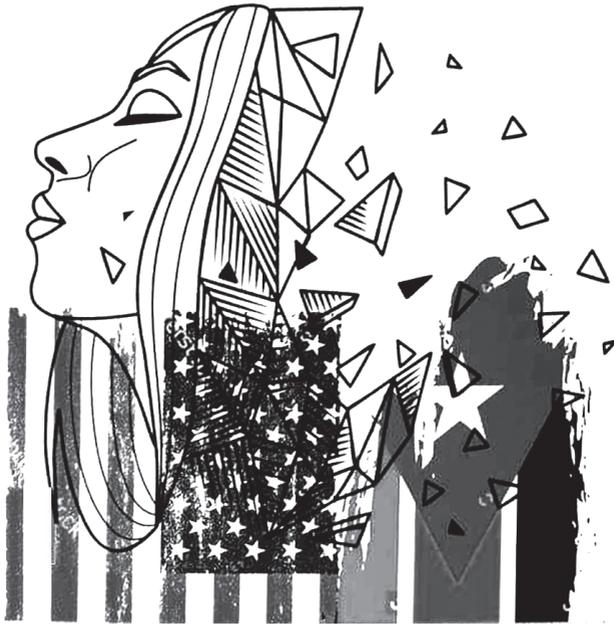


Weirial Baluang

AMERICA DESTROYED ME

A story of Love, Expectation and Betrayal



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Disclaimer

The characters, events and locales in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

DEDICATION

For those innocent hearts that have deliberately been broken by
love

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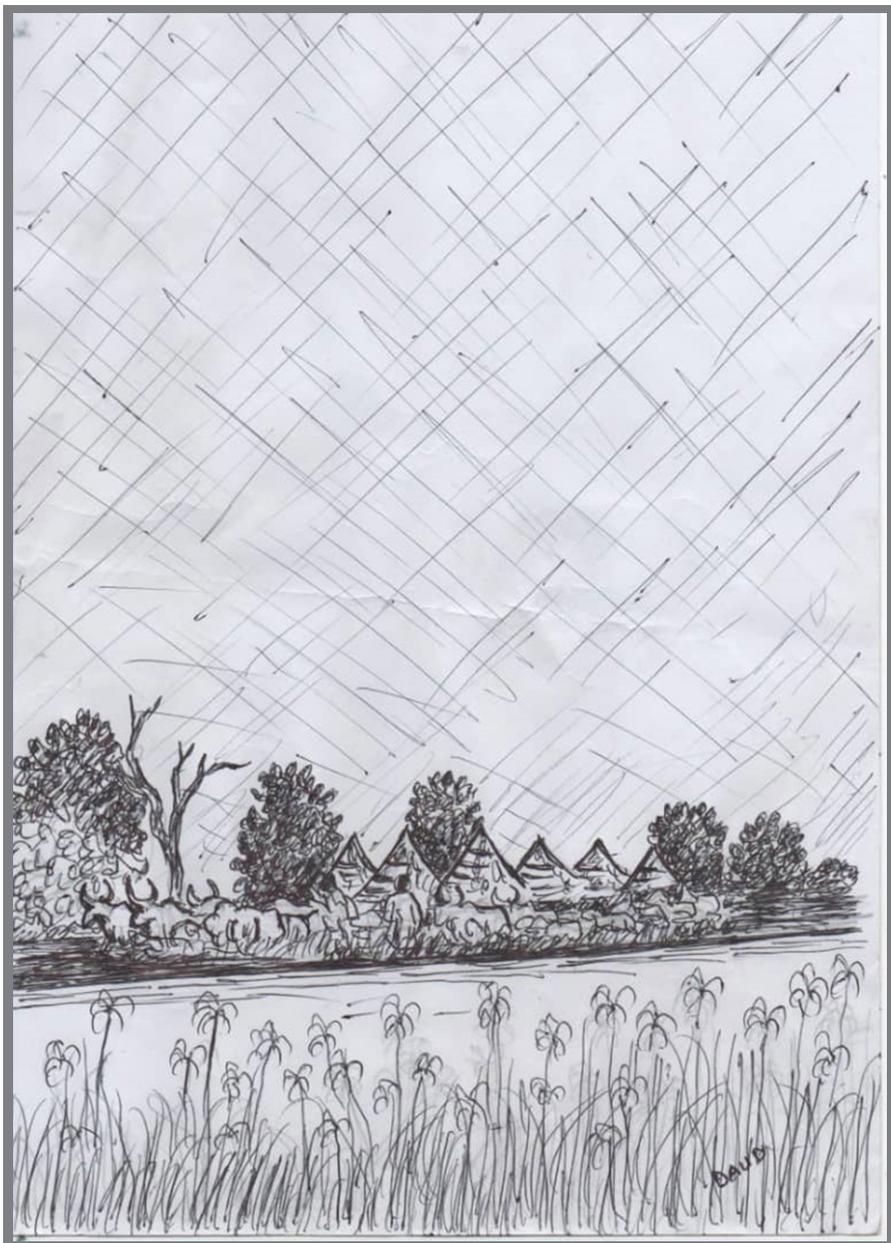
PROLOGUE

Heaven Village

AT THE FAR END OF THE HORN OF AFRICA there lived the people of Heaven. They lived in a village of many huts which were built close together. These grass huts were connected in a line by trails running through the forests along the River Nile. The people lived very much apart from mainstream society, and were closer to wild nature than civilisation. They only interacted with a very small circle of in-laws and relations from different villages with whom they shared the harmony of nature. For thousands of years, these people fished and hunted around the River Nile. The children, through their parents or grandparents, knew almost all the names of the fishes, animals and birds in the land. But they knew little about the outside world. They thought they were the only humans in the whole world as they knew nothing but the animals, fishes and birds in their immediate environment and the wider surroundings.

These people lived in close proximity to the equator for thousands of years. They married only from among themselves for many reasons. They did not want to mix their colour with that of their neighbours, who were of a light-brownish to reddish complexion; and they did not want to lose their culture, bravery and towering height. They were deeply in love with their dark

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PROLOGUE

skin tone and their physical appearance. Every man purposely married a dark-skinned woman, hoping that their children and children's children would carry forward their skin colour and body shape down to the umpteenth generation.

Eventually the people of Heaven, considered to be among the bravest communities in the land, met other people. But, unlike these other communities, the people of Heaven continued to know little about the outside world. This sweet ignorance only lasted until they came to know about America.

America seemed to the people of Heaven as the only land that represented all the available opportunities on earth. Some imagined that it shared similarities with the Paradise that they had heard about from those who came to teach them to read the holy Bible. Perhaps they thought of it as the biblical Paradise itself. The old men, who had been in contact with the Americans some years earlier during the construction of the Heaven's Presbyterian Church, had been given an extraordinary description of America and the Americans, accompanied by excessive praise of the country and the people. The young ones heard their elders speak about America and were impressed. They now wished to see that great part of the world so emotionally described by their mentors, the parents.

“Merkem,” said one of the elders, “is a great land.” ‘Merkem’ was the way they said America.

“Yes, I heard everything does itself by itself,” added another elder.

“Correct! They say in America people enjoy life and live an everlasting life without any sorrows. There is no death or disease or suffering. Not even old age or any kind of insecurity. Their land might be near to God’s land.”

“...they die but only of old age and children bury their parents.”

“It is really the opposite of our world, where parents bury their children,” said another.

“Yes, America is the most peaceful, beautiful and glorified place you could ever imagine. It is only the pious ones that go to America. The sinners go to hell but the good people go to America.”

“Do well by everyone so that God will bless you with a ticket to America.”

“Is America like the Garden of Eden which is in the Bible?” asked yet another elder – an uncharacteristically short one.

“Ha! Ha! Every good place mentioned in the holy Bible is America,” said the fifth elder. “Remember that when you die and you had behaved well in your lifetime, you will wake up in America and become an American. But when you did bad things in your lifetime, you will go to hell. The same thing happens when you are alive. A living person who does good things easily gets a ticket to America, but those who do half-good and half-bad wait until their good deeds outweigh their bad ones so that they can go to America in their lifetime or in the afterlife. And all this depends on God’s decision.”

PROLOGUE

“So the biblical paradise has turned into America? And what if America is not a real place and has turned into something else? What if the missionaries told us lies to discipline us? What I know so far is that every human – whether black, white, brown, green or chameleon – dies.”

“I don’t think the people of America die,” opposed another elder. “They must be immortal because I have never seen a dead white man from among those who spent years with us here.”

Their debate went on for some time, with some disputing the assertion of the man who said that the white men were immortal, unlike black people.

“They also say almost everyone has a cell phone in America,” said the first speaker.

“Including kids?”

“Ha! This man is talking about kids when even cows are given cell phones.”

“Can my bull own a cell phone now?”

“Yes, if it is an American bull.”

There was laughter after laughter as every old man sipped his wine.

“The bad part of this phone is that the near will be far and forgotten whereas the far will be near and loved.”

“How can the near be far and forgotten?”

“Yes, they say it takes a family away from one’s sight and thought. You may live in the same hut with your family and share food together but there is always a gap. No communication, no debate as if you are strangers to each other. The saddest part isn’t about being forgotten but it is that they don’t even know if one is sick or having problems because everyone is too busy with their cell phones.”

“This is very sad for sure. But the God of our ancestors will prevent the phone from coming to our land.”

“True, but if it reaches here no one will relate to his children anymore. They will love their cell phones more than us.”

“Yes, the proverb of our forefathers is true when they said, ‘Anything artificial has a greater effect than natural.’ What one has adapted or learnt has a far greater effect than something natural. The children would for sure get attached to their cell phones and treat them better than us, their real parents.”

Down the long road to the people of the Heaven’s main town was a UN mission camp. At the outskirts of the town there was the village’s only borehole that could be seen from the UN base. In the small village of Heaven there was the village’s most beautiful girl. She was admired by all, including members of her church. Goamar was her name. She was tall and dark. Her teeth were milk-white. The upper front teeth had a gap that could be seen from far away whenever she opened her mouth. Her lower teeth were removed in accordance with the requirements of her culture. Anybody whose lower teeth weren’t removed was teased and considered to dine with dogs and other animals. The removal of the lower teeth was intended to distinguish humans from animals.

PROLOGUE

Goamar was a humble girl. Her behaviour was said to be very rare in the land. Almost all the youth of the land scrambled with one another in an attempt to win her heart. But she never paid attention to any of the youth. Many fought over her with or without her knowledge. She was the most difficult case as no one was able to persuade her. The youth at first just wanted to have love relations with her, but then they shifted their focus to marriage requests when they failed. Both young and wealthy older people from faraway lands also wanted her hand in marriage but she would not accept them. Many handsome young men and those who were very talented in convincing girls tried and tried but to no avail.

To those she rejected, Goamar looked unorthodox for breaking the natural and social norms by deciding to care for nothing but her happiness alone without a partner.

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Chapter One

The Accidental Love

BY FATE OR COINCIDENCE, William and Goamar met one rainy day. They did not know that they would become lovers. They did not know that as a result they would be the reason for each other's death.

Goamar and William got to know each other when they were very young, but as they grew older they were separated. They had known each other by other names, as Goamar was the most admired girl in the village and William was one of the tallest young men in the village.

On the day they met, Goamar was in the bush collecting firewood and William was there to bring home his cattle when the rain poured down. William saw this beautiful girl and because the rain was very heavy he suggested a place where they could take shelter until the rain had stopped. It was underneath a big tree with many birds in it. Different kinds of birds were singing

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as the rain poured down. The two talked to each other with the language of the heart showing through their eyes because ordinary words could be meaningless in a place like that. William couldn't believe his luck. He had a feeling that he was in another world – a world where he was the only man living and Goamar was the only girl. The two gazed at each other for a few minutes and smiled while hugging each other. When William looked into Goamar's eyes, they confirmed that her love for him was true.

They had now become closer to each other than ever before. The two were fond of rain in an emotional way and each was affected by it because it brought back to them priceless and golden childhood memories. When they were very young they had played and sung songs about rain together. They would bathe in shallow streams so as not to drown, and after finishing their bath, they would stand together and look at the beautiful dark-grey sky. That was ten or so years ago. But now with this rain they became more introspective and thought of the good old days when their parents never separated them whether they were playing, chatting or bathing together. William had previously underrated himself, thinking that Goamar could never be his. But now he saw that he had found what he had been wishing for.

“I never thought I would meet you again in my life, my dear Goamar,” William said finally, after the finer words had become lost in his mind. She smiled and hugged him again. The rain had poured down for almost two hours now. However, it felt like was only two minutes to them.

“I thought I was the only one who was feeling our love, my dear William,” Goamar said at last.

The lovers, after that delightful moment, now parted ways, and each went back home. William could not believe the amount of love that Goamar had shown for him.

After the downpour, the night was freezing-cold, William found he could not sleep. He happily danced the traditional dance for the whole night as if he had no bones. He thought about and felt Goamar the whole night in his heart.

From that moment, William started to obey and respect anybody that he believed to be a relative of Goamar and her family. He also obeyed anything that belonged to his in-laws – the chickens, cats, trees, dogs, cattle, firewood and anything that was in Goamar’s area –, calling them in-laws. He had a strong certainty that the two of them would be together forever. The following morning, William started to tell everyone in the land about their young love. Most of his friends couldn’t believe him at first. It was not until they saw the love between the two young people with their own eyes.

Goamar’s love for William had changed him. William became the nicest guy in the land. She had taught him to love everything alive. He became a more caring young man than ever before. He had in the past not helped his old father cultivate the garden but now he was the one doing everything. Such was the power of love. William had also stopped drinking hot milk in the morning. When he was asked why, to everyone’s surprise he replied that Goamar was in his heart and he didn’t want to have her burnt by anything hot. Many youth became jealous of the duo’s love.

There were two friends who judged and criticised people when together. However, when they were not together, they turned against each other, judging and criticising each other viciously. One day these two good and bad friends were busy in the jungle criticising William and Goamar, not knowing that the two lovers were right behind them and within earshot of what they were saying. These two men had never been good friends in the past but they were united by their strong anger about the love between William and Goamar. It was such an awkward moment that all the four became speechless.

Still, William's love for Goamar grew hour by hour, day by day and night by night. Everyone, including the two lovers, thought that their love would never fade away.

Soon after this incident in the jungle a man came from America and asked for the hand of one of Goamar's village-mates. Goamar was mesmerized by the stories of America that the man told. It was then that her love for William began to dissipate. She chose the unseen materialistic possessions and social standing that she believed would come with migrating to America over him. Goamar not only wished to be married to someone who came from America. She began to wish to go to America with or without a husband because America became the centre of her dreams.

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Chapter Two

A man from America

MANY STORIES WERE TOLD of a few men who came all the way from America just to marry in their villages. There were many disagreements and fights between families over whose daughters were to be married and who's were not to. There was a middle-aged man who came from America to visit his family in a village near Heaven. That man who had arrived recently was given a royal welcome by everyone, including people from far-away villages. Heaven village took part, too, in welcoming him. Some of the locals simply wanted to see how a man from America looked. The village girls and boys, almost all of them, were there.

To their surprise, they found that the man's nose looked the same as the village people's noses. Before they saw him, some had expected his nose to look American or English – thin and long, with a high, arching bridge. Absolutely no change had taken place in his appearance. The only exception was that he wore loose trousers. This man told them many stories about life in

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America. He told joke after joke and people laughed at his jokes heartily. Finally, he told them about what he had experienced when he first set foot on American soil. It was a story about him and two friends whom he had left behind in America.

It was some years before the three of them left the village for a refugee camp – Panyindu – in Ethiopia. While in Panyindu refugee camp, they enrolled in a school and learnt a little English. Soon after, they were surprised that their applications to be resettled in the United States of America had succeeded.

“Merkem,” said Gai, “is our destination now.”

“Yes, we are changed men,” added Deng, the storyteller.

“Very true, we have made it in life,” added Gatluak.

These three friends became more than happy that their dream and wish to go to America had come true. A group of young people who worked for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) had visited the Panyindu refugee camp a couple of years before and the three friends had been among the few selected for interview. They were interviewed through the help of the camp chairman who translated what they said. Each of them was interviewed to determine their suitability to go to the United States. The three of them went through rigorous procedure to ensure that none of them had been exposed to a public health risk such as active polio or TB, among other diseases. There were some other people at the interview but it was only the three of them from their camp’s block whose names were shortlisted for relocation to the US.

They had several times dreamt of this. Their flight would be after three days. They invited over their friends and neighbours in the camp to a farewell gathering. Many old men gave them advice after advice. They were told to behave well in the white man's land and never to bring home a white man's woman. Dollars and clothes were booked and begged before the young men could even set foot or start work in America. Their friends who didn't give advice in public for fear of the many eyes started to tease them when the gathering was over. They were teased for failing to look American, smile American, walk American and breathe American even after they knew without a doubt that they had been given the green light to go to the great nation.

"You must also learn to talk with your nose," said one of the friends, "so that it will not be known that you are from among us."

"Do you think I am going there to deny my identity and who I am?" asked Gai.

"Would you not be happy if you were born American?" asked another friend. "Do not be proud of nothing. What is in this land to be proud of if the elderly and even children are being stabbed daily? We shouldn't pretend that everything is okay when everything isn't okay."

"There is nothing better than home!"

"Then cancel your flight if you really mean your statement. If I were you I would just learn the American walk and the way they sleep from now on instead of making unnecessary remarks about this hell that we call home."

They now dropped that heated topic and talked about the America of their imaginations.

“So you will soon after reaching America give a full recess to your hands and legs that have suffered in collecting firewood and running away from gunmen,” said another one.

“How are hands and legs given a rest?” asked Deng, who was busy giving away his torn clothes and shoes to some friends.

“Because aeroplanes are available to take you everywhere you like.”

“Yes,” confirmed another one, “they say people don’t go to bathrooms and other rooms within the same compound on foot.”

“They don’t walk to bathrooms on foot? Do they crawl like babies?” asked Gatluak.

“No, they use aeroplanes.”

“Aeroplanes! Aeroplanes are boarded even inside the compound?” asked Gai.

“Yes.”

“How did you know?”

“Gai, why do you hate my mouth? Why have you been asking me tough questions? Is it because you are going to America?”

“Gai and Par, please stop the shooting words,” Deng advised the two.

That Sunday morning the flight to the USA was going to leave after it had landed for a short time. It had brought relief items for the refugees. The three friends, among many other lucky passengers, boarded the plane for the first time in their lives. Nobody could believe that they were now going to America. Gai was afraid that the journey might turn out not be real. He told the other two that he had always had dreams related to their going and then ending up in sorrow after he woke up either in the middle of the dream or in the morning. He also feared it might be an imaginary flight.

“Let us hope that it is not just a dream,” said Gai.

“It can never be just a dream,” opposed Deng.

“Please wake up alone later if it turns to be just a dream,” said Gatluak. “Leave me and Deng to go to America.”

The plane soon took off. It flew farther and farther up into the sky. Most of the first-time fliers now set with wide-open eyes and suffered a stomach-ache. Some vomited several times and some had diarrhoea. There was an old man who had to be comforted when the plane ran into turbulence due to the towering cumulus clouds. The man thought the plane was going to crash. He cried out and wished he had not boarded the plane. “God! Why have you brought me here to die in the sky like a bird?” he said, several times. The old man suggested that the plane should be landed so that he could die and be buried in the land and not die in the sky like a bird.

“Please tell the pilot,” he continued “and his colleagues to make the plane land on earth so that I can die on the land. You will then fly back and die in this sky if you wish.”

Many of the passengers tried to open the emergency doors to jump out but all in vain. On one or two occasions a passenger threatened one of the cabin crew to stop the aeroplane so that he could go and urinate outside but was told that the aeroplane could not be opened mid-air. When he was shown the inner toilet, he slapped the crew member and said that he was not a child to urinate inside a house.

“The main door cannot be opened mid-air,” advised an old passenger, “because more air will come in and we will all die.”

“Die of air? How can a man die of air?” he asked angrily.

“There is no manhood in the sky, young man.”

“If your manhood is gone mine isn’t gone,” he retorted.

The old man’s advice was now twisted by the supporters of the first one, who wanted the aeroplane be opened. They now removed their seat belts and challenged the man and his supporters to a fight. They ordered a crew member to allow them to go and fight outside. But this time the crew members simply ignored them.

After the long and boring journey, they finally arrived at an American airport. They were overjoyed to see the great land through the portholes.

They were told to get down slowly through the plug door but the first person to get down did not follow the steps of the plug door that could lead him down. Instead, he jumped down to the ground. He was followed by everyone in a hurry. One jumped down after the other. The entire cabin crew tried to convince them to use the plug door but to no avail.

Upon their arrival in the airport, the refugees were handed to Customs and Border Patrol, who interviewed them in order to verify the accuracy of their information and check for any new details that might result in the refugee being denied final admission into the US. The officer started interviewing the oldest one of all.

“Hello,” he greeted, “welcome to the United States of America.”

“Yes,” the old man said, as his head nodded in approval.

“Which country are you from?”

“Yes.”

“Sorry, I meant your country.”

“Yes, yes!”

“I am from the United States and you?”

“Yes, yes! Ha-ha...”

The officer let him go out with his document not verified because he couldn't speak any English at all. The old man only knew the word 'yes'.

“Hello, young man,” said the officer to the second refugee, “where are you from?”

“Panyindu-you-me-Thudan,” he said and this was written down. He looked at everyone proudly in order to show them that his speech was written down.

“Very good, you can speak English,” said the officer. “Your name?”

“Gai,” he said, and this, too, was written down.

“Tell me your surname, please.”

“A door,”

“What?”

“A goat.”

“What are you talking about?”

“A pencil, a girl, a cow, a boy, a blackboard, a tree, some milk...” he repeated all the words his teacher had taught them in Panyindu.

“Your father because...” the officer said, but before he could complete his question Gai interrupted him upon hearing the word ‘because’.

“Bikos who?” he asked angrily in his mother tongue.

“I need your father’s name because it is needed in the form.”

“Gai, look at him! He has repeatedly insulted you,” said Gatluak.

Gai got up and slapped the officer for repeating the word ‘because’ several times. The refugees were now in trouble after Gai had slapped the officer. The word ‘because’ in their language meant ‘farting’. Gai and his friends felt that they had been accused of farting on American soil. But luckily enough, the slapped officer was a cooperative young American man. He forgave them after coming to learn that the refugees came from

a nation traumatised by wars. After the fine-tooth vetting, the group was handed over to the Red Cross, who took them to some places to stay there temporarily.

Soon everyone was taken to their temporary homes. The three friends were put up together in a house in the middle of the city. They never were able to meet their fellow Africans who came with them from Africa again.

While staying in an isolated house for some days because they couldn't speak English, they became terribly bored. Food and water were given to them every now and then by a brown-skinned African man who worked for the owner of the house where they were living.

"Now that we are in America," declared Deng, "it will not be a good place for us if we don't learn English."

"It is true," said Gai, "but how should we learn English?"

"Gai has spoken out my mind. How should we learn it?" said Gatluak.

"Well," said Deng, "I think we should go around so that we can hear and learn when people talk."

The three friends agreed to Deng's suggestion. They decided that it was not wise for all of them to go out at once. They drew up a timetable for them to go out to learn. It was first Deng who left early in the morning. He simply followed the long road. Fortunately, he passed through a narrow road that easily took him to the main road and found an old woman calling for a taxi. When the taxi driver asked her how many they were, she said they were about three.

“We are about three,” was the old woman’s answer. Deng crammed that and ran back home singing it so that it could not escape his mind. When he arrived home, he told his friends about the English he had newly acquired. The rest became jealous when he practised his English the whole night. Gatluak went out the next day and followed the same route that Deng had used.

When Gatluak reached a playground where American children were playing, he found two of them – one tall and the other short – fighting. An old man who was passing by came over to separate the fighters and asked them why they were fighting.

“He took two dollars from me yesterday and that is why we are fighting,” the tall one answered.

“He is lying. I am fighting this fool because of my money that he took,” the short one answered. Gatluak automatically ignored the tall boy’s response, perhaps because it was very difficult for him to cram it. He instead crammed some fragments of the short boy’s response: “...Because of money.”

He ran back home and started to repeat what he had incessantly. Gai almost ran away at night after hearing the two friends speaking and repeating words in English. The next morning it was Gai’s turn to go out. He heard many sentences but when he returned home, he realised that he had forgotten them. He nearly lost hope. However, he was encouraged by the rest not to give up.

The next morning, he found an old man calling for a taxi, saying, “Come and take us away quickly, please...” These words didn’t escape his mind again, so the three of them started

to practise their English words, but they didn't know what they meant. They practised and practised – every day and every night until they slept.

One day they decided to walk about town as home had become so boring to them. They were also happy to have the opportunity to try out their English in case they were approached by anyone on the way.

They woke up at dawn, washed their faces and set out of their home for an unknown destination. They did it for the sake of getting to know their immediate surroundings. When they were about to reach the main road, they found a dead person lying on the ground.

Bringing with them the rural Heaven attitude of trying to discover what has killed anybody found dead, they glared at the dead body for some time in an effort to find out what was behind the man's death. They were still at it when a police car with loudly wailing sirens arrived. The occupants of the car got out and surrounded the three young men. The captain proceeded to ask them some questions regarding the dead.

“Who killed the man?” was the captain's first question.

They were stunned by the question. They didn't know how to respond, so they murmured in their mother tongue. After a serious consultation about who to talk first, trio allowed Deng to speak first. This was because he was the first to learn English. Perhaps his English would make sense or would save them from the angry police captain and his men.

“Yes, sir, we are three,” was Deng’s answer, which the captain wrote down. After giving the answer, he strutted around with pride. They now consulted one another regarding who should talk next if there was going to be another question. They finally agreed that, of the remaining two, whoever had come to English first would speak next. Gatluak, according to their hierarchy, was going to be the second speaker in case they were asked another question.

“Why did you kill the man?” was the captain’s second question.

“Because of money,” he said loudly and proudly. He soon walked away in pride to join Deng where he was seated. The last question would be for Gai, as he was the only one left.

“What can we do with you now?” was the captain’s third question.

“Take us away quickly,” Gai said proudly.

Soon the captain waved to his men and the three boys were arrested and handcuffed and taken to jail. While in jail they started to fight each other. Each was blaming the other for getting them into jail.

An African who knew their language was brought to the court to help with translating their words. It was through that man that the court understood their story and set them free on the premise that they were naïve and innocent.

Upon their release from jail, the young men decided that one of them should go and ask a certain fisherman whether his fish were for sale or not. Gai, who pretended to know more

English than the rest, approached the fisherman and said: “You selfish?” The fisherman, knowing that it was an insult, answered the question with a ‘no’.

“You selfish?” Gai repeated.

“No, I am not!” screamed the fisherman angrily.

“You! You!” Gai called out angrily. “You selfish.”

The fisherman, angered by the young man’s bad behaviour, slapped him hard. Everyone was surprised why a fisherman would slap a customer. Upon returning to the other two who were shocked by the slap, Gai just smiled.

“Why would you just smile when you have been slapped?” the two asked him together. “Tell us why the white man has slapped you.”

“You won’t believe it when I tell you,” he replied with a smile.

“Tell us,” the two demanded in unison.

“Well,” he said, “the white man slapped me as a warning because he believes a good English speaker like me cannot walk with cows.”

“Is that so?” asked Deng.

“It doesn’t make sense because you don’t walk with cows,” said Gatluak.

“So it is us you and your white man called cows?” asked Deng angrily. A fight immediately broke out among the three friends.

Now these incidents happened a long time ago, twenty years or so years ago.

The young man who came from America was now the village's celebrity. Everyone wanted to be like him. They started copying his lifestyle, calling it the American lifestyle. The young man was given to snoring, farting and coughing at night. Almost everyone who shared the same house with him would imitate him. William was among those who copied the young man's lifestyle right away. The young man would be surrounded at night when he was telling stories about the American way of life. Many of his listeners would laugh out of loyalty before he had even said what he was going to say. Many girls, including Goamar, had a secret crush on the man who came from America but the man was not aware of this. How could he know when Goamar had no chance to go with him to his village? Goamar wished she could get married to him; and that was perhaps one of the reasons why she had turned down William's marriage request.

It was said that Goamar's uncle had died unmarried because of pride resulting from his handsomeness and bravery in the past. The uncle wanted to be dated and married by a girl who could pay a dowry to his family the same way men did to a girl's family. Goamar's uncle, Thontuort, was a tall, dark and smooth-skinned young man who looked fearless and strong. He had the fine manners of a gentleman. His handsomeness was the subject of much of the gossip by girls and women in the village. His bravery, on the other hand, was the subject of many conversations by youth and men in the community and even beyond. Handsomeness and bravery were the only characteristics

for which a man was valued and respected by both genders in the land. Because Thontuort was respected by all in his community, he became too proud of himself and declared that he was the Lord of the village.

Handsome or beauty in the land before the coming of the Europeans and the Arabs was determined by how well the person was built and how dark and smooth-skinned the person was. Those with brown skin were not given any attention. Neither were the cowards who never fought in a serious war in defence of the village. It was said that whoever saw Thontuort's technique as he fought an enemy would avow that he would first fart in front of the person he was preparing to fight. His guts were very deadly. Almost all those he approached for a fight, either with spears or for a hand-fight, would fall and faint before his spear or hand could reach them. Thontuort very much trusted his handsomeness and had great pride in his bravery. He decided to take his time as he waited for the right girl to come. He thought that whichever girl it was would propose to him and pay dowry to his family in broad daylight. He was truly hopeful that this day would come. Unfortunately, no such girl had come to him.

Many times, he disappointed those girls who gave up their female egos to ask him for marriage but who disagreed with him on his condition that they pay dowry to his family. But after fifteen years or so, when the village girls that he had given the tough condition for marriage had had grown-up daughters, he decided to ask some of them for marriage. Their mothers would disagree with their daughters with tears in their eyes due to the humiliations that he had subjected them to when they were still girls.

Soon Thontuort realised that height, bravery and dark skin were no longer considered very desirable qualities, especially after the villagers started interacting with the brown-skinned Arabs and the white-skinned Americans. He also realised that he no longer enjoyed the respect of the villagers. He acknowledged that he was almost fifty years of age and could no longer pretend to be a youth. Given the mass rejection in his land and in other lands that had heard of him, Thontuort went and hanged himself.

Goamar might have inherited that pride from her uncle, who had interminably waited for a girl to marry him, until he realised his mistake and caused mighty death to take him away unmarried.

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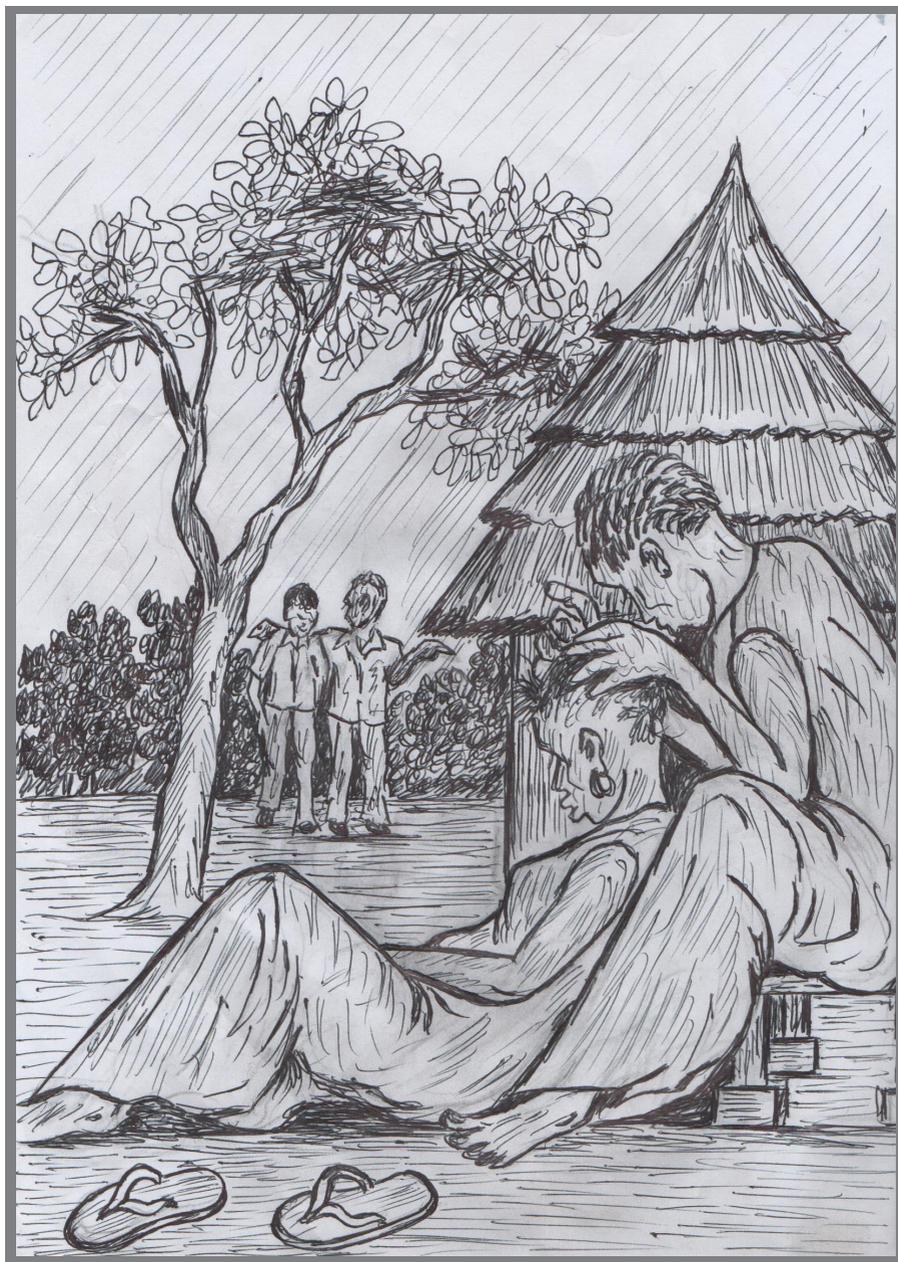
Chapter **Three**

— Goamar's love for America —

GOAMAR LOVED AMERICA more than she loved herself. The more she saw aeroplanes sailing in the sky over their village, the more she wanted to go to America. But how would she reach America? She still had the hope that one day a man, just any man, would take her to America, or that a miracle would take her there. She constantly prayed that she would meet a man who would snatch her off the land so that she could help her poor family. America, according to the wonderful stories she had heard from many people, was the supernatural world of contentment, plenty and freedom from strife.

They said that in America one could just call the name of a food he wanted and it would appear. Food cooked and prepared itself in America unlike Africa, she thought. Goamar perhaps got tired of the village life where wars and famine, which affected all corners of the land, were the norm. She was even more motivated when someone told her that there was a water tap in

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every house in America and that no one walked long distances to fetch water in a water-can. She was so tired of the everyday trip to fetch water from the river, which was so far away from their village.

William, who couldn't do anything without picturing Goamar in his mind, became weaker and sicker with love. In fact, it was time for him to get married as he was already twenty-five years old and his father had already given him the family's permission to marry. This permission was given to a young man who had been initiated into adulthood.

"You will have a partner soon when the harvest is over," declared William's father proudly. The old man was, in fact, very proud to have a son. But what he didn't know was the sorrow inside the young man's heart. Whom would he marry?

"I wish she loved me," William thought, "so that I could tell my father about her. But she doesn't."

Father and son parted after their long conversation concerning the son's marriage. The son became sicker from love than ever before. His heart felt like it had been chiselled out and thrown into the deepest river on earth. What could he do now? He went to share his pain with friends, who advised him to approach the girl for the last time before he could take his final decision to marry one of the many other girls in the village.

"Well," he said when he met Goamar at the riverside, "you may accuse me of being heartless for disturbing you when, in fact, you don't love me. But you should know that the person who always disturbs you is the only person who loves, respects

and trusts you and can die for you. Please listen to my appeal. And this appeal is not ordinary. It is from the bottom of my heart.”

“Do you tell me that all the appeals you have made to me were from the top of your heart?”

“No, hee-hee...”

“Anyway, make that appeal; I’m listening,” the girl said.

“It is not new, dear. It is the same feeling that has been destroying me over the years. I love you and I want your hand in marriage.”

“Thank you, but as I told you, I am not ready for marriage now, brother.” was the answer.

“If the matter is only that you are not ready for whatever reason, I can still wait for you, even if it means waiting forever.”

“It is always good to speak out,” William continued when Goamar ignored him, “because communication is key to some problems. So it is better to speak when the other person needs to understand you. And you should know that not all problems and people can be ignored. To ignore or not depends on the nature of the problem and the person...It is not always good to stay silent when a human being is interested in talking with you.”

“Wait forever? Waiting forever for whom?”

“Yes, I can wait forever because of you.”

“At your own risk...”

“I may be the wrong guy to you but I have the right character, dear Goamar.”

“How? Do you think there are no other guys for me to love?”

“You may and may not find them. But even if you were to find one, he would never love you the same way I love you, dear Goamar.”

“This is not true.”

“Well, life will prove me right or wrong, dear Goamar,” William said with a sad voice, “but what I know so far is that you are the victim and not me.”

“Nonsense!” She felt like her female ego had been provoked. “Do you think you are so handsome that I can be the victim because of losing you? You should know that better people come into someone’s life when the wrong people are gone.”

“I didn’t mean that,” William said. “I meant that you are the victim because you have rejected someone who loves you dearly but for me I am rejected by someone who doesn’t love me. So it is you who is the victim.”

The girl spat on the ground and changed her expression to show her hate and contempt for William and whatever he was saying.

“Whether we like it or not, dear Goamar, we are one,” William continued, even after he realised that the girl was uneasy being with him. “Our destiny is one and will always be one. We may live differently but our natural end will be one because we are soul mates.”

“It is always good not to compromise in love,” Goamar asserted. “I am sorry to tell you that I can never love you again, William.”

“I don’t doubt that you hate me,” William whispered, sadly. “I know more than you do that you are no longer in love with me but what I dearly aspire for is to become like your dog so that I can follow you wherever you go.”

“Thank you; but I don’t want a dog.”

“Then let me be your cat. Perhaps then I can feel at ease keeping you in my sight.”

“I neither want an animal nor do I want to be followed. I advise you to look for another partner,” she continued, “before it is too late. Love grows or fades away depending on circumstances and interactions.”

“The love that I have for you, dear Goamar,” he said, “cannot simply be turned off like this. If you think the feeling and love can easily be extinguished, as you have put it, then you weren’t in love with me in the first place.” The girl was now obliged to seek another branch of the subject because she didn’t want to hear more about the case.

William fell silent and looked straight at Goamar. She, however, didn’t look at him as she was indifferent. William collected his thoughts, gathered up courage and shook hands with her. He pretended to smile outside but was frantically weeping inside.

William walked away from the girl. When he found out that he had no place in the girl’s heart, he became numb and his poor heart felt like it had been broken into pieces.

“Gone are the days of our fore-parents,” he thought loudly, “when people really understood and valued what falling in love is. The love of the good old days was more of responsibility than of just holding hands, kissing and getting physical, with break-ups being as easy as they are today.”

William went back, feeling sad and disappointed. On his way back home, he walked absentmindedly and stumbled several times. An acacia branch tore away the slipper on one foot but he didn't feel it. It was only when he was told that he had only one slipper on after he had reached home that he realised he had lost the other one. He had, during a meal, nearly destroyed one of his eyes when he had poked it, mistaking it for his mouth.

“How can she destroy my life like that?” he thought. “I am going through these tough moments alone while she and others think that I am fine. But what I am quite sure of is that both of us must either be happy or suffer the same pain together one day. She doesn't know that one person's sorrow can affect the other in one way or another. She will be another man's wife over my dead body. Goamar is myself and I am Goamar.”

All the grains had been harvested and this was the season favoured for marriages in the village. William's father called on his son for the third time. The son came silently and sat cross-legged before him, to show respect. There was a log burning so that the two could see each other's faces clearly. The father covered himself with a blanket because the weather was very cold. But the son tolerated the cold weather for two good reasons. One was that he was young, and the other was that he was hurt.

“It has been a while since I last told you to find a life partner,” said his father without beating around the bush, “and you haven’t yet shown me who your partner will be...and you should know that late marriage destroys one’s peace of mind... Do you want me to choose for you?”

“I think I should make myself richer than I am before I marry,” said William.

“How would you become rich before you marry?” asked his father.

“I think I must cultivate more land in the next season so that I can buy more cattle and build my own family home.”

“Well, my son,” the old man said, “you are not poor as you think. To be rich isn’t determined by whatever amount the rich ones have. One is only considered to be truly rich and wealthy when one has all the things money can’t buy.”

“But everything that makes someone rich is bought with money,” William protested. “Livestock, grains and outfits, among others.”

“You are wrong. These have never been riches. To be considered a rich person is when you are healthy and peaceful and joyful and, most importantly, have a caring family. No amount of money can buy peace, health, family and joy.”

“But still dignity, love and respect are better than them,” the son said.

“Dignity, love and respect among others can be faked but family, health, peace and joy can’t be faked. You need to know the difference between physical riches and spiritual and mental

riches,” the father continued. “It is good to be rich in mind than rich in body. I repeat that late marriage destroys one’s peace of mind.”

The young man thought for a short while about how to respond. In fact, he wanted to get married but the girl he loved was Goamar and she didn’t love him. What could he do now? Should his father choose for him? Parents’ choices were always based on how hard the girl could work, carry water-cans, and so on and so forth. Beauty was not a priority to them because they always convinced their sons that ‘beauty isn’t eaten’.

“Thank you, Dad,” he said. “I think what destroys one’s peace of mind is not late marriage but the wrong marriage. I am not ready as of now since I am monitoring and observing the character of the girls so that I can choose.”

“Nonsense. Do not tell me that you have no lover in this land! Or you have so many lovers that you have difficulty in selecting one?”

William couldn’t answer his father’s two tough questions.

“Listen, my son,” the father continued after the son had failed to answer him, “I know as well as you do that I am an old man. Our elders say, ‘Whoever doesn’t have an elder must buy for himself an elder.’ We know many things concerning life though you, this generation, think you know more than us. But the truth is that no woman or girl is perfect in this world. If you avoid girls over the few mistakes you have noticed in them, then you will end up being without a partner in this world, just like one of my childhood friends who failed to marry because he

unceasingly waited for a day that didn't come. Always learn to love without conditions in order to give yourself peace of mind."

William knew who his father was talking about. It was Goamar's uncle, whose sad story of waiting in vain for the right girl to propose and pay dowry to his family was known far and wide.

One of his friends advised him to visit a medicine man to seek out a powerful love potion that could restore Goamar's love for him. He at first was very happy about the advice but he was discouraged later by his fellow Christians, who told him that herbalists had no power to bring back lost love or anything else. "These medicine people are mad," said a fellow Christian. "You can find them selling, in the hot sun, what they call 'medicine of luck' at a cheap price. Why don't they use it themselves if, in fact, it works? Or why don't their relatives use it?"

"Yes, why would someone sell such a thing? And yet there are fools who believe in them," added another. "If they think they can buy love, then why don't they own beautiful women?"

"They are congenital lairs," said Peter, who had been silent from the beginning of the conversation. "My father one day went to one of them when our cow was stolen. You cannot believe that the medicine man requested five cows for him to show my father the whereabouts of the one cow."

"It is similar to what had happened to my father," said another. "They told my father, who has only one wife, that he was being bewitched by his third wife."

William was now convinced by his Christian friends against consulting a medicine man.

A story was told that William had knocked out his best friend's tooth simply because he had caught the friend staring at Goamar's stretched out legs as she braided her friend's hair around the borehole while they waited for their turn to collect water. The two young men had at first drawn up a timetable. They had warned each other against giving her an opportunity to fix her eyes on theirs because, if she did so, she would for sure sit in a way that would not allow them to enjoy looking at her thighs and legs.

"Let us be careful," warned William. "If she discovers us, she will sit badly."

"True, she is sitting well now," added his friend. "Let us look in a cost-effective way. Let us pretend to also be busy so that she doesn't notice us."

Goamar continued braiding her friend's hair while they waited their turn in the long queue to collect water with their water-cans. The braiding continued because the girl had a big head the size of two heads put together. Perhaps that was the reason the braiding was taking such a long time.

It was William's second turn when his friend interrupted him by telling him that he had spent a few more minutes looking, contrary to their agreement. When William gave him a chance to look, he spent more minutes than the agreement allowed and forgot to pretend that he was no longer looking. Meanwhile Goamar, after noticing that someone had been looking at her

thigh, changed the way she was sitting. When that happened, William gave his friend a hard kick to the legs and a powerful punch to the mouth, which sent one of his teeth fling out.

“You have destroyed our enjoyment. Stupid!” he insulted, and added another kick.

Goamar’s family suffered a lot, and in many ways. It was said that some evil youth in the village, who were once angered after their love requests were rejected by Goamar, had once or twice mobilised their fellow rejected friends and defecated inside Goamar’s family compound at night as a punishment.

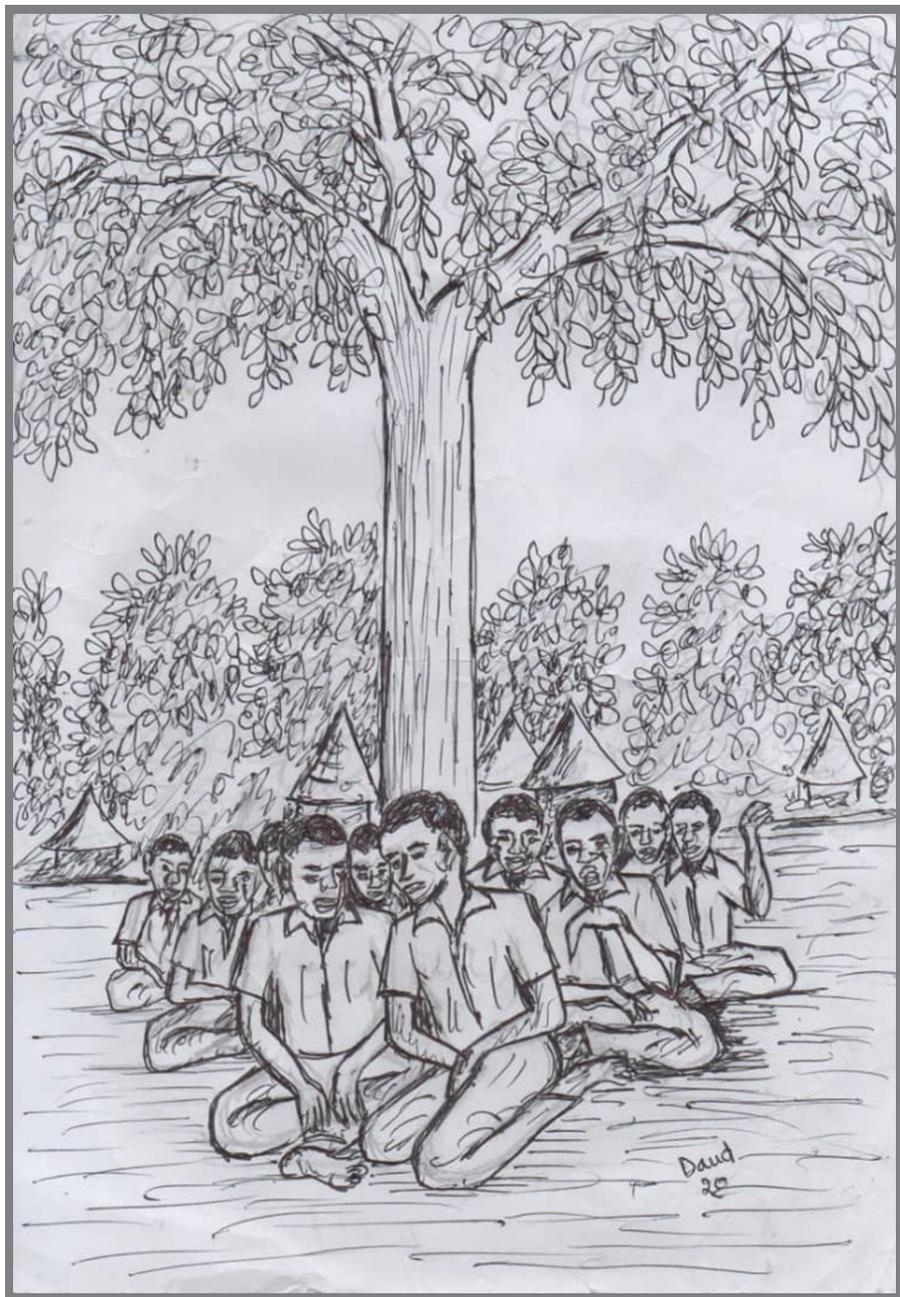
Chapter **Four**

William talks to friends

THE GREAT DESPAIR and unspeakable grief that William now experienced could not be described. His heart had been broken into a trillion pieces. He felt a great deal of pain because of Goamar. William felt a deep-seated hopelessness. He wished the girl she married was Goamar and they were in their home enjoying life together. However, his wishes were mere wishes because the woman he had married wasn't Goamar and Goamar would never be his wife.

Goamar had insinuated herself into his skeleton and every part of his body. Sometimes he would be able to forget her for an hour, and then he would remember her for a full day. Again, he would forget her for a day and he would remember her for a full month. His love for her was like a battle on a mountain, which he had to climb day and night.

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After the village youth discovered that their friend, William, was fading away because of his love for Goamar who didn't love him back, they paid him a mass visit to deal with all the issues disturbing him. Many had noticed his changed behaviour.

One day he had been walking on a footpath, when from the opposite direction a girl came rushing, looking right past him and accidentally collided with him. Angered by the collision, William said, "Why has this stool hurt me like this?"

The girl answered back simply: "Have you just said the stool has hurt you, brother? Why don't you go and defecate in the bush in order to feel at ease? You should know that God wants us to fill up what is empty and empty what is full."

William set upon her and continued to beat her badly until rescuers arrived.

There was another day when he was full of rage. He was picking his teeth after he had eaten some meat when a certain guy asked him, "William, son of my land, what have you been trying to remove from your molars?"

William angrily replied, "It is cum."

The man replied sympathetically, "I am very sorry. You are removing from your mouth a hazardous thing, cousin. But how did it reach your mouth?"

Upon hearing that witty reply, feeling affronted, William jumped on the man and pulled him down.

The youth who had come to visit William were served with wine and water. After beating around the bush discussing the happenings in the village and beyond, the youth finally disclosed the object of their visit.

“You should know,” said John, trying to convince him, “in life there is always one person that one fails to get married to or have a relationship with. These are the sad permanent and natural truths about love and life. Nobody can run away from this rule. Take heart and forget her at once because she is not meant for you. Your wife is now the only one who deserves your heart and, after all, you must know that great pain or the sweetest happiness both come from within.”

“Point of correction,” William said. “Happiness doesn’t come from within. It comes from a second or third person. One is made to be sad or happy by another person. The way you cannot make yourself sad is the same way you cannot make yourself happy.” He would have spoken some more had he not been counselled by Samuel to abide by the cultural requirement to respect advice-givers.

“William,” said Samuel, his best friend, who was older than him, “remember we have not come here to listen to your viewpoints. We have come here to comfort you and you should keep your dignity in accordance with the culture... Well, it is good to be given this chance,” Samuel continued when William kept silent. “William, son of my father, I know very well that being rejected hurts. But you should know very well that you cannot force Goamar to love you back. What you must do is to force yourself to stop loving her. You should not even blame her for rejecting you because her life belongs to her as much as yours

belongs to you. You must also accept her decision because you cannot make her love you. I'm stopping here because what I have not said will be said by the other guys who will speak after me."

"Those who speak last are always the victims," said Gatkuoth jokingly, "because the good words and advice are selected and said by the first speakers. Anyhow, my advice is brief and clear. William is a fully grown-up man and should know that pain is part of life. We haven't come here to force you to forget Goamar but to advise you that you need to forget all the feelings you have for her because I am quite sure she has already forgotten all her feelings for you. Always learn to accept anything you cannot change or get. I have finished."

"Before I give my advice," said Riek, "I have a simple question to put to William. William, tell me which one is better between love and life." Riek waited but William didn't answer him. "I am waiting for your answer, William." Still William couldn't reply. Riek was asked to continue by the rest since they all knew very well that William was deeply hurt.

"Well," Riek continued, "life is better than love though there can be no good life without love. It is true that only one in a hundred relationships is eternal. In point of fact, rejection is not a big deal because you can love again. But when you die you don't get another life or maybe only that life which is talked about in churches. All in all, everyone has only one life and is entitled to make the best of it. I am done."

"To me, William wasn't rejected by Goamar but was instead set free to find the right path of his life. I have no more to say. Thank you." This was Deng's advice.

“You are even lucky, William,” said another friend. “My soulmate was taken away from me by a neighbour. Imagine that most horrible pain of seeing the dearest person in your life in the neighbourhood turned into another person’s wife!”

“You are even luckier than me by having her in your neighbourhood,” said another friend, deriving jokes out of the tension so William could feel at ease. “My beautiful neighbour who had been responsible for childbearing in my family has died. Now, I don’t know whether I can still have imaginations about the dead person or not.”

“But did your wife know that you used to have imaginations?” asked another friend.

“I don’t think so. But how could she read my thoughts?”

“So you didn’t mourn your neighbour’s wife?”

“I did and my wife quarrelled with me because I had mourned beyond the normal mourning and, besides, she thought the deceased wasn’t just a neighbour to me. My wife thought I had had an affair with her but mine was just imagination.”

“Then come and see my former lover who lives in my neighbourhood. Perhaps you can continue the childbearing with her picture in mind.”

“No, thank you,” he said, and then laughed. “We are friends. We can’t share the same woman.”

“Hee-hee – as if it is a real-life woman!”

“Yes, even if it is not a real-life woman, at least you are involved in an unseen and untouched legends’ love. What you

should always do is to see her before you go to bed with your wife.”

“See her before I go to bed?”

“Yes, so that you can imagine sleeping with her when, in fact, you are with your wife.”

“I thought I was the only one in that,” said William. It was only the second time he was speaking since the beginning of the discussion. “This scenario isn’t new to me. I have been doing it since I first brought my dear wife home.”

“You have been doing it since you first brought your dear wife home?”

“Yes, there never has been a day where I had intercourse with my wife while thinking about her. I only get to notice her presence when the game is over.”

“But the first two rounds are always by default whether with or without imaginations. However, what I know about the subject is that if the woman or girl is very attractive, you are likely to get a follow-up erection much quicker. The women should be skilled in getting our thing up and they should be romantic,” said another friend.

“But guys,” said another one, “children born out of imagination are not always good-looking.”

“Could it be because they will not resemble either their mother or the woman in the imagination?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Imagination in childbearing is a crime,” said William. “So it is always good for someone to marry the one that reaches his heart and soul.”

“But this happens because love is really a dangerous and heartless thing,” he continued. “You ignore someone who runs after you and you are ignored by someone you are running after who is also ignored by someone else. And the list can go on and on and on.”

“You have said nothing but pure fact,” said his childhood friend. “It is similar to our case when we were young. I was afraid of you and the late John was afraid of me but you were afraid of him. Think of it!”

He was comforted and felt at ease. He had come to accept that losing a very special person was part of life. Almost everyone told him about many different experiences. Some told him that they noticed his pain, sadness and tears. However, no one told him about his mistakes until a courageous young man cleared his throat and talked.

“You made a mistake, William,” he said, taking a sip of wine. “You shouldn’t have, in the first place, exposed her to the girls and boys of the village as someone that you had a crush on or a love affair with. Precious things are hidden, my friend. It is only a cheap thing that can be advertised. A true girl like her cannot be exposed even to the sun, let alone human beings because sometimes even those you once helped or who seemed good to you can be the biggest snakes in fighting a heavy war behind your back.”

“This is a sad truth, cousin,” said another one, his speech slurring as the result of the wine.

William, in fact, had a list of people whom he blamed for losing the girl. He blamed everyone and everything, including the trees and their shadows and cattle, for whatever failure they might have occasioned. The girl was truly his soul mate. Not a single night passed without him dreaming of her.

“Yes, those who once looked nice to you can be the worst snakes. But don’t forget that those who once looked like the worst snakes can be the best people to continue the journey of life with,” said another friend.

“Guys,” William said, after a long silence, “you know as well as I do that it is very difficult to stop loving someone you once truly loved. The loss of the one you shared some of the most intimate moments with cannot even be compared with the demise of a relative. Before Goamar came along and invaded my life, I was a normal person. I was neither sad nor happy. My simple life was perfect and typical. But when she showed herself to me I knew there was something that had been missing in my life. I actually felt like being illuminated by a car’s headlights in total darkness when she accepted my love request. Goamar took me to the Republic of Love without asking for a passport. She might have taken me there unwillingly. And that must be the reason why I now stayed stuck in her love unable to restore my real self after she stopped loving me. The former, single me had not been sad or happy but my life had been going on normally. The former single me who was just living a simple life without stress was by far better off than the current married me. Oh love! I hate you, hate you in this life and will hate you in my next life,

too...But even though we are not together physically, we are still together in my heart and mind.”

“Being together with her?” said another friend, feeling disappointed. “You should erase her from your mind with immediate effect because you don’t deserve each other. Just use that past pain as motivation to show true love to your dear wife and forget about Goamar, who doesn’t and will never love you. You should know that nobody is a soul mate or whatever in real life. All these are not real. They are only in our heads.” From his tearful voice everyone knew that this fellow was actually himself stuck in love with a girl that would never be his, no matter what, for many reasons.

The inequality based on wealth between his family and Goamar’s was one of the many reasons why William could never be with Goamar. William felt that perhaps nobody else would ever fill the gaps and cracks in his broken heart. He had gone for days and nights without eating.

“Those who married their best girlfriends don’t exist,” added another friend. “If they exist, then they are not successful because they will live a life of no competition with outsiders – negative or positive competition.”

“Yes, it is true. You will never be responsible and caring enough if you have never been hurt or disappointed before. All those who were once disappointed always try their best to make their ex see how successful they are in life and they will become obsessed with this.”

“Look at Ezekiel who married the girl he had loved since childhood. He has now become a drunkard and thief. It is because

nothing that was precious to him was taken away. If that had happened, he would have worked hard to let his ex-girlfriend see how successful he now was.”

“When I was young,” added another fellow, “I thought love was all about happiness and romance. But now I know very well that it is not. It is instead about everlasting pain, hurt and hopelessness. But any boy or girl who has no ex is like a featherless eagle.”

“Guys,” said another friend, “many of you have been blaming William for keeping the girl in his heart. It seems like you, guys, don’t understand the power of love and that the heart is flesh and sometimes it takes time for it to heal. Differentiate between flesh and bone. William’s heart is hurt but it is a man’s heart. It will get well soon.”

“I disagree that love is about everlasting pain, hurt and hopelessness,” said Ruai, “because love is very sweet when you find the right person and that is felt by the heart. Love is only felt to be nastiest to those who are rejected.”

“Why don’t we go and defecate in their compound?” suggested Tidual, the village fool, after listening to the conversation in silence. “That way, Goamar can feel the pain of cleansing their compound of our manure in the morning.”

Tidual was ignored since everyone knew that he was abnormal. His suggestion had been put into practice in Goamar’s family compound before by some of William’s friends when they were children. But now most of them had become responsible and couldn’t put into practice Tidual’s idiotic suggestion.

Soon their food was brought. One of them brought up the topic of the village's well-known trespasser who always disturbed the villagers by appearing during meal time. But the youth, after seeing him encroaching, ruled that they would only invite him once or twice to avoid him eating with them again. As they were talking, the trespasser arrived like lightning. But the rule that they had agreed on was that he would be invited only once as it would be unfair to them to invite him several times like they had done before. It would be boorish not to call a visitor even once.

“Bang, come let us eat,” their spokesperson called out.

“No, thank you. I have eaten, brothers,” the village's trespasser replied. The moment he said he had already eaten, nobody bothered to ask him again, in line with what they had agreed. Bang, in fact, wanted to be invited twice or thrice so that he could eat but the young men had decided against doing that. Bang was starving and needed food badly but his luck had gone away that day. As a diversion, one of the youth brought up a story about a village mate who, when the youth of Heaven were on the run as a result of being defeated in a battle, was advised to run faster than he was running. He instead replied, “Do you guys think that a run which isn't shown in a time of death like this can again be called a run? The only speed at which one runs while escaping death is this. This is my maximum running speed.”

After listening to the story, the youth ate in silence. The trespasser stood there, crying inwardly and pretending on the outside that everything was fine. However, his tongue and mouth eventually betrayed him.

“God, why they don’t call me for the second time?” He thought he had quietly spoken to himself. He didn’t know, however, that the words he had been saying in his mind and heart had accidentally come out through his big, open mouth. When they heard the words, everyone burst out laughing.

But soon the laughter turned into great sadness and shame. They saw some tears in the trespasser’s eyes. The trespasser was looking up, trying to hide the tears. However, the moment he looked down the tears poured down his cheek like rainwater. It was similar to tears shed at funerals. But these were tears about a meal. The young men felt sorry for their actions that had deeply hurt a starving village-mate.

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Chapter **Five**

———— The Village Fool ————

TIDIAL WAS THE VILLAGE FOOL whose lifestyle was based on a lack of common sense and on side-splitting imbecility. He was very handsome but his handsomeness wasn't enough to tempt the village girls to marry him because he was the last man in their world to be given a hand in marriage. He was a stutterer who prolonged and repeated words incessantly. His severe stuttering had affected him from childhood. Whenever his stammer became so bad he would visibly struggle. For example, he would push people with his hands with his eyes closed. Because of the stammer, Tidal would predominantly speak using physical signs accompanied by smiles. But when he sang or chanted, he would not have any problem at all.

Tidal talked and laughed heartily about any object that came his way. He was found several times talking to cows, goats

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and trees as if they were people. At night, the teenage boys of the village would gather round him as if they were watching a movie. He would tell jokes involving women and girls, something that was so interesting to the teens. Some would join him just to enjoy his stuttering, and yet others would join simply to hear his wonderful laughter. Almost everyone loved Tidual except the young children who, after they saw him, would chant while referring to his red gum among other bad things. This would anger him enough to hurl stones and other missile within his reach at them. He once hurled cow dung and human manure at the small children, something that caused serious outrage among their parents cried.

Occasionally Tidual would walk naked if no one told him not to do so. He was known in the village for his yellow shorts with a torn seat through which his buttocks could be seen. Sometimes strangers could not recognise his idiocy until he talked or laughed. His utterances erased all doubts about his idiocy and lack of common sense. Whenever he opened his mouth, he would stutteringly say funny things related to female organs. Tidual was, in fact, a good-looking young man. If he didn't talk, a girl would pick him from far away out of a hundred young men. However, the moment he talked the girl would repudiate not only him but the whole group of young men or the whole village.

Most of the village women exploited him by fooling him that they would allow him to marry their daughters. When he was told by someone that he would marry their daughter, he would shout happily and go to the home of those who made the promise so that he could help them with the house chores. He

was, in fact, a good worker and that was the reason the village women exploited him. Tidal could carry three water-cans at a go without difficulty, which was very rare in the village. He could also clean the compound and the gardens in the shortest time possible.

Tidal always asked after the wellbeing of everyone in the village. If ever there was sickness or death, Tidal was the first person to know of or disclose it because he always paid morning and evening visits to the entire village and asked about each and every person. Most of the homes he frequented had beautiful girls.

When the villagers were idle because there was no harvesting or planting to do, they would feel bored. They would then say good or bad things about other members of the village and beyond. Tidal was the hero when it came to collecting gossip from women and relationship issues from men. Whatever Tidal reported was considered to be accurate and truthful because he didn't have the tendency or cunning to add or withhold anything. Because of Tidal's talent the women, especially those with the evil motive to damage their rivals' reputations, would lure him, even in the middle of the night, to spy on their rivals or social competitors by giving him just a meal or making a bogus promise that they would give him their young daughters' hands in marriage when they grew up. Every woman befriended Tidal in order for them to be on the safe side of gossip.

If one had been insulted behind one's back, Tidal would report this even if he had not been present at the scene. Some believed that he had divine power.

Chapter Six

The Most Terrible Plan

IT WAS NOW THE BEGINNING of the new year and everybody was happy except William. His married colleagues were enjoying life with their wives and children.

One day the friends gathered at William's house to decide the fate of Tidual, the village idiot.

"Now that we are all married with the exception of Tidual, I think his continued bachelorhood will be shameful to our manhood," said William, "if our group mate doesn't marry because of his natural disability and malformation."

"Yes, it would be very disgraceful," chipped in a friend. "But what should we do since all the village girls don't love him and won't accept to marry him?"

"We must come up with a manhood plan," said William.

"Tell us about that manhood plan," said another friend.

“Why don’t we look for the most beautiful girl in the land and trick her that we have a family member in America?” said William.

“I agree,” said yet another friend, “but up to when won’t the girl find out it is Tidual?”

“I think William wants us to take Tidual to a different land and bring him back under the pretext that he is coming from America,” said the first speaker.

“No, not like that.” said William. “No matter how long you hide Tidual, he will remain the same even if you take him to America.”

“Then how will your plan be carried out?”

“Well,” William said, “you know our girls don’t want to be called second-hand after divorce. So, we will take advantage of that attitude and deceive a girl and take her home to Tidual so he can sleep with her. She will not agree to become second-hand after discovering that it is Tidual in the morning. Moreover, she will now be his dear wife.”

“Yes, I totally agree with you,” said another friend. “You know, guys, girls hate truths and love lies. They can die for a guy when he lies. So it is always good for the unmarried to lie.”

“I think we should not call it lying,” protested William’s best friend. “We should instead call it pretentiousness. It is a fact that every normal person is a pretender. We are all pretenders for good or bad reasons. It is only an idiot that shows his real personality because he doesn’t know how to fake his life. I agree

that we should pretend so that our good friend Tidal can have a life partner.”

“The two of you have spoken what I had in mind about girls’ strong love for sweet lies and strong hate for bitter truths,” said William, smiling. “Yes, girls love to be told lie after lie. That is why real men don’t have much luck with them. They hate real men to death for being honest. I wish we had been lairs!”

“Yes,” William added, after remembering something. “We are all pretenders. Look at the fake behaviour and hospitality that we always give to guests over a short period. If the welcome and good treatment we give to visitors were to permanently be there, the whole world would be at peace and friendly. Unfortunately, such hospitality and friendliness are usually short-lived.”

“This plan is incredible,” said William’s close friend. “But before we implement it, we should teach Tidal how to make love. He is very raw. Teaching him is another step that needs our ideas.”

“Never mind,” said William. “My dear wife will teach effectively him how to make love.”

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Chapter **Seven**

— Tidial is Educated On Love —

IN WHAT SEEMED A REVELATION to William's wife, the husband called her and asked her to teach Tidial how to make love. William only talked to his wife when they had to deal with a serious matter or he had to offer advice. He was always angry with her and anything in his sight. The wife got used to his frightening behaviour.

"It is always good to help our loved ones who can't help themselves," he said. "You know very well that Tidial, despite his natural disability, is one of my closest friends in this village and that he can never do me harm."

"Yes, I am very much aware that true friendship or understanding does not depend on status. I know very well that Tidial is your close friend," she said.

"Good," he said. "Then it is our obligation to help him. I want you and your female friends to teach him how to make love. He is getting married soon."

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The wife at first could not figure out what William was up to. However, after deep contemplation, she realised that Tidal was abnormal and for that matter he needed to be taught how to behave like a man when near a woman.

“Well, we shall try our best,” she said.

The wife had no alternative because since she had been brought home as William’s wife she had never felt loved and cherished. She had instead developed fear rather than respect and love for her husband. William treated her not like a wife but like an enemy.

William’s wife went out and informed her fellow women that they needed to teach Tidal how to make love in view of the fact that he was getting married. However, the women didn’t know who his bride would be. She told them that the matter had been debated and agreed upon by the youth and that was the reason they had decided to give the responsibility to William.

The idea to teach Tidal emerged as a result of a situation that had happened in the past. A man called Dual, who had lived in the village many years before, had spent two years or so without touching his wife after marriage. He didn’t know how love could be made and the girl didn’t know either, due to the fact that she was very young and didn’t have access to other grown-up girls when she got married. When the villagers noticed that Dual didn’t sleep with his wife and failing to see any sign of pregnancy, they approached him one day. Dual, in trying to convince them, told them that he was not in a hurry. He told them that he had been abstaining on purpose and claimed that a real man was never in a hurry to devour what belonged to him. The wife, on the other hand, was ignorant of what childbearing

involved as she had never had a male friend or boyfriend when she was still single. She thought children came without a man touching you.

William's wife, together with two other women, called on Tidal one evening and started to play with him. The women caressed his hands, hair and his entire body. They satisfied themselves that his manhood was alive and well when they saw some irrefutable signs.

William's wife, after establishing that Tidal was not lacking in manly ability, hugged him tightly. He steadily developed a serious erection. When he was shown the woman's most intimate part, he speedily inserted himself in her and put his hands behind her back. Tidal's hand interlocked with hers after he had established that he had already entered her. The woman tried to push him away but in vain as Tidal was three times heavier than her. Tidal now had a power greater than before. His speed went up as he neared orgasm. The other women tried with great effort to push him off but to no avail. Tidal wouldn't listen to anyone. He started talking: "Oh my stomach, oh diarrhoea, oh woman! Oh, I am going to defecate now. Oh, I have defecated at last on a woman, Oh..."

When the orgasmic ecstasy was over, he told the woman to bring it back again. "Bring back that diarrhoea again, woman," he said, lying on the poor skinny woman. "I want to sleep on you for the rest of my life..."

William's wife, infuriated by Tidal's idiotic actions, slapped him. Tidal didn't care because what he had got from the woman was way better than the slap itself.

Tidial now got up. William's wife regretted having come near the idiot. She felt ashamed that Tidial had taken her by force when, in fact, she had only been trying to teach him. She felt violated.

Tidial became very happy indeed about having accomplished what he called 'the sweetest obsession ever'. He ran to William to report to him what had happened, as he always did. It was to William that he always turned to seek help or advice. William was so fond of Tidial that he would even take a bullet or suffer other harm on his behalf.

"Your wife is very sweet," he told William. "She put mine between her two legs today and my body and back feel unusually good."

William was at first in high spirits about Tidial's cheerfulness. However, he suddenly became puzzled by Tidial's remark. He now realised from Tidial's utterances that his wife had given herself to Tidial either deliberately or by accident.

After that first incident, whenever he had the opportunity, Tidial would beg William's wife to give him another lesson but she would, instead, insult him. He would become sad and go off to ask William to convince her so he could enjoy her again but William wouldn't accept it. Months went on and Tidial became more frantic. He wanted very badly to experience more of what William's wife had allowed him to experience. He dreamt many times about William's wife.

After four to five months, William's wife's pregnancy became apparent. She knew very well that she was pregnant with

Tidial's child. William, with his changed behaviour towards her, had stopped sleeping with her earlier and only resumed sleeping with her two months after she had been told to teach Tidial. The woman became ashamed of herself because the other women who had been with her on that unfortunate day knew what had actually happened between her and Tidial. What could she do now?

The poor woman was at first determined to tell her husband about the having got pregnant by Tidial. But she knew it would be the end of her marriage since William would take advantage of that as, from the very beginning, he had not been in love with her. The girl had been chosen by William's father after he had failed several times to show his father the girl he wanted to marry. The woman kept the secret to herself and decided to wait for the child to be due. It was during labour that women admitted having been involved in incest or any abomination or else they would die together with their unborn child. It was common in their culture for a woman who cheated on her husband to be forced by the labour pains to reveal the truth to the people present for her own safety. William's wife was waiting for that day so as to reveal the facts behind her cheating on her husband.

Chapter Eight

Goamar Is Deceived

WILLIAM WAS NOW EXPECTING a baby. He thought his wife was pregnant with his child but he was wrong. It was Tidual's child. But his love for Goamar was still intact. He had had quarrels so many times with his wife over mistakenly calling her by Goamar's name.

"How many times shall I tell you that my name is not Goamar?" she said one day after she got fed up telling him that she was not Goamar.

"I am sorry for the mix-up," he said, "but never ask about my whereabouts when I come home late. Also, mind your business when you see me go away from home at any time. Never ask me. When I am angry, never speak to me. Most importantly, never suspect me to have an affair with anyone even if you find me on top of a woman. When I seem drunk, never think that I am drunk for real because it may be just pretence..."

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“Dear William, I don’t know why your words are always very sharp and dangerous. I never heard you speak friendly to me. It is not healthy to always see faults in a human being. Learn to see good things too. If ever you want to say something bad, you better keep it to yourself. Take a deep breath, relax and walk out because the world only likes positive things. There is nothing to lose in saying good words. You should respect my feelings because I am also a human.”

His wife complained several times about his changed and embarrassing behaviour. Everything in his thoughts rotated around Goamar. There was an embarrassing moment when his sisters-in-law came to visit him. After the girls had finished introducing themselves, he absentmindedly introduced himself as Goamar. But he suddenly realised his mistake and pretended that he had meant to call himself by that name because his relationship with them was good since that was what the name Goamar meant in their language.

One day, William found Goamar collecting firewood in the forest and greeted her. He plucked up courage, swallowed his pride and masked his heartache in order to approach her. They exchanged some few words, after which he expressed his admiration for the girl. He told Goamar that he had been trying to have a word with her for a long time but in vain.

“I am glad that I have found you here today, my dear Goamar,” he said. “In fact, my respect, trust and love for you will always be there irrespective of who will marry you. I want you to be married by my brother though he is very far away. If you will accept to be a member of our family, we will be grateful.”

“How many times shall I tell you that I am not ready?”

“It is not me, my dear.”

“I know that you are married. But I am not ready.”

“My brother lives in another part of the world.”

“Did you say another part of the world?”

“Yes, another land, dear.”

“America?”

“Yes, America! I am wondering why you did get to know about it. Hee-hee...your cleverness is still in place, dear.”

“Okay, let me think of it, dear William,” she said, “but when will he come?”

“He can come as soon as you have accepted us.”

Goamar’s face broke into a smile. She didn’t bother to find out the man’s name or anything else about him. As far as she was concerned, the man was perfect as long as he came from America.

After being told about her prospective suitor who lived in America, Goamar started frequenting William’s home in order to wash their clothes, including those of the village fool. She didn’t know that Tidial was actually the real suitor. The elders became curious about what had really inspired her to start cleaning their compound, among other chores, when, in fact, all the family’s youth had got married. Goamar, because of the culture and the need to keep her own dignity, couldn’t tell them that she was doing all those chores because their son was going to marry her. If

she saw one of the women from William's home or area fetching water at the village borehole or stream, she would hurriedly snatch the water-can from her and fill it herself. This scenario went on for some time in the village.

Two men from the village had proposed to Goamar – one was old and the other was young. She was, in fact, ready to choose one of them. However, that was when William surprised her with the good news about his brother living in America who wanted a wife. Goamar quickly turned down the two proposals. She never had a clue that what she was doing was going to be the worst mistake of her entire life.

William, in representing his supposed brother from America, would chat and laugh all day long with Goamar. He was, in fact, enjoying his time with her because of his old love for her but Goamar was doing it out of mistaken loyalty to her prospective suitor. With the regular conversations and the conveying of fake messages from America almost every day, William had grown even more strongly attached to the girl. He wished he could turn himself into a different person so that he could marry her. He would sometimes request a hug or kiss when they were parting ways, claiming that he was, even in that respect, representing his brother. Goamar would, however, refuse and tell him that what he wanted her to do wasn't acceptable in their culture. To do so would no doubt amount to betrayal and incest. But William still felt very happy about having the chance to connect again with the girl he had dearly loved before.

In William's mind, the marriage wasn't really meant for Tidial. He kept this secret away from other youth who believed the marriage was really intended for Tidial. To William, it was

impossible to present Tidual, the village idiot, before Goamar as the suitor. It would be a big challenge, according to him.

One day, Goamar asked to hear her suitor's voice since telephones were available in the nearby town. William promised to bring her a phone. Soon after, he brought a small mobile phone that he had borrowed from someone who lived in the town. He gave the phone to Goamar one night and instructed her to talk to her suitor.

"Here is your suitor," he declared, "and he wants to hear your voice, dear Goamar."

"Nyaa-llooo," she said. "Nyaaa-llooo!"

"Just talk. He is listening. Say Hallo not Nyallo..."

"But I don't hear him."

"This phone is different. It doesn't take two voices at the same time."

"How is that possible?"

"This is not an American-made phone that we all know. It is Chinese-made."

"What is the difference between the American phones and the Chinese phones?"

"American phones talk live but Chinese phone don't talk live."

"Okay. Thank you, dear William. Haa-llooo baby!" she continued, at the top of her voice. She had concluded that she had to raise her voice because she was talking to someone very far away.

“Please I have just told you that he is listening. Just talk and ask him anything. He is going to answer back to you tomorrow or the day after when the phone is brought back again. And don’t forget that he doesn’t know our language. He will first translate your utterances into English and his into our language.”

The girl was convinced by that and started to talk. She talked and talked alone for almost an hour.

“...and thank you for listening,” she said at last when she was about to finish. “The God of our ancestors will make our marriage peaceful when you come to our land. Love you, darling, and goodbye!”

“Thank you for talking to him nicely,” William said, and then smiled and looked her straight in the eye. “You will possibly be married in two months’ time in the name of our forefathers.”

“Thank you, dear William,” she said, “but I also ask your forgiveness for whatever disappointment I might have caused you when we first got to know each other.”

“No, you did not disappoint me, dear,” he said and fell silent, looking down. “It doesn’t matter anyway,” he continued after a long pause, “since you are soon getting married to my brother. We are the same blood. But I would have considered it a disappointment if you had been married to someone who is not my relative.”

“You are very kind,” she said. “I wish you a happy life with your dear wife. She is beautiful, isn’t she?”

William couldn't answer because he felt mocked and his heart lurched with sorrow. He didn't want any lifetime happiness wish for anybody other than he and her.

“Goodbye,” he said at last. “I will bring back the phone when he's finished translating what you said.”

The two departed. Goamar was engulfed by happiness. William, on the other hand, was filled with jealousy and sorrow about the girl who preferred nothing to him.

“What a poor heartless girl,” he said to himself. “Loving nothing and hating something! Choosing thin air over me!”

Most of Goamar's age mates were married and that fact played a great role in making her easy to deceive and exploit by William and his group. With the realisation that she might end up being unmarried and with all her great expectations and the economic status of her family, she became open psychologically to any possibility of being married to a soul coming from another, more highly valued, land.

Chapter **Nine**

Goamar talks to friends

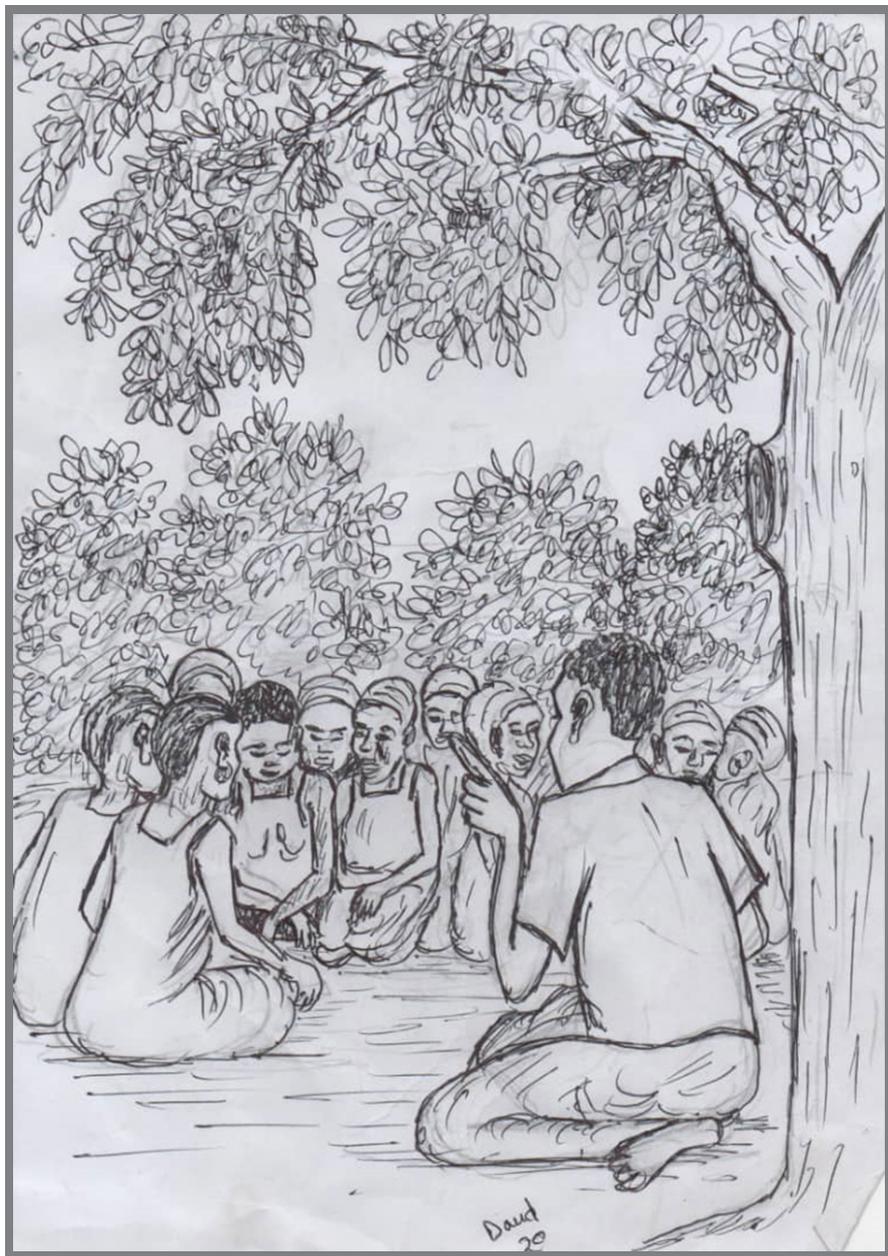
GOAMAR INVITED ALMOST ALL her close friends, including those she had had grudges against over boys in the past. They all gathered in her step-mother's hut. She served them with water and stewed beans before she could disclose to them her good news. Many of these girls suspected Goamar's news might be about marriage plans.

"I decided not to hide it or tell it to you late," Goamar broke the news to the gathering. "To be brief, sisters, I am getting married to someone in America."

"America?" they said in unison, doubtfully. Some of them immediately became jealous on hearing Goamar's news.

"Yes, America," she said proudly. "My suitor has arrived in the country's capital and he is now waiting for his private helicopter that he has left behind in America."

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Goamar also reported the conversation between her and her suitor to them but they questioned the status of the telephone that didn't allow two people to talk to each other. They became even more astonished when they heard that one of the reasons the man didn't reply on voice call was because he didn't know the local language and he was going to first translate the girl's utterances. Goamar, however, couldn't give them a chance to challenge her suitor. She tried many ways to convince them. At last, they were all convinced by her.

"Best wishes, sister," said Nyadak, "but never forget us when you reach that great land."

"Beautiful! So you will soon be flying into the air like a bird. That is the best news of the year," said Nyaluak, happily.

"Never forget to send us American clothes when you reach there, please," pleaded Nyadak.

"Why clothes, Nyadak?" asked Marnaath, who was also unmarried. "We don't need American clothes. We only need American suitors so that we can be neighbours with Goamar in America. Just find more suitors for us when you reach America, please."

"You are very lucky, sister," said another friend. "I am also hoping to be married to someone in America so that he can take me away from here, like you."

The girls now talked about America and never cared to know more about the man and his family. It was only in the middle of their discussion that they became eager to know more about the suitor. However, Goamar couldn't say more because she had no extra details about the man. All she knew was that he

was William's brother.

After they had finished with Goamar's news and wished her luck in her forthcoming marriage, they shifted to the general gossip of the village. They gossiped about their boyfriends, crushes and the girls who failed to come to the gathering.

"You know, sisters," said Nyaluak, "the guy that has been dating our dear sister Nyakuoth for years has decided to dump her."

"Yes, I heard it too," confirmed Nyadak. "It is very sad. That tailless animal has wasted the poor girl's time."

"Do not insult the animals," advised Nyakuoth. "Animals are by far better than him, sister. There is no living creature to be compared with him."

"Why did you love that big-head at all," asked Goamar. "Or you didn't see his head at the beginning? Or you fell in love with him during a moonless night?"

"I saw his big head and his wide nose too, sister," said Nyakuoth, "but I am not one of those who prefer good looks over character. The way he talks, you can mistake him for a true human. At first he used to say, 'Nyakuoth, you are unique. You are different from all the girls I have ever met in my life. I don't sleep at night because of you. You make my day brighter and you are this and that.' Then it suddenly turned into, 'Who do you think you are? Do you think you are more beautiful than all the girls in Heaven and beyond? You are worse than I thought. You are bad this and bad that.' He completely has robbed me of my time."

“These boys mislead us by claiming that they don’t sleep at night because of love when, in fact, they sleep soundly and snore and...Peace will never come until the time good intentions are disclosed the same way love is disclosed. If one can say, ‘I love you so much,’ then why can’t one say or reply, ‘I respect you so much..., I believe you so much...I...’,” said one of the tallest girls, angrily.

“He has surely wasted your time, dear Nyakuoth,” said Nyadak, comfortingly, “but there must be a girl who has turned him away from you.”

“Yes, it is that girl with ears like the rabbit’s, with a head like a grinding stone, with a neck like the giraffe’s,” said Nyakuoth, emotionally. “She doesn’t even have buttocks so that whenever she bends down you can see the trail of our village between her chicken-legs.”

There was general amusement after Nyakuoth’s speech but she didn’t laugh together with the other girls because she was deeply hurt. Her face was pale.

“For me, I don’t just love a guy without first noticing his tallness, beard, eyes, hairstyle and dress, among other features. It is only then that I show him my feelings,” said Goamar. “But we must know that those boys who pocket their hands or gnaw their lips when they see girls are the worst pretenders and liars. Their lies live in their pockets and mouths.”

“Nyakuoth is by far better than me because hers is just a rejection, which I think is the best inspiration ever,” said Marnaath. “I am in love with a fool who may be the worst of all fools in this land.”

“Is it Tidual?” asked Goamar and the others together.

“No, ha-ha,” Marnaath said. “Not Tidual; it can never be him. This guy is not a real fool but his actions are worse than the fool’s.”

“What does he do?” asked the girls together, eagerly.

“Whenever I told him to leave me alone even inside the dark house where I brought him, he would leave me for real,” she said. “The same thing happened when I told him not to touch my...”

“He is the real fool,” said another, short girl, laughing. “He should know that when a girl says ‘leave me alone’ she means ‘stay please and kiss me and hug me and...me.’”

“True,” said Marnaath, “but do not forget that not all males are men. My friend once cried, fought and argued with her boyfriend and said goodbye to him intentionally to check if she was the potential person for him but the fool-boy left the fool-girl for good.”

“We are the unluckiest generation ever born in this country village called Heaven,” said Goamar, “because those we call our future husbands are as unintelligent as scorpions because a simple love joke is taken seriously and can even end a long-time relationship.”

“Marnaath,” Nyadak called. “What happened to your dear friend had actually happened to me some time back. My ex-boyfriend loved that shameless old-girl with so many acnes in her distasteful and wrinkled face. I thought she would be faithful when I asked her to go and test my boyfriend to see if his heart

was really with me. Unfortunately, they are now happily married, leaving me with the broken heart.” Tears were dropping from her eyes as she concluded her speech.

“But Nyadak, why put your boyfriend to a test of love?” asked Marnaath, surprised. “It is not good for you to put a person you truly love to a love test. What you should have done was to take a close look at your insecurities.”

“Be careful, sisters,” said another tall girl, “not to test your boyfriends or husbands. Putting a man in a test with a girl is like putting a fly in a test with milk.”

“So sad,” said Goamar. “I always wonder if our fathers and grandfathers behaved like that towards our mothers and grandmothers.”

“They are exactly the same, sister,” said Nyakuoth. “Men are as heartless as death when it comes to love. Imagine the most feared, the most respected and the most hated ones are all the same when it comes to love and cheating. A man is a man no matter what. They are low-priced creatures.”

“Yes, cheating or lying is what men are created for,” said Nyadak.

“It is very sad that when you are too loyal to your boyfriend he will think you are inexpensive and low-grade. Boys of these days take us for granted,” said Marnaath.

“So sad, sister, when you truly give them your heart, they will think you are cheap. They will go and run after those who pretend to hate them. Boys love girls who fake their lives. But

my advice to you is not to love or talk to any boy too much because that, too, has consequences. It will hurt you someday.”

“I think Nyakuoth needs to try her tall and handsome ex-boyfriend with tears of love,” said another one, “because there are many ways to catch a man.”

“Yes,” said Nyakuoth. “He is handsome and tall. But he is not a very respectful and passionate man. I am quite sure his future wife will be so proud to have him as her husband. But as for me, I don’t see the use of having a handsome man who makes me cry every single day. I better get a shapeless one who doesn’t make me cry every single day.”

“I agree with Nyakuoth,” said Nyagoa. “People only give their true love to those with good shapes and faces even if they make them cry every single day, leaving behind those who don’t make them cry simply because they don’t have beautiful faces. Are these people who don’t have beautiful faces not humans? Don’t they need to be loved? It is very sad that the mind of people is colonised by the beautiful elite who think their design is the best.”

“Very true,” confirmed Nyarial. “It is very sad that the people of this land think that being ugly means you can unconditionally accept anything and anybody as if you don’t have feelings. The owners of beautiful faces are given maximum respect even if they are rude and irresponsible. Our people should know that being ugly doesn’t mean you have to invite every rubbish into your life and being beautiful or handsome doesn’t guarantee a happy marriage.”

“We should not be shaken by the bad behaviour of our boys and how our parents force us into unwanted marriages, sisters,” said Nyakuoth. “We have to wait patiently with or without boyfriends because for every young girl there is a man waiting to marry her in God’s good time. We will never give up keeping our dignity and female ego. But let us not forget that the words ‘beautiful’ and ‘handsome’ are deceitful words, and that our actions towards ourselves matter a lot.”

Soon, Goamar’s step-mother, who owned the hut, walked in because she wanted to do the evening chores. Goamar escorted the girls to their homes, including those who lived in the remote corner of the village.

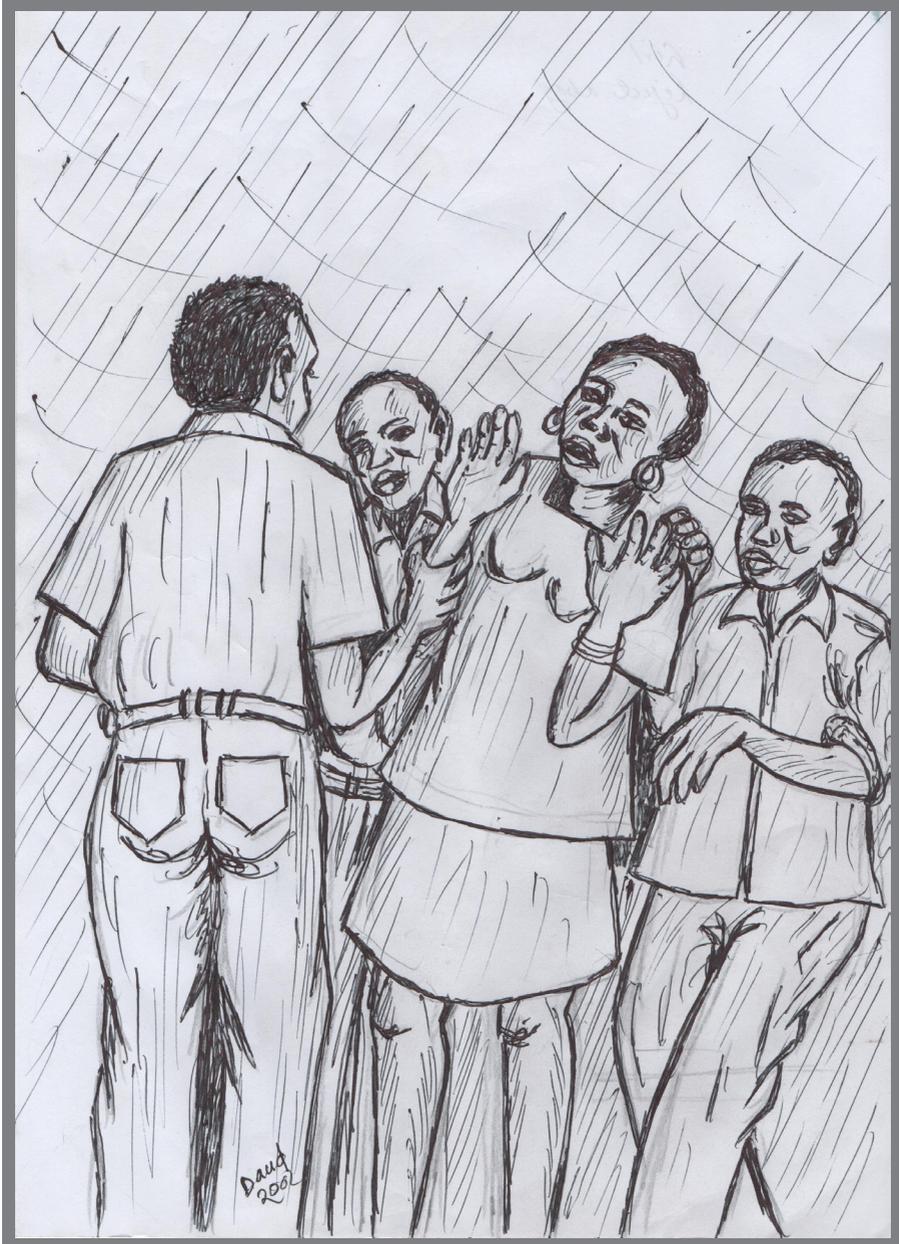
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Chapter Ten

Goamar's Elopement

GIVEN THAT THE FAMINE and economic hardships in the land of Heaven and beyond were caused by the long-running wars, the people in the land became dependent in one way or another on the monetary help sent by their sons and relatives who had earlier gone to America and other foreign lands. Whenever someone from America expressed an interest in marrying from the village, the villagers would fight over whose daughter was to be married. Giving their daughters in marriage to people who lived in America guaranteed financial support, and for some, access so their little children and other relatives could go to the great land, America. Because of the financial insecurity in the land, every young girl wished to be married by those they had never seen before in real life. Girls as young as fourteen and thirteen from poor financial backgrounds were given away to men who were as old as fifty and sixty years just because they came from America.

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The village of Heaven was a remote country village. It was very difficult for the child rights group and other organisations to discourage child marriage. When marriage by people from America became a widespread practice in the village of Heaven, some of the locals volunteered to become brokers or hagglers. Their work was to determine whose daughter got married when the next person from America decided to marry from the village. At first, they did it on a timetable which showed whether a family had stable financial status or whether they didn't have. But after some years they became corrupted. They took bribes from the poor families just for them to negotiate the marriage of their daughters. A problem once erupted between one of the village's brokers and an old man who had paid bribe to him but when the marriage was to take place, the broker recommended only his niece.

"Betrayal is not good," said the old man. "Why have you changed the deal?"

"What should I do if your daughter is as young as twelve years?" said the broker. "Should I force the family of the suitor to accept your young daughter?"

"Did you say my daughter is twelve? Who told you?" he asked heatedly while squaring up for a fight. "I have always denied it when people say your head is not correct. Now I have confirmed it. Are you my daughter's mother?"

The two questions angered the broker, who insulted the girl's father back.

"Thank God your adoptee is not married by the man. How can such a person be an in-law? You have insulted me

about being your adoptee's mother but an insult from a castrated bull cannot be considered because it has no effect at all. It is only when I am insulted by a functional man that I can insult him back because..."

The girl's father rushed towards the man with the intention to fight him but they were stopped just before the fight could begin. He had heard from unreliable and unconfirmed sources that he was believed to be impotent but today the broker had said it to his face.

"Can I try you, pig?" he insulted back heatedly, trembling with anger. "I am by far a better man than you. You cannot talk because you have no family of your own and you had a love affair with a hen when you were young."

They now insulted each other badly in front of everyone. The girl's father at last disclosed his daughter's real age to the participants to secure a marriage for his daughter who might be thought to be too young. She was fifteen years old. The girl's father accused the broker of having 'demoted' his daughter in order to cut him out of wealth but what angered him the most was that the broker had taken a bribe for unfinished work. He had given the broker a fully grown-up he-goat for work that he failed to do.

Another rare case had happened in the past concerning a beautiful young woman whose little girl was sold immediately when she had been born. The suitor, who lived in America, had known the young woman when she was very little. This was before he had departed for America. The young woman was very lovely, so he was encouraged by her beauty to buy her daughter in childhood with the hope that she would look like

her mother when she grew up. The suitor was forty years old then. The man had immediately started giving financial support to the young woman's immediate as well as extended family. When the woman's daughter turned fifteen, the suitor was fifty-five years old.

When he came to the village to marry and take his bride, the young girl had an opportunity to see him in the flesh for the first time. The young girl immediately lost all feelings for and hope in the man. One, the man was too old for her, and was even toothless. Two, he had a spinal deformity, perhaps a hunchback. Three, she felt that her dignity and integrity had been insulted. The fact that she had been bought the moment she came into the world forced her to marry the old man anyway. He took her to America but she ran away from him after living with him for a meagre five years. When they heard of this, the villagers insulted and cursed her and her family.

It was now the beginning of summer. It was during summer that the village youth held night parties. Goamar, after knowing that she was going to be married to someone from America, happily distributed all her clothes to her friends. She was getting rid of the African clothes with the certainty that she would replace them with American clothes. She several times asked about when the groom would be coming but William had told her that the guy had already arrived in the country's capital and didn't want to use the public aeroplane. William and his friends told her that the reason why William's brother didn't want to use the public aeroplane was because of the flu, among other diseases, that could be contracted in such an aeroplane.

The UN helicopter that supplied the UN mission troops in Heaven had landed that evening. This occurrence became a reasonable basis for them to deceive Goamar. The landing of that helicopter was the best coincided seamlessly with their plan because there was going to be a party during the night which would make the elopement easy. The youth sent someone to the girl to inform her about the arrival of her suitor from America.

“He has arrived!” declared the one who had been sent.

“Jesus! Emmanuel!” said Goamar excitedly. “I knew it would be him who came with the UN helicopter.”

“Yes, but it is not the UN helicopter. It is his private helicopter we have been talking about. Your dear husband’s helicopter didn’t go back because it is waiting for the two of you.”

“So our helicopter is waiting for me and my husband?” asked Goamar, beaming. “Will he take me before we enter into the marriage?”

“You don’t understand American culture. Elopement is what Americans believe in. They think it is only the old men who can marry officially.”

Goamar nodded. She was in fact engulfed by happiness and gratitude for being able to go to America and for having a husband now since finding a responsible husband in the backward and isolated village of Heaven had proven to be very difficult. She would accept any option that would allow her to leave Africa for America.

Chapter Eleven

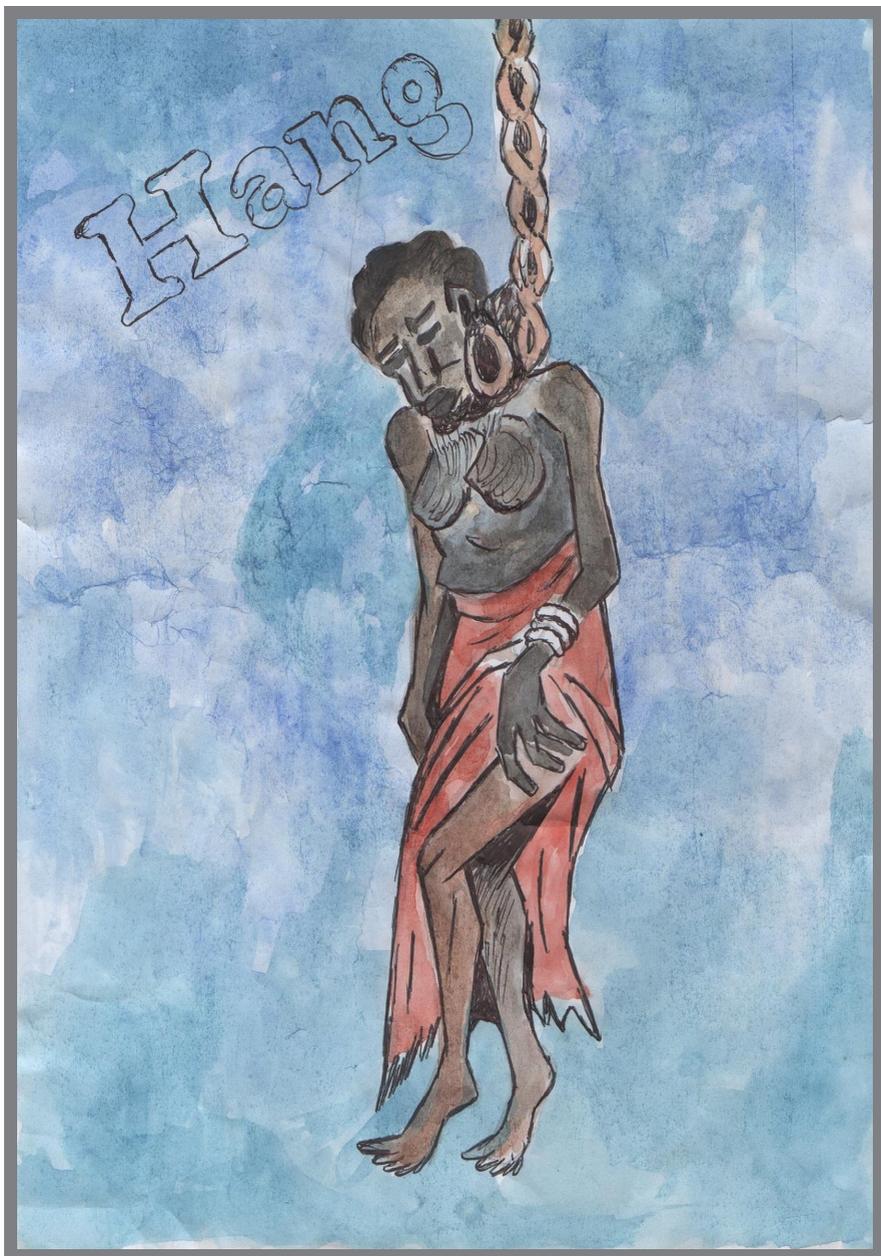
Goamar hangs herself

THE NIGHT WAS GETTING quiet and dark when Goamar was taken home by the youth. Before she could arrive in the compound, she heard over the BBC World News channel that was being played at high volume to make her believe that the guy had really come from America.

“Good morning and welcome to BBC World News...we are live in the studio...It is Monday the 10th of January 2005... Sudan leaders sign historical deal...Sudan’s government and Southern rebels have signed a comprehensive peace deal to end Africa’s longest civil war...Foreign dignitaries, including the US Secretary of State...” the news went on in the middle of the night.

Each and every youth, including William’s wife, was in attendance in the place of instructions in order to advise Tidal on how to behave towards his prospective bride.

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“Never get excited too much when she comes to you later,” said William. “Just be in control so that you don’t look new to manhood.”

“No, no, my man,” Tidual said. “I will do exactly like what I did to your wife. Ask her now and she will tell you.”

“Forget about that one,” warned another youth. “Just focus on the directives. Don’t be so tense and quick later when your wife comes to your place. Never say a word. Just caress her because we will tell her that you can speak only English.”

“Believe me, guys,” Tidual said happily. “She will run away from me tonight because I will caress every part of her body with this hand of mine. I will also caress her molars.” “And,” he continued, “I will put my...”

“Stop that rubbish,” said another youth furiously, stopping him. “Don’t you know we have a woman here with us?”

After the instructions, he was given a razor so as to shave his private parts. Unfortunately, he would later cut himself. However, it was a normal cut that healed shortly after. All the instructions were given during the day.

Tidual, in a full black suit, was now ready in the dark hut waiting for his bride.

For the first time, there was a beautiful perfume in the village. During the day, William and some other youth had to run to the Heaven’s main market to buy a radio, two beds, and perfumes, among other things, just to convince Goamar.

“Dear Goamar, now that your husband is inside the house,” said William, “please abide by all that we have told you.”

“Yes, I will never betray you, son of my father,” said Goamar.

“Thank you, but I have some few facts that I didn’t tell you before because we were with many people. I decided to reserve them for the sake of your dear husband’s good name.”

“Feel free to tell me, darling,” demanded Goamar, shaking William’s hand in happiness.

“Well,” William said, “your husband went to America when he was only ten years old. He doesn’t speak our language and he doesn’t know our culture. Please don’t be surprised when something unusual happens later on in your bed.”

“Something like what?”

“He sometimes talks at night.”

“How do you know when he left the village before you were even born and he came back just today?”

“Our father was like that.”

“So it has become a way of life in your family?”

“Yes, it has.”

“Then there is nothing wrong with it.”

“I think I must tell you these facts as well,” he said, breaking his silence after trying, in vain, to say them in parables. “Please be informed that my dear brother may fart, urinate, snore, cough

and kick while sleeping but never get disappointed because it is part of their culture in America. If the Arabs normalise these things that I have just told you about, then what will the Americans, who live much farther away from us, do?"

The girl nodded her understanding.

"And," William continued, "don't do that half-resisting thing which is normally done by our girls. Do not do that, please, because the man will be angry at us and will think you don't love him. That part of our good culture means refusal and total rejection to them."

The girl, after agreeing with the rules and regulations, had now found herself near the disguised American. The grass-thatched hut was too dark for her to see who her suitor was. She could only feel his presence in the room as the man was breathing loudly. The tension between the two went on for some seconds, minutes and hours. Each of them wanted to be caressed first by the other. When they became tired of the tension, the young man could not tolerate the sleepiness anymore. He fell back on the bed, still in the suit. He now started to snore, fart and urinate. The girl didn't get surprised as she had been briefed very well before by the youth and also by William.

What occupied her thoughts was the certainty that she would go to America the following morning. The young man continued his peaceful and one-sided night battle until five o'clock in the morning. The girl could now see little by little parts of the hut as the sunlight filtered in through the window. As soon as the sun came up, she was able to clearly see the face of her suitor. She couldn't believe her eyes. She couldn't

help crying out when she recognised him. Words spilt out of her mouth when she discovered that her suitor had turned into Tidial, the village fool. Her cry woke up Tidial, and he began to make some remarks absentmindedly, “Yes. Yes. You can now brush my teeth. You are my wife now because I have slept with you.”

“Slept with me?” she asked, wanting to confirm it.

“Yes, I have just enjoyed you, my dear wife. Please dry my trousers and...”

“Enjoyed me?” she asked.

“Yes, very much, my wife,” he said. “But you weren’t as sweet as William’s wife.”

“Oh America destroyed me! America has destroyed me!” Goamar wailed. “America has really ruined me.”

She had thought of how her life would be in the far-away land. She didn’t want everyone to hear while she was still breathing that the most beautiful and the most respected girl in Heaven had eloped with the village fool and that she had slept with him.

“How has America destroyed you, my wife?” he asked, while undressing himself. After removing his trousers, he handed them to Goamar to take them outside to dry because he had urinated in them during the night.

Goamar neither took the trousers from him nor talked to him. She instead started searching inside the house for something.

She finally found that thing after a long search. It was an old rope. She checked its condition by stretching it; it proved to be a strong rope. Goamar looped one end of the rope into a noose. She ensured that she had done it correctly so that nobody could later on undo the noose quickly in case they wanted to rescue her. When she was ready, she tied one end of the rope to the roof, put her head in the noose and hanged herself. Her body was now hanging between the ground and the roof. The village fool had been keenly monitoring with a smile all that the girl was doing. However, he thought the girl was just playing or celebrating her marriage with him.

Epilogue

It was in the early morning. Tidial cried out. He wanted to get out of the hut but he could not do that because Goamar's dangling body blocked the way. Some of the nearby village youth and neighbours, with the exception of William who was nowhere to be seen, ran to him in order to see what had made him cry out at dawn. They were, instead, shocked to see Goamar's body hanging from the roof.

Goamar was found to be in a coma. She was revived by the efforts of the first people to reach her. They poured water on her and she came back to life.

“Dear fellow sisters in the land,” she said in a weak voice, “never make the mistake to have unrealistic expectations. No expectation, no disappointment. Choose to accept your situation because accepting ends with cheers, while unrealistic expectations lead to tears. Get married to that imperfect man because your efforts will make him perfect. Marry as soon as possible that special person and do whatever is possible to put him in your heart, value him, and treasure every moment in life. Anything can happen anytime and you may be disappointed and realise that it is too late to save yourself. Life is very puzzling because what one wishes to get doesn't always come the way one expects it to. So, no matter how hard the situation, how difficult the life, how bewildering the land is, never wish to leave it for another land.”

EPILOGUE

She took a long break and everyone resumed their lamentation. Her mother had already fainted. “Remember that the food crisis is Satan,” she continued after vomiting some blood. “Those who have never seen the image of Satan should know that it is famine and the lack of food. But because it doesn’t show up in its true form as a result of disguising itself, it confuses us. Satan in the form of famine has now destroyed me. It was because I wanted to make my widow mother happy that I turned down the men in our village, in other villages far and wide, hoping to be married to a better-off man from across the seas. My enemies got the opportunity to end my life on purpose or unintentionally because of my expectations.”

Her mother had now resurrected. She now crawled towards her dear daughter and kissed her while giving her a hug.

“Mother,” Goamar said in a tearful voice, “I am very sorry for letting you down, for failing you, for bothering you as you carried me inside your womb for nine months, for the pain you suffered when you were giving birth to me, for taking care of us when my father died so young. I did not wish to leave you without rewarding you or doing something good for you but poverty has now physically separated us.”

The village doctor was away when the incident had happened. He had gone to town in order to bring some medicines. But even if he had been present he would not have prevented her from expiring.

“Now I am dying a spinster,” she continued, speaking with difficulty, “and my death is because I have pushed a loving and caring person away over a mere expectation. It is always

good to swallow our arrogance, egos and expectations, to humble ourselves and treasure what we have because time is too sluggish for those who wait, too speedy for those who fear, too long for those who grieve and too short for those who laugh. Never make any excuses and compromises when it comes to love and marriage. Never think of your future's comfort zone because that one day you're expecting to get into that zone may never come in your lifetime but..."

She could not complete the sentence. She fainted and closed her eyes. Goamar was dead!

As soon as Goamar died there was another cry in the neighbourhood. The people around the dead body thought it was someone who had just heard of Goamar's death. However, it turned out to be William's wife. She had found her husband, William, hanging in the backyard of their homestead. He had hanged himself out of regret for his evil plan and also so as to follow his soul mate as he couldn't continue living on earth without Goamar.

"I have never been an animal or any other living creature," said an old woman, looking sad, "but as far as I know the human race in general is the only creature that destroys itself."

"Yes," confirmed another old woman who was shaving off Goamar's head in preparation for her burial, "no other living creature commits self-destruction except humans."

"This Diengni age-group is the worst generation I have ever seen," said the old woman, with her head resting on her hands.

EPILOGUE

“Yes, it is the most horrible,” confirmed another woman. “It is a proud and selfish age-group. Imagine one loses a partner just to keep one’s ego and pride.”

“Letting go of someone just to keep one’s ego and pride shows lack of common sense. What will they do with it? Will they sell the ego and pride?”

“God might be punishing us with the Diengni age-group. It is only this age-group which doesn’t accept faults but claims to be right at all time and only sees faults in all others.”

“Yes, they claim to know everything and yet they don’t. The saddest part is that they celebrate one another’s failures rather than successes.”

“Not only failures. They derive fun from one another’s misery, including death.”

“I thought the Liethni and Koayni age-groups were the most terrible but I was wrong. It is only this Diengni age-group where a close friend easily turns into an enemy just because they are full of pride and they feel too important to apologise.”

“It is really an age-group of proud and dim-witted people.”

The day became a grief-stricken day. The villagers had to bury the two people who had committed suicide one after the other. Everyone in the land was sad for the two who had let their egos and social norms get the better of them and set their lives on a destructive path. Neither Goamar nor William had a child to carry on their different lineages.

Lastly, Tidual, the village fool, and the late William's wife were officially married and lived happily ever after with their children.

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Weirial Puok Baluang

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