-law, of course".

"Yes, Father. This is my daughter by this woman, and this is my son by his mother". Johnson's anxious mother was already coming up to the scene. Johnson (he said later) felt like a giant cut down to the level of a dwarf. He held Rita firmly, possessively. She might faint. Johnson's mother continuously wiped the sweat on her face. Eyes were on us. The Reverend man stood dumbfounded.

"What are you saying ?" he asked, coming back to himself.

"Yes, Father. I had Rita with this woman and Johnson with this one."

"So this is your woman ?"

"Yes Father".

"And this, too, is your woman ?"

"Yes".

"Are you a polygamist ?"

"No ! No, no ! Father, I am a good Christian, married to one wife."

I receive Holy Communion. My wife and children are now in Nzo. I met these two women separately a long time ago, and they have never known each other as being connected to me."

"You mean you have three women : you have had children with three women ?"

"Yes Father".

"You are, therefore, a polygamist. The word simply refers to a man that has more than one woman". Then addressing the congregation, he said, "The marriage cannot be contracted because bride and bridegroom have the same father. To be a good Christian does not mean..."

What followed might have been a long sermon, but I did not hear a word of it. I heard sounds. I stood there and a thousand thoughts flashed in my mind. One of them was that I should assemble all my women and children and reign for the rest of my life in my little kingdom. As I recovered from my reverie, the Reverend man was saying, "One thing remains : parents, know your children; and children, know your parents. God be with you".

E. N. D.

Back in Bamenda, Nkwain felt the matter aching him like a toothache. He hated his nephew. He wondered why he had not died with the rest of his mother's children so that he, Nkwain, could inherit Akem's property without the inconvenience of having to help his nephew through life as tradition demanded. He would disown any relationship with the boy immediately after his father died, and Kuma's mother must pass for a witch.

Nkwain opened his safe and recounted his money — £400, and another £100 in the bank. He sat there gazing over his wealth which he ever found insufficient. He wanted to buy two new lorries. He calculated his brother's wealth: just the cattle — one hundred at roughly £10 each will give £1000! Then £100 in Barclay's Bank!

"Hm, my brother will make up for it!" he said to himself.

The next day he was back at Njinikom. His brother had just returned from the office. "You are not safe, brother, you are not safe!" said Doctor Nkwain.

"What?" Akem asked, frightened.

"My brother," Nkwain continued, "you know we are only two of us left in our mother's house. I don't want you to die. I have brought strong medicines for you to keep you safe from that terrible killer. People are really dying!"

"Well," said Akem, "that is why we have you as our own eye. It is just an infection," said Doctor Nkwain. "It will prevent not only that disease but all others. It is called antibioticology."

"Then give me enough of it!" said Akem. "I have written something about what I told you last time. It is in that big box; but give me sufficient of that medicine, brother, no matter the cost. Death is a thing one can bribe away with all his money."

"You'll have enough of it," said Nkwain with a smile as he loaded his syringe. Well, Nkwain gave him more than enough or just enough to take him to Abraham's bosom. As Akem wriggled in his bed like a wounded snake, Nkwain quietly left the room and the compound unnoticed.

That night Akem's compound was crowded by very anxious people. Nkwain was restlessly rubbing his brother with vaseline.

"It is good that you came, Doctor," said one of Nkwain's dupes. Akem could not speak; just writhing and writhing and coiling. Suddenly he lay still. Nkwain ordered everyone out of the room. He collected the will from the box and twisted it into his pocket.

"Has he spoken?" asked Kuma's mother, who was the first to return.

"No."

Later that night, Akem died.

One week later Kuma arrived at Bamenda on his way home. It was bright that morning though it had rained all night long. At the Mankon motor park the passenger tout for MONEY HARD was shouting at the top of his voice, badgering passengers.

"Bikom dii way; one way to Bikom, Ha! Kuma, na come you di come so?"

"Yes."

"Nobi you don yudi news for country?"

"Yes."

"O.K. we de go now now!"

The lorry was packed full like an overloaded ark. Kuma sat on the wooden bench and, as goods were packed below to the level of the benches, his knees were touching his chin. He felt no physical pain as he was wrapped in his thoughts. He was going home.

"Home? What's home to me when my father is dead?" he asked himself.

"My uncle, my crazy, miserly uncle, will take over the compound; my mother and I will wander about like beasts of no nation, Christ Jesus! His eyes were red, and he began to question the customs of his people. He had never felt them such a burden until then."

"Why?" he pondered. "Do our people think that women are generally unfaithful to their husbands? Am I not my father's son?" "But the whole mystery of the matrilineal society did not dawn on him."

"Home? — Hell!" he cried out, but his voice was drowned by the loud chatter of the passengers.

The road was muddy and slippery. Several times the lorry had to be pushed out of mud. When it got to Big Babanki, it sank so deep in mud that it could not be pushed out...

Kuma and a good number of others decided to continue the journey on foot. They arrived at Belo at 6 p. m. and, as it began to rain, Kuma decided to call at his father-in-law's compound.

"Welcome, my son," said his father-in-law. Kuma, then a full grown man of twenty-three, had already been married to his daughter in the traditional way. He was waiting until Christmas for the church wedding.

"How did you get the news, my son?"

"I received a letter."

"My son, when trouble knocks at your door and you ask him not to come in because you have no more stools, he will say you should not worry because he has his own stool. My friend just died."

"What actually happened?"

"No one can really tell."

"Was my uncle there before he died?"

"Yes, Doctor Nkwain was there. He knows all the tricks of the whiteman's medicine, but the man who is to inherit the widow is not likely to provide medicine to cure the sick husband. I entered his lorry once to Bamenda. He asked me himself to pay the fare. From that day I knew that he likes money more than people though he is always smiling."

"Welcome, my son," said Kuma's mother-in-law just coming in, and went on without stopping. "you got the news, my son, oh, death is a terrible stranger! Every day we cook for him, but he does not come to eat; when we have nothing in the house, that is when he comes. I never thought..."

"Well," interrupted her husband, "bring him something to eat. He intends to continue his journey."

"But he cannot go in this storm."

That night at Njinikom, when the hail-storm was fiercest, Nkwain said to Kuma's mother:

"Tomorrow is the last day of the celebration, I want you to leave this compound tonight."

"No. Not until my son comes!"

"You must go away, you witch. You killed my brother."
 "Yeh, yeh!" shouted the people in the room except Kuma's aunt.
 "But it's raining hard," she complained.
 "Go witch! witch!"

She tried to resist but she was pushed out and her sister followed. Both were weeping.

"Witch! Witch!" went the cry as it was gladly taken up by the villagers who believed that witches travelled in the storm to destroy peoples' things. It was a long way to her sister's compound so they knocked at several doors for shelter. Each time the door was opened, but in seeing two dark, wet figures in rags, the person quickly shut it, and the shout of witch filled the air. So they stumbled and fumbled in the darkness through narrow, muddy foot paths, and before they came under shelter they were wet to the bone. Kuma's mother sat by the fire. Her eyes dimmed and she never spoke again. Her sister was restless.

The next day Kuma started from Belo for his late father's compound at Njinkom. It was already crowded by the villagers for the late celebration. The sun shone brightly and it was remarkably hot. Foofoo and palm wine were seen all over the compound. Dances were being performed one after the other. Just as Kuma arrived at the compound, the Njeng dance was on and the loud hoarse voice of the leader could be heard followed by a deafening chorus:

They follow me there;
 My troubles are many; my joys are few!
 'Ah my troubles!
 I trust people or trust them not
 While on the road or in my hut'
 They follow me there
 My troubles are many; my joys are few!
 Eh my troubles!
 Like a bird in its nest
 -A rat in its hole at rest'
 They follow me there;
 My sorrows are many; my joys are few!

So he went on, recounting misfortune after misfortune. The drummer on the long drum was beating a syncopated rhythm. His eyes were shut. His lips were firmly closed, and his body was streaming with sweat. The dancers executed intricate steps while those looking on gazed with unflagging admiration. Everyone was happy. It seemed more like a cultural festival. The Njinkom jem juu dancers were already waiting to perform. They waved their horse tails in great impatience. Their various masks frightened little children and caught the admiration of the adult eye. The Njeng was moving out as the xylophone was being tuned.

Nkwaïn sat in his inherited home. He drank palm wine smiling all the time; thinking of profit and loss.

On entering the compound, Kuma was told that his mother was lying very sick at his aunt's. He would have entered his room but it was locked.

"Where is my key?" Kuma asked his uncle.
 "Which key? Have you any room here?" Nkwaïn asked angrily.
 "What?" Kuma exclaimed. His eyes were red, and he came close to his uncle.
 There was silence in the room.
 "I say you have no room in my compound. Follow your mother."
 "What about my own things in the room?"

"They are no longer yours. Don't you know our customs? Everything in this compound now belongs to me," Nkwaïn stressed. Kuma felt hopeless. He stood there looking at his uncle.

A woman in the room started weeping. Nkwaïn was not moved. When a man who knows no sorrow hears weeping, he thinks it is a song.

"So you wanted my father to die? Or maybe you killed him yourself? Yes, you killed my father! you've nearly killed my mother. You have confiscated my own property!"

Nkwaïn was alarmed at last, but before he could stand up blows rained on him. Kuma was furious. Several people were on him, but he struggled free and seized a sharp cutlass which he swung with his eyes closed. In a minute the room was empty. Out in the yard there was confusion; people running into the house ran into those that were running out. In the stampede people stumbled over the xylophone and drums but lost no time in standing up.

Kuma was out in the yard twinging his cutlass almost blindly. Those that came too near went off bleeding. Kuma spied his uncle at a distance and started after him. Nkwaïn increased his speed. His large stomach went far ahead of him, but his buttocks remained sluggishly behind.

"Hold him! catch him!" Nkwaïn yelled
 "Catch him! Hold him," Kuma cried from behind.
 "That boy is damned!" said an old man looking on.
 "How can a boy chase out the rightful heir of his father?"
 "This has never happened before," said another. "You cannot fight a people."

"He will not live," concluded a third. Kuma was closing on his uncle when someone knocked him down from behind. His weapon was seized and he wept as he was being led back in custody to the compound.

There was a fresh out cry in the compound as Kuma entered. His mother had just died. Kuma sank to the ground. His blood ran cold. He saw misfortune settling on him like flies on a dead dog. The world was against him. What had he done to the world? And what was the world? To him it was his father and mother. But whatever the world was, he was sure he could never, never succeed in it. With his father dead, his mother dead, he completely lost the appetite to live.

The corpse had to be brought to the compound before burial, so he waited. It arrived. Kuma saw his own mother lying dressed in the coffin which was soon closed and carried off. He remained silent. People thought him very brave, for he did not cry like a woman. After some time Kuma felt himself beginning to breathe. He stood up quietly as if to follow the procession but went behind the house into the coffee farm.

Nkwaïn sat in chains between two policemen. After the debacle he had become restless, saying to the men that crowded around him, "They say that I killed my brother; that I gave him a bad injection and he died."

"Who are saying such things?"
 "People!" Nkwaïn replied.
 Two policemen who had come from Bamenda to attend the market came along.
 "What's the matter?" asked one of them.
 "People are saying that I killed my brother; that I gave him a bad injection and he died!"
 "Who are they? Name one of them."
 "People, many people!" said Nkwaïn.
 He was led to his own compound and a little search revealed everything.

"You're finished this time," said one of the policemen triumphantly as he took out the bag containing Nkwaïn's syringe. It had been there since it was last used on his brother. A large quantity of prohibited drugs were also found. Nkwaïn offered a sum of £30 which the policemen accepted but asked him to sign a certain document before he could be set free.

"Yes, sir, Constable," Nkwain said hurriedly signing.

"Have you read it?"

"Yes, Constable, sir."

The policemen read the signed paper:

"I, the undersigned, own that I gave my brother an injection on the eleventh of July 1951 and he died same day. Some drugs were found in..."

"Sir, Constable! Oga, Constable, Sir, I did not read..." interrupted Nkwain, while he tried to resist, the two uniformed men handcuffed him.

"Just take £ 200," Nkwain offered in vain. "Just let me go and bury my late brother's wife," he pleaded. No answer. So he sat there in chains, having signed his own condemnation.

The burial of Kuma's mother was over, but Kuma was not seen. Until then no one had thought of him again.

"Where is Kuma? people asked here and there. Nowhere. His friends from the market square ran back hurriedly to report his victory over his uncle.

"Where is Kuma?"; they asked in chorus. He was nowhere to be found. The sound of the 'talking drum' was heard coming from the village head's compound. Everyone listened to its loud informing notes:

"Missing! missing! A man missing! Look for him! In the farms, in the bush, in the valleys, on the hills; search for him!"

The men brushed the hillsides armed with clubs; the women, the maize farms; the children, the coffee farms. But they did not have to go far. Just behind his father's house, in the coffee farm, Kuma was seen dangling at the end of a rope, hanging down from a kola nut tree. The men came trooping home as the notes of the talking drum once more filled the air.

"Found dead! Man found dead!"

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