

AN AFRICAN JOURNEY

A Story of two Continents

By

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Two young people from different worlds meet through the pursuit of medicine. Their love is tested by separation, illness and infidelity.

An African Journey

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An African Journey

Akumu awoke, soaked in sweat: the heat like a heavy blanket enclosed her stifling her breath. The light flickered through the open window slowly replacing the darkness. Another day, another struggle to survive, would it never end she sighed. Like a ballet dancer she tiptoed between the slumbering figures, moving gingerly so as not to wake her brother who was still asleep. She could hear her father snoring - a deep rumbling, and her mother breathing gently.

The others were creating an orchestra of sounds but above and below all these, she could hear the cockroaches, their constant companions; their croaking calls and the hissing of their wings. She loathed them but they were part of their lives. They would brush them off their faces and if they had not washed their hands properly before sleep, they would find them nibbling at their fingertips for the small morsels of food remaining under their nails. In the mornings they scurried away under their feet before they had a chance to catch them and enjoy crunching the life out of them.

Akumu was the youngest of ten children. She was born in the outskirts of Mombasa,

Kenya into a desperately poor family who struggled to feed and clothe their children. They occupied a single room with no running water or electricity and shared a toilet with ten other families. Akumu's father worked in the docks unloading one hundred weight sacks of grain for 100 Kenya shillings a day, less than an English pound. Her mother sold home-grown vegetables and fruit from a small covered wagon in the market.

It was her mother who kept the family together, all ten of them. A strong broad hipped woman, she was their backbone. Her willingness to work all hours without complaining became ingrained in the psyche of her children especially the girls whose own lives would reflect hers. Ugali made from maize flour was their staple food. Served from a large communal bowl, it was eaten with skuma wiki a type of spinach cooked in vegetables and gravy. They would all help themselves, the younger ones starting but quickly pushed aside by the bigger children always grabbing more. Photographs of Akumu as a child show her big swollen tummy due to Kwashiorkor, a vitamin deficiency disease that affected many children. When her father was working, things were much easier but he nevertheless had 10 mouths to feed. At first he would come home and give his wages to his wife but as work dried up and his

wages diminished, he used what he had and go drinking. He came home late singing and falling into a drunken stupor. Then the money dried up completely and they went hungry.

One of Akumu's jobs before school was to fetch water. It was a ten-minute walk to the communal well. She tried to get there early before the crowds otherwise she would be late for school and get a beating. The old men used to sit by the well watching the young women. They waited for the water to spill onto their chests and outline their small breasts. Then they would jeer and hoot, pointing and laughing. In reply the women balanced the water buckets on their heads and covered their chests with folded arms. The men tried to touch their bottoms or press against their breasts. Walking home alone from school was always dangerous as some men would try and grab them and drag them into the bushes where they would rape them. So the younger women always walked in a group. With limited toilets, they had to squat outside in the longer grass so as not to be seen.

As soon as she could, Akumu left home and had her own house. It had one room which served as a bedroom, a sitting room and a kitchen. She shared a toilet with four other houses. Although her rent was not high, she often had difficulty paying for it because she

didn't have a regular job. She earned money where she could by selling small artefacts by the roadside. When she was lucky and had extra money, she sent it home to her mother. She felt it was her duty to look after her as she had been looked after when she was growing up.

Akumu was very bright and worked hard. She had inherited a work ethic from her mother whom she would always try to copy. Eventually she got a scholarship to a local primary school. At first her father said she couldn't go, she was needed at home to help. But her mother persuaded him. There she gained high grades. One day a doctor from England came to the village and spoke to the headmistress. He had come into a small fortune from selling land in Kenya and wanted to use it to help a Kenyan student. The teacher had no doubt whom she would recommend.

'I have just the student, she is called Akumu Onyango. She is special; she has a sharp natural intelligence. She is wonderful with animals and I know would make a good doctor. I can strongly recommend her for your scholarship.' When Akumu was told that she was to be awarded the scholarship to go to England she was frightened and reluctant to leave her family. Her father recognised the

opportunity and persuaded her that she was doing it for the family

‘You will be the first doctor in our family. We will be so proud of you. Don’t be afraid God will guide you. Your brother will go with you.’ In time Akumu agreed but Initially she was very homesick. She hated the food and missed the warm weather and it took her many months before she got used to it. She would listen the BBC world service waiting for the weather forecast from home then close her eyes and imagine she was there. She would feel the warmth of the sun on her back and smell the sweet scent of the Frangipani trees.

After some weeks of searching she began to work as an Au Pair looking after an Architect’s two small children. She had the afternoons off which enabled her to continue her studies and was awarded a place at St Margaret’s Medical School. She was 25 when she began the Medical course doing parts 1 and 2. She worked every night and at the weekends living a very frugal existence. By that time her brother had returned to Kenya and she was living alone in a small apartment in Notting Hill Gate. Her intention was to return to Kenya after she had qualified and to work in the field of HIV Aids.

Akumu was beautiful in a classical sense with well-proportioned features and dark

unblemished skin. She was of mixed tribe part Kikuyu and part Luo which accounted for her appearance. She was tall and slim and stood with an erect posture, which emphasized her height and figure. Since a young girl she had been aware of her effect on men of all ages and initially this puzzled and sometimes irritated her. But as she grew older she got used to it. She had learned about life the hard way and was a lot older than her years having acquired a sixth sense from contact with life on the streets of Mombasa.

‘Hi’, Adam whispered turning to the stunning dark-haired girl seated on his left. It was Monday morning and they were attending the Introductory Course lecture at St. Margaret’s Medical School before commencing their first year of clinical studies. He wanted to chat her up before someone else did. He always had problems speaking to girls but this seemed a God-given opportunity. Akumu heard the whisper but chose to ignore it.

‘Hi’, he said again. Akumu turned to look at him and saw a shy, slightly built young man with thick black hair. He’s old she thought and turned away to speak to her neighbour.

‘They are so immature, what does he want?’ said a friend. ‘I can guess,’ Akumu muttered. It had been the same ever since she

was a teenager. Boys and men always wanted her attention and usually something more.

Turning towards him, she replied,

‘Hi,’ hoping it would end the conversation.

‘Hello. Are you new here?’ As he spoke he realized how stupid he must sound. It was after all the first day of the new intake of medical students and of course she was new. He could feel his face blushing and sweat appearing.

‘Yes, like you’, she replied, thinking, what a twit he was and hoping they were not all going to be like him. She had glanced at him again and took in his small neat hands and clean nails. His face was thin and reminded her of a beaver.

Everyone was excited and there was a general babble of voices amongst the students who were meeting for the first time. The lecturer was late which was to become a regular pattern. Footsteps could be heard and the voices quietened. A studious looking grey haired man about fifty, wearing a long white coat walked slowly to the lectern holding a small electronic pointer. He was balding and wore a crumpled white shirt with a creased tie.

‘Good Morning Gentlemen,’ he chose to ignore the female students who made up more than one third of the class.

'Welcome to the first of ten lectures on an Introduction to Clinical Medicine. Today I am going to talk about the course and how you can get the most out of it together with some reading material which will augment your studies.' His voice was low and monotonous and he had soon lost his audience.

Adam was acutely aware of Akumu's presence. He could smell her perfume, a light flowery odour that he inhaled deeply. He looked at her. She was writing furiously, taking down everything the lecturer was saying. He turned to the speaker and began to listen more intently hoping this would distract him from her presence. It worked for a while and he was doing fine until she moved and he heard the slight hiss of her stockings as she uncrossed her legs. He immediately turned to look at her. The light from the screen partly lit up her face – her short dark hair framed an oval face with high cheekbones, deep brown eyes and a full mouth. It was partially open to show a row of sparkling white teeth. He was quite entranced and quickly looked away realizing that he was staring at her.

The lecture finished and he stood up and waited, praying that she would walk past him but instead she left her seat and walked out from the other side. Deflated, he had come to accept this was the way things were always

going to be for him. Some men seemed to be so natural with girls but he always felt awkward. He waited until the row had emptied, followed his fellow students to the refectory and lined up at the counter to buy a cup of coffee.

Akumu was sitting laughing with a group of friends and he felt a pang of jealousy. I have no right to be jealous after all she doesn't even know I exist, he reasoned with himself. But Akumu had noticed him. She had noticed the sadness in his face and for a moment felt a bit sorry for him. He got his coffee and wandered around for somewhere to sit. All the seats seemed to be occupied and then he noticed one in the corner of a table filled with senior students, probably from the year above. He sat down and grunted a 'Hello' and began to drink his coffee. No one took any notice of him; he felt very alone. He glanced at his watch and almost fifteen minutes had passed. He must get back to the lecture. By the time he had arrived back in the hall, it was full with the lights already dimmed. He found the nearest seat and sat down. He couldn't see Akumu anywhere. A youngish man, a lecturer in a white coat was now speaking.

'Today I am going to talk about the examination of the heart.' A diagram of the heart was projected onto a large screen and the teacher began to explain the anatomy – the four

chambers - four valves and specialized muscle with a unique nerve supply. He outlined the flow of blood through the heart before describing the common abnormalities and how to recognize them. The lecture was very interesting and Adam was fascinated by the miracle that was being unfolded before him. He was so absorbed that he didn't notice that Akumu was sitting no more than three seats away.

An only child, Adam was delighted when he had passed the interview for medical school, despite his father's disapproval of his choice. His father a family doctor had once tried to explain why he didn't want Adam to follow in his footsteps. He remembered they were walking in the garden at the rear of the house. It was early spring and the daffodils were out in all their glory. His father loved the garden and spent all his spare time, little as that was, tending the vegetable patch. They were in the little orchard at the rear when the subject came up.

'You see,' he said. 'You cannot serve two masters. One is bound to suffer in the long run.' That had certainly been the case for his family. He always felt that he had given too much to his profession and not enough to his wife and his family. He believed it was the duty of a doctor to put his patient first even at the expense of his family. Doctors should be single minded in their

commitment to their patients and always put their needs first. He disapproved of the new trend that the profession had reluctantly accepted that doctors and their families had a right to a private life. This had been achieved by reducing working hours and it inevitably meant that the patient paid the price by not seeing the doctor of his or her choice and was often being looked after by a different doctor much later.

The days and weeks seemed to rush by and Adam soon got into a routine. Alarm at 6.30 am, a shower and shave, a quick breakfast of corn flakes and coffee and then the short bus journey to the Medical School for a 9 o'clock start. He had not seen Akumu for a while and had almost forgotten her when one morning she was standing at his bus stop. His heart almost missed a beat. She was waiting completely absorbed in her thoughts unaware of his presence. He watched her, then controlling his nerves, stammered a hesitant, 'Hello,' and then to his surprise, somewhere within him came a spark of courage and he blurted out, almost choking over the words,

'Would you like to have coffee with me some time, say Saturday?' Akumu was deep in thought but looked up surprised by his voice.

'Yes, OK, sure, why not? Where shall we meet?' She replied. He hadn't thought that far

ahead but having regained his composure, suggested 10.30 at Starbells on Peter's Street.

'OK. I'll see you then,' she replied. They turned away from each other and waited in silence for the bus. He was elated. She had already forgotten the invitation and was thinking about an essay she hadn't finished and how she needed to get a book out of the library. The bus arrived and they boarded sitting next to each other in silence. He was acutely aware of her shoulder pressing against his and the faint smell of her perfume. She was already thinking about the first lecture.

The days seemed to drag but eventually it was Saturday. Akumu knew there was something she had agreed to do but at first couldn't remember. Then she remembered the bus stop and that she'd agreed to have coffee with that boy, whose name for the life of her she couldn't remember.

Adam had hardly slept that night and awoke early. He was too excited, so he warned himself to remain calm. He sat quietly, breathing slowly and deeply allowing his thumping heart to calm. He kept looking at his watch. Time seemed to go so slowly. He put on his sweater, checked his wallet and keys and left the flat locking it behind him. He walked slowly because he didn't want to arrive too early but certainly not late. He considered texting her but

thought that would suggest that he couldn't rely on her. Instead he walked on until Starbells came into view with its brightly lit double glass fronted entrance.

He could see a figure sitting on a stool in the window but couldn't make out any details. As he approached the figure waved. She had arrived early. He entered and went over to her.

'Hi, how are you?' and not waiting for the answer, 'what would you like to drink?'

'A latte with a croissant and jam please.' Great! He thought to himself, that's what I'll have also. He went over to the counter, gave the order and paid. He waited until the order was filled and then took the tray over to Akumu, putting it carefully down in front of her. She smiled.

'Thank you, that looks delicious.'
After a moment she got up and came back with some serviettes.

'Sorry,' he mumbled, 'I forgot.'
They settled down, munching in silence. After a while he asked,

'How is the studying going?'
'Good! I am really enjoying it but find it very frustrating trying to remember so many new words, what about you?'

'I agree but I guess we are all having the same problem.' He hadn't really thought about it before but it suddenly came to him.

‘Perhaps we could test each other,’ he blurted out. He knew that some students were working together. It seemed to help as the one encouraged the other. She thought for a moment and said,

‘Yeah! Why not? When do you suggest?’

‘We could meet once a week and test each other on what we had learned during the week.’

They fell into an easy conversation discussing the week’s work and what they had done in the evenings. Akumu told Adam that she worked in a bar after school sometimes up to midnight. She said that she struggled to get up in the morning. He thought she looked tired and her eyes were a little red.

‘I worked very late last night as we had a special party in the bar which went on and on.’

He could feel himself beginning to like this person. He felt concern for her situation, which required her to work so many hours after she had finished her schoolwork. He wondered if he could help. He didn’t want to offer money that he could ill afford but he could offer her his spare room.

Adam had moved from home and was renting a two-roomed flat in Notting Hill gate. He had a spare room that he wasn’t using. He knew

the old saying that two could live as cheaply as one but hadn't the courage to ask her.

'I've got to work late tonight. I am beginning to dread this job, it saps so much of my energy and makes it so difficult to concentrate on my studies.' She was saying. He began to listen more carefully. Perhaps, he thought, she would consider it. Maybe I should invite her over for a meal one evening and slowly introduce the idea of flat- sharing he thought.

Some weeks went by before the opportunity came. They were in a practical class and found themselves seated at the same bench. Towards the end of the lesson he plucked up courage.

'Akumu, I was wondering, would you like to have dinner with me one evening at my place. I am quite a good cook if I say so myself,' he blushed.

She looked at him and again was drawn into his clear blue eyes.

'Yes, I would like that.'

'How about Friday? He gulped. He daren't suggest Saturday as she was bound to have a date.

'Sorry, no I can't. I'm working on Friday but Saturday would be fine,' she said. 'Where do you live?'

'My place isn't far away,' he replied, explaining to her how to get there. 'Shall we say 7 o'clock?'

'Ok. I'll see you then.' She added, 'Let's exchange numbers in case we need to change the arrangement.'

Adam reviewed the day. He was still amazed at his boldness and was very excited about the forthcoming evening with Akumu. He began to plan the menu. He suddenly realized that he had not asked her if she had any food likes and dislikes. Perhaps she was a vegetarian? He considered phoning her and then decided not to. I've got to be decisive. I'll prepare a non-meat meal and she should have no problems.

He had settled on avocado to start followed by Tofu curry and rice and for dessert, fruit salad. He had checked his funds and found he was a bit short but would be very careful during the week. He planned to have everything ready at least an hour before she was due to arrive.

First he had to straighten up the flat. He was by nature a tidy person but inevitably the bathroom needed some attention together with the toilet. He hoovered the lounge and put up a small table that they would eat off in the sitting room. In the early afternoon, he began to

prepare the meal. Adam began to daydream, visualising Akumu sitting at the table, her dark hair shining in the candlelight. As she leaned forward, he would see her cleavage and would feel his excitement rising. She would see where his eyes were and would smile touching his hand. Then he smelled burning and woke up managing to turn off the gas and save the meal. He showered and changed and then thought about music and checked his CDs. Something soft and gentle such as Nelson Riddle might do the trick.

The doorbell rang and for a moment he froze. He rushed to the door almost tripping over a rug. Akumu was standing in the doorway. She was wearing an off the shoulder red top, a pair of tight jeans and gold sandals.

'You look beautiful,' he said feeling his face blushing. She smiled.

'Come in, come in. Did you have any trouble finding me?'

'No, your directions were great apart from the last bit when I couldn't see the number on the door.' As she brushed past him to enter the small living room he smelled her perfume again and inhaled deeply. She noticed and added,

'Do you like it, it's the same I wore when we had coffee at Starbell's.' She had remembered that he had commented about it. He followed her in and invited her to sit.

'Umm, what would you like to drink, I have some nice wine?'

'Wine would be good.'

'Red or white?'

'Mmm, red please.' she replied. He disappeared into the kitchen and re-appeared with two glasses of red wine.

'Cheers', he said and they both drank.

'Are you hungry? Shall we eat now, the food's ready?'

'No, if it won't spoil, I'd rather sit a while and enjoy the wine. It's delicious, what is it?' She asked.

'It's one of my favourites, a Merlot from Chile,' he replied.

They sat together on the couch each in their own thoughts. She thought he seemed such a gentle and caring person. He could only sense the nearness of her and a strong desire to kiss her. She seemed to read his thoughts. She could feel his eyes on her, scanning her face, her skin, her eyes, admiring and devouring every bit of her. She found it strangely comforting and enjoyed the effect she was having on him and bathed in the light of his admiration. It was so unlike the look of lust she saw in the gaze of so many other men. She could feel his face coming closer, his breath warm on her cheek – he was going to kiss her.

Akumu looked into his smiling face, she saw his clear blue eyes and knew that he was the one she had been searching for all her life. She hugged him and turning towards him gently kissed him on the lips. He responded by returning the kiss more firmly until they were kissing passionately. After a while he released her and they sat both a little breathless. Finally he broke the silence, as if nothing had happened. A broad smile spread across her face.

'Come and sit at the table and I will get our first course. I hope you like avocado?' He placed the avocado on the table. It had been cut it into a fan shape with added strawberries on the side.

'Wow! That looks delicious,' she said smiling at him and touching his hand, 'you are very clever, I would never have thought of putting the two together.'
He resisted the temptation to boast and simply thanked her.

They ate in silence and then he took the empty dishes and went back into the kitchen to fetch the main course. While he was away, Akumu looked around the room. It was quite large with one wall replaced by a floor to ceiling bookcase. At the far end there was a large old-fashioned window over looking a small garden.

'Is the garden yours?' she called out.

‘No! It belongs to the basement apartment, although I can use it,’ he replied from the kitchen. He returned carrying a tray with plates, and hot pots, containing rice, curry and vegetables.

‘Mmm, that smells good, I love curries,’ she said. He placed them carefully on the table and then said,

‘Help yourself please;’ pointing to the dishes. She paused and seemed uncertain where to start.

‘Let me help you,’ and without waiting for her answer began to put some rice on her plate.

‘Not too much, thanks.’ Then he added the curry and vegetables. She looked at the food which smelled so good and smiled at him. Meanwhile he helped himself and sat down opposite her.

‘Would you like some chutney?’ He said offering her the jar. They continued to eat in silence occasionally looking at each other and smiling.

‘What a wonderful dish you have made, you must tell me the recipe,’ she said between mouthfuls. It was all going so well, he thought to himself. He silently thanked his mother for teaching me not to be afraid of cooking. Having finished the desert, they retired to the settee to listen to some music. She reached out and touched his arm.

'You know when I first saw you, I thought you were very remote and detached but now that I have got to know you, I think you are a wonderful person and will make a really good doctor.' Adam blushed.

'Thank you, I think you are a lovely person and I am so happy to be with you,' and he leaned over and kissed her gently. **'I am having a wonderful evening, you have made me so happy,'** he added. Akumu suddenly got up and turning to Adam said,

'Let's dance, I love this music.' Adam stood up feeling self conscious and awkward.

'I'm not a very good dancer I'm afraid,' he apologised.

'I'm sure you are, let's see.' Akumu said reaching out to him. At first he stumbled and trod on her toes.

'Sorry,' he mumbled, **'I told you I'm not very good. She laughed.**

'C'mon just relax and move with the music.' Gradually he responded and soon they were moving smoothly together, she gently guiding him when he missed a beat or lost the rhythm.

'Well Adam, what do you say now? You dance beautifully like a pro.' Adam stopped in the middle of the music and holding her tight kissed her soundly on the lips.

'You're wonderful,' he exclaimed delighted with his progress. Then they sat quietly holding hands.

'I don't know whether it has happened to you Akumu but something amazing has happened to me, finding you feels like a miracle.

An opaque swing door led into the Anatomy Room situated on the top floor of the research building of the St Margaret's Hospital Clinical block. A sign: No Entry unless authorized was pinned to the door handle. The class had assembled outside at 2 pm having climbed the seven flights as the lift was out of bounds. Akumu and Adam stood with a small group of about 20 others, looking uncertain and insecure. At five past two, the Anatomy Demonstrator David, wearing a grubby off-white long coat appeared and pushed his way through the crowd and opened the doors. He was tall and thin with a pallid complexion, unkempt hair and a five o'clock shadow and as one of the students would later quip,

'I thought he was one of the cadavers coming to greet us'. Entering the room, the class was immediately aware of the strong smell of formaldehyde. It irritated their eyes causing them to smart and water. They found themselves blinking and rubbing them to

ease the stinging. The Demonstrator saw their discomfort and barked,

'You'll get used to it, follow me'. They filed into the room and stood aimlessly looking around. The room was long and high-ceilinged with ten trestle tables, five on each side, running the length of the room. The narrow tables were draped with sheets outlining the shape of a human body. The Demonstrator began calling out the students names and allocated four students to each table. They stood two on either side uncertain, waiting for instructions.

Wow! Akumu thought to herself, this is it, the real thing, human bodies to dissect. Not for her but for most of them it would have been the first time they had seen a dead person and that memory would remain with them for life.

'Pay attention please, I have something very important to say. Under these sheets lay the earthly remains of your fellow human beings. They have loved and worked, struggled and achieved. In short they are like you and me and one day we also will be dead. Never forget that they deserve your utmost respect at all times. You are privileged to be dissecting their bodies. They would have left them for this purpose giving you the

opportunity to learn human anatomy by dissection, a long-standing tradition in medical teaching'.

As she listened Akumu could feel the excitement of what was about to happen and felt a strange surge of happiness realizing that this is what she always wanted to do. As luck would have it, she found herself on the same table as Adam. They did not speak to each other. They had decided that their relationship should remain outside college and that in school they would just acknowledge each other. Both were deep in thought contemplating the task that faced them. Each pupil had come prepared with a copy of the Anatomy manual to which they would refer to for instructions while dissecting. The Demonstrator's voice interrupted Akumu's thoughts.

'On each table choose one person to read from the manual and another to dissect. The others can watch and then take turns.'

Akumu was selected to read, Adam to dissect. She turned to the section on the upper limb and began reading:

Make a 5 inch incision through the skin from the outer point of the shoulder.

Do not incise too deeply, only through the skin and subcutaneous tissue.

Holding the scalpel firmly in his right palm, Adam cut through the dry and stiff skin with difficulty. More pressure and it would have gone too deep.

Undermine the skin by dissection between it and the underlying fatty layer until an opening 5 inches wide has been developed.

They could now see the muscle and some of the nerves and blood vessels as there was in fact very little fatty layer. The dissection proceeded slowly with each structure being identified from the text and drawings. It was not easy as unlike in life, the tissues were not pliable to dissect. Time seemed to stand still and then it was four o'clock and they were tidying up. Adam fell into step with Akumu as they were leaving.

'That was quite an experience, it's the first time I have seen a dead person.' Adam admitted.

Akumu was subdued and didn't answer. Where she was brought up, dead bodies were common. Often when they had no relatives, the dead were left where they had died, lying in a field after a heart attack or having been attacked; children lying shriveled in the gutter like crumpled paper, their skin parchment

thin just like the bodies on the table, eyes sunken, skin taught and wrinkled.

'People who have died from starvation...'
She had started to speak about it but instead went quiet, seeing no purpose in mentioning it. Instead she said,

'Let's go have a cup of tea.' Over tea, they sat quietly, each in their own thoughts. Adam didn't want to ask Akumu about what she had begun to say but made a mental note that one day he would.

Anatomy dissection became a regular weekly lesson. Adam would wait for Akumu and together they would climb the seven floors pausing at the top to catch their breath. Then they would stand by the body until the others had arrived. Eventually it was Akumu's turn to dissect. Carefully holding the tweezers in her left hand and the scalpel in her right, she gently stroked the tissue watching it part beneath the blade to reveal a vital structure, a main nerve or artery. After a while she gained confidence cutting more firmly. This is good she thought, she liked the feeling of control, the need to be meticulously accurate and how the body responded by revealing its secrets. It was as if she was having a dialogue, speaking a language of life despite the evident death of the corpse. When the bell rang to finish she did so

with reluctance as if leaving a friend and not a dead body. Walking down stairs with Adam, Akumu was very quiet,

'What are you thinking about?' he asked,
'Nothing really, I was just wondering what the person was like. I would have liked to have thanked her for allowing us to dissect her.'

'Don't be silly Akumu,' laughed Adam, 'she's dead, long gone to distant fields, leaving her body to us.'

'Exactly,' she replied, 'so that we can become better doctors and help the next generation. I think it's a very selfless thing to do.' That evening Akumu began to talk about her childhood. How death was always part of life.

'Where there is extreme poverty,' she explained, 'disease rages, and with it comes violence. People desperate for food steal and the natural response when catching a thief is to kill him. If someone takes the only food you have or the small amount of money to buy food, he is effectively killing you, your children, your wife, yourself so no mercy is shown. Once caught the thief may be kicked, battered or burned to death and I have seen all of these atrocities.'

'But that's terrible,' said Adam, 'it's barbaric, inhuman. How can you condone it?'

'I understand it and therefore don't judge it.' Akumu replied. Adam looked at Akumu as she was speaking. What different lives they had lived and what different views they had acquired, he thought.

Neither Akumu nor Adam realised when they first attended the Skin's Outpatients what an interesting and informative experience it would be. Dr Whitaker, a Dermatologist, was an irascible teacher, nearing retirement. He had seen it all before and was unable to control his impatience when a student struggled over some simple at least simple to him skin lesion. It happened to Adam on his first day. A young man not yet fifteen presented with a painful lesion under the sole of his foot. Adam was required to describe it. Stammering he began,

'I-it's a raised roughening of the skin of the sole of the r-right foot measuring about 5 mms by 5mms. It is tender to the touch. He has had it about two years.

'So what is it?' asked Dr Whitaker impatiently. There was a pause and Adam began

'It's a painful lesion... '

'Ye-e-s' said the chief tapping his foot.

'Of the sole of the right foot.'

'We know that. C'mon what is it? A name man, a name?'

'I think it could be...' Adam searched the faces of the other students praying that one would interrupt and release him from this torture but none did. They were all enjoying his discomfort too much. He pleaded with Akumu, mouthing, *help me*, but she didn't know the answer and could only shrug her shoulders. Dr Whitaker impatient to move on asked,

'Could it be a boil?' Adam knew enough to know that it wasn't.

'No, he said proudly.' The good doctor continued.

'Could it be a melanoma?'

Adam shuffled his feet; he knew this was the crux question so throwing everything to the wind he answered,

'Yes, it's a melanoma.' Gleaming with delight, the doctor asked,

'And what colour is a melanoma?' Adam realised he had been bowled centre wicket mumbled,

'Black.'

'Is this lesion black?' retorted the Doctor.

'No, it's the colour of the surrounding skin.'

'Exactly, so it can't be a melanoma?'

'No,' admitted Adam, now completely floored.

'OK, gentlemen and lady, let me tell you what it is. It's a verruca.' Adam sat back drained

by the exchange and confident that he would get no more questions but he was wrong. Once the doctor had a student in his sights he didn't let him go.

'Adam, what is a verruca?' he asked.

Adam felt he was on firmer ground.

'It's a virus infection of the skin of the sole of the foot caused by the human papilloma virus.' The Doctor turned to another student a tall gangly young man with short brown hair.

'Now Doctor,' he began sarcastically, 'tell us what the treatment of this condition is?'

Then followed a well thought out answer, which pleased the doctor, no end.

Turning to the group he said,

'There you see, that's what I want to hear from you, not a lot of rubbish.'

The next patient an older man had a lump on the back of his neck. Akumu was invited to describe it. She carefully felt it and said,

'It is a smooth round non tender soft swelling with a hair follicle in its middle.'

'What is it?'

'It's a sebaceous cyst.'

'Good, and what is the treatment?'

'Removal, surgically under local anaesthetic,' said Akumu confidentially.

Patient after patient presented with a wide range of skin disorders. There seemed to

Akumu to be no limit to the number of different

skin conditions. By the end of the clinic they had seen over thirty patients all with different rashes or lesions. They could all be diagnosed by history and clinical examination alone. This was a refreshing difference from some specialities in which investigations were essential for diagnosis, thought Akumu.

Having seen all his outpatients, Dr Whitaker proceeded to the ward followed by the students. They stopped first outside a side ward in which a small child was being isolated because of an extensive skin rash. The students were invited to peer through the small window in the door. When her turn came, Akumu was not prepared for what she would see. A child about two years old covered from head to toe with an angry red rash, with areas of bleeding and scabbing.

'This is impetigo,' announced the doctor, 'a very infectious skin condition.' Akumu had seen similar rashes in children back home in the village. They usually died because the family couldn't afford the antibiotics needed.

'He's going to die,' she whispered to a colleague. The Doctor overheard her comment.

'Why do you say that? He asked.

'Because I have seen many children like him back home and none of them survived.' The doctor looked surprised,

'What treatment did they receive?'

'They were treated with oils and special leaves from the witch doctor.'

'What about antibiotics?' Asked the doctor.

'We didn't have them. They were too expensive.'

'Happily, he will survive, come back in a few days and see him.'

Akumu returned and to her amazement the boy was no longer in quarantine but running around in the ward. That night she spoke to Adam and talked about what they had seen.

'It was a miracle.' she exclaimed. 'What an extraordinary discovery antibiotics were.'

Akumu had walked passed the operating theatre swing doors many times on her way to out-patient clinics and always felt a slight feeling of apprehension. What was going on in there? What life and death drama was being re-enacted in that rather forbidding place? Not yet ready to find out the answer, her pace would quicken. She knew that one day she would have to enter. She sometimes thought about it in the early hours when she couldn't sleep. The swing doors would open and she would be walking down the narrow corridor leading to a passage onto which the operating rooms opened. Each had a small antechamber into which the patient on a trolley was wheeled while awaiting the

anaesthetic. Each room also had a main door through which the surgeon and staff entered.

Suddenly in her dream, that door would open and a patient on an operating table would be rushed out, blood streaming from his belly, surrounded by anxious looking assistants. The whole scene was frenzied. No one seemed to be in control. The effect on her was electric. She could feel his heart racing and she was bathed in sweat. She would lie shaking with fear. Inevitably and sooner than she thought the day came when her name was on the list to visit the operating room. THEATRE DUTY Monday 14th October at 8.30 am.

She read it several times to make sure she hadn't made a mistake and wrote it in her diary. She had got used to doing that since she had completely forgotten an assignment and received a real telling off. On the appointed day she arrived early and was the first to assemble outside the theatre. Initially she thought she was on the wrong day and checked her diary. Suddenly the doors opened and a gowned figure appeared

'Are you the student for theatre?'

'Yes?'

'Do you know which one?'

'Yes, Theatre 4.'

'You're with Mr. March, follow me'

She followed the gowned figure along the corridor and was taken into the changing room.

'You'll find greens on the shelves, tops and bottoms, and select a pair of boots. I'll wait for you out here. Akumu soon found some greens to fit her, but getting the right sized boot was more difficult and she ended up padding out in an oversized pair. She followed the assistant into the Operating Room, which was larger than she had imagined. An immense window through which she could see a distant playing field replaced one wall. In the middle of the room was the operating table, a flat padded surface on a central pedestal. Above was a circular dome, which emitted several beams of light. These were adjustable to provide illumination to the required part of the patient.

There were several people already preparing the first case. A nurse whom she presumed to be the theatre sister was setting a trolley. She had covered the top with a crisp green sheet on which she was laying out instruments in a precise pattern. In front were two scalpels with artery forceps and holding forceps. Next was a row of retractors of different sizes. At the rear were the swabs and sponges which she was carefully counting out with a junior nurse.

'Eight, nine, ten. Next bundle,' she rasped and the swab count started again.

'Are you the student'? She called out without looking up.

Akumu realised she was talking to her.

'Yes, Sister.'

'Have you been in theatre before?'

Before she could answer, she added, 'No, I can see you haven't,'

'Have you ever scrubbed up?'

'Yes, in A&E.' She could feel her legs trembling.

'Then show me how you do it.'

Akumu went into the scrub up area where she could see a row of faucets but no handles. She stood, perplexed looking around for them.

'On the floor', sister hissed, 'on the floor.' Glancing down she saw a raised rubber control.

'Press it with your foot,' sister ordered, and as Akumu did, warm water emerged from the tap.

Using her elbow she released a small amount of liquid soap and unwrapping a small brush began to systematically scrub her hands first the left and then the right paying careful attention to each area. Each finger and thumb was carefully scrubbed. She could feel sister's eyes watching her every move, waiting to pounce should she put a step wrong. Finally a nurse standing behind her handed her a sterile towel and she dried her hands.

Now the gown, she undid it and holding it at arm's length allowed it to unroll and hang down in front of her. She put her arms into the sleeves easing them on by shrugging her shoulders until her hands emerged. Now the tricky bit, the gloves. She desperately tried to remember how to put them on. Opening the package she carefully tipped them onto a towel-covered table. Holding the cuff of the right hand glove she pulled it on gently. Then she used her right gloved hand to pull on the left glove avoiding touching the skin. Then she turned to allow the trainee to tie the back of her gown. She handed her the loose tape, which she tied around her front closing the back of the gown. She was ready and stood waiting for further instructions.

At that moment a tall, capped and masked figure entered. She had never seen Mr. March before but presumed that this was him. The masked figure walked over to the scrub up area and began to scrub. Akumu stood waiting not certain what to do. The tall figure asked her in an accent which she recognised as antipodean.

'Are you the student who is assisting me?'

'Yes, Sir?'

"What's your name?"

'Akumu. Sir

'Akumu what?'

'Oh! Akumu Onyango.' She replied feeling a bit embarrassed. People here always had trouble with her name but it was her family name and she was proud of it.

'I'll call you Akumu, OK. Have you assisted before?'

'No Sir.'

'Right, after the patient is brought in, come and stand on the left side of the table and sister will show you what to do. Keep your hands up in front of you so you do not touch anything.'

Akumu waited until the patient a man in his forties was wheeled in. He was already asleep and attached by tubes to the anaesthetic trolley which followed him. Two Assistants stepped forwards and lifted him gently onto the narrow operating table.

Mr March spoke to the room.

'This man has a large stomach ulcer and I am planning to do a partial gastrectomy.' He turned to Akumu,

'Please tell us what is a stomach ulcer?'

Akumu cleared her throat, paused and began,

'Sir, umm, it's a break in the lining of the stomach caused by the acid juice dissolving it.'

'Good, and tell us what is a partial gastrectomy?'

'It is an operation to remove part of the stomach so as to reduce the amount of acid produced.'

'Right. Sister, let's begin.' Akumu watched as the team proceeded. They knew exactly what was required so that Mr. March hardly had to say a word. After about ten minutes, Akumu was handed a metal instrument, a bit like a flat spoon with a curved handle. It was a retractor and she was told to hold back the bowel gently so as to reveal the stomach. Akumu watched with amazement as part of the stomach wall was clamped between two flat blades.

'We are now going to remove that smaller part,' Mr March told her **'and then sew up the cut edge so that nothing can leak out.'** She watched as the scalpel cut through the redundant tissue which twitched as it was divided. Akumu gasped as the tissue moved beneath the knife. Mr March must have seen her reaction because he leaned over to her and whispered,

'Don't worry the patient won't feel any pain, the anaesthetist has seen to that.' The cut surface was then beautifully sealed with over and over sutures. When he had completed the repair, the stomach size had been reduced by a third.

'That should lower the acid sufficiently to allow the ulcer to heal,' concluded the surgeon. Then handing over to his assistant he said, 'Sew up please,' and nodding to Sister he left the room.

Akumu stayed and assisted the younger surgeon to complete the operation. Later in the coffee room, Akumu listened to a conversation. Mr March was discussing a patient who had just been admitted as an acute. His assistant had seen the lady and was describing the clinical situation. She had lost a lot of blood and was very anaemic with a haemoglobin level of 65%.

'I have arranged for a blood transfusion of four pints, I think that should be enough,' he said.

In the next theatre, Adam was scrubbing and gowning as the next patient was being wheeled in. He had previously glanced at the notes and read the summary. A twelve year old boy had fallen from a tree and fractured his right elbow. The bones were widely displaced and could not be held in a satisfactory position without an operation. Adam watched as the arm was prepped with an iodine solution and carefully draped so as to leave a rectangular area exposed. This was then covered with a sticky transparent sheet so that the skin was now completely occluded.

The operation could now begin. Adam had been told that the surgeon Mr Benjamin used a non-touch technique. He noticed that the surgeon did not touch the tissues or the ends of instruments entering the tissues. Carefully feeling the bony landmarks on the arm he drew a line five inches long with an indelible pen. Then with the scalpel held in his right palm, he gently stroked the skin. A fine rosary of bright red drops appeared. Deepening the wound, he exposed a thin pale layer of fat. Another stroke and gleaming muscle covered with gossamer thin tissue became visible. He identified the shallow valley between the muscle bellies and gently eased them apart, revealing the bone which emerged like a whitened stone. It was fragmented and splintered, but his trained eye could see that enough was intact to stabilise and repair it. Adam watched hardly able to breathe.

The living body was so different from the corpse he had dissected in Anatomy. He was riveted by the palette of colours, bright red blood, pale yellow fat, muscles a rich brown and whiteness of the bone which amazed him.

The surgeon carefully removed some bone fragments, aligned the two bone ends until they could interlock, and then gently, very gently, bent them to a right angle which released the soft tissues allowing the bones to

lock together. As he straightened the limb, the fracture fell into position. Adam thought of Lego and the way the plastic pieces slotted into each other. Fracture surgery seemed so much like that. The fracture was now firmly in place while the assistant secured it with a plate and eight screws. The operation was over apart from closing the wound which he left to his assistant. Adam absorbed every detail of the operation. He knew then that his life would never be the same again. He had seen inside a living person not a mortuary body as he had seen before, but a living, breathing, sentient being. He saw blood vessels pumping and muscles twitching beneath the surgeon's knife.

Somehow he knew in that moment that even if surgery was not going to be his destiny, what he had experienced that morning would never leave him. He wanted to stay to see the next operation but was due in surgical out patients so taking his leave and thanking the surgeon and the scrub nurse, he made his way to the refectory for a short break. As he entered he saw Akumu sitting alone nursing a coffee. He had forgotten that they had arranged to meet for lunch and rushed over ready to apologise but she beat him to it,

'Sorry I'm late, I forgot we had arranged to meet,' she confessed.

'Me too,' he replied sheepishly. 'How was the morning?'

'Brilliant, Mr. March did a partial gastrectomy. I was bowled over by his skill and the team. They all worked like clockwork. He hardly had to say anything. What an amazing machine we are once you get below the skin. I think we're both in surgical OP this afternoon.'

The Outpatient clinic of the surgical department was held on the third floor of the main hospital and could be reached either by three flights of stairs or by a rather unsatisfactory lift. Adam and Akumu decided to walk up the stairs and arrived at the fourth floor puffing and trying to catch their breath.

'We're not very fit,' gasped Adam as they reached the third floor. Turning right they walked a short distance to a door indicating Out Patients. It led to a long corridor off which were offices, consulting rooms, treatment rooms, waiting rooms and rest rooms. There was a small library. Adam went in. The air smelt rather stale as if the room wasn't often used. Books were stacked on a bookshelf near the window and on the table were some magazines. Meanwhile a number of patients were already waiting to be seen in the clinic.

The Chief hadn't arrived yet so Adam and Akumu went into the consulting room to wait

for him. Two other students from their year had already arrived and were sitting patiently. Akumu felt excited, she was going to see actual medicine being practiced. She made sure she was sitting somewhere close so as to be able to see everything that was going on. She checked her bag and removed her notebook and pen. Meanwhile the nurses were sorting out the patient's records and getting the latest test results. They were allocating patients to separate cubicles, once in the cubicle they were asked to undress and put on a dressing gown while waiting to be seen by the specialist.

Just after two o'clock, Mr Hood arrived breathless and a bit dishevelled. Short and balding with a small moustache, Akumu thought he looked more like a barber than a surgeon. After a clipped 'Good Afternoon', he sat down at the desk and waited for the first patient. The nurse standing behind the desk ushered her in.

'This is Mrs Gladys Trimmingham, Sir'. A short rather plump woman entered the room.

'Good afternoon, please sit down, how can I help you?' The specialist asked. As he was speaking, he was reading a letter which was in her notes.

'Your doctor says that you have been having a pain in the left side of your tummy for about six weeks.'

'Yes, it's here,' she explained, pointing to the left side of her abdomen.

' Mmm, what's the pain like? Is it there all the time or does it come and go.'

'It comes and goes?'

The students listened intently as the Surgeon went through the history systematically eliminating different causes of abdominal pain and then before examining the lady, he turned to the students.

'Well! Who would like to hazard a guess as to what is wrong with this patient?' A hand went up.

'OK Jake what do you think?'

'Colicky left sided pain in a lady of this age is...?'

'Shall we say she needs some investigations?' Interrupted the Surgeon.

'Nurse please arrange for this patient to get dressed and I will write out the request form.'

'Now that the patient is out of the room, Jake please continue,'

'A woman of this age with colicky abdominal pain of six weeks duration must be considered to have a large bowel obstruction. A serious cause such as a cancer must be excluded,'

'Exactly, what would you expect to find on examination?'

'Possibly a tender mass?'

'Good, how would you investigate her further?'

Jake replied, 'I think she should have a sigmoidoscopy and if a tumour was found, a biopsy.'

Adam listened intently; this was real life, no longer textbook medicine but people with real disorders. At first he found it difficult to grasp. He struggled to understand the connection between symptoms and disease but knew instinctively that it was that link which would eventually lead to the correct treatment.

Akumu's mind was momentarily elsewhere. She was remembering her grandmother writhing in pain with no one able to help. The family had taken her to the Witch Doctor of the village, an elderly man with a white untrimmed beard and broken brown teeth. He lived in a hut made of straw and mud and was sitting on the mud-baked floor surrounded by herbs of all varieties. After he had seen her grandma, he had recited a prayer in an unintelligible language while mixing up a potion of herbs, which she was told to take three times a day. Grandma had battled on bravely but didn't survive more than a few weeks. During the last week she was continuously vomiting and clutching her tummy. No one could help her. She was given some herbal painkillers but

they made no difference. Akumu was only three at the time but she remembered every detail. She even crawled into her grandmother's bed trying to help.

This woman in the clinic, thought Akumu, this woman's future would be so different, she could be cured, so why was my Grandmother punished, she was a good woman, she worked hard and hurt no one? There seemed no answer, no justice in the world.

The next patient was a man with a lump in his groin. Akumu took the history.

'How long have you had it,' she asked,

'About six months,' he replied.

'How did it appear?'

'I think it came after I was lifting some heavy wood. I felt a pain in my groin and the next day the swelling appeared.'

'Is it there all the time?'

'No, it comes and goes especially if I strain.'

'What do you think he has Akumu?' Mr Hood asked.

'I think he has a hernia,' Akumu replied confidently

'Good, and what is the treatment?'

'He could wear a truss but surgical repair is a better solution.'

'Yes, he is a youngish man and would find a truss very uncomfortable.'

Adam and Akumu saw another four patients before they had to leave to attend a tutorial.

Later that evening Adam and Akumu met in the refectory and exchanged notes. They were both still very excited by what they had seen.

Akumu liked working on the surgical ward. It was always busy and dramatic. Patients would come in desperately ill and in a few days would be up and about; it was such a rewarding place to work. Situated on the fourth floor of the main building, close to the Operating Theatre, it was a mixed ward with a central panel separating the sexes. The ends were communal and ambulant men and women, able to walk about could meet and talk. The theory was that by the time the patients had recovered sufficiently to know where they were, they would be discharged home or to another ward. Often in practice, another placement was not available so that relatively fit male patients remained much to the dismay of some of the older women.

Each student was allocated an individual patient to clerk and to present their clinical findings on the ward round, usually held on Monday morning at 9 a.m. Akumu was allocated Gladys, the frail elderly woman in her 80s whom she had first met in the surgical clinic.

Gladys had noticed that her abdomen was swelling, and that she was constipated. Investigations had shown that she was obstructed, and that this was probably due to a tumour in the large bowel. An operation had been scheduled for the following day. Gladys had become very attached to Akumu, the first person in many years who had shown interest in her. Her husband had died some years earlier and she had lost touch with all of her four children. Bringing out a creased discoloured photograph she proudly showed Akumu her family. It was a group picture of an older man standing with his arm around her in front of four smiling children, two boys and two girls.

'It was taken many years ago,' she mumbled. 'They're now grown up and I no longer see them.' Holding the picture Akumu thought about the sadness of life; a woman now so alone after sacrificing her youth for her family. Turning to her she hesitated before offering to contact the children, and let them know what was happening. This was usually done by a social worker but for some reason had been overlooked. At first Gladys declined saying that the children wouldn't be interested but Akumu persevered and eventually Gladys gave way and let Akumu have several telephone numbers, as she was not certain where her children were living. Akumu promised to phone

the numbers and try and make contact with the children.

That evening, after supper, Akumu returned to her room and began to make several phone calls. The first few calls were not answered, but then a male voice replied. She explained who she was and that she was speaking on behalf of a patient called Gladys whom she was looking after. The man whose name was Peter listened carefully and then began to apologise, saying how sorry he was that he had not seen his mother more frequently. Akumu told him the name of the hospital, and how to get there. He did not live far away and promised to come the following day, which would be the day before the operation.

Over coffee the next day Akumu mentioned to Adam what she had done. He was a bit surprised saying that she should be careful, it wasn't the duty of a medical student to be a social worker but he would be interested to hear how she got on. It was after lunch the following day, when a nurse called Akumu to tell her that there was a man named Peter at the entrance to the ward wishing to see his mother, her patient. She walked briskly through the Ward to the door. A man in his 50s, with grey hair and a slightly bent posture was standing there. She approached him,

'Are you Peter?'

'Yes, are you the doctor?' He asked.

'No,' she replied, 'I am a medical student looking after your mother.' They fell into conversation about his mother and as Akumu explained, Gladys was due for surgery the following day.

'What's actually wrong with my mother?'

'I'm afraid she's very ill. She has a tumour in her large bowel, which we fear, is probably cancer.' They walked together down the ward and stopped at the old woman's bed. She was dozing and looked very frail and weak. Peter went up to her, lent over and kissed her gently on the cheek. She woke and looked up. Slowly as if a mist was clearing she recognised him.

'Is that you Peter dear? You shouldn't have bothered to come, I know you're very busy.'

'No! Mum, I should've come sooner, I've no excuse for not finding the time.'

'Peter,' she said in a weak voice, 'what's wrong with me? I know the doctor has tried to explain but I don't really understand.'

'Mum, the tests have shown that you have an inflammation in your tummy.' As he was saying this he looked at Akumu who nodded. He continued,

'The doctors want to remove it as it is stopping your food from going down.'

'Is it a serious operation? I'm not worried. I've had a good life and if it's my time to go so be it.' Peter reached out and took her hand.

'I know Mum, but we need you so you're not going yet. You've a lot of good years yet.'

'Peter I don't know, I get very tired and sometimes I just want to sleep, sleep forever.'

'I think we should leave your mother now and let her get some rest,' said Akumu taking Peter gently by the arm.

'You're right Doctor,' he said leaning over and giving his mother a kiss on the forehead. **'I'll come and see you after the operation. I love you Mum,'**

The operation was planned for 9 am the following morning. Akumu had no lectures so she arranged to be there to take her patient into the Operating Theatre. When she arrived on the ward to say hello to her patient, she noticed that Gladys was trying to wet her lips. She had been on Nil By Mouth overnight in preparation for the operation and was getting dehydrated. Akumu fetched a moist swab and wiped Gladys' lips and then let her suck on it. At that moment the trolley arrived to take her into Theatre. Akumu accompanied her holding her hand. She could see how afraid her patient was.

Gladys was looking around as if uncertain what was happening; blinking her

eyes frequently with tears wetting her face; clenching her fists spasmodically. Akumu squeezed her hand. Arriving at the theatre, Akumu was able to accompany her into the Anaesthetic room and stood still holding her hand as a thin catheter was inserted into one of her arm veins.

'You'll soon feel sleepy,' said the anaesthetist as he slowly injected a pale yellow fluid into the tube. Within about twenty seconds, Akumu felt Gladys relax her grip and watched as her face previously drawn in fear softened, the lines of tension slowly disappearing. Two porters appeared and wheeled Gladys into the theatre and gently lifted her onto the operating table. Akumu nodded to the surgeon now gowned and masked and he nodded in reply. She positioned herself at the side of the room while the patient's abdomen was prepped and gowned.

From where she was standing, she was able to see through an overhead mirror what was happening. An incision about five inches long was made in the abdomen to the right of the midline and deepened through the yellow fat to the pale brown muscle. Blood vessels were sealed with a diathermy. The muscle was retracted and the belly opened. After a few moments of exploring the large bowel, the surgeon came upon a thickened section which

was white and hard and had replaced the normal pink colour of the bowel. The nearby glands were normal.

'That's it,' said the surgeon, 'it's a cancer of the bowel which has blocked the lumen, causing an obstruction.'

'What's the answer?' asked the surgeon turning to Akumu.

'The affected bowel needs to be removed and the cut ends joined together.'

Some days later Akumu visited Gladys. She was sitting out in a chair by the side of her bed. She looked relaxed and smiled as Akumu approached.

'Wow, you look wonderful,' exclaimed Akumu taking her hand. 'How are you feeling?'

'Like a new woman, I'm ready to go home. Peter's coming for me.' A few days later Akumu got a call to say that there was something for her at reception. During her lunch break she went to Reception and gave her name. The receptionist beaming with delight handed her a huge bunch of flowers. There was a note which read, *Thank you for your kindness we will never forget you, Gladys and Peter.*

Akumu met Adam as he was leaving that evening. She was still carrying the bunch of flowers.

'Who's been giving my girl flowers?' he joked as they greeted each other.

'You'll never guess,' smiled Akumu, 'you know that lady with the bowel cancer on the surgical ward?'

'Yes,' said Adam.

'The one you told me not to be her social worker to. Well it was her son. My phone call brought them together after many years so say you're sorry.'

'Sorry Akumu, you were right,'

It was dark when Akumu left the hospital. She passed between the two neoclassical marble columns before stepping out into the street. The cold air of late September hit her and she pulled her collar close around her hair.

'Gosh it's cold,' she thought as she started towards the bus stop. As she approached the shelter she saw a solitary figure standing in the shadow just outside the cone of light from the street lamp. She thought no more about it as she took her place under the shelter waiting for the bus.

Several moments passed and then a voice, deep and full with a distinct African accent said, 'Habari yako, (how are you?)'

Those accented words heard in a London street flashed Akumu's mind back to her childhood. She was just eleven years old and

had gone to get water from the well in the centre of the village where she lived. It was the only source of water for miles. It was her job to get water for the whole family before she went to school in the morning.

‘Hi! Habari yako, how are you’, they shouted in unison exaggerating the ‘you’. Akumu was flustered and embarrassed.

‘Ignore them’, said an older woman ‘and they will tire of it’. The memory of that painful event never left her and here she was in London year’s later hearing the same greeting. She felt a stab of fear and looked at him momentarily. She replied with a short dismissive word.

‘Fine’, she said, intending it to be a final comment. But he had more to say.

‘Are you going far?’ he said moving closer to her so she could now see him. He was tall and muscular with short curly hair, about thirty she guessed. This was not what she wanted. She had hoped the bus would have come so she could get away. He had repeated the question assuming she hadn’t heard the first time. She hated this situation, it had happened so many times before and she still didn’t know how to handle it. She had quickly gone over in her mind the alternatives – be friendly and answer politely, say nothing as if she didn’t hear him. She had tried both

strategies in the past with variable effect - being friendly had its advantages but also its risks.

‘What’s the matter girl, are you too posh to speak, to talk to the likes of me? We’re both Kikuyu aren’t we?’ She turned to look at him for the first time, recognizing the characteristic shape of his forehead, eyes, nose and lips.

‘Habari misuri, umetoka wapi?’ (How long have you been in London?) ‘Do you live near here?’ He asked. The conversation continued in a friendly fashion and she began to relax. She was leaning against the post of the shelter holding her bag loosely on her arm when he suddenly moved. Without warning he grabbed it. Before she realized what had happened he had gone.

‘Stop’, she shouted but he had disappeared into the darkness. It all happened so quickly that she didn’t have a moment to think. She was devastated; her bag contained everything, her money, credits cards, house keys and worst of all her books and lecture notes. Gradually she calmed down as her anger against him was replaced by anger against herself. How could I have been so stupid? I know better than to trust anyone especially a stranger in the city. Back home I wouldn’t have fallen for this but here my guard was down. What am I to do? Her sobbing slowly eased and she began to think more clearly. She looked

around to see if anyone had witnessed what had happened but the street was deserted apart from a stray cat meowing in an alley. She had no money and then she remembered that Adam lived nearby.

She set off feeling a bit more confident. She knocked and waited. It seemed a long time and then she heard footsteps and the door opened.

‘I’ve,’ she stammered but he cut her short.

‘What’s the matter you look as if you’ve seen a ghost?’

‘I’ve been mugged and my bag with everything in it has been stolen’. She collapsed in a bout of sobbing.

‘Gosh, are you all right? Did they hurt you? Come in, come in.’ He led the way into the living room. Once in familiar surroundings she felt herself becoming calmer.

‘Sit down and tell me everything, slowly. Would you like a drink?’

‘Yes please, a strong black coffee.’ Adam went into the kitchen to make the coffee and called out,

‘Keep talking I can hear you.’ Akumu recounted the story, which was punctuated by the occasional sob.

‘What am I going to do?’

‘OK, tell me carefully everything you had in you bag. Try to be as accurate as possible.’

Akumu began

‘Two credit cards, oh yes, my door keys, my wallet with about £20, some makeup and lipstick, and more important, all my notes and folders.’

‘Right, cancel the credit cards. Use my phone.’

‘I don’t have the telephone number.’

‘What cards do you have?’

‘A Natwest and an American Express’

‘I have the numbers so ring them and cancel.’

Akumu rang and although she didn’t have the card numbers, she was able to stop both cards.

‘Next.’ Adam said, ‘your keys? Do you know the telephone number of your Landlady?’

‘Yes it’s..... ,’and she recited the number off-heart.

‘Good, then ring her and tell her what has happened and arrange to meet her at your flat.’ Within a short while Akumu breathed a sigh of relief.

‘Thank you so much I just couldn’t have managed without your help.’ They sat together on the couch in silence, each thinking of the other. Akumu was overwhelmed by Adam’s kindness. Adam was so pleased to have been able to help. Suddenly an extraordinary idea

came into her head. I wonder, she thought would it work?

‘Adam,’ she said, ‘why don’t I ring my phone? He won’t have got rid of it so soon, and speak to him, what do you think?’

‘It’s a brilliant idea. Try, you have nothing to lose.’ The ring sound continued for what seemed an inordinate period of time when it was answered by a voice that she immediately recognized.

‘It’s him!’ she whispered, ‘he’s answered.’

‘Try and arrange to meet him.’

The voice continued ‘What do you want?’

‘You bastard, you stole my bag and I want it back.’ She heard laughter at the other end.

‘Why should I return it? I need the money.’

‘It’s my files and books, I am a medical student and I need them for my studies.’

‘I’m busy at the moment. Ring me tomorrow morning and I will think about it’. Akumu put the receiver down and looked at Adam.

‘What a bastard, and a Kikuyu to boot.’

‘I think you have done as much as you can tonight. I’ll walk you back to your place.’ The following morning Akumu arrived early at Adam’s place. He was just having breakfast when she rang the doorbell.

'Come in, would you like some coffee, it's just brewing. How are you?'

'OK! I suppose,' she nodded.

'Do you think it is too early to ring him?'

'No, try, it will serve him right if you wake him up.'

The telephone rang for a long time before it was answered by a sleepy voice. He had reached over and picked up the phone. He knew it was her. Akumu suggested that he meet her but he declined assuming it would be a police trap.

'Look I don't need your files and books. I'll leave them in the waiting room at Paddington Station some time today.'

Adam realized that he had to get to the station quickly if he had any chance of catching the man. He jogged down Praed Street and crossed over to enter Paddington Station. He knew the waiting room was at the far side of the concourse and quickly reached it. He waited in a corner concealed by a column and after about thirty minutes a man entered and placed a carrier bag under a seat at the far end of the room. Adam realised immediately that he must be the thief and without thinking crept up behind him. The thief must have heard or sensed something because he suddenly turned. For a brief moment their eyes met.

'You thieving bastard,' Adam said and raising his fist hit the man with all his might. A

sudden look of surprise appeared on the man's face. He tried to dodge the blow but stumbled and lost his balance. He fell heavily hitting his head on the tiled floor. He let out a moan and then lay still. Adam bent over him and noticed a small trickle of blood beginning to appear on the floor.

'My God,' he thought 'I've killed him?' He felt a wave of panic and without thinking rushed out of the waiting room. 'I must get away. If I tell the police they will never believe me'. He ran all the way back to his room and sent Akumu a text message telling her that he had her books and files. She returned it some hours later saying that she was sorry but she was tied up and thanks for getting my things back.

'Are you all right?'

'I am fine,' replied Adam, 'but a bit worse for wear.' Akumu didn't understand what that meant.

Akumu remembered the old A&E department, a series of small buildings linked by ill-lit dingy corridors. She had once had to go there herself as an emergency having fallen and hurt her ankle. She recalled being put into a small cubicle with a dull light and greenish walls which made her feels sick. She had to wait for hours and eventually decided to go home and no one stopped her or asked whether she

was all right. It was a dismal unhappy experience but this new department only recently opened by the Duchess of York was the state of the art, perhaps things would be better now.

A large entrance with automatic doors opened into a high-ceilinged atrium not unlike a five star hotel. Reception was behind a long counter on the far wall and beyond, several corridors led off to the examination cubicles. It was a far cry from the clinics she recalled as a child, small dingy rooms crowded with people, mothers with children at the breast, men sitting slumped with a dirty bandage around a hand or a leg; the flies and the smell. The image came back to her in a flash, but she shrugged it aside. That was the past and she was now able to benefit from so many advances thanks to the thousands of nameless people who had made it possible.

She had had difficulty finding the new department as she was initially directed to the old department which was now being upgraded into a Physiotherapy Unit. Most of the staff she had asked didn't even know that the new department was open and receiving patients. They were hurrying to their own departments; no humour, just the seriousness of the place and the job. Although she had set off early, as

was her habit, by the time she found the new department she was almost late.

The Consultant in charge, Mr. Seymour was waiting. He was getting impatient and was tapping his fingers on the desk. He was a tall heavily built man with bright ginger hair, blue eyes and a small moustache. He was wearing a white coat and standing with his hands in his pockets and a stethoscope hanging around his neck.

'Where is your colleague?' He barked without even a 'Good Morning.'

'I don't know I came alone.'

'We'll wait a few more minutes but if he doesn't turn up, I'll start without him.' He said impatiently.

At that moment the second student arrived rather breathless. He had faced the same problems of misdirection.

'Sorry,' he panted.

'OK! OK! Let's get going.'

'I want you to imagine that you are a patient arriving in the department for the first time, initially as a walk-in or GP referral and secondly as a stretcher patient brought in by ambulance.' He marched off without warning and they had to rush to keep up with him. He disappeared down one of the corridors with the two students in hot pursuit. They entered a large open plan space with row after row of

chairs many of which were already occupied by waiting patients.

'This is the walk-in patient's waiting area. These patients have come here as emergencies or have been referred by their family doctor. This room can seat about 200 patients at any one time. Our target is to see each patient within 15 minutes. This is achieved by using a Triage Nurse. The concept was developed during the war to identify the degree of urgency of treatment. Each new patient is registered and then seen by the triage nurse who places them in one of three categories. Group one are minor injuries or illnesses which often only requires reassurance. Group two are more serious and finally Group three are seriously ill and need immediate attention. Any questions?' he barked. There was no reply.

'OK. Triage ensures that patients receive attention according to their need and not to their place in the queue. This can sometimes cause arguments when patients think that they have been overlooked or forgotten.' He seemed pleased with his knowledge and obviously enjoyed showing off.

'Let's stand behind Nurse Johnston who is the triage nurse this morning and see how well it works.' Nurse Johnston was from Nigeria, with a round smiling face. She was in her mid thirties.

'Mr. Smith', she called and an ill-looking man stood up and walked towards the chair. He sat down and handed the nurse a letter he had from his GP. She read it quickly and looking up asked,

'How long have you had the chest pain?'

'About two weeks,' he replied suppressing a cough.

'Go into cubicle three where the doctor will see you.' She wrote three on his card.

'Next,' she called and a young boy, no more than ten, who came forward with his mother.

'He's banged his knee and says it still hurts.' The nurse examined the knee and said,

'He will need an x-ray. Sit back where you were and we will call you.' She wrote a two on his card.

'How long will we be?' asked the mother.

'About thirty minutes? Is that OK?'

'I suppose so,' she mumbled and she and the boy went back to their seats.

Mr. Seymour whispered,

'The system seems to be working quite well. Let's continue with our tour. We have a lot to get through.' He marched off down one of the corridors and they rushed after him. They entered a smaller reception area from which the examination rooms could be reached. Several were already occupied with patients waiting to

be seen. They found an empty one and Mr. Seymour beckoned them to enter.

'I want to show you what equipment is in a typical examination room. First of all the couch, it has certain unique features. It can be raised and lowered at both ends and has wheels to enable the patient to be moved with minimal disturbance. On the wall behind the couch you can see two pipes, one for oxygen, the other for suction. The trolley at the side contains some basic examination equipment and dressings.' Once again Akumu marvelled at the set up, clean, clinical and very efficient.

'So let's go and see a typical patient.' He drew back the curtain from one of the cubicles. A black man was lying on his side on the couch. He seemed at first to be asleep but then he stirred, and turned over to face them and Akumu gasped with surprise. It was her mugger. He didn't recognize her as she was wearing a mask. She stared at him, had she made a mistake, no it was him without a doubt.

Mugging was not what he ever wanted to do but he was desperate and needed some money to get food. He hated himself but rationalized that he had no choice. The first time was the worst but with each attack it became easier and he became more confident. Each day he would go out looking for possible victims.

Lone women were the easiest. They usually carried a bag of some description which could be snatched from their grasp or taken when they had put it down for some reason. Men often left their wallets sticking out of their back pocket.

Heri was born on a shamba near Lake Naivasha in Kenya. He was the youngest of eight children and had virtually no schooling as his parents were unable to pay for further schooling after the free schooling finished when he was six. He helped his father on the land caring for the few cows and goats and weeding the crops. His parents died within two years of each other when he was twelve. Looking back he knew that it was probably AIDs. His older sister then looked him after. She married a Mzungu, an Englishman and went to live with him in Streatham in South London.

Heri grew up to be a thoughtful young man with a strong love of nature. He found it difficult to come to terms with the inequalities he saw around him. He learned to read and pored over anything he could get his hands on, old newspapers, discarded paperbacks, pamphlets anything he could read. He soon learned that while all may be born equal, all were by no means born into in a similar world. His world was one of deprivation, overcrowding, malnutrition and disease.

The one he saw on TV was of affluence, comfort, opportunity and wealth. And he couldn't understand what decided into which you were born. He knew the one he was in and riled constantly against it, asking again and again why me? The priest was no help. He simply said that it was God's will and he should accept it and be thankful, as many were worse off than him. By the time he was twenty five he had had only one proper job working on a building site earning the equivalent of three dollars a day.

In recounting the story to Adam, some days later, Akumu had said,

'I looked into the mugger's eyes and for a moment I seemed to see my uncle, my favourite uncle, amongst the many that I had.' I was repeatedly told that he was a particularly unpleasant character. Apparently he had left my aunt with a small child and had disappeared, no one knew where he had gone and then we heard that he had killed a man in a drunken brawl and was in prison.

But I remembered him differently, as a tall charismatic well-built man in his 40's with short curly black hair and a small neat moustache. He had a deep scar under his chin. Against my family's advice I had decided to visit him. The prison was about an hour's bus ride from the train station and I had been told to arrive after

lunch. The bus deposited me outside the walls of a large towering grey stone building.

‘This is the prison Ma’am. Good luck. I hope all goes well.’ said the friendly bus driver as I alighted. I had never been inside a prison and as I looked at the tall grey stone frontage I begin to feel very frightened. Perhaps he wouldn’t remember me and refuse to see me. Perhaps he will think I have come to gawk at him. But I had come this far and was going to see it through. I pulled the chain and heard a bell gong. A small window opened in the enormous iron door and a face appeared. I had showed the pass I had been sent by post and a smaller door opened to let me in.

‘Wait here while I get the prisoner No 74635 to come to the reception area.’

I found myself standing in a small courtyard open to the sky with a ceiling of barbed wire.

‘Come this way.’ I followed the guard into a large room like a gymnasium with a vaulted roof from which many lights hung from long cords. Despite that, it was dim and depressing. There were rows of desks with chairs some of which were already occupied.

‘Sit there’ he said pointing to a chair at an empty desk. What am I doing here? I thought, this is a mistake and I began to feel really afraid. I clasped my hands together to stop them from

shaking and then I saw him. He was being brought in still handcuffed. I could hardly recognize him, he seemed shrunken. Where was the tall confident uncle I remembered? This man was a broken shell, stooped and walking slowly, shuffling his feet. He slumped in the chair opposite me and after what seemed a very long time, looked up.

‘What do you want, why have you come here? I don’t want to see you,’ and he went to get up.

‘No! Wait.’ I said, ‘I just wanted to see how you were.’

‘Now you have seen me you can go.’ What a tragedy I thought, that a strong able man is brought to this.

‘I have brought you something,’ and I handed him a small parcel. He handed it to the guard who opened it and examined the contents before giving it back. It was a small silver photo frame with a picture of his son and the boy’s mother. My uncle studied it for a long time and then tears filled his eyes.

‘What a fool I’ve been. I gave all that up for a dream of being a big man’. I leaned over and touched his hand. The guard barked, ‘no touching.’ and I withdrew my hand.

‘Times up,’ the guard shouted. I stood up and smiling said, ‘I will come again.’

But I never did and later heard that he had been killed in a fight with another prisoner.

Akumu now realised what she had to do, say nothing and arrange to return later, using any excuse to get to see him. Some time later, she excused herself from the coffee shop and returned to the A&E Department.

While the duty nurse's back was turned, she slipped past and went into his cubicle. He was still lying there on the couch. He heard her as she entered and turned to face her. Now she was not wearing a mask. He didn't initially recognise her and then suddenly

'Oh my God it's you! The girl in the bus shelter.'

'Wewe, umenipataje na unafanya nini hapa? (You! How did you find me? What are you doing here?)

'I am a student in the hospital.'

'Sikiliza, nitakupeleka kwa polisi na niko na akili nzuri ya kufanya hivyo.' She said in swahili (Listen I could turn you into the police for what you did to me and I have a good mind to do so.) He winced.

'Please don't report me I have nothing. I was stupid and I was hungry and alone. I shouldn't have attacked you, one of my own.'

'That makes no difference, you are a criminal, a violent man and you should be

locked up.’ She kept her voice low but very firm and was beginning to enjoy his discomfort.

At that moment he asked,

‘How is your friend?’

‘I don’t know? After he hit you, he thought he had killed you and he panicked. He’s laying low. Leaning closer and speaking in a low voice she said,

‘Listen and listen well. One false move from you and you are in prison and on the way back to Kenya. Do you understand?’ He nodded. She looked at him for a moment and felt sorry for him; she knew what it was like to be alone and rejected not knowing which way to turn. Finally she said looking straight into his bloodshot eyes,

‘I want to help you but you must give yourself up to the police and claim asylum. I will do what I can to substantiate your story and will forget about the incident this time.’

A small number of people mainly young men had assembled at the foot of the spiral staircase in the front hall of the Royal College of Surgeons in Lincoln’s Inn Fields. It was almost 5 pm and the results of that day’s examination for the FRCS were to be announced. They stood in small groups not talking but simply nodding to anyone they recognized. Akumu had rushed to get there in time. She had to leave her

evening job early much to the dismay of her boss who had threatened once again that if she didn't make up the time he would sack her. Breathless she ran up the broad stone steps between the twin marble columns into the hall and joined the others who were waiting.

At the stroke of five, footsteps were heard and the registrar a small neatly dressed official wearing a University gown descended the spiral staircase and stood about ten steps above them. All eyes focussed on him. It was as if they were in church looking up to their saviour who had appeared not surrounded by angels but clutching a bundle of papers in his hands. In a slow sonorous voice he intoned,

‘These are the numbers of the candidates who had been successful that day.’

Then followed a list of numbers.

Akumu had arrived just in time and stood some distance from the crowd. She was one of only three women in about 15 men who awaited their results. She listened patiently as the recitation began. No more than a quarter of the applicants would pass so the numbers called were widely separated and it was easy to miss your own if you were not concentrating. Her arrival had not gone unnoticed. One of the hopefuls had nudged a colleague on his left,

‘Who's that?’ he whispered, ‘the girl, what do you think she is doing here?’

'The same as us I suppose, why?'

'She can't be, she' a blackie...'

'Is that a problem?. Please shut up. I want to hear what is being said,' he whispered impatiently.

Akumu was listening carefully as the roll call began. She felt her palms becoming moist and her heart pounding as the announced numbers came closer to her own. There was an unreality about the whole occasion. Standing in the hall of this prestigious building through which so many of the great surgeons of the past and present had walked, she was conscious that she could be joining this illustrious body.

Founded in 1800 as the Company of Surgeons, it had received a Royal Charter in 1843 to become the Royal College of Surgeons of England. It had first occupied its present position in Lincoln's Inn fields in 1897. As a woman Akumu would be amongst a minority of successful female applicants although, as she learned later, in recent years the numbers of women applying and passing the Fellowship had increased substantially.

Then she heard it, her number called, but by the time she had registered it, the next number had drowned it out. She stood puzzled, did she or did she not hear it? She turned to her neighbour and asked him but he shrugged his

shoulders; he was listening for his own and didn't want to be interrupted.

She left the hall puzzled and confused as she walked into the cold night air. Arriving home, she was pounced upon by her roommate.

'Well, how did you do?' she asked anxiously.

'I don't know.'

'What d'you mean you don't know,' she cried, exasperated by Akumu's uncertainty.

'Well, I was standing waiting for my number to be called and I think it was, but it all happened so quickly that by the time I had collected my senses, the official was reading out the next number and I wasn't certain whether I had heard my number or not.'

'That's ridiculous, you couldn't have forgotten so quickly. How can you find out?'

'They said that the numbers of today's successful candidates would be posted on the College notice board after 6 pm.'

'Then what are you waiting for?'

'I don't understand, what do you mean?'

'For God's sake, get yourself down to the notice board and find out, now.'

Akumu was hungry and wanted to have something to eat before she took the long journey back to the college but her need to find out overcame her hunger and she set off. It was after the rush hour so she got to the college

very quickly. As she entered she saw a number of people standing around the notice board. Insinuating herself in the crowd, she got to the front and then ran her eyes down the numbers. She stopped at her own, yes! It was there, she had passed. With a whoop of joy she pushed her way out of the crowd and rushed home. She let herself in and stepped into the lounge.

'I'm a mister, no I mean I am a Miss, no longer a doctor,' she exclaimed to all and sundry. She was not only telling the living she realised, she was also telling the dead, her forbearers, those generations of people from whom she had sprung, the slow evolution of a family through generations never knowing what their offspring many years later may achieve. If her father and mother could have known what she had achieved today, they would never have believed it. She had proved what they had always told her, that her strength lay within, not necessarily evident to the outside but part of the invisible world deeply embedded inside her, the essence that only she could bring to the fore and be the person she aspired to be. If she could have listened she would have heard in the wind the cheers of generations who had struggled before her and not given in, who had struggled against unbelievable odds and had come through, sowing the seeds that she was nurturing to maturity.

'What does it mean?' asked her flat mate when she returned full of joy. Akumu thought for a moment and explained,

'It's like this. It's not the end of my training, it's the beginning of the end; it's the key that allows me to open the doors into further training culminating in my own unit, my own name on the wall. But what I have achieved now, today, is that I am no longer Dr Onyango, I am Miss Onyango. That may not seem much to you but to me it's marvellous. I must tell Adam he will be delighted. Picking up her mobile she texted,

Breaking News: the BBC is pleased to announce that Dr Akumu is now Miss Akumu
He'll know what that means. By return she received a message,

Hooray well done Miss Akumu I knew you would do it.

The tension and worry before and during the FRCS examination had taken its toll on Akumu's well being. She had neglected her health and now looking at herself in the bathroom mirror, she no longer saw her usual healthy skin and shining eyes; instead a gaunt and strained face stared back at her. She rubbed her cheeks to make them redden but that did nothing to make her look better. I need a holiday she decided. I need to reconnect with

my past, to visit the family cemetery and to thank my fore-bearers. I should go home but she knew that the trip would not be easy. It had been a long time since she had forsaken the luxury of western living and she faced the prospect of life in her village back in Kenya with some consternation.

Terminal 4 at Heathrow was in turmoil when she arrived at about 5 pm to catch the evening flight to Nairobi. It was in the middle of a refurbishment and looked like a building site, workmen's ladders and piles of rubble were cordoned off restricting the passageway and long queues had formed limiting passengers from getting from one part of the hall to another. Akumu viewed the scene with a sigh, travelling was becoming such a burden. It was almost not worth doing it but she had no choice if she wished to see her family.

She had taken the Heathrow Express from Paddington Station directly to Terminal four carrying a small handbag only. As she moved slowly with the crowds towards the check-in desk, she wondered how her grandma was back home. She was nearly 90 and lived alone up country in a small house in her native village without electricity or running water. Akumu recalled how she had visited her. The memories came flooding back. The bright

sunlight waking her in the early morning, the fields of maize waving in the breeze, the bougainvillea in pink red and orange glowing in the evening light. She could still remember the delicate scent of the pale pink and white flowers of the Frangipani trees which lined the path.

She got into the queue and pushed like everyone else until she reached the Kenya Airlines' desk. What a shambles it all was. The clerk looked harassed and exhausted, repeating hundreds of times,

‘Departure Gate No 14 at 19 00 hours.’

Akumu handed over her passport and waited while it was checked on the monitor.

‘Gate 14 at 1900’ said the clerk handing back her passport and a boarding card. Akumu moved slowly towards the gate looking at the monitor as she walked. She was concentrating when she heard her name called. She looked ahead to see a young woman, a girl from school whom she hadn’t seen for many years. She looked thinner, and a bit older. She shouted,

‘Vanity, what a wonderful surprise, how are you?’

‘I’m fine, how are you? Where are you going?’

‘I’m going home. I have been in Germany with my husband Heinz. We have been together for about three years and have a little boy. I’ve left my son back home with my mother in

Kisumu. The two friends began to chat as if they had never been apart and were soon exchanging photographs, checking their flights and promising to meet when they got back to Mombasa. They had a lot of catching up to do and didn't notice that time was passing.

Suddenly they heard their names called and realised that they were in danger of missing their flight. They arrived at gate 14 panting and hot and breathless.

'Your boarding card please,' said the air hostess, coldly, 'please hurry as the flight is about to leave.' They followed a line of passengers making their way through the boarding tunnels until they reach a stand still. Ahead of them was a dense line of people waiting to board the plane. They could see children crying and hear voices raised saying goodbye to loved ones on their cell phones, the sounds being magnified by the enclosed space. At last they reached the entrance and stepped into the plane, a hostess checked their seat numbers, they were sitting several rows apart.

'We would like to sit together,' said Vanity to the hostess.

'OK, I'll see what I can do. Sit in your designated seats and when the flight gets going I'll see if we can sit you together,' she replied smiling. They followed the line of fellow passengers to their seats waiting while hand

luggage was placed in the overhead lockers. As usual it was all a bit chaotic. Akumu wondered why passengers weren't called in by blocks of seat numbers beginning at the rear, it would have made settling them so much easier. Eventually Akumu and Vanity were seated and found themselves about three rows apart.

Akumu looked up to see the seat belt sign switch on and adjusted her belt. After the usual announcements about the safety features and the demonstration of the life jacket, the engines began to roar and the huge aeroplane slowly left the parking area and made its way towards the runway. Voices were now subdued, each thinking about what was to come and experiencing a slight fear of the unknown. Akumu had only flown once before and hadn't yet found a way of relaxing. The plane slowly taxied into position at the beginning of the runway. Akumu could see the broad expanse of tarmac stretching out ahead almost to the limit of vision. The plane slowly turned until it was facing the runway and then the engines began to roar and the plane to shake. Slowly it gathered speed with groaning sounds coming from the lockers and doors. Then it lifted and the sound of the wheels lessened as the great machine rose into the air, the ground falling away. Climbing steeply, Akumu could feel the pressure on her back as if she was sliding

backwards. Then the engine sound lessened, the plane levelled off and the shaking stopped. She took a deep breath and relaxed into her seat. She looked around and smiled at Vanity who was adjusting her seat. The hostess then spoke to Akumu and pointed to two empty seats,

'You and your friend could move to those seats if you like,' said the hostess. Akumu and Vanity got up and made their way to the empty seats and sat down.

'Wow, that was a bit scary,' exclaimed Vanity, 'it's only my second flight and I am still a bit scared.' What have you been up to? Weren't you studying to be a doctor?'

'Yes, I qualified three years ago and have just become a surgeon, a FRCS, I am no longer called a doctor I am a Miss, it's very exciting.' Vanity went quiet; she was always secretly a bit envious of Akumu.

'That's wonderful,' she said, 'I always knew you would do well.' The two friends went quiet each in their own thoughts.

The flight seemed to pass quickly, Akumu managed to get a few hours sleep and then the intercom announced their imminent arrival. Immediately the passengers began to collect their property and as the plane landed with the wheels skidding on the tarmac, Akumu wished

Vanity goodbye promising to meet her again as soon as possible.

The friends parted and Akumu made her way to the Bus station in central Nairobi. She had a long way to go, a journey of about 16 hours to reach her village. She was tired but excited at being amongst familiar sounds and smells that stirred memories of when she was last here. Several buses were going up country so she had to check a number of companies until she found the one going to her village.

She was directed to a huge single decker bus, which was waiting to depart. Akumu put her luggage in the locker and climbed aboard. She had been allocated a window seat at the rear. She settled herself into the seat and was looking out of the window when she felt someone sit down in the aisle seat next to her.

'Good evening,' a man said, 'I believe we are travelling companions.' He spoke with an impeccable English accent. Akumu turned to look at the speaker. She was expecting to see an Englishman but instead her neighbour was African, about forty year of age, he had short black hair, and was wearing a suit with a white shirt and a silk tie.

'Hi, yes we are?' Akumu turned to look out of the window. Unperturbed he added,

'Would you rather not talk? We have a

long journey and it would pass more quickly if....' Akumu interrupted,

'I'm sorry, I was very rude, you're right, my name is Akumu, I am going home to see my family.'

'My name is Alfonse Mderi, I am a Lawyer.' I am going to Naivasha to advise a family about a land query. What do you do, are you a student?'

Akumu was still shy to mention her recent qualification but decided she must get used to it.

'I am a trainee surgeon,' she blurted out.

'You a surgeon, that's wonderful, you're so young?'

'I am twenty-six, that's not so young,' she retorted.

'Take it from me,' he said laughing, 'it's young. You must be a very bright young woman.' Akumu paused and thought about what he had said. Was she brighter than her schoolmates, really? No, she decided. There were several girls in her class brighter than her but she had been given the opportunity. She knew so many girls who could have done what she had done if only they had had the chance.

'No, I am not, I have just had the opportunity,' she added. Alfonse thought about her answer. He knew she was right. He had met

so many bright young women here in Kenya who would be destined to a life of hardship.

'Were your parents wealthy?' he asked finally, knowing that in Kenya, it is only with money that a young person can get a good education.

'No, but I had a sponsor, an English doctor who paid for me, I have promised myself that I will pay him back one day. He has changed my life.' Meanwhile the bus was rushing along bumping and rolling on the badly repaired roads.

'I had forgotten how bad our roads are.' remarked Akumu thinking how amazingly easy it was to forget the unpleasant things in life.

During a break for passengers to visit a cafe or the toilets. Akumu needed a visit but as she approached the facility, the smell and the flies greeted her. Again she had forgotten and she turned tail and went back to the bus, I can wait she decided. The journey resumed. It was now dark so that apart from the occasional light, visibility was minimal.

'What about you, how did you become an accountant?' Akumu asked.

'I like you was lucky. My father was in business, sadly he died recently.'

'I'm sorry,' said Akumu. Alfonse continued,

'He wanted me to come into the business but I wasn't interested, I loved arithmetic. Numbers fascinate me so after a real battle I got my own way but he insisted that I did the accounts for the family business which I still do.'

'So you are going back to see your family? How long has it been since you've seen them?' Alphonse asked. Akumu pondered,

'About five years I think.'

'They will have changed, you know, so will the village.'

'How do you mean?'

'Wait and see,' he said philosophically, 'nothing stays the same.'

It was a long and uncomfortable journey and by the time Akumu had arrived at the cross roads near to her village, she was hot and tired. Her clothes were creased and stained with sweat. Bidding farewell to her companion, they exchanged phone numbers.

'Ring me if you ever need any help with numbers,' he shouted as she alighted from the bus and set off to the village. It was before noon and the sun hadn't yet risen high into the sky but it was still glaring in her face making it difficult to see. Unknown to her, she had been seen by a number of small children who came shouting, singing and dancing, reaching out to

hold her hands and pulling her along. Smiling she came into the main square and was amazed at what she saw. Gone were the mud and wattle houses, instead she saw row after row of solid coral stone bungalows with corrugated roofs and small gardens some of them growing flowers.

Above she saw a wind turbine, its blades humming gently in the wind. Reaching the centre of the town she saw women filling their buckets from a water pump. The place was a far cry from the town she had left so many years ago. The children took her to a house at the outskirts of the town and called out. An old woman dressed in a long black gown came to the door and looked out. At first she didn't recognise Akumu but then she let out a scream of pleasure and lurched towards her.

'Akumu,' she called, 'is it really you?'

'Yes, Grandma it's me, it's been such a long time.' Akumu ran to her and was enveloped by her arms. She smelled Grandma's familiar slightly sour scent and returned the hug.

'Come, come in,' Grandma gestured.

Akumu went up a small step and drawing a curtain aside entered the room. It was cool and dim as there were only two small windows. It was sparsely furnished with only a few pieces of furniture; two chairs a settee and a

sideboard. A second room beyond was the bedroom.

The word soon went round that Akumu was a doctor and people began to line up outside Grandma's house from early morning to wait to see her. She was happy to help and gradually much of her day was taken up with what she was calling her clinics. Most of the cases were simple: cuts, bruises, coughs and colds but occasionally without warning something more serious would arrive. Realising this, Akumu would at the beginning of the day walk quickly amongst the waiting people identifying serious problems early. It was during this that she saw something that stopped her. A small child had its hand wrapped in some leaves. Guiding the mother indoors, Akumu carefully removed the leaves to expose a badly burned hand, an injury that would cripple a person's ability to earn a living. Calling to her Grandma, she shouted out,

'Get me a bowl of cold water please.' Slowly she lowered the child's hand into the clean water. The child was exhausted from crying and simply whimpered. Fortunately the burn was only a few minutes old so that Akumu's quick action prevented a more serious outcome. After renewing the water several times, she wrapped the hand in soft dressings and arranged to see the child the next day. A

few nights later Akumu was woken by her grandma.

'Come quickly Akumu it's a sick child.' She followed her Grandma to a house several hundred metres away. The room was lit by the light of a small candle. On the floor was a child no more than 2 years old. A man whom Akumu recognised as a witch doctor was intoning a mantra and was putting thick oil on the child who was dressed in several layers of clothing. The child was shaking from a rigor. Akumu immediately realised that the child was seriously dehydrated with sunken eyes and a bone-dry mouth. Her skin had lost all its fullness and felt like dried paper.

'Take her clothes off please,' she commanded the mother, who hesitating looked at the witch doctor for support. Akumu repeated the command, beginning to peel off the many layers of clothing until the child was undressed. Her small frail body lay almost lifeless. Her mother looked on helplessly.

'Bring me a bowl of cold water and a cloth please,' Akumu whispered. No sooner had they arrived than she began to sponge the child and at the same time put the moistened cloth in the child's mouth to suck. The mother was now beginning to help.

'Keep giving her sips of water from this cloth, a little at a time she can't take much at the

moment.' At first nothing changed. Then gradually the shaking stopped and the child began to move her lips. The mother no more than a slip of a child herself continued to give the child sips while Akumu sponged the child with cold water. Suddenly the mother reached forwards and touched the water, it was cold.

'Stop, she will catch cold, it will kill her please stop,' she insisted. Akumu looked up and smiled,

'Please mother, she'll be OK,' she said and continued. Over the next few hours the child began to move a little and occasionally a whimper would escape from her mouth. As the light began to creep into the room, the child fell asleep no longer burning hot. Later she woke and took a drink. Akumu handed the baby to the mother and indicated that she could put her to the breast. At first the baby could hardly suck but gradually she grew stronger. By the following day the child was almost back to normal. Akumu was beginning to find her new life in the village very tiring. It certainly wasn't a holiday she decided. There were two more incidents that stayed in her mind long after she had returned to the UK.

The first was when a stray male elephant ran amok in the vegetable fields and several villages went out and shot it. Akumu saw the great beast hesitate as the bullets hit it, then it

shuddered, beginning to lose its balance. She saw its eyes staring, confused, looking bewildered and then glazing over as it fell onto its right side. Akumu watched mesmerized by its grandeur and the tragedy of its murder. But she was not prepared for what happened next. As if called by a bell, hundreds of villagers appeared with knives and machetes and began hacking at the body. Large chunks of bloody muscle were cut off and dragged away. At first Akumu was horrified at this blood lust. Before her eyes, this noble beautiful animal was being reduced to a pile of food. Horrible as it was at first, she could see that it made sense. The animal was dead the people were hungry and the meat was edible, but the memory of that day stayed with her. Years later when she visited a zoo in London, she made a special trip to see the elephants. She stood for a long time watching them as they walked about, marvelling at their great strength and gentleness with their young. She recalled that day when another elephant was not so fortunate and had strayed into the wrong place.

Finally she recorded in her journal, an event which still haunted her. Late one afternoon she had been called by a father to a hut where his son in his late teens was lying on the ground. In garbled English, he had described how the boy had been in the forest

looking at an ant hill, he was always fascinated by the industry of ants, when a cobra suddenly reared up and before the boy could move, had bitten him on the forearm. The boy said he had felt a sharp prick and then the arm began to tingle and feel heavy. By the time he had got home he said couldn't move the hand or elbow and a dark discolouration had begun moving slowly up his arm.

Akumu had recognised the problem immediately. He needed anti-cobra venom to save his life. The father had shaken his head, no one had any. Acting quickly she had fashioned a makeshift tourniquet and bound it around his upper arm above the level of the discolouration. Then she had accompanied the boy to the nearest hospital several miles away. The surgeon on duty was on another call. They had waited about twenty minutes when her cell rang to say that he was tied up with an emergency and wouldn't be back at the hospital for a further two hours. Akumu had looked at the boy and turning to the anaesthetist said,

'He can't wait that long, I will do it. She had never performed an amputation but she knew her anatomy, that day at Medical school when they dissected the upper arm and shoulder flashed into her mind. By this time the boy was almost unconscious and required minimal anaesthesia. Akumu prepped the skin,

checked her instruments and methodically performed a through shoulder amputation as if someone was reading the Anatomy book. All went well. The wound healed uneventfully and the young man's life was saved but sadly not his arm. Just before she left to return to the UK, the boy's father gave her a small beautiful carved ebony elephant.

There were two letters waiting for Akumu when she let herself into her London flat. It had been a long journey and she was keen to get into the shower but she couldn't resist opening them. Chucking her bag onto her bed, she tore open the first. Recognising the address, a hospital in Leicester she read aloud, *You have been shortlisted for the post of rotating SHO in Surgery. Please attend for interview on.....*

She reread the letter and gave out a loud whoop of joy. The second was also an invitation for interview in a hospital in Scotland. Akumu took a deep breath I must phone Adam, it's a long time since we spoke. She dialled his number and waited. The call back message clicked in'

'This is Adam, I am sorry I am not available at present please.....' Akumu left a message.

Stepping into the shower, the hot water cascading down her back, she luxuriated in its warmth. She had chosen a honey smelling soap and had covered herself with it, enjoying the pleasure of feeling clean for the first time in months when she heard the answer phone ring. She waited until the message had ended and then heard Adam say, Welcome home, darling, am looking forward to seeing you. I guess you're in the shower so ring me when you're free. I'm at home.

He knows me so well, she thought with a smile. Resisting the temptation to stay under the shower to continue to feel the hot water prickling and tingling her skin, she turned off the tap and stepped onto the mat grabbing the thick white towel that hung on the door. She had a quick glance at herself in the mirror, not bad, the loss of a few pounds had made a big difference, I must not put it back she decided, remembering the basic food in the village, ugali, chapatti, rice, bananas, pawpaws, mango and beans. There was not much protein and too much starch, no wonder the women soon turned to fat after their twenties. She dialled his number and waited excited at the thought of hearing his voice.

'Hi is that you Akumu?' He said.

'Yes, how did you know I was in the shower? She added.

'I could see you,' he laughed and added, 'in my memory.' Akumu recalled the last time they had showered together. He had crept in obscured by the steam and suddenly was beside her.

She realised how much she had missed him. Dressing hurriedly she got out her bicycle, pumped up the tyres and set off to his home. He was at the door when she rang the bell. They fell into each other's arms hardly able to speak a word. Gasping for breath she slowly freed herself. He looked tired and seemed older.

'How have you been? Have you missed me,' she teased.

'Like hell, I have been counting the days, you've been away such a long time. By the way congratulations on your Fellowship, I'm sorry I wasn't able to be there but we must go out and celebrate.'

'Yes, that would be fun, I didn't mean to stay away so long but I got caught up with the local life and its problems. She then began to tell him about some of the unusual and exciting things she had done. He listened interposing the occasional, wow or really but he was only partially listening, he was thinking more about their future life together. They had drifted apart because of the different paths their careers were taking. Although they had qualified at the same time, he had chosen to pursue a career in

General Practice while she had been training to be a surgeon, a very different route.

Adam like all training doctors had spent a three-month's attachment with a General Practitioner. He had found the variety and nature of the medical problems fascinating and loved the ability to care for patients over a lifetime. It was very different from a Specialist who ceased to see the patient once treatment had been completed. He used to look forward to the day's surgery never knowing what might come through his door.

'Yesterday for example,' as he explained to Akumu, 'I had just returned from a coffee break when a mother brought in her six year old son. The family were originally from India but had come to the UK when his father got a job with the London Bus Company. The boy was born in England but was of Indian descent. That was significant,' explained Adam.

'The boy was developing bow legs,' complained the mother. 'His legs are bending.'

'Why doctor?' she had asked, 'what is wrong with him?'

'I examined the boy's legs and confirmed the bowing. Then I had looked at the boy's wrists and noticed the typical thickening found in Rickets. The growing ends of the bones were not calcifying and appeared thickened. I told the boy's mother that it wasn't serious and that it

was caused by a vitamin D deficiency. I prescribed some tablets for him to take and told her he'd needed to continue taking them until he is fully grown and that he needed to go in the sun as often as he could. Akumu was listening intently. She hadn't been attracted to GP work, it had all seemed too repetitive but what Adam had described was very exciting.

'That was an amazing bit of detective work Adam,' she had exclaimed. 'What made you look at the wrists?'

'There were a number of clues, the most important was his ethnicity.'

'How do you mean?' She had asked.

'Although born in the UK, he had the increased skin pigmentation typical of his origin.'

'Yes, of course, that would reduce the absorption of sunlight and the formation of Vitamin D,' she deduced.

'Precisely! You are a bright girl,' he said kissing her on her lips.

'Oh shut up you clever dick, I can't bear it when you crow,' she laughed kissing him back.

'Where would you like to eat?' he asked, remembering his suggestion.

'What about Chez Nous?' she said with a straight face. Adam was a bit puzzled.

'Where is that? Have we been there before?'

'Many times,' she said stifling a laugh.'

'Many times?' he repeated, I don't remember going there, OK if you remember it so well what did we eat.'

'The last time we started with an avocado salad and then had a curry.'

'Good, let's go there again,' he decided.

'Fine, I am going out to do a bit of shopping and I expect dinner to be ready when I return.' Akumu announced. Adam's face fell, suddenly he understood'

'Crumbs, he said, 'you must think I am a complete idiot.'

'Not complete but half way there, see you later,' she said hugging him.

It was wonderful to see her back but he had to admit that life was a little calmer when he was on his own. He felt a bit of a fool not realising that she was making fun of him over the restaurant Chez Nous. I'll show her who's the boss. I'll make a meal that will seduce her. Checking his fridge, he settled for a Risotto Alla Milanese and some fish with a mixed salad. He had most of the ingredients but needed some Saffron and Parmesan Cheese. I know, Akumu can get them for me so opening his mobile he tapped out a message to her. *Darling I need the following please, Saffron and Parmesan cheese,*

Back came a message. *OK. Love you.*

Akumu returned laden with parcels and bags. As she came into the house she shouted 'Hi, I'm back, got your things, mmm smells good.'

Adam came into the room, greeted her and saw her parcels.

'Gosh you've had a good time, have you left anything in the shops?'

'Plenty', she said kissing him on the cheek. 'I needed to replace a lot of my things and remembered I had to have something special for the interview,'

'What did you decide?'

"I settled for a trouser suit in a dark blue, I'll show it to you later.

Adam served dinner was in the sitting room at a small table with subdued lighting and soft music. Akumu was seated when the food arrived. Adam smiled a broad grin as he brought the food in. Akumu's face was a picture as she devoured with her eyes the feast that he had prepared.

'Well,' he said, 'what do you think.'

'It looks wonderful and if it tastes half as good I will be delighted.'

'It will, tuck in.' Adam poured out two glasses of red wine and they settled down to enjoy the food. They ate in silence the only sound being the click of their cutlery and the

quiet melody from the disc player. Akumu glanced up and studied Adam's face while he was absorbed eating. She noticed the slight greying at his temples and the leaner look of his chin. Several furrows had appeared across his brow. He looked up and saw her watching him,

'What are you thinking?'

'Oh nothing, just it's been a long time, too long away from you.'

Adam leaned over and held her hands,

'Darling, I know our paths are going to separate and we will become totally involved in our different jobs but I want you to promise me that one day we will find a way to be together, to have a family and to grow old together. Akumu gripped his hands,

'I want nothing more. I promise that even when we are separated, I will keep in touch. You promise that also.'

'I promise,' and he kissed her. The kiss lingered and they began to explore each other's mouths, her's tasting of honey.

'Let's leave the dishes,' and lifting her carried her into the bedroom. The light was subdued as they feverishly undressed each other.

'You are so beautiful,' he said, 'I love to touch your silken skin, his hand gently caressed her breasts, it's been such a long time.'

'Yes, she whispered, yes. I love you to stroke them.'

'Yes, yes,' he gasped, breathing more deeply. Neither wanted to rush the moment allowing the sensations, wave after wave, to flow over them. Neither could wait any longer.

'Now,' Akumu hissed, 'now,' and he slowly entered her. She squeezed her pelvis feeling the strength of him gradually moving more deeply.

'Don't move,' he pleaded as his spasms of pleasure began to increase. She stopped and held her breath, waiting for him.

The ring of his alarm woke Adam suddenly. Akumu was sleeping, her breathing slow and regular. He leaned over and kissed her. Sadly he had to get going, as he was due back at the surgery in Dulwich later that day. He had taken a few days leave to be able to greet Akumu on her return from her trip and had wanted to stay longer but the practice was short handed due to the absence of a colleague on Paternity leave. It had been introduced some months earlier and the practice manager had not yet worked out a system to avoid the occasional staff shortage such as now. He grabbed a banana and his overnight bag and was about to leave when he heard a whisper from Akumu,

'Darling, drive carefully and phone me when you arrive, love you,' and she waved a bare arm at him. He went over to the bed and kissed her,

'Speak later,' he said, 'love you too,'

Later that day, Akumu's small open topped car left Dulwich and weaved its path through the London traffic on the way to the M1. The traffic thinned as she saw the sign to the M1, a four-lane dual carriageway ahead. It was going to be a bright sunny day and she accelerated feeling the wind brushing her hair. She loved the freedom of the open road as it spread out before her; it was as if the whole world was hers.

Glancing at her watch she noticed it was just after 10 am. She knew it would take about two hours so she was in no hurry as the interview at the Leicester Royal Infirmary was not until 2 pm.

She began to go over in her mind what was to come. She had attended a number of Interviews before and knew they all followed roughly the same pattern. The hospital staff would have short listed 4-5 applicants, all with the requisite qualifications. They would have ranged in age from 26 – 30, any older would not have been considered. She knew she had the necessary qualifications but her experience was

on the light side and that may be held against her. She did not want to consider her gender although she knew that in many posts it would be considered a disadvantage.

She had driven about 60 miles and decided to stop and have a break. She nosed her car into the car park and got out. She was walking towards the entrance when two young men came out. Their bare arms were decorated with tattoos and they had rings through their lips and close-cropped hair. As they came near Akumu, one muttered under his breath to the other,

'I'd like to screw that blacky.' It was just loud enough for Akumu to hear. They laughed. She turned to see the man who had spoken and was giving her a two-finger gesture. Speechless, she felt a wave of deep disgust and humiliation. For a moment she thought of following them, recording their car number and reporting them to the police but she knew that would be futile, there was really nothing she could do. She was now sorry she had stopped. Why did they do that? She asked herself, I'm a black woman, so what? I was doing nothing to provoke that. What mindless creatures they were?

The excitement of the interview had now gone and she began to dread it. How am I going to get through it, feeling as I do now, she asked

herself. Another hour and she had left the Motorway and had followed the signs to Leicester and the Infirmary. The car park was very full when she arrived but after looking around she found a section for doctors. She had just parked when there was a knock on her window. A uniformed attendant was speaking. She wound down the window.

'Excuse me miss; you can't park 'ere,' he said officiously.

'I've come for an interview for a surgical post,' Akumu replied.

'Ave you any paperwork Miss? I'm sorry but I 'ave to ask.' Akumu fumbled in her bag and brought out the rather crumpled letter inviting her for interview. The attendant glanced at it and smiling said,

'Sorry Doctor, welcome, make sure you lock the car, there are thieves around. You need to go to Admin, it's over there,' he added, pointing to his right. Akumu collected her case and followed his direction. She found herself facing a modern brick building with a sign on the door RECEPTION. The automatic door opened and she entered a sparsely decorated room with a desk to the right and some chairs along the far wall.

'Can I help you?' a voice asked from behind the desk. Turning she saw a young woman wearing a white coat.'

'Yes please, I've come for an interview.'

'What post?'

'The rotating SHO in Surgery.'

'Are you a doctor?' she asked surprised.

Akumu ignored the question and said,

'Please tell me where the interviews will be held?'

'In the Board Room, I'll take you there.'

Akumu followed her into the corridor and at the far end they entered the old part of the Hospital.

The ceilings were high with decorated friezes.

The waiting room was large and well furnished with comfortable chairs and small tables. No

one else had arrived yet. On the walls hung a number of paintings and portraits of past

dignitaries, hospital secretaries, and medical staff. Akumu wandered around the room

studying them. They were all male, not a female in sight and all white. Their broad faces stared

down at her from above. She didn't recognise any of the doctor's names. As she had about an

hour to pass, she decided to return to the corridor to look for somewhere to eat. Opening the door, she almost bumped into a nurse.

'Excuse me nurse, is there a canteen anywhere?'

'Do you mean the cafeteria,' she said correcting Akumu.

'Yes I mean the cafeteria, thank you for correcting me.' The nurse blushed.

'Sorry Miss I didn't mean to be rude.'

'It's nothing,' Akumu murmured.

'It's along that corridor,' the Nurse said pointing to her left. Akumu followed the sound of voices until she reached a swing door which opened into a large dining room. The sudden din of voices, people walking, and chairs being scrapped as diners left their tables took her aback. For a moment she was confused and then she saw the food counter and made for it. Having selected a small salad, some tuna and a slice of bread, she moved on to the cashier and asked,

'How much please?'

'You need a lunch voucher, no cash,' the woman said sharply. Akumu was nonplussed, what was she to do? At that moment, a male voice from behind asked,

'Are you a candidate for the SHO job?'

'Yes,' she said meekly, turning to see a tall fair-haired man in his late thirties. He turned to the cashier,

'Here,' and handed her a voucher, 'I'll pay for the doctor thank you.'

'S-sorry doctor, I didn't realise,' the cashier said.

'It's no problem, thank you.' smiled Akumu.

'Follow me, we have a table for medical staff over there. By the way, my name is

Michael, Michael Stone. I'm the registrar in General surgery. We might be working together if you get the job.' Akumu carrying her tray followed him to the far side of the room where a number of doctors in white coats were seated.

'What's your name?' Asked Michael as they reached the table,

'Akumu Onyango, it's a bit of a mouthful but that's what I was christened.'

'Gentleman, we have a visitor, this is Doctor Onyango.'

'Miss Onyango,' Akumu smiled correcting him.' He turned and looked at her,

'You have an FRCS?'

'Yes, just,' she said proudly.

'My mistake, gentlemen, this is Miss Onyango, she is applying for the SHO in Surgery so be nice to her,' he smiled. He made the introductions and Akumu sat down and began to eat. After a few minutes her neighbour leaned over and asked,

'Where are you from?'

'London I have just driven up today.'

'No I mean...,' he insisted.

'Leave her alone, let her enjoy her lunch.' Michael interrupted, 'she has quite an ordeal to face later.' Akumu turned to Michael and mouthed thank you.

It was about a quarter to two when Akumu returned to the waiting room. By now

there were three other applicants waiting. She said hello to them and sat down on the nearest chair. A young woman whom Akumu later learned was the Hospital secretary came up to her,

'You are Miss Onyango?' Akumu nodded. 'Welcome, please be seated, you will be called in second. Akumu looked around, she didn't recognise any of the other doctors. They were all deep in thought; the only sound was the ticking of a wall clock. Suddenly a young woman came into the room from the committee room and called the first name. A very young nervous looking red headed man with a small moustache stood up and followed her. Akumu could hear voices and periods of silence. After what seemed to be hours the door opened and the young man returned looking more relaxed and took his seat.

'How was it?' one of the others asked. He smiled and said

'OK I suppose.'

Then Akumu's name was called and she stood for a moment collecting her thoughts, this is it, do your best you can girl, a voice inside said and she followed the young woman into the room. It was large and brightly lit from several windows behind a long table at which five men and one woman sat. Their names were printed on small tablets in front of them. In the centre of

the table sat the hospital superintendent who introduced himself and asked Akumu to sit. Then he introduced the other members of the panel. Akumu had looked them up and knew a little about them. By now she was aware of a pounding in her chest and a clamminess of her hands. She settled herself in the chair, took out a small handkerchief and held it.

'Good afternoon Miss Onyango,' he began, you are applying for the one year rotating post as a Senior House Officer in Surgery.' Akumu shifted her position, the seat now felt very hard.

'Yes Sir,' she replied.

'I believe congratulations are in order; you have just passed your FRCS?'

'Yes Sir, two days ago.'

A chorus of 'Well done,' came from the members of the committee. The Chairman then asked a number of questions about her training and experience. He then passed her onto the Consultant on his right, the Senior Surgeon who began,

'Now Miss Onyango, tell me how you would handle the following surgical emergency? Akumu listened as he outlined the problem. She thought for a moment and then gave a well thought out answer.

'Good, thank you,' he said. The next questioner was a Lady Paediatrician, who asked,

'Have you had any experience dealing with very sick children?' Akumu looked down and thought for a moment. Suddenly she remembered the sick child in the village back home.

'Yes Ma'am, I recently had an occasion to save the life of a sick child in my village. She then began to describe the situation and what she had done. The panel sat glued to her every word. When she had finished the Paediatrician said,

'That was a remarkable story, very well done.' The questioning continued. The surgeon was particularly interested in her surgical ability knowing that at her stage she was unlikely to have done much on her own.

'Tell me Miss Onyango, what surgical experience have you had?' Akumu was a bit taken aback by the question but then remember the snakebite. The committee were spellbound as she told them about the boy and how she had carried out a through-shoulder amputation to save his life. Now Akumu was beginning to enjoy the interview, she had relaxed and was speaking confidently and with assurance. The committee was also relaxed. Her control of the interview enabled them to forget her gender and

judge her answers in an objective way. She left the room with calls of thank you ringing in her ears. Two more doctors were then interviewed, the fifth failing to attend.

Then began a long wait as the applicants sat thinking about their interviews and hoping that they had been successful. Akumu had decided that she had no chance. She would however have been amazed if she had been a fly on the wall. Her interview had caused a conflict in the chamber. The chairman and Senior surgeon had no doubt that she was the best candidate. The two other members both men had reservations about her ability to adapt to a Northern population with prejudices against both black and female doctors. The Lady Paediatrician was undecided between her and a local trainee. Finally it came down to the chairman who in a fiery speech decided the issue.

'Colleagues, we are here to appoint the best person for the post, not to pander to the prejudices of the community, we are doctors not politicians. In my opinion, Akumu is the best candidate and she should be appointed. Let's have a final vote. There was a hush and then four hands went up. Akumu had won.

'Miss Jones, please call Miss Onyango back, thank you.'

All eyes were on the Committee room door as it opened. Each candidate waited for his name to be called. The secretary appeared and seemed to pause before she called,

'Miss Onyango, the committee would like you to come back please.'

Akumu heard her name but for a moment froze. The secretary repeated her name and she heard the others congratulating her. Then she was standing in the committee room being told that she had got the job. Her hand was being shaken and there were smiles all around. She felt an enormous sense of achievement and in that moment tears appeared in her eyes. Dad and Mom would have been so proud, she thought. As soon as she could she phoned Adam. He answered almost immediately,

'Well, tell me how did you do?'

'Guess?'

He paused, 'You got it?'

'Yes I got it.'

'Well done, you are brilliant. I knew you would. What was the competition like?'

'There were three men, I was the only woman, I loved it.' Adam could hear her laughing.

'Once I had got over my nerves. I began to enjoy it. Can you imagine enjoying an interview? I am so excited I can hardly think

straight. I've got the job, I've got the job,' she repeated.

'Wow girl, calm down you'll burst a gasket. When do you start?'

'Two weeks time, just enough time to clear my flat and move up to Leicester.'

'What about us? I want to see you before you start.'

'I want to see you too. Why don't I come and stay with you?'

'When? I will be off next weekend for three days,' said Adam.

'Right that will give me enough time to sort out things in London, spend some time with you and then go on to the job. What do you think?'

'That sounds good, let's work on that.'

Adam had soon settled into the General Practice routine. He was excited by the prospect of a permanent job which he liked. He felt lucky to have been chosen to join the Dulwich Practice. His colleagues were all young and keen to work so it was an environment that suited him. He was scheduled to work eight half days and be on duty every fourth weekend.

After several unsuccessful attempts he managed to rent a small three bedroomed detached house overlooking Dulwich Park about 20 minutes walk from the practice. As he

looked around his new home he thought of Akumu. What was she doing now? How was she settling in to her new job? He had tried to ring her on a number of occasions only to find her phone turned off. Eventually he sent her a text,

Hi Darling, have tried to ring are you OK? Love to hear from you. Akumu got his message when she got back to her place and immediately replied,

Hi Darling, sorry to miss your call. Life very hectic, seem to have no time for anything but work. Hope all is well with you, love you.

Soon after he had arrived in the surgery on the first day Adam was invited to a Practice meeting to get to know everyone. He learned that they all had special interests and he was asked what was his interest. He knew what he wanted but didn't know whether anyone else had already chosen it.

'Children,' he answered when the question was put to him, 'I would like to do children.'

'Good,' said John the senior partner, 'that won't tread on anyone's toes.' So Adam became the children's doctor of the practice. He loved children although he didn't have an extensive knowledge of Paediatrics. He promised himself that as soon as he could he would set about

studying the subject. Adam gradually learned his partner's names and interests and settled into a routine. He quickly felt at home and was soon on first name terms. Time seemed to fly and before he knew it, it was the weekend and he was off duty. I could drive up to Leicester and give Akumu a surprise, he thought but when he rang her, her phone was off so he texted her.

Am off duty this weekend, dying to see you, are you free? She replied,
Sorry Darling am on duty, a last minute change and will be tied up all weekend.

Damn, he thought, we just don't seem to be able to get together. I suppose I should have expected this. Feeling a bit despondent he was about to make his way home when the senior partner caught up with him.

'Adam, what are you doing this weekend?'

'Um, I don't know yet I guess.'

'Well why don't you join us? Can you play tennis? I have booked a court for tomorrow at 2 pm.'

'I haven't for a long time but I could when I was younger,' replied Adam.

'Good! Then join us. We are looking for a fourth, I can lend you a racket,' and without waiting for an answer, he waved and was off.

Adam collected up his papers and made his way home. It was almost dark when he let himself into the house. I am really quite hungry he decided but knew there was nothing to eat in the fridge. On the way home he had seen a fish and chip shop and after cleaning up decided to try it. The restaurant, a five-minute walk, was up some stairs. As he entered he saw a vacant table by the window and made for it. He had just settled himself when a waitress no more than sixteen years old handed him a menu.

'Thanks,' he said, 'I'll just have the fish and chips please with some brown bread and a pot of tea.'

'You're new 'ere aren't you?' She asked, 'I ain't seen you 'ere before.'

'Yes I'm the new doctor at the Dulwich Practice down the road.' The waitress went away and while he was waiting for his food to arrive, an older woman came to his table.

'Good evening Sir, I am Mrs Tadcaster, the owner. My waitress told me that you are a new doctor at the practice down the road?'

'Yes,' he said, 'I started about a week ago.'

'Welcome, I'm pleased to meet you, I hope you will be very happy in our community,' she said and walked away. Adam was very touched by the warm greeting. He thoroughly

enjoyed his meal returning home with a lighter step.

The next afternoon he arrived at the Tennis court fifteen minutes early and introduced himself to the manager.

'My name is Dr Adam, I'm a guest of Dr John,' he explained.

'Oh yes, Dr John told me you would be joining them. The changing rooms are over there to the right. I'm sure Dr John will be here soon.' After changing, Adam made his way to the tennis court to be greeted by John, his wife Mary and their daughter Veronica. Adam caught his breath. She was beautiful, about 25 years old, a natural blonde of medium height with long shapely legs. She extended a warm hand to greet him.

'Shall Adam and I play you and Mum?' She asked turning towards her father. It was agreed and as the two youngsters walked to the far side of the net she said,

'Dad tells me you are the new Doctor at the practice?'

'Yes,' he managed to blurt out before John served the first ball. Adam realised how out of practice he was when it came to his service. He struggled to get his second service in having failed repeatedly with his first. Veronica was very patient and waited while he struggled. She was a natural player and

effectively carried him throughout the set which they won six games to two. Having showered and changed they met up in the club bar. It extended the full length of the first floor and was a rather glitzy chrome and glass affair.

'What will you have to drink? Adam asked once they had settled themselves on the bar stools, wanting to reciprocate their kindness.

'Another time,' John said, 'it's a no cash bar, let me do it.' They ordered and were served drinks by a Jamaican barman. Adam found himself sitting next to Veronica. She was wearing white shorts with her bare legs almost touching his, which he struggled to avoid looking at. She smiled to herself aware of his discomfort. They chatted amicably and he learned that she was a teacher at the local kindergarten. She had planned to go on to Uni and get a degree, but became ill after she left school.

It was early evening when they left the club and he promised to ring her during the week. Having let himself into the house, he immediately phoned Akumu wanting to tell her about the afternoon. Her phone rang but then switched on to messages.

Hi this is Akumu, sorry I can't take your call, please leave a message and I will call you back.

'Damn,' Adam swore, 'she's never available. I'm really getting fed up with this.'

Frustrated he sent her a message, *Tried to phone AGAIN love A.*

When he got in on Monday, there was a hand written note on his desk. He didn't recognise the writing which was large and round. It was from Veronica.

***We are having some friends over for a family party on Saturday, I wondered if you would like to join us?* There was a telephone number to reply.**

Adam sat looking at the card. He knew that his hesitation wasn't just about going to her party. He was very attracted to Veronica, she was bright, funny and feisty and he was in danger of being unfaithful to Akumu? He decided to put it into his pocket and think about it later. Throughout the day, whenever he had a break he would take out the card and look at it and smell her perfume. This is crazy, he thought, I have only just met her and I am already thinking about her. By the end of the day, he had decided not to go, torn up the note and put the pieces in his pocket until he could find a rubbish bin.

He awoke in the early hours and suddenly his mind was clear, he loved Akumu and had no intention of being unfaithful to her. He was an adult and he could meet other women and yet be true to her. Next morning, he searched in his

coat pocket, found the pieces and laid them out on the breakfast table. He replied,

Yes, I would be delighted and posted the invitation on the way to the surgery. As the weekend approached Adam became increasingly anxious. He had spoken to Akumu only once during the week and she had to cut the call short because of an emergency. He was getting frantic, he was unable to speak to the one he loved and was now in danger of behaving badly.

Veronica's house was at the end of a long winding drive on either side of which were Azaleas, Rhododendrons and Japanese Cherry trees. Adam drove into the car park, which was already almost full. It looked like a big party he thought as he got out of his car and locked it. He followed some people to the front door and was greeted by Veronica. She was wearing a pale blue off the shoulder chiffon dress with a necklace of pearls. It showed off her shoulders to perfection.

'Wow! Veronica, you look beautiful,' Adam exclaimed. She beamed with pleasure.

'Hi Adam, she said giving him a peck on both cheeks, 'I was looking out for you, as you won't know many of the guests. They are mainly family and business associates of my father.' Taking his arm she steered him into the main lounge where her mother and father were

receiving the guests. Adam greeted them and then circulated amongst the other guests. He recognised some of his patients and one or two members of the tennis club whom he nodded to and then wandered through the other rooms and found the library. He was beginning to read some of the titles when Veronica reappeared.

'Ah! there you are,' she whispered, 'I was looking for you. Dinner is being served in the Orangerie. Are you hungry? I'm starving. Let's get some food,' and taking his hand she led him to the buffet. A long sideboard was laid out with an extensive buffet of every conceivable choice. Veronica led the way and began to select delicacies until her plate was piled high.

'Come on Adam, help yourself, it's all got to be eaten.' He followed, selecting small portions as if it was a smorgasbord and he intended to come back for more. With a half full plate, he followed her into the snug and sat down besides her at a low table.

'Close the door,' she suggested, 'and we can have some privacy.'

They ate in silence and then Veronica looked up and suddenly asked if he had a girlfriend. Adam was prepared for the question. He had mulled it over in his mind during the last few days. What if she asks me about a girlfriend he had wondered, I will tell her no, he had decided. There was no need to tell her about

Akumu. In any case it was not likely to lead to anything

'Umm no! He answered, 'not at present, I'm really too busy with my work.' Veronica leaned over and took his face in her hands.

'Adam, you need to have some fun, you know,' and kissed him. Her lips were soft and yielding and despite himself he returned the kiss. They moved closer as he put his arms around her feeling the softness of her skin. He inhaled her perfume and found himself beginning to get excited. She moved her hand onto his lap and brushed his groin. He leant over and slipped his hand into her dress caressing her breasts.

'No, not now,' she murmured. 'Let's go back to the dining room, I'd like some pudding, wouldn't you?' He followed her back to the buffet his mind confused. He would have gone further if she hadn't stopped him.

Adam followed Veronica into the Ballroom where some people were already dancing. She turned and asked,

'Shall we?' He nodded. She was a good dancer and soon they moved in unison, their hips closely moulded. Where was this going he wondered enjoying her proximity. The music stopped and he was about to sit down at one of the tables when she excused herself. I guess she is going to the bathroom, he decided, but

then he saw her talking to a young man and next think, they were dancing. She had given him the brushoff very politely but definitely. He felt deflated and dismissed. We hardly know each other he rationalized so why should she spend a lot of time with me. He looked around and saw that John was on his own.

'Lovely party John, thanks for inviting me.'

'I'm glad you are enjoying yourself.' John paused,

'How are you getting on with the work? Everyone speaks very highly of you.'

'It's great, just what I wanted, a mixed practice and good colleagues,' said Adam.

'May I ask you a personal question?' John lowered his voice.

'Sure go ahead.'

'Are you in a steady relationship? We like our colleagues to be settled so to speak, it avoids any difficulties, you know what I mean.' Adam was a bit taken aback by the frankness of the question and didn't know how to reply. He didn't want to deny his relationship with Akumu but at the same time wanted to get to know Veronica better. Luckily he didn't need to answer as another partner came over and joined the conversation.

'Do you mind if I join you?' he said.

'No not at all,' said John, 'we were just talking about the practice.'

At that moment Adam spied Mary, John's wife, who was standing on her own and went over to her.

'Good Evening Mary, what a lovely party.'

'How are you enjoying yourself?'

'I'm having a wonderful evening, meeting all sorts of interesting people.'

'I saw you disappear with Veronica earlier this evening. She's a wonderful daughter and very popular especially with the men, I guess you noticed that.'

'Yes,' said Adam, 'I think she's a lovely person, so full of life.'

'I must warn you that she is a bit of a flirt so please don't get hurt by her fickleness,' continued Mary.

Akumu was finding life in the hospital hard. She was working long day shifts and doing every third night on duty including weekends. Adam's failed attempts to speak to her were upsetting her. She was feeling really bad having to put him off. Meanwhile she and Michael had become close friends and they met frequently usually to discuss a surgical problem. One night after they had been in the OR , he began to talk about himself,

'I am the eldest of three sibs. I have a brother and a sister. Dad was in a single handed practice and had always assumed that I would follow him into the practice but I had other plans. I wanted a more exciting life and despite my father's wishes I studied for my Fellowship. When I got it, to my surprise my father was really pleased and wished me every success.' Akumu listened as Michael poured out his feelings about the struggle with his father's wishes. She understood too well the difficulty of going against one's parents. Her father had the traditional view of a daughter's role in the family, to get married and have children, and that is what would have happened if she had not won a scholarship. It took her to England but it wasn't easy, she confided to Michael.

'I was always short of money and often went without food but like you I knew what I wanted.' The two new friends sat deep in thought each so different from the other yet sharing the same dream.

Akumu was never allowed to forget her colour. Time and again it would come between her and her patients. She would be reminded of it at the most unlikely times. One day she had been called to the Emergency room when a small boy had cut his hand badly. As she entered the cubicle the mother of Indian

extraction put up her hands in horror and shouted,

'Don't let that black woman touch my son.' The nurse shaken by the outburst looked at Akumu who shrugged her shoulders.

'Let me have a look at the hand,' Akumu said as if nothing had happened. Turning to the mother she said in a quiet voice,

'It's not too bad, the nerves and tendons are intact, it just needs a few stitches and he will be fine.' After the operation had been completed and the hand bandaged the mother touched Akumu's arm.

'I'm sorry Doctor, it was a stupid thing to say, please forgive me,'

'Of course, I understand, don't worry about it. He's a fine and brave boy.' Later in the nurse's office having a cup of chocolate, Akumu was asked by one of the nurses if that happened often.

'No, not often, so rarely that I sometimes forget and think I am just like anyone else but then,' she paused and changed the subject.

Later Akumu returned to her room flopped onto the bed and dissolved in tears. After a while she sat up and dried her eyes. I guess I will always be judged by the colour of my skin, she realised.

Eventually Akumu and Adam managed to coincide on their weekend off.

'Look,' suggested Adam 'why don't you come down and stay with me here in Dulwich, it's not far from the West End and we could take in a show?'

Akumu had set off early planning to join the M1 and then the M25. The journey would take about 3 hours before she would see the sign for Dulwich. By eleven she had decided to stop for a break at the Watford Gap between junctions 16 and 17. Parking her car she had recalled the last time she had stopped at a motorway stop. She was a little anxious as she entered the food hall. It was now quite busy with coach loads of Pensioners milling around. She made her way to the drinks counter to be greeted by a warm,

'Jambo,' from the waitress, a young woman called Lilian.

'Habari yako; she replied.

'Mzuri Lilian,' she said and the two fell into easy conversation

'I've a break in five minutes, can you wait? Asked the waitress. It was the first time for ages that Akumu had spoken Kiswahili. She felt the tension slowly slipping away as they conversed in her native language. I must try and do this more often she thought, there was bound to be an African club in Leicester. She

learned that Lillian was born in England but had difficulty getting a job after she left school. She had wanted to go to Uni but her grades weren't good enough. She had to have two jobs to get enough money to attend a cram school to get the requisite 'A' levels. On parting, they exchanged mobile numbers and E-mails promising to keep in touch.

Akumu resumed her journey feeling much happier. I will soon be with Adam she hummed as the wind caught her hair. The sign for Dulwich came up and she swung off the road. She had set her Satnav for Adam's address and was soon coasting along his road looking for the number. She found it, stopped and sat for a moment looking at his compact detached house with its rose bushes lining the path. Net curtains hung from the downstairs windows.

It was built in red bricks and had a grey slate roof. There was no chimney, which made the roof look strangely incomplete. Adam's car was not in the drive but there was a single garage. It must be in there she decided. She tidied her hair in the mirror put on a dab of lip shine and got out of her car locking it by the remote. Standing in the pale sunlight she dialled his number.

'Hello Adam, I'm here,' she called. There was a pause and he picked up.

'Welcome, darling, I will be with you in about 5 minutes. I had to do some shopping; I thought I would cook for you tonight. Within five minutes his car appeared around the corner and stopped behind hers. He sprang out and crushed her in his arms.

'Darling it's wonderful to see you, I've missed you so much. How was the journey?' Akumu was silent, a bit overwhelmed by his reception.

'Fine,' she managed to mumble before he had opened her boot and taken her luggage into the house. She followed him admiring the neat front garden. The house was cool and smelled of flowers. He put her luggage down and again hugged her, kissing her firmly on the lips.

'I've missed you so much,' he repeated. 'Let me look at you. You look a bit tired but otherwise as beautiful as ever. Can I get you something to drink?'

'Tea would be perfect,' she replied.

'I've got some of your favorite scotch shortbread, we'll have it with tea.'

'Mmm, that would be nice.' she agreed.

'I'll put the kettle on and then show you upstairs.'

There were three bedrooms with the master one being en suite. Adam put her luggage on the floor in the main bedroom and showed her around.

'I feel quite sweaty, I could do with a shower,' she said after seeing the shower.

'Why don't you go ahead and I will prepare tea.' Adam suggested. 'Give me a shout when you are finished.'

Akumu stepped out of her clothes and into the shower. It was a modern unit and she soon mastered it, sending steaming hot water cascading over her head and shoulders. Adam returned to the kitchen and put on the kettle. He suddenly had an image of Akumu in the shower. On an impulse he turned off the kettle and bounded up the stairs. He could see her through the shower door and stood mesmerized by her beauty, her shining dark skin, her shapely shoulders, her full breasts and slim hips. He tapped on the door and shouted,

'I'm coming in.' She nodded and undressing he joined her. They clung to each other letting the hot water stream over them. Akumu handed him some soap and he began to wash her beginning with her shoulders and arms and moving slowly downwards until he was soaping her thighs and between her legs. She responded by soaping him, slowly reaching below until he had to ask her to stop, as the pleasure was so intense. Putting his hand on hers he said,

'I think we must be clean now,'

They had tea in the conservatory overlooking the park. They were both quiet. She was tired and he a bit overwhelmed by her presence. He had dreamed so long about this moment when they would be together, so many things had contrived to keep them apart. They talked about inconsequential things as they slowly began to feel familiar with each other. It had been a long time since they had last been together and in some ways they felt like strangers. So much had happened in that period which they had not shared so they had a lot of catching up to do. Adam broke the silence and asked how she was coping with surgery?

'Have you done a full operation yet?' he asked?

'Not yet, I have done most of the parts that make up an operation but not all of them together. I think I am ready for say, an appendicectomy. It'll probably be the first operation most surgeons cut their teeth on. It's a nice procedure with definite stages from the incision to the closure.'

'What about you? How are you enjoying being a GP?'

'It was a bit strange at first as I was seeing a lot of follow up patients whom I had not met before but was expected to know. The new patients were much easier because I was

able to start from the beginning and get their full story.'

They were now beginning to relax and feel more comfortable in each other's company. Finally Adam suggested that they get an early night.

'You go up first,' he suggested to Akumu, 'while I finish off down here.'

By the time he had cleared up downstairs, she was in bed. He felt unexpectedly shy as he removed his clothes and put on his pyjamas. He finished off in the bathroom and then got into bed.

'Good night dear, it's been a lovely evening,' said Akumu giving him a peck on the cheek and turning over away from him.

'Good night, sleep well,' he echoed, confused. He somehow thought that they would fall into each other's arms and make passionate love. He turned off the light and prepared to sleep.

It was during the night that he was awakened by Akumu kissing him. He switched on the bedside lamp and saw she had removed her nightdress, her bare breasts pressing against his chest.

'I love you,' she breathed, 'I have missed you so much, I want you.' He leaned over and they began to kiss passionately. He was swept away by the strength of her ardour. He began to

move over her when she gently rolled him away and moved on top, her legs wide apart, her knees bent around his hips. Gently she began to manoeuvre herself and slowly lowered her body. He experienced a shudder of pleasure as he entered her. He lay still as she began to move slowly thrusting herself down onto him until he was fully within her. As she arched her back above him, he felt her breasts with their silken skin and firm texture. He gently squeezed them rolling the nipples between his thumb and fingers. She let out a sigh of pleasure as they moved together. Her breathing deepened as she sensed him filling her. She held his shoulders as they began to move slowly together and then more quickly as the waves of pleasure began to pulsate in her.

She felt Adam now fully awake kissing her breasts. She could feel him following her rhythm but realised when he held back that he was in danger of finishing too soon. She started to pant and heave, she felt her vagina contracting in waves, as her orgasm began to spread bringing her to the very edge of delight. She could feel herself squeezing him, wanting to initiate his ejaculation. She gave a cry of pleasure and together they reached their climax. Replete, she fell forwards onto his chest, breathless. They hugged each other both dripping with sweat, neither wanting to move.

How long they stayed, not moving is unknown to both. They think they feel asleep because the sun was shining brightly through the curtains when Adam roused himself, sat on his elbows and smiled at the sleeping face of Akumu. He was happier than he had been for years.

Slipping out of bed he had a quick shower and then went downstairs to prepare breakfast. He was starving. He was busily engaged in laying the table when Akumu crept up behind him and put her arms around his waist.

'Good Morning my darling, what a wonderful day it is.' He turned and they kissed, all the tension of yesterday had gone.

'What's for breakfast, I'm starving,' she smiled. 'I think I had a busy night.' After they had cleared up the breakfast things, Adam asked Akumu what she would like to do.

'I'm happy to go into town and do some window shopping, what about you?'

'That sounds fine. I have had an invitation to play tennis after lunch,' Adam said. How do you feel about that?'

'I've never played tennis but would love to watch you play.'

'OK, I'll phone Veronica and let her know that we'll be joining them.' Akumu pricked up her ears.

'Who's Veronica? She asked casually.

'Oh! She's the daughter of John who's the senior in the Practice, His wife is Mary, a very friendly person, I'll introduce you to them.'

Having tidied the house and relaxed reading the papers, they drove down to the High Street where Adam managed to find a parking space in the town centre.

'Let's separate,' Akumu suggested, 'I want to buy some things and I know you will be bored to tears.'

'Yes I think I should buy myself a racket, I can't go on borrowing John's although he hasn't complained, the one he lends me is a bit battered.' They kissed and parted. Akumu knew exactly what she wanted and seeing the sign to Lingerie took the escalator. It was a large and confusing department and in the end she decided to ask an assistant. They were few and far between but eventually she collared one,

'Excuse me, I'm looking for a 34D bra in black with minimal padding please.'

'Will you want the knickers to go with it? What size are you?'

'Yes 12.'

'OK, follow me.'

Akumu followed her through rows of underwear until they came to the black frilly ones.

'That's what I like,' Akumu said pointing to a row of bras. Searching through the row, the assistant found the correct size.

'How many sets do you want?'

'Three sets please. They last a long time but I like to have some in reserve when travelling.'

'Is there anything else I can help you with this morning?' asked the assistant'

'Yes, can you point me in the direction of sports wear I need some tops.'

Meanwhile Adam was making his way to a sports shop just outside Dulwich. On the way he sent a message to Akumu,
Hi darling, am going to Capstick's Sports shop, it's just out of town. Will meet you back in town. If you get time, there is a great Deli called Romeo Jones on the High Street. Choose some goodies for lunch. Love you.

Capsticks was an enormous open plan shop with a central stairway to the first floor. Adam entered and was overwhelmed by what he saw, rows and rows of sports gear of all types and a wide range of sports clothes. As he stood taking in the scene, a young man with a Mohican haircut and rings in his lips, ears and nose came up to him.

'Good morning Sir,' he said in an educated accent. 'Can I help you this morning?'

'Yes!' Adam hesitated, 'Umm I would like to see your range of Tennis rackets.'

'Follow me sir, they're upstairs. As they went up the stairs the assistant turned to him and asked,

'Are you a serious player Sir? We have three ranges of tennis racket depending on your level of skill. May I ask what level would you say you play at?' Adam hesitated; he should have said beginner but felt embarrassed and settled on average.

'I'm a social player, not you're Wimbledon buff, you know,' he said laughing.

They reached the first floor and went to the far side where the wall was festooned with tennis rackets of all sizes and makes. Adam looked aghast, how on earth am I going to choose a racket, there is too much choice. The young man was speaking,

'How much did you want to spend?' He asked.

'About £100 give or take,' Adam replied.

'Well Sir, I have the Dunlop double racket deal at £99. That would suit you fine. It's one of our most popular rackets. Let me show it to you and you can try it out at our practice net.'

Adam was a bit shy about practicing his strokes but it all worked out OK and he left the shop carrying his purchase, quite pleased with himself. At that moment his phoned pinged, a message from Akumu,

How are you getting on? I've finished my shopping and am at the Deli, lovely shop can't resist spoiling us.

Please do, I've got my racket and am on the way back probably 5 minutes, will park in the same place and come and look for you.

Adam found her in the Deli trying to decide what salmon to have.

'They have it from Sweden, Scotland and gravad lax from Alaska,' she explained.

'Let's go for the gravad lax, it's a bit more expensive but more tasty. What else have you got?'

'Some freshly baked rye bread, a tuna salad with green and black olives and a piece of delicious looking cheese cake. We are going to have a feast,' she exclaimed hugging him.

They arrived home carrying their big bags of goodies.

'What did you get in Marks?' he asked as they got inside.

'It's a secret,' she said and then, 'wait a moment and I'll show you.' She darted up stairs and after a few minutes shouted,

'Close your eyes and stand at the bottom of the stairs.' Adam was waiting when she descended.

'OK, open them.' Adam was stunned; Akumu was wearing a black bra and panties only. She saw the hungry look in his face,

posed coquettishly and ran back upstairs saying,

'Later it's all for you, later.'

It was after 1.30 when they had finished eating. Adam looked up at the clock.

'We are due at the Tennis court at 2.30 we had better get going.' Changing into his tennis things and carrying his new rackets he went to the car. Meanwhile Akumu had changed into a pair of light blue jeans, a reddish silken top and a hat worn at a rakish angle. She looked good enough to eat Adam thought as she joined him. They arrived at the club in good time. Adam parked the car, acknowledged the attendant who now recognised him and went to the bar. John was already sitting having a soft drink. Adam introduced Akumu,

'This is my girl friend Akumu, she's a surgeon working in Leicester.' John stood up and shook her hand, '

'Welcome to the Club, do you play tennis?'

'No I'm afraid not but I'll enjoy watching you.' At that moment the ladies joined them and were introduced. Veronica immediately went to Adam and kissed him on both cheeks. Akumu struggled to conceal her surprise at the appearance of Veronica. She was so unlike what she had imagined. She was not a fat plain young woman as she had expected. Instead she

was tall and slim with long golden hair and shapely legs, she was beautiful and she seemed to know Adam very well. Why had he kept her a secret? What was going on she wondered as they chatted comfortably? I am going to have to watch out for this girl she looks like trouble, Akumu decided.

Veronica hadn't expected Adam to appear with a girlfriend and an African one at that. She managed to appear in control but inside she was struggling to make sense of it. He hadn't said anything about a girlfriend and now he appears with a black one. I admit she's beautiful but she's black, where on earth did he find her and how come she's a doctor? Veronica was totally confused, her mind desperately trying to keep calm and to appear relaxed and at ease

'Let's go and change,' said John, 'we'll meet you on the court.' Akumu and the two younger players made their way to the court. Mary, walking behind them, caught up with John and whispered,

'That was a surprise, she seems a nice enough young woman but she's black!' Couldn't he have got a white girl? I don't understand.'

'It's none of our business you know darling, whom he chooses as his friends. We don't own him you know.'

'Yes, but I thought he and Veronica... '

'Yes I know and so did I.'

There was a cool breeze when the four players strode onto the tennis court. They had decided to change partners and now the men were playing the girls. John was impatient to ask Adam about Akumu, she had been such a surprise when she appeared at the bar with him. He began asking him between points.

'How did you meet Akumu?'

'We met at Medical School, we were in the same class.' said Adam returning Veronica's serve.

'Do you have m-much in common? She's a very beautiful girl.'

Adam was surprised by the question.

'Yes, of course a great deal. We both love medicine she is training to be a surgeon. 'Why wouldn't we?'

'I know this is an impertinent questions but don't you like Veronica?'

'Yes she is a lovely, you must be very proud of her,'

'We are, but I mean, do you like her more than that?'

Adam was speechless. How could he ask him that question. It's none of his business but I don't want to be rude, he is my host and a boss in some respects. How am I going to get out of this? Fortunately it was the last ball of the third game and Adam avoided answering the question by suggesting,

'Let's change partners, what do you say John?'

'Yes er, why not, that sounds a good idea.'

Akumu was watching with amusement. She could see that the players were talking to each other between shots and she guessed what they were talking about. I wonder how Adam is warding off the questions. The partners changed and the game resumed. John was now playing with Veronica, and Adam with Mary. As soon as she could, Veronica whispered to her father,

'What do you think of her?' She couldn't bring herself to use Akumu's name.'

'She's very nice, why?' He said.

'Because she's ...' John didn't let her finish the sentence'

'I can see. I don't want to hear you talk like that young woman,' he whispered angrily.

'C'mon Dad, you're being a bloody hypocrite. John felt embarrassed. Walking back to the changing rooms, Adam fell in step with Veronica,

'Akumu's lovely, why didn't you tell me you had a girlfriend?' she asked.

'I didn't think that you'd care, you're always very fickle and I never know from one day to the next what our relationship is?' Veronica smiled,

'Adam it depends on you, what would you like it to be, as far as I am concerned we're good friends but,' lowering her voice said, 'we could be more.' She leaned over and kissed him on the cheek, secretly hoping that Akumu was watching. Maybe when Akumu has gone back, I might have let myself go, he thought to himself.

Over tea, Akumu could feel that something had happened. They all seemed much more relaxed and she felt as if she was now not an outsider but part of the family and it had all happened without her having to say or do anything. Perhaps just being, not trying to prove anything or arguing is the answer. On the way home Adam was very quiet.

'Are you alright Adam?' she eventually asked.

'It was a very interesting game of tennis.' he admitted at last. Turning to her he said

'You were wonderful, Akumu, I was so proud of you.'

'I did nothing and said nothing.'

'Maybe, but you showed yourself to be a confident secure young woman and that won them over in a way that no amount of talk would've.'

The week with Adam in Dulwich had just flown by. Akumu had had a wonderful time so much so that she was reluctant to leave but she

knew that if she wanted to be a successful surgeon she must put aside her personal feelings and adopt a professional approach. So it was with some reluctance that she bade him farewell and set off North to Leicester and the hospital. She was much more confident on this second visit, Leicester was almost beginning to feel her home. The weather was fine with bright sunshine as she drove, humming to herself; life was good she had decided as she faced the new challenge. On arrival her first duty was to register with the office, sign her contact and find somewhere to live.

'You can live in if you wish,' suggested the clerk, 'but it is not obligatory provided you find somewhere near to the hospital.' Akumu relished the idea of living independently; she had spent too much time as a resident in hospital accommodation. She looked forward to cooking her own meals and of course entertaining Adam when he was free. The clerk suggested a number of addresses where she knew there were vacancies. Deciding to go on foot, Akumu walked out through the gate of the hospital waving at the attendant and set off to the first address. She found it easily. It was in a row of neat town houses on a quiet leafy street, ideal she thought. She was feeling confident as she read the notice on the window, *Nice two-room flat en suite all facilities*. The price was

right so she pressed the bell and waited. A large red-faced woman appeared,

'Good morning, I'm a doctor at the Infirmary. I wonder if I could have a look at the flat which is for rent. You were recommended to me by the hospital,' she began but before she could continue the woman, her face stern and unfriendly announced.

'Sorry the flat's let,' and slammed the door. Akumu was a bit taken aback by the reception but thought nothing more about. When she received the same answer after trying several more places she began to realise that she was facing a wall of prejudice. She had read about this attitude but hadn't thought anything more about it but now she was actually experiencing it. Dejected she returned to the hospital where she met the clerk who asked whether she had found anything suitable.

'There were a number of vacant places but as soon as I appeared they said they were taken.'

'I'm sorry,' said the clerk, 'people around here are a very close knit community and most of them have never seen a- a person like you.' 'You mean a black person?' Akumu said.

'Yes I'm afraid I do. Here In the north, there is a great deal of resentment about black people especially the successful ones.'

Akumu felt crushed, she had met this so often but foolishly thought that now she was a doctor and a trainee surgeon, things would be different. She tried not to be judgemental. They don't know, it's not their fault. I must look like something from outer space but, another inner voice much more strident replied; don't accept it, we are in the 21st century; they are refusing to live in the real world where people of all colours and creeds are judged not by the colour of their skin but by their ability. She could feel herself getting angry. It was in that mood that she returned to the hospital and bumped into Michael.

'Hi, how's it going?' He asked, 'are you finding your way around. Are you settling in OK?

'Well not exactly,' Akumu confessed.

'I'm sorry, what's the trouble, is there anything I can do?' She shrugged her shoulders.

'Not really, it's something I have to deal with myself.'

'At least, tell me what has happened.'
Akumu hesitated. Could she trust this man? She had only just met him, she knew nothing about him, but her unhappiness got the better of her and she poured out her heart. The tension was too much and she began to fight

back her tears, he stepped forwards and hugged her.

'It'll be alright, it must be very difficult,' he said, 'let me help you.'

'I don't know how you can?' she said struggling through her tears. They found a quiet spot in the cafeteria and Akumu painfully described what had happened. Michael listened incredulously. By the end, he was incensed,

'I can't believe that this still happens. I feel so ashamed.'

Akumu looked at him, She saw a kind caring face, someone who had gone through a lot of pain and understood, someone who cared. She smiled,

'Thank you for listening, Mike, sometimes I feel so alone as if I am fighting the world and it's wonderful to meet someone who understands.' He took her hand,

'I'd like to be your friend, to help you fight this battle to establish your right to be accepted for what you are and not what some may think. I hate the thought that you are judged even before they've had a chance to know you. It just isn't fair,' he paused, look! I've got an idea. Why don't I go and see the first flat that you visited and if it is suitable, I'll take it as if I was going to live there. Then you can come as a friend. Once they get to know you I'm sure everything will be OK.'

'Are you sure? I don't want to inconvenience you. I know you're very busy.'

'Yes, but I've got a free afternoon and I would like to have a go at my idea, that's if you agree?'

Later that day after he had finished his Outpatients, Michael removed his white coat, put on a jacket and made his way to the flat. The advert was still in the window. He knocked and waited. A woman, called Mrs Staines who matched the description Akumu had given him, opened the door. When she heard that he would like to look at the flat, she was all smiles.

'Are you from the hospital? She had asked in a wheedling voice.

'Yes,' he replied.

'You must be so clever,' she continued, 'please follow me.' She showed him the flat which occupied the whole of the first floor. It had two good-sized bedrooms, a well-fitted bathroom, a kitchen and a spacious lounge. It was tastefully decorated and he thought it would be perfect for Akumu.

'Would you mind if my friend came to see it?'

'Not at all, please bring him them to see it.'

Michael sent Akumu a message.

I am at the flat it is very nice. Why don't you come and have a look, I think you'll like it. Back

came a reply, *What about the Landlady?* He replied, *don't worry about her, come as soon as you can.*

Michael turned to Mrs Staines,,

'She's coming; she'll be here in about 5 minutes.

There was a ring on the bell and Mrs Staines opened the door to see Akumu standing there,

'Not you again? What do you want? She said roughly. Before Akumu could answer, Michael shouted out,

'Is that you dear? Come up and see the flat it's very nice.' Akumu brushed passed Mrs Staines and entered the flat. It was just what she wanted, bright, airy and spacious. She turned to see the Landlady standing defiantly at the door.

'I don't want this black woman living here,' she said pointing to Akumu. Michael kept very calm,

'Why is that? Don't you like doctors? She's a surgeon at the hospital. Is that a problem? The landlady look confused.

'No! It's not that?'

'Then what is it?'

'Me neighbours,' she repeated, 'me neighbours won't accept her.'

'What about you? You can see that she's a fine young woman can't you?'

By this time Akumu was ready to leave. She didn't need to be humiliated by this ignorant woman. She turned to look at Michael pleadingly,

'Please Michael, let's go, I'm not wanted here,'

Mrs Staines interrupted,

'OK, OK, she can stay. I need the money but I still don't like the idea. My neighbours won't like it,' and with that she stormed away

'Michael looked at Akumu,

'Give it a go, please. They don't understand. I know that once she gets to know you it'll all be different you'll see.' Akumu thought for a moment, you're right I can't keep running away. Sooner or later I am going to have to stop and face it.

'OK I'll take it.' Within a few days she had moved her things in and the place began to look and feel like home. Some months later, when she related it to the nursing staff in the department, Akumu would laugh about her experience finding somewhere to live, but at the time, it was a very different matter.

She soon settled into a routine, Outpatient clinics three times a week and theatre sessions four times week. Michael had become a good friend and she often deferred to him when she had a medical problem. But it took quite a while for patients to accept her. She

still smarted when thinking about that first morning's clinic. It was due to start at 9 am. She got there early and introduced herself to the nursing staff one of whom was also of African descent coming from Nigeria. Unlike Akumu she was born in England and had never been to her native country.

Strangely they didn't really have much in common although they always acknowledged each other. That morning Akumu took her own clinic seeing follow up patients. The word soon went round the patients in the waiting room. It was evident that some did not want to be seen by the black doctor, as they referred to her. One particularly outspoken woman demanded to see the Out Patient Sister and was invited to go into her office.

'Please sit down Mrs Wakefield, I am Sister Rogers. How may I help you?'

'I'm sorry Sister, I don't want to be seen by that 'er you know, that new Doctor with the funny name.'

'Do you mean Miss Onyango?'

'Yes the black doctor, I don't want her hands on me, you know what I mean?'

'No I don't as it happens, may I ask why?'

'Umm, it's difficult to explain.'

'Try please,' insisted Sister impatiently, she was becoming a bit angry by this time.

'Ok, when I was a little girl we had one of them as our local doctor. She wasn't very popular and many people thought she deliberately let children die.'

'How old were you?'

'Seven.'

'So you didn't know if it was true?'

'No but me Mum told me.'

'I see, well we have a problem because Miss Onyango is one of our specialist doctors and is highly thought of. Perhaps I should discuss it with the Consultant Mr Winchester and see what he wants to do about it.'

Mrs Wakefield fidgeted and began to stutter,

'I didn't mean to cause a fuss Sister. I'm sure she will be very good, thank you sister.'

Sister checked the files and slipped Mrs Wakefield to see Miss Onyango.

When she came out from the consultation Sister nabbed her as she was leaving.

'How was the consultation?' she asked innocently. Mrs Winchester blushed.

'She was very thorough and very kind. What a nice person.'

'Thank you, Mrs Wakefield,' said sister smiling, 'you'll see her next visit?'

'Yes please,' agreed Mrs Wakefield.

It was some weeks later that Akumu first heard about the patient who didn't want to see her and

how sister had dealt with it. She took sister aside and thanked her.

'No need to thank me Doctor, you are one we should be thanking.'

Akumu soon got into the routine of the department. She was attached to Mr Winchester a general surgeon. He was a tall rugged man of few words, a very skilful surgeon but his bedside manner left a lot to be desired. Patients would often ask Akumu why he was so brusque, often ignoring their question or answering them in such a manner as to make them feel stupid.

'It's just his manner,' she would explain and add, 'I can always try to answer any questions that you have.' In her spare time Akumu would go into the department library to read the latest journals, as she had not yet decided which branch of surgery she would like to pursue.

It was in the theatre that Akumu felt most anxious. Mr. Winchester said so little that she was never certain if she was doing the right thing. The most she would get from him was a grunt when she asked something. One of her jobs was to prepare the theatre list for the following day. Having reviewed the patients and checked that all the necessary investigations had been done, she had to ring the surgeon that evening and let him know the details. Armed

with her list she would dial his number. His wife usually answered the telephone.

'I'll get him for you,' she would say and then there was a long wait before he replied.

'Yes, what is it?'

'I have the list for tomorrow,'

'Go on then,' he would say impatiently.

Akumu would then read out the names and procedures to be carried out.

'Thank you,' he would say and the line would go dead.

Akumu always felt drained after the conversation. She was so afraid that she might get something wrong. Happily she rarely did.

Although Akumu had been living in her apartment for over three months, she and Mrs Staines were still only on nodding terms. There was no sign of a positive friendship developing despite her attempts to be a good tenant, keeping her radio noise low, being meticulous with her rubbish disposal and paying her rent in advance. The situation came to a head one morning as she was leaving the house. Her neighbour, Mrs Robin was also leaving her home and the two met on the pavement. Akumu was about to greet her when she was met with a outburst,

'You! You are still here, why don't you go home and leave us alone, you blackie?' Doctor!

I hear you're a doctor at the hospital. Ha! I wouldn't let you touch my cat let alone me.'

Akumu was stunned by her attack and at first didn't know what to say. She wanted to walk away and ignore the woman but something stopped her. She heard Michael's words ringing in her ears, they don't understand, it's not their fault, be patient. So she listened to the tirade and smiled.

'It's OK. Mrs Robin,' she said, 'I know what you're saying. I would feel the same. A strange person, a black person from another country, living here, taking our jobs. It isn't fair is it? Look I'm due at the hospital so I can't talk now but can I come and see you later.'

'All right then,' she grunted, 'I'm in most of the day.'

It was late afternoon when Akumu knocked lightly on her neighbour's door. Mrs Robin had been waiting for the knock with some trepidation. During the day she had thought about her verbal attack on the doctor and was beginning to feel bad about how she had behaved. It would have been easier if the doctor had shouted at her or been angry but just to listen and say she understood really puzzled her. Akumu for her part had just got on with the day and had almost forgotten her appointment with Mrs Robin. It was only as she was approaching home that she remembered.

Mrs Robin heard the knock and froze for a moment. Then patting her hair and straightening her dress she went to the door.

'Come in please Doctor,' she said in an unusually soft voice. 'Come and sit down,' she continued, pointing to a comfortable chair in the sitting room. Before Akumu could say anything she began,

'Doctor, I have been thinking of what I said earlier today. It was a stupid outburst, done without thought for your feelings. I want you to forgive me, I was cruel and thoughtless and feel ashamed.' She began to cry silently.

Akumu was taken aback by this display. She hadn't expected it and was embarrassed by Mrs Robin's obvious discomfort. She tried to interrupt and say that it was all right but Mrs Robins needed to get it off her chest. Akumu listened and let the words sink in. Her immediate response when she saw Mrs Robin begin to cry was to go to her and hug her but something stopped her. It was if she had come to believe that she was in fact not acceptable. But Mrs Robins took the initiative and reached out and held her. The two women who differed in so many ways hugged each other sharing a moment of common humanity.

'Lets 'ave a cup of tea?' said Mrs Robins, brushing away her tears, 'we need it.'

After that they became good friends. Akumu would drop in after work and share her day with Mrs Robins. They soon became on first name terms, her name was Elsie. Her husband had died and she had been living on her own for over ten years. She had two grown up children whom she rarely saw as they lived a long way away.

Akumu was now part of the establishment no one saw her as any different. That is what she thought but an incident occurred that caused her to rethink her position. It started inconspicuously and without warning. It was in a clinic like any other. She was sitting at her desk when the patient, a small boy was brought in by his father.

'He keeps bruising himself we don't know why,' he said, no sooner has one bruise disappeared than another appears.' Akumu saw a small ill-kempt boy sitting without a smile, hardly taking notice of what was happening. Examining him she found widespread bruising on his chest and back. She had seen this before and recognised it as baby battering and concluded that someone in the family was hitting the child. She discussed the case with her Registrar who agreed with her diagnosis. The next step was to notify Social Services. She later heard that the child had been taken into care. She thought nothing more about the boy

until she began to get death threats, telephone calls, messages left on the windscreen of her car and eventually letters pushed through her post box. Not knowing what to do she discussed it with Michael. He offered to help her and together they went to the Hospital authorities. They were sympathetic but said it was a police matter. The nearest station was at Hinckley Road so as soon as they had finished their clinics they made their way to the station. It was empty when they arrived but no one was at the desk so they rang the bell on the desk and waited. A woman police officer eventually arrived.

'Can I help you?' she asked. Akumu explained what had happened. The officer took out a pad of paper and began to take notes. After listening to the whole story she looked up and said.

'These are very difficult cases to solve. It is usually someone who is a bit deranged.'

'I don't mind if you don't prosecute him, all I want is for it to stop,' said Akumu.

'Exactly,' said the officer. 'We will arrange for a regular watch to be kept on your home and hopefully it will stop when the person sees officers around.'

For whatever reason Akumu had no more threats or writings. However the incident had a profound effect on her, she realised that as a doctor she had a high profile in the

neighbourhood and that she had to be more vigilant.

As the weeks went by, Akumu felt a deep uneasiness, a restlessness, a dissatisfaction with her life. She loved the work, her colleagues and of course Adam, but there was something missing. Each day seemed to be like the previous one, she was no longer excited by what might happen. Have I come this far to settle for a routine life so soon, she asked herself. I am still young and am hungry for adventure. I still have a dream to change the world or at least the lives of those less fortunate. If I told Adam, would he understand or would he try to persuade me that what I was doing was important and that I should be patient. I'm not patient, time is flying by.

On an impulse and without telling Adam she drove to London to visit the offices of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). She had seen an article about them in a magazine and was curious. She then went online and found that they sent volunteer doctors to Northern Kenya to the Displaced Peoples camps at Dadaab. The three camps, Ifo, Dagahaley and Hagadera) were constructed in the early 1990s. Refugees from the civil war in Somalia first settled Ifo camp, and later efforts were made by UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for

Refugees) to improve the camp. For many years the camps were managed by CARE (a humanitarian organisation concerned primarily for the care of women).

Although she had prepared herself as much as possible by reading from their website, the meeting she had with the Staff officer challenged her greatly. She was invited into a large open plan office on the first floor and handed a three-page application form to complete. The question that she had most difficulty with was at the end of the formal questions and it was simply,

Why do you want to work with MSF? Tell us in three paragraphs.

Akumu sat and looked at the question her elbows resting on the table, supporting her chin. She had thought about this for some weeks but had never actually formulated her reasons. Now facing the task she struggled to find the words. She knew that she would make mistakes if she tried to write it out without checking the choice of words, her spelling etc. so she asked for some scrap paper and began by writing appropriate words- concern, responsible, surgeon, opportunity, give back, helpless, fortunate, my countrymen, displaced. Word after word poured from her pen. Looking at the list she began to put them together in three sentences so as to express her wishes.

There was a time limit. She had 15 minutes to answer that question so she wrote:

I want to work with MSF because as a surgeon I believe I can help.

I am concerned about the fate of displaced peoples and those less fortunate than myself. As a Kenyan I would like the opportunity to give back what I have been lucky to have received for the benefit of others.

She checked the spelling and punctuation and handed in the completed forms.

'Please wait, I would like to go through your application with you.'

Akumu sat wondering what he would ask her. After about ten minutes the secretary called her in. Another person, whom he introduced as Dr Hussain a medical Officer, had joined him.

'Dr Hussain has a number of question to ask you.'

'Hello,' Miss Onyango he began, 'I have read your application with great interest. I note that you are currently completing a Senior House Job in Leicester. I am confused why you wish to interrupt your surgical training at this time rather than wait until you are fully trained and then apply to us?'

'I agree that it would make more sense medically speaking but from a personal point of view I feel this is the right time. I have a boyfriend who I know wants to get married and

have children,' she replied frankly, 'but I want to do this before life gets too complicated and I miss the opportunity.'

'Um, I see you were born in Kenya but are you now a British resident?'

'No, not yet but I plan to apply as soon as I can.'

'Thank you Miss Onyango, we will be in touch with you within the next two weeks.'

'How would you like us to notify you?'

'Post or E-mail please.' She paused and then said, 'I have one more question. I realise you may not be in the position to answer it. Can you tell me what my chances are?'

'I am not officially able to answer that question but I can say that your application will be looked on very favourably. Good day.'

Akumu returned to the hospital feeling very uncertain as to the outcome of her visit to London. She thought they would welcome her with open arms but instead she faced a gruelling interview with no certainty of success. It was only the few comments of the officer as she was leaving that gave her any hope.

She returned to the hustle and bustle of everyday life and had almost forgotten her application to MSP when a bulky letter arrived. It had a London postmark and for a moment she puzzled over it. She was on the way to clinic at the time so put it into her cubbyhole to be read

later. She had some time after lunch as the first case had been cancelled and remembering the letter, returned to the department library to read it. She studied the envelope before opening it.

It was A4 in size and felt as if there were several sheets of paper in it. The date was smudged but looked like two days earlier. It had a first class stamp. The MSF Logo was printed on the top left corner. Opening it carefully she extracted six pages and spread them out on the table, the first was a letter. She read it slowly,

Dear Miss Onyango, I am pleased to offer you a six weeks tenure at the MSF unit in North Kenya as a practicing surgeon. Please find attached documents as follows:

- 1 Information about the Unit and your duties.
- 2 A form to be completed to confirm that you are medically fit and have had the required injections.
- 3 A declaration that you accept the risks involved and absolve MSF from any responsibility or litigation.
- 4 A statement from your current employer granting you the appropriate leave
- 5 Terms of Employment

When you return these, you will be notified by e-mail of your starting date. We will be responsible for all travel arrangements. Finally please read carefully and

sign the terms of employment form and return to this address.

Akumu replaced the papers in the envelope and put it back in the cubbyhole. I need to spend some time going over these she realised. Later that week she sent off the papers and forgot them. A few days later when opening what looked like a bill she saw the heading MSF and realised that this was the letter she had been waiting for. She read it slowly, her heart in her mouth. She was required to attend at their offices in Nairobi in two week's time, air tickets together with a list of things she would need were enclosed. She sat thinking about the future. What would Adam say if she told him? Michael would understand but would the hospital agree if she explained where she was going? In the end she decided not to say anything. She would explain to Adam when she got back. By using her mobile he would think she was still in Leicester. I am being deceitful I know but Adam would try and dissuade me.

A sickly choking miasma of rotting food, faeces and urine reached Akumu's nose long before she had arrived at the camp. The smell of human detritus rose from the huge heap piled high by the roadside where carrion wheeled and dived to eat off the stinking mass. Several crows screeching in the wind, descended to

pick up pieces of rotting meat, flying away with them hanging from their beaks. Others sat gorging on the decaying remains. Small children waded amongst the grey stinking purulent mounds of waste searching for scraps of food. She gagged and swallowed, managing to hold back the acid fluid that rose in her mouth.

'You'll get used to it,' Rico, her driver, shouted over the roar of the four by four diesel engine sitting idling by the road side.

'In a week's time you won't even notice it,' he added.

The vehicle had stopped outside a hut on the outskirts of the settlement. It was brick built and slightly bigger than the others, made of mud and wattle and banana leaves intertwined on their roofs, that sprawled up the side of the hill.

'You'll live in there, it's small but safe.' he informed her, pointing to the hut. She carried her single holdall into the house and was at first confused by its dimness. As her eyes grew accustomed, she could make out a low bed in the corner, a table and two chairs and in the far corner, a drop toilet with a shower.

Her heart sank, have I made a terrible mistake? She wondered. Should I have given it a bit more time before I accepted the job and plunged into this life? Her thoughts were

disturbed by a sound caused by a small boy dressed in rags, peeping around the door.

'Hi,' she said and he forced a strained smile on his drawn face. Shaken by his appearance she realised in that moment, why she was there. He and thousands like him deserved a better life. She put out her hand and he walked falteringly towards her. His hands were hot and dry, his cracked lips covered with flies picking at the flaking scabs of skin. She grabbed her water bottle, opened it and put it to his lips. He drank greedily spilling the water down his chest. She held the bottle steady so that he didn't choke. Then she remembered the piece of dried sandwich in her bag. Reaching for it she broke off a small piece, moistened it with some water and handed it to him. He ate it greedily chewing the still stiff bread with his few broken teeth. Taking him by the hand she walked outside looking for his parents. Rico was waiting to take her to the hospital set up by Medecins san Frontieres.

'Where did you find him?' Rico asked, having been examining the vehicle's tyres and not watching the house.

'He just followed me in. I presumed he lives near here.' Rico examined the boy's tattered shirt and read a faded name Alfonse.

'He has come from the children's home, he's an orphan. There are thousands like him

here either separated from their parents or their parents were dead, it's often the same,' he said. 'We'll take him back on our way to the hospital. I want to show it to you before it gets dark. By the way there are no lights after dark so don't come back here on your own, we have guards who will accompany you.'

Akumu looked at the boy. She remembered another small boy whom she hardly knew, her brother. He was only three when he started to get diarrhoea. No one was able to help him, they couldn't afford the doctor's bills so her mother nursed him but he didn't recover. She remembered his small dried out body lying on the ground being wrapped up in a sheet and buried in a makeshift grave, a small cross fashioned by her father placed over it.

The hospital was about a ten-minute drive along a bumpy rain soaked road. The boy's home was a small hostel which he shared with twenty others. A matron and a house girl cared for them. The boy didn't want to leave her when they arrived at his home but she promised to return using signing and gestures. He stood by the door waving as they left.

'You've made a friend,' Rico said sarcastically, 'there is no shortage of them I'm afraid.' The hospital was further up the hill, the road getting more rutted as they proceeded.

Rico stopped the vehicle outside and together they went in.

'It has been extensively improved in the last few years,' he announced. 'It now has several operating rooms and a maternity unit with a labour and delivery room able to care for premature infants. The hospital also receives a regular supply of sterile dressings and disposable one-use syringes.'

Considering where they were, Akumu thought the facilities were remarkably good. But as she was to learn the demand for this two hundred bedded unit far exceeded its capacity. At any one time at least three hundred patients were being accommodated in makeshift beds, trolleys and mattresses on the floor.

Akumu started work the following day. She arrived to see a long line of people waiting in the blazing sun. Most of the problems were straight forward, dehydration, infected wounds and babies with diarrhoea, eye and ear infections. She spent three days a week in the OR dealing with injuries, bone and joint infections, fractures and abdominal acutes. She was so busy that she had hardly any time to decide whether she had made the right decision.

She had managed to keep Adam totally unaware where she was by means of her mobile. She would contact him daily speaking

as if she was still working in Leicester. He would be unaware that she was speaking from Northern Kenya on the border with Somalia. She had hoped that she would be able to keep it from him. Her idea was to complete the six weeks contract and then have a break for six months before starting again. She would continue her career in the UK using her holiday to work at the camp.

That was her plan until she began to develop abdominal pain. She ignored it at first but it became more acute and she struggled to get to the OR. During an operation, she felt dizzy, light headed and passed out. She awoke to find herself in a hospital bed with a drip. Unknown to her she had been airlifted to Nairobi and was in the Aga Khan hospital. At first she looked around in amazement then pulled the bell. A nurse appeared and in Swahili asked if she could help.

'What has happened? Where am I?' she asked, confused and frightened.

'You've had an operation to remove your appendix,' she said calmly, 'how are you feeling?'

'Umm OK I suppose. I was working in Dadaab hospital. I don't understand how I got here. Please will someone tell what happened?'

'The doctor's coming in shortly and will explain everything, now please rest, you've been very ill,' said the nurse sharply. Then Akumu remembered the little boy, Alfonse. He won't know why I haven't visited him.

Adam's life had returned to normal after Akumu returned to Leicester. They had spoken to each other almost daily and both felt happy in their relationship. But suddenly, Akumu was not answering her calls. Adam didn't think too much of it at first as it had happened before but as it continued for a third day, he got worried. What could have happened? He wondered. In the end he decided to phone the hospital. The operator replied.

'May I speak to Miss Onyango, she is one of your junior surgeons?' he asked.

'I'm sorry sir. I am not allowed to put anyone through to the staff.' There was a click and a different voice said,

'This is the office, may I help you?'

'Yes please, I would like to speak to Miss Onyango, she is a member of staff.' There was a pause

'I'm sorry Sir, I can't put you through to her.'

'Why not?'

'It's hospital policy, Sir, something to do with security.'

'I am a friend and I need to speak to her urgently.'

'Have you tried to use your mobile or send a text?'

'Of course I have but she doesn't answer.' Perhaps she doesn't want to speak to you, the clerk thought but said,

'I'm sorry sir, all I can do is give her a message.'

'OK then,' he said angrily, 'please tell her that Adam rang and she should ring him as soon as possible.'

He waited for her call, drumming his fingers on the table and watching some birds drink from the birdbath in the garden. Suddenly the phone rang,

'Hello Akumu, thank God I was so worried. But it was a man' voice that he heard.

'This is Mike Stone, a colleague of Ms Onyango. Switch told me you're looking for her.'

'Yes I am a close friend, a GP in Dulwich. My name's Adam, I haven't heard from her for three days and I am getting worried.'

'Hello Adam, she told me about you. Perhaps it may be that the line is poor in the camp?'

'In the camp? What do you mean in the camp. I don't understand?'

'She's working in Dadaab camp in Northern Kenya with Médecins sans Frontières.'

'She's what? Are you serious?'

'Yes, she's working as a surgeon in a displaced person camp, didn't you know?' The line went silent. 'Are you still there?'

'Yes, I was just thinking about what you've said. When did she leave for the camp?'

'She's been away about two weeks. She took six week's unpaid leave and said she would be back at the end of next month.' Adam still confused, slowly absorbed what he was being told and then he asked,

'Are you sure she's all right? I had been speaking to her almost daily thinking she was in Leicester but presumably in the camp, and now the silence. Adam couldn't believe what he was saying. How was he to know that she wasn't working in the hospital in Leicester?'

'Look, assured Mike, 'I'm sure she's fine but to put your mind at rest, I know one of the office staff at MSF in London. I could ring him and find out where she is and if she is OK.'

'Would you? Please do, I would be most grateful.'

'OK, I'll ring you back as soon as I know something.'

A few minutes later the phone at the MSF office in London rang.

'May I speak to David please, it's Mr Mike Stone from Leicester Royal Infirmary.' After a moment a voice answered,

'Hello Mike, it's David speaking, 'long time no see. How are you?'

'Fine David, I've a favour to ask you.'

'OK fire away.'

'A colleague of mine, a GP in Dulwich is concerned about his girlfriend. Her name is Ms Akumu Onyango. She's been working in Dadaab as a volunteer surgeon and she normally speaks to him daily but he hasn't heard anything for three days. Can you find out what's happening.'

'Officially, no, but I'll check and ring you back.'

After a long wait and a broken conversation on a bad line, Mike was told that she had been transferred to Nairobi with an Acute Appendix. A call to the Nairobi hospital established that she was recovering well and would be flown out of Kenya in the next few days. Mike rang Adam who listened incredulously as the story unfolded.

The journey back to Nairobi had been a nightmare. Much of it had passed in a haze of sounds and images. Akumu remembered the bumpy ride across the tarmac to the waiting Cessna Caravan C208B, a fixed wing aircraft

operated under license to UNHAS (United Nations Humanitarian Air Service). It should be a lot easier than the eight-hour journey by road from Nairobi she had done two weeks earlier, she was told. She was carefully lifted onto a stretcher and placed on the back seat. The plane was otherwise full of returning volunteers.

She wanted desperately to sleep but it was a rough journey due to turbulence near the mountains, bouncing the plane about and jarring her. An hour later the plane landed at Moi International Airport in Nairobi. An ambulance was waiting for her and she was rushed to the hospital. She felt the next few days pass in a haze and then she was sitting up in bed nursing a sore tummy. Then she learned about the appendix. Suddenly she remembered Adam,

‘I haven’t spoken to him for days what must he be thinking?’ She looked for her phone but it was no where to be found.

‘Nurse I must make a phone call,’ she shouted.

‘I’m sorry, no phone calls are allowed. Can you wait until you are allowed up?’ The nurse replied.

‘I must get back to the UK. Please book me a flight as soon as possible.’

There was about a three hours wait in the lounge before Akumu was helped onto the Kenya Airways flight to London. As luck would have it, there were some spare seats in Club Class and she was allocated one. They were wide and could be made to lie almost flat, Akumu found that the most comfortable position. She had almost fallen asleep when the roar of the engines taxiing onto the runway woke her.

Lying on her back staring up at the locker above her, she began to recall some of the incidents at the camp. She could not forget the children, the children with their huge eyes staring, waiting not speaking, their lives on hold, hardly able to walk and certainly not able to play, the mothers patiently waiting for food, uncomplaining, accepting and always thanking God. Akumu on the other hand was struggling with God. Couldn't he/she see what was going on? Didn't they care? Was it OK for the young ones to die before they even had any life? Tears began to prick her eyes. It was so unfair. ; she wanted to scream out,

'It's unfair, unfair. They did nothing to deserve it.' She could feel her anger rising, but anger against whom? There was no one to blame, it just wasn't fair. Eventually she must have fallen asleep because the dawn light flickering through the windows woke her.

'Are you comfortable? Did you manage to sleep? Can I get you anything?' the stewardess asked.

'Yes fine thanks, may I have a bottle of water please.' Sitting propped up she drank the cold liquid soothing her mouth from its overnight dryness.

Adam was waiting at Heathrow when Akumu came through customs in a wheelchair. She saw him and waved. He was overcome with emotion. She was crying tears of relief and pleasure at seeing him.

'It's wonderful to be back,' she said as they hugged and kissed. He took over the wheelchair, thanked the porter and pushed her into a nearby coffee shop. They sat looking at each other, holding hands. He could see that she had lost a lot of weight and looked pale and tired. He was still reeling from the unreality of the situation. Akumu knew that she had a lot of questions to answer but they could wait.

'Let's just be together for now, we can talk about everything when we get home,' she suggested. Adam nodded.

'I just wanted you home safe and well.'

'Let's go home,' suggested Akumu after they had sat for a while enjoying their coffee.

'I think I can walk slowly without the wheelchair. I'd like to try.' Adam stood up and

helped Akumu to her feet. She was a bit unsteady at first but then was able to manage a few steps on Adam's arm.

'Stay here while I return the chair. I'll be back in a jiffy,' he said.

Akumu had time to look around. The airport felt very different now than it did when she was here last. Then she was excited and couldn't wait to get started. Everything was new and challenging. She was at the beginning of a new adventure, something that she had dreamed about. Now she felt sad and disheartened. Gone were the bright lights the expectant faces of those waiting to depart to distant lands. Instead she saw rubbish strewn on the concourse and the tired faces of her fellow travellers.

Akumu had found it tough at the camp, the living conditions had tested her to the limit but the work was so rewarding; helping people in real need and seeing the effect of her efforts. As she waited for Adam's return, reality began to weigh heavily on her. She had managed to fight back her emotions for so long but now she broke as heavy tears came cascading down her face. All the tension of the last few days was being released. Adam saw her pain as he approached and his heart went out to her. He reached over and held her.

'It's all right darling, let it go. It must have been a terrible time. I don't understand what happened there or why you went but you're safe and we're together.' Akumu sobbing put up her hand and stroked his face.

'Dear Adam, I'll explain it all later, let's go home.'

The house was in darkness when they arrived home. Adam unlocked the front door and turned on all the downstairs lights. He then went back to the car and helped Akumu. She was looking drained and the colour had gone from her face.

'Straight to bed young lady,' he commanded. **'I'll bring you up a hot water bottle and a hot chocolate. I am going to spoil you like crazy.'** Akumu forced a smile.

'I think I will need help to get upstairs then I think I can manage,' she whispered.

Once tucked up in bed with a hot water bottle, the colour returned to her cheeks and her drawn features softened. She sipped the scalding hot chocolate while Adam looked on.

'Darling it's so good to have you home. With Dr Adam's special care you'll soon be up and about you'll see.' Akumu drained the cup and settled down in bed. Adam held her hand as she began to nod off. Soon her breathing was deep and regular. He turned off the bedside light and tiptoed out of the room. The spare

room was made up and he decided to sleep there so as not to disturb her in the morning. He finished the dishes, turned off the downstairs lights and left a light on, on the landing, in case Akumu got up during the night. Then he retired. The road traffic noise slowly subsided and they both fell asleep.

Deeply asleep he was awakened by a scream and rushed to Akumu who was sitting up in bed staring at the window.

'I saw a face, a child's face in the window. He was tapping, trying to get in.'

'It's all right darling, I'm here,' he said holding her. 'You must've had a bad dream. I'll stay with you, try and get some sleep.' Akumu snuggled down and was soon asleep again. Adam wrapped himself in a blanket and sat on a chair by the window. He was now wide-awake. He could hear her breathing becoming regular as she returned to sleep. What a strange few days it had been he thought? There were so many questions he wanted to ask but he would wait until she was ready. He realised that it might take a few days.

What shall I do about my surgery? I really don't want to leave her on her own at this time but I know they are short-staffed. I'll speak to John in the morning and see what he says. Adam waited until morning before he rang John, Akumu was still sleeping.

'Good morning John,' he began, 'I'm sorry to call you so early. Akumu is here with me. She's not well and I'm reluctant to leave her on her own. I'm worried about not going in because we're so short staffed,' He waited for a reply.

'Do you need any help?' Asked John.

'No, thanks, it's just she's exhausted and needs to rest. I tell you about it later.'

'OK Adam, you stay with Akumu. I might be able to get a temp. There's a retired doctor in Dulwich who has filled in before for us. I'll ring him and see if he's available. Don't worry, leave it to me,' and the line went dead. Akumu overheard some of the conversation and called out,

'Adam, you go in. I'll be OK here. I had a good night and feel much better.' Adam called back,

'John thinks he can get a temp to cover for me so they should be all right for today at least.'

Akumu decided to try and go downstairs for breakfast. She put on Adam's dressing gown and slowly made her way downstairs, Adam could hear her struggling.

'Hold on Akumu, let me help you,' he called out.

'I'm OK. I'd like to try and do it myself, I'll take my time,' she replied. She held the

bannister and began to step down slowly. She felt a little light headed and stopped for a moment waiting for it to clear. Adam must have heard her stop because he called out,

'Are you all right?'

'Yes, I'm fine. I felt a bit giddy but it's better now.'

The kitchen was bathed in bright sunlight when Akumu entered. Adam was smiling with his arms outstretched,

'Welcome to breakfast, I hope you're hungry.'

'Not really, could I just have some toast and tea please?'

After breakfast, Akumu went into the lounge and lay on the settee.

'I hope you don't mind if I don't get dressed.' As she lay down she felt her stitches pulling and asked Adam to have a look at her wound. The wound, about 5 cms long was clean and healthy.

'It looks fine, healing well,' he concluded.

'What about the stitches?'

'They're absorbable and don't need to be removed, didn't they tell you?'

'I think so, but I forget.' she admitted sheepishly.

It was later in the afternoon after they had had some tea that Akumu began to explain.

'Adam, I need to explain to you why I didn't tell you that I was going to that camp. It must be difficult for you to imagine being brought up in poverty even though I know you have tried. The struggle to survive sometimes gets so hard that you want to give up but something inside stops you so you go on fighting with no hope of anything better. You drag yourself from one day to the next; sleep being your only reprieve. Then you wake and it is the same struggle again. You see suffering that tears your heart out because you can do nothing about it. It was while I was at Leicester that it came to me. As I was seeing patients and treating them, I slowly began to realise that there were people in my country Kenya who were in greater need, particularly those who had been displaced through violence or natural disasters. That's when I heard about MSF. On a whim I went to see them and got caught up in the excitement of a new challenge.' Adam was listening intently and waited for Akumu to pause before speaking.

'What I don't understand is why you didn't tell me what you were planning to do?' Don't you trust me enough to confide in me?' Adam frowned.

'I'm sorry Adam, it wasn't that. I didn't want to get into an argument with you because I know you would've tried to change my mind

and you'd have probably been successful. You see I don't think you understand the deep guilt that I feel because of how lucky I've been. There are thousands of young people as able or more able than me who will never have a chance, an opportunity as I have had. Somehow I needed to repay the gift that I had received. Can you understand that?' She asked. 'I almost did it. If it hadn't been for my bloody Appendix, you'd never have known.'

'And is that what you wanted?' Adam asked, puzzled. 'You wanted to have a secret life that I didn't share?'

'You make it sound so underhand, almost a deception.' said Akumu getting frustrated.

'Well, isn't it, wasn't it?' insisted Adam. 'I might have wanted to come with you?'

'No! You wouldn't have, you couldn't have wanted to go where I went?'

'How do you know what I wanted?'

'You've never given any indication to me that you wanted to do voluntary work.'

'Nor have you for that matter.' said Adam. Akumu looked at Adam,

'Dear, I think this conversation is in danger of getting out of hand. D'you think we could cool it. I'm really tired so can we continue it tomorrow?'

Adam prepared for bed and automatically went into the spare room to sleep.

'Aren't you coming to bed?' Akumu called from her bedroom. Adam paused before replying. He needed his sleep and didn't want to get into another discussion which might keep them up all night.

'I'll probably disturb you and you need sleep more than anything,' he replied.

'All right, at least come and kiss me good night,' she said.

Adam came into the room seeing her drawn face illuminated by the bedside lamp. He leaned over and gave her a kiss.

'Please Adam, she began...'

'Good night Akumu, sleep well, see you in the morning.'

Akumu turned off the light and lay in the dark. It would be some time before her mind would allow her to sleep. She went over the conversation she had just had with Adam. I should have told him, she decided and faced the consequences. I thought it would be easier and took the coward's way out and now I am paying the price. He thinks I don't trust him that I want to live a secret life. How can I convince him that it was not my intention to go behind his back? Thoughts went round and round in

her head but eventually she slept. Next morning she was woken by Adam gently shaking her,

'I've brought you a cup of tea. I'll put it here on your side table, be careful it's hot. Do you want the usual for breakfast,' he said in a matter of fact way. Akumu was now awake and sat up. Her mind was clear and she knew what she wanted to say.

'Don't go Adam, I want to say something. I've been a fool. The longer I know you the more I love you and I know you want the best for me. I should've trusted you and not gone behind your back. I never wanted to deceive you. I was just frightened. I now realise that it was stupid. Can you ever forgive me?' Akumu reached out and touched his hand. Adam listened taking in what she was saying. He was now beginning to understand why she did what she did. He saw her struggling to find the right words and felt for her.

At last he spoke,

'I was puzzled when you went away without telling me. Because of the mobile telephone I didn't know that you were so far away and working in a camp. It was a wonderfully selfless thing you were doing and I've nothing but admiration for you, but will you promise me that in future you will tell me what you're doing particularly if you plan to go away again. I need to know where you are in case you

get into difficulty and anyway I love you and need you to be safe.'

Akumu smiled and put out her arms. Adam came to her.

Adam returned to the surgery after two days to a warm welcome from his colleagues all of whom wished Akumu a speedy recovery. She was now going out for short walks in the town. Total strangers who must have heard of her exploits and her illness came up to her, shook her by the hand and wished her well. Akumu was overwhelmed by this show of friendship something she had not met before. It was the first thing she told Adam on his return that evening,

'Adam,' she said kissing him, 'I was just amazed, total strangers wished me a speedy recovery. I was so moved by their kindness.'

Adam took her hand,

'Darling, people can be very nice, not all are suspicious and unkind you know? He paused,

'I was thinking, now that you are so much better what are your plans?' Akumu knew this question would arise; she was torn between two choices. Her heart told her to return to the camp and complete her assignment but her head told her to return to the hospital and continue with

her surgical training, after all she was only just at the beginning.

'I really don't know what to do', she said. What do you think?

'It seems to me that you could get the best of both worlds, return to the hospital and continue your studies. Then later on in the year when you are fully recovered, you could apply for another six weeks leave and spend it at the camp. Have a word with MSF and see what they say.' suggested Adam.

'What about us?' Akumu asked, 'when would we see each other? Adam thought,

'We could meet at weekends. I could come to you and you to me. We both get weekends off every so often so it shouldn't be too difficult.'

Akumu settled on a date to leave and phoned Mike to let him know her plans. He was clearly pleased to hear from her,

'You sound wonderful how are you feeling?'

'Fine, rearing to come back to work,' she laughed.

'How did you sort out the camp business? Adam sounded very distressed at not knowing where you were. So would I have been,' he added, 'you took him on a fine dance?'

‘Oh! That’s all settled, I’ll tell you more when I see you.’

It was several weeks later and Akumu was driving south to see Adam on a warm, sultry day. She had got an early start and was making good progress when four motorcyclists all in black leathers overtook her. She thought nothing of it enjoying the sense of freedom she always felt as she drove. Then she noticed that one of them looked over his shoulder as he overtook her and nodded to the others. They then began to close ranks, moving in a line just in front of her car. Gradually they began to slow down. Akumu couldn't understand what they wanted and beeped them. They ignored her and continued to slow down. Then she tried to overtake them but they spread out to the right blocking her path. Eventually she was brought to a stand still on the hard shoulder.

By this time she was feeling frantic. Fear crept in and slowly paralysed her thinking. She could feel her skin creeping, her stomach contracting. She didn't know what they wanted but realised it couldn't be anything good. She looked in her rear mirror desperately hoping to see another car approaching but it was still early and the road was empty.

Her initial response was to lock all the doors and phone for help. As she began to dial,

one of the cyclists, his face invisible behind a darkened visor, came up to her window and peered in. He tapped on the window and signalled her to open it. Initially she did nothing. He waited and then two of them began to rock her car until she was bouncing about inside. At one point it seemed as if they would turn the car over. She was distraught, totally confused and frantic at what was happening. She could feel her heart thumping in her chest, sweat pouring down her face and her legs were wet and sticky. She realised that she had no alternative but to open the window and hear what she presumed the man had to say. To her surprise it was a woman's voice that ordered her to get out. For a moment she felt relief, it was going to be all right. But she didn't expect what happened next. An arm grabbed her and pulled her out of her seat.

'Get down on the ground,' she was ordered. The woman reached in for her bag and found her ID. She read aloud,

'Akumu Onyango, surgeon at Leicester General Hospital.' There were hoots of surprise and one voice said,

'I've never had a black surgeon's pussy before. Get them off,' he ordered. At first she was confused but as she felt hands pulling at her jeans she realised the worst. She was grabbed and spread-eagled on the front of her

car. Each in turn had her with the woman squealing in delight. Her mind went blank, this couldn't be happening she prayed, She felt the deep pain of each entry struggling to keep her legs together and then as in a dream she heard an approaching police siren and as if by magic, the riders disappeared, driving away shouting abuse. She heard footsteps and a gentle, kind voice said,

'It's the police, you're all right miss,' as he covered her with his coat. 'It's all over, they've gone.' Akumu lay for a while sobbing with relief. She was gently lifted and helped into the police car and taken to a nearby hospital. Time passed as if in a dream, all she could think about was calling Adam but her mobile had been taken. After giving a statement she was medically examined and given some antibiotics. By now she was reasonably calm and asked to use a telephone.

'Adam please come, I've been assaulted. Am at the hospital with the police.'

Adam was just coming to the end of the morning surgery when the call came through. He had no time to think. He finished quickly, excused himself explaining where he was going and rushed to his car. He knew the hospital where Akumu had been taken.

He was shocked at what he saw. Akumu was sitting covered by a blanket, her face tear stained, her eyes reddened and downcast.

'Akumu it's me, Adam,' he said kneeling in front of her.

'Thank God you've arrived. It's been a nightmare. Please get me out of here. I want to go home please.'

Akumu slept soundly recovering from the shock of her terrible experience. Adam sat by her bed watching. He didn't know how to come to terms with what had happened to her. He tried to imagine the horror that Akumu had just suffered. She awoke and called to him. He had drawn a bath and helped her into it. She slipped into the warm water enjoying the soothing effect but she was concerned about any damage that had been caused and asked Adam to have a look. He saw badly swollen bruised tissues but no actual lacerations or obvious infection.

'I think it's going to be OK,' he reassured her, 'but it will take time I'm afraid. I think we should get you seen by a Venereologist as soon as possible just to make sure.'

Akumu didn't want anyone at her hospital to know what happened, she was too ashamed and somehow blamed herself.

'I should've driven over them, she told Adam.'

'But you weren't to know what they would do,' he reminded her.

They settled for a clinic in South London. It was held in the basement of the main hospital building and was approached by a back entrance. Akumu looked at Adam,

'I feel like a criminal,' she whispered.

'It's just to encourage people to attend who wouldn't otherwise go to a clinic in the main hospital.' Her number was called, they apparently didn't use names and she was shown into a small office. It was decorated in white with white cabinets on the wall. A grey haired man in his late fifties was sitting at a desk looking at a screen. He looked up, and beckoned her to sit.

'You must have had a terrible time,' he said stroking her hand. 'Let's hope that nothing serious has happened.' After a thorough examination, some swabs and blood tests were taken.

'You are healing well and I think in another week you'll be fine. I'll send off the tests and let you have the results by text. There will be no need to see me again if all is well. I trust you to finish the antibiotics,' he added. Akumu nodded. Walking back to the car Akumu said to Adam,

'What a nice doctor so kind and gentle, it makes such a difference.' Three days later Akumu received a text message.

'All tests negative, suggest repeat HIV in three months good luck.' She immediately forwarded it to Adam, who replied,

'Excellent. See you later. Lets go out and celebrate,'

Akumu thought that the effects of the attack would slowly become less disturbing as days went by but instead she begun to experience dreams that shattered her sleep, reliving the events of that day. Initially she would suddenly awake with a sickly feeling in her stomach her eyes searching the darkness. Then the dreams became more realistic, she would see flashing lights and hear the roar of the motorcycle engines. Sometimes she would wake as if in the middle of the assault reliving the pain and humiliation.

Adam slept through and she was reluctant to tell him. But one night in her attempt to get away from the monsters that were stalking her she kicked Adam. He woke with a start and saw in the light coming through the window her startled face and staring eyes as if in a trance. He gently woke her.

'I think you were having a dream,' he said.
'Can you remember what it was?'

'Yes I was being attacked by those cyclist, it was so real.'

'Is this the first time you've dreamt about them?'

'No, its been happening regularly.'

'Why didn't you tell me?'

'I didn't want to disturb you, you needed your sleep.'

'I think we should try and get you some help, what do you say?' Suggested Adam finally.

'Lets talk about it in the morning,' said Akumu gradually slipping back into sleep.

Over breakfast Adam raised the question of her nightmares. Akumu had almost forgotten about them and told Adam that she was all right and not to fuss. But he was not prepared to leave it and decided to be more vigilant at night to see just what was happening. He set his alarm for midnight on the quietest tone and went to bed as usual. The soft ting woke him and he lay in the dark listening to Akumu's breathing.

Suddenly he heard a strange gurgling sound coming from her and next she began to gasp for breath. She seemed to be trying to say something but the words stuck in her throat and sounded like a foreign language. He could make out Help and No, no, then she screamed and sat up staring into the darkness. Adam lay still, he

wanted to wake her but knew that if done too soon it could frighten her more. He gently nudged her and at first she pushed him away. Then her eyes seemed to focus and she must have seen him because she shouted,

'Adam, help me, He immediately sat up and grasped her around her shoulders.

'I'm here, it's OK you're safe. It's just a dream.'

The following morning Adam again raised the question of Akumu going to see someone about her nightmares. This time she seemed more receptive to the idea.

A week later Akumu was at the office of a well-known Psychotherapist, Abigail Thompson, a woman in her early forties. She listened patiently to Akum.

'What you are experiencing is a form of Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. At night when you are sleep, during the REM phase, your brain sorts the images which it was bombarded with during your assault. This is a normal and healthy response to a horrific experience. There are medicines that can be prescribed but I wouldn't recommend them. Instead I would simply accept what is happening, unpleasant as it is, as a healing process. The nightmares will eventually disappear.' Both Akumu and Adam were relieved by this good news but both wanted to know how long it would take.

'Unfortunately there is no way of knowing,' Dr Thompson said. 'It varies from patient to patient but for most its about three months.' Akumu and Adam left the office in much better spirits.

'Now I am ready for a celebration,' Akumu announced, taking Adam's hand.

The day after Akumu left Dulwich and returned to Leicester and the hospital, Adam got a phone call from Veronica.

'Hi Adam, I've only just heard that Akumu hasn't been well; she's had an operation? An appendix? How is she? I'm sorry I haven't rung you sooner.' He didn't refer to the recent attack but replied,

'Oh, she's fine. Unfortunately you've just missed her, she went back to Leicester yesterday.' Then changing the subject, she asked,

'How's your tennis? We need a fourth for Saturday, Can I count you in?'

Adam began to look forwards to the weekend and seeing Veronica again. He had completely forgotten the way she had dismissed him like a naughty boy the last time they met. All he could think of were her long brown legs and deep cleavage. They had arranged to meet on the court and she was there to welcome him when he arrived. She

looked terrific, her blond hair tied in a pigtailed and her long brown legs shown off by white tennis shorts, he couldn't keep his eyes off them. She smiled at him and they kissed on the cheeks. There was something different about her; she seemed more relaxed and friendly, touching his hand or shoulder when they passed. Also she was talking a lot, telling him about her college course and she was excited by the horse that her father had just bought her.

'You must come and see him,' she cooed in between games. Her tennis was so much better than his that she again took control and although he had improved, his service was still a disaster. After the game, they were walking back to change when she suggested,

'If you are free, come back for tea? We make a big splash, sandwiches, scones and cakes, the lot. It's the only meal I let myself go otherwise I would get fat,' she said parading herself. Adam admired her slim shapely figure and nodded.

He followed Veronica into the dining room where a huge tea had been laid out on the dining table and said Hello to Mary and John who had already begun to tuck in.

'Help yourself Adam,' said Mary with a cream scone half eaten in her mouth. 'We don't want any left do we John?'

'No Mary,' he said, stuffing on a sandwich. Adam took a plate and began to fill it. Veronica who was standing close to him would occasionally lean over and brush his shoulder. He smelt her new perfume; slightly stronger and more sophisticated than the previous one she had worn.

'That's a nice perfume you are wearing, is it new?' he asked.

'How clever of you Adam, daddy brought it from London last weekend. I'm glad you like it. I wore it especially for you,' she blushed. After tea, Veronica suggested they go and see her new acquisition. The stables were at the side of a large lawn marked out as a tennis court. As they walked towards them Adam casually asked whether they used their own court,

'Sometimes, but we prefer the company at the club, it's more fun,' she replied. Veronica led the way into the stable where her horse was kept. It must have heard them approaching because he began to get restless.

'There there boy,' Veronica said patting his neck and head, isn't he beautiful?' Adam admired his dark black shining coat and large intelligent eyes.

'I don't know anything about horses but I can see he's a fine looker. What's his name?'

'I have given him your name, Adam, if you don't mind that is, the first man.'

'Umm, I'm flattered but a bit embarrassed. Are you sure it's an appropriate name for a horse? What did you mum and dad say?'

'They don't know yet, I'll tell them when we go back.' Veronica closed the stable door and walked around to the back of the block. Adam followed, where are we going he wondered. She then opened a door into a small shed and went in. Adam saw that there was a divan and a table. The single window was open allowing a cool breeze to enter.

'Let's sit in here for a while,' Veronica suggested kicking off her shoes. Sitting next to her on the divan, Adam was very conscious of their closeness. Their shoulders were touching and he could feel himself becoming excited by her nearness. She sensed his need.

'Do you want me?' she asked putting her hand on his knee. Not waiting for his reply she leaned over and kissed him lightly on the lips.

'You're a very handsome man, you know Adam. I'm very attracted to you.' Adam thought of the last time they had met when it was a very different story. I wonder what has changed he thought. Now she was kissing him more firmly and letting her tongue insinuate itself into his mouth. At first he tried to resist her but gave up. They were now kissing with abandon. She

began to remove his shirt, he undid her buttons and eased off her top, He reached behind and unhooked her bra, letting her breasts fall free, full soft and firm. He took them in his hands and fondled them gently kissing the nipples. She was now undoing his belt and helping him take off his shorts. She stepped out of her own and slipped out of her G-string. They were now both naked. He was out of control kissing and caressing her, his hands reaching down to her thighs, her bottom. She in turn was kissing his chest, his stomach and then his penis was in her mouth, he gasped for air. She licked him, inflaming him and then he reached over and began to push himself towards her.

'I've got a thing you know,' she whispered, 'may I put it on you?' She didn't wait for his answer. She slowly unpeeled the wrapper and slipped it over his penis then she guided him into her vagina. They fell together moving slowly.

'You are so beautiful, I want you so much'. He could feel the surge of pleasure mounting, she was writhing and her vagina began to contact and relax drawing over him. They soon got into a rhythm as their desire increased.

'Yes, she said, yes now,' and he came, a pulsating river of pleasure encompassed him. She was ready and felt her own mounting

spasms until they seemed to overflow and spread out into her thighs, stomach and buttocks. They clung to each other as the tumult reached its climax and slowly subsided.

They were at first speechless, overwhelmed by their passion. Then slowly, they parted trying to delay the moment for as long as possible. They kissed in silence then each dressed. They walked slowly back to the house not saying a word, each surprised by the ardour of their lovemaking.

Mary and John saw them go to the stables and looked at each other. They finished their tea and sat in the snug reading. When Veronica and Adam returned they both looked a little flushed although it was a very cold day. John kept his thoughts to himself. He might ask her later but for now he would say nothing.

'What a beauty, the new horse is.' said Adam as he came into the room. 'Thank you Mary and John I must be on my way, I've really enjoyed myself.'

'I'll see you out,' said Veronica taking his arm. As he was getting into his car Veronica asked,

'When will I see you again?' Adam hesitated,

'I'll ring you,' he murmured and drove away.'

Akumu's car had started immediately; she backed into the main road and set off for the M25. The traffic was light and she was soon at the junction with the M1. She glanced at the time and decided to break the journey at the next motorway stop about thirty miles away,

The food hall was virtually empty when she entered. Spying the coffee bar she made her way to it and ordered a large Latte and a cheese croissant. They were served on a small tray which she carried to a table near the window. She pulled up a chair and sat staring into the car park mesmerized by the arriving cars. She had worked out that she had been away from the hospital for almost two months. Many of the staff would have changed during that time and I will probably feel like a stranger at first.

Then she thought of Mike.

'I'll ring him and let him know I am on my way back,' she had decided. It was now 10 am, he will probably be in theatre. I'll send him a message,

***Hi Mike, how are you, am on the way back, will phone you when I arrive in about 3 hours time. Akumu.* Mike got the message at about midday just after he had left the theatre. He was looking forward to seeing her and hearing her news, in particular he was keen to hear about her experience in the Camp.**

Akumu had made good time and was approaching the hospital at about 12.30pm. She parked her car and phoned Mike. He was waiting for her call and they arranged to meet in the common room. She was surprised how excited she was to see him. She had often thought of him when she was alone in the camp, wondering what he would have done with a medical problem that she was struggling with. She found it very helpful to envisage him being there and advising her like a guiding angel. Reaching the Common Room she saw him standing by the window. He looked tired and had lost some weight. He turned and saw her, his face lighting up. He thought that she looked really well, relaxed and happy. They rushed to each other and hugged.

'Hi Akumu,' Mike said, holding her at arms' length, 'it's good to see you back, you look really well and rested,'

'I feel fine, ready to get back to work,' she replied.

'Look I'm due at a clinic now so could we meet later. I could come round to your place at about eight. I'm very curious to know about the camp,' he said and rushed off.

Akumu sat for a while getting her bearings and then decided to go to the office and find out her duties and timetable. It all still

seemed unreal. Relieved that she was not required in the clinic until the following day, she dropped into the surgical department and said hello to a number of staff who were pleased to see her back. She received smiles and hugs. There was a pile of post waiting for, mostly bills. Having collected them, she returned to her car and drove home. Her landlady Mrs Staines was out when she arrived so she let herself in. The apartment was as she had left it. Her cleaner had obviously been in the day before and done a good job.

She wandered around noting the fresh flowers on the table. She casually opened the fridge to find it spotless and filled with basic items such as milk, butter, cheese, some cold meat, lettuce, tomatoes and fruit. It was good to be home once more and have the day to settle in. She put her washing on, made herself a cup of tea and returned to the lounge. She set the tray on the small table, switched on Classic FM and sank into the settee. It was if she had never been away; hadn't lived through those extraordinary days in the camp; as if she hadn't recovered from an operation. It all seemed like a dream, something that had happened to someone else but when she touched her tummy and felt the tenderness of the scar, she knew that it wasn't. She really had been through it.

She must have sat daydreaming for some while because she was suddenly roused by the sound of the washing machine as its cycle ended. Reluctantly she got up and loaded its contents into the dryer. She returned to the settee aware of a mounting uncertainty. She knew she was deliberately avoiding the nagging question in her head. How much longer could she evade the decision? She took down a wall calendar and studied the dates. How practical was it for her to take six weeks off a year and spend it at the camp? It was the whole of her annual leave. Could she cope with the strain?

She would only have every third weekend to be with Adam and his timetable also needed to be considered. They may not see each other for long periods, was that what she wanted? How am I going to deal with this? The more she thought about it the more it went round and round in her head. She suddenly had an idea, she would discuss it with Mike, he always gave me good advice.

She must have dozed off because she awoke to the sound of knocking on her door. Glancing at the clock she realised it was eight o'clock. It must be Mike.

'Won't be a moment,' she shouted through the door and then opened it. He was holding a bunch of yellow roses and a bottle of red wine.

'Welcome home, it's great to see you, it's been such a long time,' he said stepping forwards and hugging her. She noticed that he was wearing an aftershave lotion.

'You smell nice,' she commented, 'is it new?'

'No I've had it a while, I only wear it for special people.'

'Come on in and make yourself at home. Have you eaten?' he shook his head.

'Good, I'll rustle up some food. Would a cold snack be OK, it's the only thing I've got at the moment.'

'Yeah, that'd be fine, have you a corkscrew? I could open the bottle.' While Mike was opening the wine, Akumu prepared the snack of cold meat and salad. She laid it out on the dining room table. She had previously turned off the central lights leaving the lamp standards on.

'This is very cosy,' he remarked as they sat down opposite each other. He poured out two glasses of wine and then raising his, said,

'Welcome home Akumu,' they clinked glasses and drank in silence. While they were eating, Mike began to ask her about the camp and listened fascinated as she described the living condition.

'What about the working conditions? How were they? He asked watching her face closely as she spoke.

'Pretty basic, we had very few surgical instruments and sterilisation was a problem.

'So how did you manage?'

'We had to resort to old fashioned boiling in big metal pots.' she said. As he listened, Mike realised he had forgotten how beautiful she was. The low light outlined the strong contour of her jaw, her deep shining eyes and the soft glistening of her skin. Akumu could feel his eyes on her. He was no longer concentrating on what she was saying instead she sensed a change in his attention. He was in a very subtle way coming on to her. She had over the years developed a sixth sense which was now warning her.

She had never seen their friendship in this way and didn't want it to develop into a love affair, but how to indicate that without losing it, something which she greatly valued. Mike watched her lips moving, full, velvety and inviting. He wanted to kiss her, to feel their softness against his. He leant forwards and put his hand on her arm. Akumu didn't move. She didn't want to give him any encouragement and hoped that her lack of response would deter him. Throughout she continued explaining how she had applied in London and had had an

interview. Whether her lack of response or what she was saying, had regained his attention and brought him back to her story, she wasn't sure but the moment had passed and she was able to relax.

'What an extraordinary experience,' he said finally, sitting back in his chair, 'and you want to go back. Am I right?' He added.

'That's what I want to talk to you about, to get your advice.' Akumu said noticing the light sparkling in his eyes.

'I need some more wine,' he said, filling his and Akumu's glass. Mike sat for a while pondering the question.

'The thing that bothers me most is your relative inexperience. I know you have the fellowship but you've only been doing actual surgery for about a year, am I right?' Akumu nodded.

'Common sense tells me that you should complete at least two years of surgery which should include trauma because I suspect you'll be mostly involved with accident surgery, don't you think?' Akumu was cradling her wine as she listened. Mike was right but two years seemed an awfully long time.

'What d'you think about my idea of doing six weeks a year at the camp?' She added.

'That would take up all you leave. How does Adam feel about that, I presume you've discussed it with him?

'Yeah, it was he who cautioned me about that, expressing concern that we would rarely see each other. I said that we would be able to have weekends together when our off duty coincided.'

'Have you discussed this with MSF, they may want you at short notice which could cause all sorts of problems in your department?'

As it was getting late, Mike got up, thanked Akumu for a lovely evening and made his way to the door. Akumu stopped him and said,

'Mike, I can't believe I have forgotten to thank you for the amazing help, getting me back here and keeping Adam informed. We are both so grateful to you.' Mike smiled,

'It was a pleasure, good night,' he said and stepped out into the cold night. On the way back to the hospital he realised what a fool he would have been trying to kiss her. As soon as Mike had gone she picked up her phone and called Adam.

'Hi darling, have arrived safe and sound. How are you?'

'Worried, I expected to hear from you sooner and began to imagine all sorts of things that could have happened.'

'I'm sorry, I just got caught up with my time table.' She didn't want to tell him about her supper with Mike, Adam sounded too stressed.

'How was your week end?' she asked.

'Fine'

What did you do?

'Umm I played tennis in the afternoon.

'Was Veronica there?' Adam coughed,

'Yes.'

'Was she wearing those sexy shorts showing off her legs that you couldn't keep your eyes off?'

'As a matter of fact she was and she looked lovely.' Adam was trying to divert her from further questioning but she continued.

'Are you trying to make me jealous?'

Akumu said, 'because I am,' she said laughing.

'Don't be ridiculous, Akumu, there's nothing between Veronica, and me' he said, raising his voice.

Akumu froze, she was only joking but he had taken it seriously. Why? She thought. Is there something going on? Is it possible that she and Adam, no, I am not going to believe that he would, not Adam? But the suspicion lingered. They talked about other things, when she was coming to Dulwich, her decision about the Camp, but all the time that little voice wouldn't be stilled. Finally they arranged a weekend when Akumu would come to Dulwich

and then said goodbye. Akumu stood holding the phone, she looked at it and wondered. She wanted to see Adam's face through the telephone to reassure her.

It was about three weeks later when Akumu parked her car in Adam's drive and let herself into the house; he was still at the surgery. She dumped her holdall in the bedroom and went into the kitchen. He had told her that he was planning to come home for lunch so she had set about preparing some food. A call of nature took her to the bathroom. After washing her hands she idly opened the wall cabinet and glanced at its contents, the usual male items, shaving cream, razor, after-shave, toothbrush and paste, and then she froze. She saw something that puzzled her, a packet of condoms.

Why did he have them? She wondered. They had never used them as she was on the pill and in any case he said he didn't like them, so why were they there? She took the small packet out and could see that two of them had been used. Then she remembered the conversation about Veronica, how he had been very quick to say that there was nothing between them. Her feminine intuition alerted her, her antennae told her that nothing was for nothing and everything was significant. She

was now on her guard. I need to watch him like a hawk, she decided. Suddenly the whole axis of her life had shifted. No longer was she preoccupied with her career it was now her relationship with Adam that was under threat and dominating her thoughts.

She decided to say nothing. It would all reveal itself in good time so she returned to the kitchen and busied herself with lunch. Adam arrived home just after 1pm apologising for his lateness.

'Sorry darling,' he said kissing her. 'I had to see one patient who had been waiting. How are you? You look good,' he enthused. 'Mmm, smells good I'm starving, what's for lunch?'

'I've opened a tin of tomato soup and made a Salad Nicoise with tuna and hard boiled eggs,' Akumu replied. 'Go and wash your hands and it will be on the table.'

They ate in silence both a little shy. Then Adam asked,

'Did Mike help you to decide about your future?' Akumu had forgotten that she had told Adam that she was going to speak to Mike and get his views.

'Yes, he was very helpful. He reminded me that I was still a very inexperienced surgeon and needed more training.' He suggested that I complete at least a two-year surgical training before...

**'Before what? Adam interrupted,
'Before I work on a regular basis with
MSP.' Adam looked puzzled.**

**'I see,' he said, 'so you are still committed
to working in the camp abroad. What about us?
Where do I fit into this plan?'**

**Akumu was surprised by his reply she
had assumed that he was OK with her plans but
now she had doubts. She struggled to reply.**

**'I love you and want us to be a couple but
I also want to have a career. I'm not cut out to
be a housewife only, I thought you realised that.
I'm sorry if somehow I gave you the wrong
impression.'**

**'Me too,' I thought the plan was to finish
your training and settle into a job here in the
UK,' said Adam.**

**'Yes it was, but since I've seen the terrible
plight of people in the camps, my plans have
changed. I know now what I have to do, it's as if
God has called me to this job.'**

'Please don't bring God into this,'

'How else would you explain it?'

**Adam went quiet but his mind was in a whirl. All
the things he had planned with Akumu were in
danger of falling apart. At that moment his
phone rang. He looked down, it was Veronica.**

**'Akumu, will you excuse me, it's a call
from the hospital.'**

'Hi Veronica,' he whispered, 'can I ring you later?' Akumu just heard the name Veronica. In that moment she realised that her suspicions about Adam and Veronica were not in doubt.

After Adam had returned to the surgery, Akumu decided to go to town shopping. She needed some things for the house and also for herself. It was while she was in Waitrose that she saw Veronica out of the corner of her eye. She was alone and had not seen her. Plucking up courage, she went over and greeted her,

'Hi Veronica, how are you?' For a moment Veronica was confused, who was this black woman?

'Oh! It's you Akumu, I didn't recognise you. You look different, you've changed your hairstyle and I've not seen you in a dress before. Oh, I'm fine. How long are you down?'

Akumu was looking closely at Veronica, there was not a flicker of guilt on her face, perhaps she didn't feel any?

'Just the weekend, have you got time for a coffee?' Akumu asked.

'Umm, yes that would be nice. I've just got a few more things to buy. Let's meet at the cashier in about five minutes.'

'There's a coffee bar just down the street,' said Veronica. The two girls walked in silence to it. It was quite busy when they entered and they

had to wait for a table. Akumu looked around, she couldn't help noticing that she was the only black person in the place.

'Two cappuccinos,' ordered Akumu nodding to Veronica. Akumu found the whole situation bizarre. She didn't quite know how to begin. They were making small talk when all she wanted was to come right out and ask Veronica, are you sleeping with Adam? Instead she talked about her job, Veronica's new horse, the weather, anything but what was really on her mind. The nearest she got was to ask Veronica whether she and Adam were still playing tennis.

'Oh yes, we play every week, Adam is becoming quite a good player.' Now Akumu knew that they were seeing each other regularly.

What she didn't know was that Veronica was quite surprised to see her in the Supermarket. Adam had told her that Akumu and he had parted so she was struggling to understand what was happening. Was he still seeing her and deceiving both of them? She had to find out. Both Veronica and Akumu were playing a cat and mouse game, each not wishing to reveal their situation but at the same time wanting to know about the other. It was Akumu, who made the first move,

'Are you sleeping with Adam?' She asked bluntly. Veronica wasn't expecting such a

straight question and was at first lost for words. Then she took hold of the situation and replied, 'Yes we have been sleeping together,' Adam said that you and he were over otherwise...'

'Otherwise you wouldn't have done so,' Akumu said sarcastically.

'Of course not, what do you think I am?' Akumu smiled. She knew exactly what she was but didn't want to waste her breath saying it. Akumu stood up turned and walked out. She had nothing more to say. Suddenly Veronica called after her,

'Don't you think you should go back to where you came from, you're not wanted here you know?' Akumu stood inwardly fuming, shaken by the racist remark, even when you think you have broken the mould, it comes back to haunt you, she realised.

Letting herself into the house, Akumu went straight to the bedroom and collected her unpacked luggage and left it by the front door. She was tempted to get in the car and drive back to the hospital right away but she decided to stay and have it out with Adam. She needed to hear it from him, to listen to him tell her that they were through. The thought of it nearly reduced her to tears. They had been so happy together, they had it all planned and now she felt her life was in ruins. How am I going to

control myself, I don't want a slinging match when I see him.

Adam came home early, he had seen Akumu's car in the drive and called out, 'Hi darling, is tea ready,' as he let himself in through the front door. The first thing he saw was Akumu's luggage.

'What's your luggage doing here?' he asked surprised.

'Can't you guess,' she said coolly.

'No I can't, should I? What's the matter?'

'I met Veronica in town, we had coffee together and,'

'And what?' he interrupted.

'She told me everything.'

'Everything! What are you talking about?'

'Adam, please don't pretend. I know what's been going on. How could you? Behind my back, with her?' Adam's face went pale, he tried to speak but the words wouldn't come'

'Akumu try to understand,' he stuttered, 'she seduced me.' Then he told her the whole story about the incident behind the stables. How she had stripped and stood in front of him in the nude, she was beautiful, he was overwhelmed, he couldn't stop himself.'

'But you didn't stop there did you? She came back here; you had her in our bedroom, you're disgusting.' Adam was speechless; he put his hands over his face and began to cry.

Akumu stood and watched him, a pathetic figure, the man whom she had committed her life to, crying like a baby. At that moment, she despised him, she hated him, all her anger and venom spilled out. She felt a sudden spasm in her stomach she felt as if she was going to vomit. She rushed to the bathroom retching into the basin. She now knew it was true; she could no longer kid herself.

'I hate you Adam, you who I admired and looked up to, reduced to what? A snivelling wretch.'

'Forgive me please, I've been so stupid, it's you I love, not her, you, he pleaded.

'How can I forgive you, how?' she screamed. 'No Adam I can't, not now, maybe in the future but not now, I can't stay here any longer. Good bye.'

She pushed past him, picked up her luggage and left the house slamming the door.

Her mind was in a whirl as she drove out of the drive and onto the main road. She almost went the wrong way but slammed on the brakes and turned into the correct road. Once on the motorway, Akumu jammed the accelerator down hard, the car responded leaping forwards, eating up the miles. Gradually she felt calmer; she could feel her anger slowly ebbing away. No more deceptions no more lies, just reality. The

journey flashed by and before she realised it she was parking in the drive outside her apartment. She let herself in and heard Mrs Staines call out,

'Is that you Akumu, I've just brewed a pot, would you like a cup?' That was the last thing she wanted but she couldn't be rude so she answered,

'Yes thank you, I'll be right down.' She carried her luggage to her flat, washed and tidied herself and came back downstairs. Mrs Staines was pouring the tea when Akumu entered the sitting room.

'How was the journey?' Mrs Staines asked. She knew that Akumu had been to see her boyfriend.

'Is he OK?' Akumu didn't answer but sat sipping her tea. Mrs Staines could see that something was wrong but she waited to let Akumu tell her in her own good time. Suddenly Akumu began to cry, her head bowed in her hands.

'What's it love? It can't be that bad? What's happened?'

'He's been sleeping with another woman behind my back,' she spluttered.

'The bastard,' shouted Mrs Staines, 'oh, sorry love I didn't mean to .. . but they're all such wasters. Me Harry, 'e was just the same. Behind me back he was roggering the maid.'

Akumu was so amused by her language that she stopped crying and began to laugh and soon they were both laughing, holding their sides and hugging each other.

'That's be'er ain't it love, don't let 'em get to you, they ain't worf it.' exclaimed Mrs Staines.

Adam heard the front door slam and saw Akumu's car disappearing in the distance.

'Christ what a mess I've made,' he said aloud. Just then his telephone rang, it was Veronica.

'What the hell did you say to Akumu?' He shouted angrily, 'she's just up and gone?'

'I told her the truth, the truth that's all.'

'What truth?' He repeated.

'That we are sleeping together and that you had finished with her.'

'God! You didn't. How could you have been so stupid?'

Akumu gradually calmed down. Mrs Staines' down to earth humour had her seeing the whole issue in context. Being able to laugh at it allowed her to think about her future without Adam, painful as that felt at the present. But the question now was where did she go from here. Suddenly she thought of Mike, he was a good friend and perhaps could become more. It would serve Adam right if she an affair

with Mike, she thought. It wouldn't be difficult. She remembered that he had already showed that he was attracted to her.

After clinic the following day they bumped into each other in the cafeteria.

'How was the weekend? When did you get back?' Mike asked.

'Not good.'

'How do you mean?'

'Adam's been having an affair with a local girl. I only found out by chance. I'm a bit shaken by it.'

'I'm sorry. I can understand how you feel. Look we can't really talk here. If you're free let's go down the Pub tonight and we can have a natter.'

'I don't know, I don't really feel like blubbering all over you.'

'You won't, I'll try and take your mind off it.'

The afternoon raced by and at the end of the clinic, she was much brighter and had begun to look forward to seeing Mike. Somehow his invitation had cleared some of the confusion in her mind.

He was sitting in their favorite corner seat when she arrived in the pub and immediately ordered her a gin and tonic. Returning with her drink, he handed it to her.

'This will do you good.' She cradled the glass in both hands watching the bubbles rise to the top and then took a gulp feeling the cold liquid stinging her throat.

'Thanks Mike, it's just what I needed.' She leant over and kissed him lightly on the cheek. He touched her face.

'I always forget how beautiful you are,' he said. Akumu smiled. She always felt so safe with Mike. Finally he asked,

'Have you decided what to do about MSF?'

'Not yet, I need to speak to them and find out what they want so that I can plan my higher surgical training. But Mike, let's talk about the future later, let's just enjoy the present. They had another drink and then Mike suggested that they go for a drive.

'It's a beautifully clear night, the moon's almost full, I'll put the top down and let's drive over to the moors. There should be a fantastic view at the summit.'

They drove in silence, the wind ruffling their hair. After about ten minutes Mike took a left at the edge of town. As they climbed, the wide-open space of the moors came into view with its unbroken vista stretching for miles. The moonlight had picked out the rocky outcrops and reflected them back while lights were

twinkling in the distance from the many farmhouses.

They stopped at a vantage point and got out. Mike put his arm around her waist to guide her and Akumu leaned in towards him as they walked towards the edge. She felt safe and at ease. Mike had an overwhelming desire to kiss her but he remembered the last time and just stood holding her. Akumu guessed what was going on in his head. She was also confused. She wanted him to kiss her but what about Adam? Was their affair really finished? She struggled with indecision. One part of her brain wanted to let the evening go where it would even to the point of letting Mike make love to her, the other was telling her to hold back, that Adam was still her true love. The wind began to freshen and he felt her starting to shiver.

'You're getting cold,' he said, putting his jacket around her bare shoulders.

'Let's go back to my place and sort out your future,' he said smiling.

Mike lived in a restored old farmhouse with a thatched roof. He had bought it three years ago from the owner; an old lady whose husband had died and she needed to go into care. The car drew up outside the house that was outlined in the moonlight.

'Home sweet home,' he announced as they reached the front door.

'What a wonderful house you have. I thought houses like this only existed in the movies.'

Mike unlocked the front door and switched on the downstairs lights. Akumu walked ahead into a low ceilinged lounge with original oak beams and an Inglenook fireplace.

'It's beautiful; I've never been in a place like this. Who looks after it?'

'I have a woman who comes in three days a week, I do the rest.'

'Do you mind me asking?'

'No not at all.'

'Is it your own furniture?' asked Akumu touching the traditional mahogany table and chairs?'

'Yes, I inherited most of it from my parents.'

'I love them, they are so much nicer than the modern stuff that seems to be all the rage.'

'You'll love the kitchen.' Akumu followed Mike and stood in the doorway admiring the modern work surfaces and cupboards.

'Is that an Aga?' she asked in surprise.

'Yes, it was in the house when I bought it. Are you hungry? I have some smoked salmon in the fridge. I could make us some open sandwiches.'

They sat in the snug eating the sandwiches and washing them down with some

local cider. Akumu felt at ease for the first time in weeks. She thought of the many people who had lived in the house. It had an aura of calm and permanence. Suddenly almost without her knowing it, she asked,

'May I stay with you tonight?'

Mike didn't answer at first. Then getting up he came over and kissed her and said,

'I would like that.' They were both a bit shy undressing in the bedroom. Akumu went into the small bathroom first and examined the shower. She couldn't decide which tap to turn so called Mike to help her. He turned the shower on and was about to leave.

'You don't need to leave Mike, let's shower together.' Mike felt his throat go dry. He watched Akumu undress, marvelling at her figure. She noticed that he was shy to undress in front of her but said nothing. She was soaping herself when he entered the shower and taking the soap he began to wash her, beginning with her shoulders then her breasts and her back. He was now fully excited and out of control. Akumu began to soap him gently squeezing and stroking him. He was unable to control his emotions and with a gasp ejaculated.

'I didn't mean to do that,' he said breathlessly.

'I know but I wanted you to.' Somehow she knew she didn't want to have sex with him not now. During the night Mike began to cuddle her but she feigned sleep. The next morning Akumu woke to bright sunshine dazzling her eyes. She could hear Mike moving downstairs and smelt the aroma of toast. He must have heard her moving because he shouted up to her,

'Breakfast is ready.' Akumu put on one of his shirts that was long enough to reach to her knees and came downstairs. The table had been laid in the patio with a unbroken view of the distant hills. The coffee was brewing and the toast already done. There was an assortment of fresh fruit, cereals and prunes. Akumu realised how hungry she was. It was such a pleasure to have time to enjoy breakfast, she usually had it on the run but now she was able to relax and enjoy the feast.

'Good Morning, Mike,' she said kissing him on the cheek. 'What a wonderful spread. Do you have this every morning?'

'No of course not, only for my special guests.'

**After breakfast, Akumu switched on her mobile to see a message from Adam,
*Sorry, I'm so ashamed, need to speak to you I can't bear losing you.***

Akumu decided to do nothing.

Adam sat waiting for a reply but none came. What to do he pondered? He certainly didn't want to let their love just die without a fight. He had a crazy idea of driving to Leicester and surprising her but knew he couldn't get time off in the middle of the week, it would have to wait to the weekend. Throughout the afternoon he kept checking his phone but it remained silent, the battery was full.

Later that afternoon Akumu returned home. It had been a hectic clinic and she had had no time to consider her private life. Now in the calm privacy of her sitting room with a cup of tea on her lap she began to think about the phone message. She knew that she could no longer ignore it; the longer she left it the more difficult it would be. But what did she want to say? One part of her wanted to say that their relationship was over, that she could no longer trust him. Another remembered his voice and his touch, so gentle and caring. Did she want to throw that all away? The more she raised the alternatives the more difficult it became. Then like a flash it came to her, I love him, I know I love him. That hasn't changed. Now her choices had become easier, she knew she wanted to forgive him.

She sat staring into her cup watching the liquid swirling round and the steam rising. I

need to make him suffer, to understand what it feels like to be cheated on so that he will never do it again. She now felt more in control, knowing what she wanted to do. The question was how to do it. In the end she decided that they needed to meet. I can't do it on the phone, I need to see his eyes; hear his voice; know how sincere he is. Taking out a piece of paper she wrote out a few different text messages, she wanted to get it right.

We need to meet and talk, you have broken my heart

I can't forgive you I need time to think

How could you have treated me like this I am devastated.

She settled for, *we need to meet and talk*

Adam was dozing when he heard his phone ping. Nervously he picked it up and read the message. It was from Akumu. At least she has answered me, will see me. He felt a flood of relief. I can explain. It was a stupid selfish thing to do and I'll seek her forgiveness. I'll ring her and arrange the meeting, he decided, then he had second thoughts, perhaps a text message would be better.

Hi, sorry to have made such a mess of things. I want to see you and explain. Are you free next weekend?

Akumu checked her diary and texted,

Yes I'm free, will come down early Saturday, should be with you lunch time.

It was a bright sunny day when Akumu left the hospital car park and followed the signs to the M1. She already felt ill at ease even though the forthcoming meeting with Adam was still sometime ahead. Happily the traffic was fairly light when she joined the M25 so she was able to make good time sufficient for her to stop at the first cafe and order a coffee, a routine that was now becoming very familiar. She texted Adam,

'Am on M25, with you at midday.'* He replied *'see you soon'

As she nursed her coffee a recurring question kept nagging her.

Was this the first time or had he been with other women while she had been away? So many women must have gone through what she was going through now, wondering whether their partners had been faithful. Like her they would have assumed that infidelity was the worst crime a man can commit but was it?

She drained the cup and returned to her car and sat for a moment before starting the engine, it spluttered then roared into life and she meandered out of the car park onto the motorway. It was almost midday and the traffic had increased. She slowly moved into the outer

lane of the motorway and accelerated to 80. The miles flew by. Soon she was seeing the sign for Dulwich, and Adam's street came into view. She slowed and gradually came to a halt. His car was nowhere to be seen. He hadn't got back yet.

She still had his keys so she was able to let herself in. Although everything was familiar she felt decidedly uncomfortable as if she shouldn't be there, an interloper. Overcoming the feeling she went into the kitchen and put on the kettle, it seemed a civilised thing to do. She was waiting for it to boil when she heard his key in the lock. She froze, unable to turn as his footsteps came closer.

'Hello Akumu,' he said in a matter of fact way, 'how was your journey?'

'Fine,' she replied as if speaking to a stranger. He noticed the coolness in her voice but said nothing, what could he expect, a warm reception. He was tempted to make a joke but let it die in his throat, instead he said,

'I appreciate your coming, it couldn't have been easy.'

'No it wasn't, I had second thoughts about coming at all. I would like us both to behave like adults and not lose our tempers, that would achieve nothing. I think you should start Adam; tell me what do you want? I need to know.' she stressed.

Adam cleared his throat, then in a quiet voice said,

'I've been a fool, a bloody fool. I was blinded by sex and acted without thinking, without respecting you. I suppose I thought it would be a one-night stand and that would be the end of it; just a moment's madness but she had other ideas. I think she liked the fact that I was in the practice with her father, but I have no excuses I went along with it.'

Akumu listened as Adam poured out his soul asking for forgiveness.

'Adam you haven't answered my question. What do you want?' Repeated Akumu.

'I want you to forgive me. Let the past be forgotten and let's start again. I want you to let me show you that you're the one I want to spend the rest of my life with, please I beg you.'

Akumu wanted to believe him but how could she be certain that it wouldn't happen again especially as their work took them so far apart.

'You have betrayed me and made a fool of me. You have treated me shabbily and made me feel like dirt. I thought we had something special, a trust that no one could threaten but I was wrong. I don't know how I am going to be able to forgive you as much as I want to.'

Akumu could feel a choking in her throat stopping her. She struggled to continue.

'I-I want to...' and then the words failed and she began to sob. Adam saw her face crumble, this strong beautiful woman whom he had hurt so much. It was only then that he truly realised the effect of his actions. A silent cry of anguish rocked him as if all eternity was condemning him. He wanted to take her in his arms, to hold her and protect her from the pain he had caused, but he stood helpless as she struggled to regain her composure.

'What are we going to do?' she said in desperation, 'How can we mend it?'

Adam stood his arms hanging down by his sides. At first he had nothing to say. Then searching for the right words Adam said,

'Can we start again as if we had just met. You go back to work and continue your career. I'll continue here in the practice and try to imagine we hadn't met. Then I will 'phone you like a blind date and you can decide what you want to do. If by that time you have decided that you don't want to see me again you can ignore my call.'

Akumu arrived back in Leicester after dark and made her way home. The lights were on down stairs when she entered. A cheery 'hello' greeted her.

'How was the trip?' Mrs Staines called out from the kitchen.

'Oh, all right I suppose,' replied Akumu going up the stairs. Mrs Staines caught the sadness in the young woman's voice and replied,

'I've got the kettle on, come down and have a cuppa tea if you like?'

Akumu wasn't ready for sleep. Her mind was in a whirl with questions spinning round.

'Thanks I'll be right down,' she replied. They sat in silence each sipping their tea. Mrs Staines could see that Akumu had gone through a very stressful time and waited for her to speak.

In a low voice Akumu began,

'He admitted everything and asked for my forgiveness. He said he loved me and hadn't wanted to hurt me, then why did he, why?' She repeated.

'He wants to start all over as if we had just met but how can I forgive him. He has hurt me so badly.'

Mrs Staines waited until Akumu had finished then she asked,

'Do you still love him?' At first Akumu didn't answer as if she hadn't heard the question, but Mrs Staines knew she had so she waited.

'Yes, I suppose I do.'

'You don't sound certain,' Mrs Staines added. 'That's the most important thing, everything else follows from that.'

'Yes I love him, damn him. I wish I didn't.'

'OK then let me tell you a story. You begin to get a pain in your arm and a big carbuncle appears, you can't sleep and eventually you have to get treatment. The doctor gives you a choice, I can lance the boil or cut off your arm, what would you like, both treatments would be equally effective. The woman chooses to have the carbuncle lanced. I don't want to lose my arm, she cries, even though it hurts me so much.'

Love is like a carbuncle, it hurts and we want rid of it but not at the cost of our arm.'

Akumu listened as the story unfolded.

'I suppose in a way Adam is my carbuncle,' she laughed, 'I'll just have to get him lanced.'

The End

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