Journey of Dreams: A Teenager's Life in Kenya

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Preface

I first met 17-year-old Hastings Kamau during my travels to and from East Africa as a community service volunteer in the late 1980s. I was in Nairobi, Kenya for several weeks awaiting a visa to travel to Southern Africa, where I would be working. Over many days spent loitering around the city center area where Hastings worked, he told me about his traditional village upbringing in the equatorial highlands near Mt. Kenya and the challenges he and his family were left to face following the death of his father when Hastings was five. Grinding poverty is what forced him, at 14, out of school and into the cities in search of work.

Despite being six years apart in age and of different races and levels of education, we discovered that we had more in common with each than we did with many of our own kith and kin. For, like Hastings, I lost my father when I was five years old. These losses, we agreed, had always made us feel set apart from our societies, in which a boy without a father was like being a fish out of water. We were also the only boys in our immediate families, so without fathers or brothers to help model our lives, we were left to shape our own.

By the end of our five weeks together in Nairobi—two of them in shared quarters—Hastings and I had formed a special bond, becoming best friends, honorary relatives, even business partners. Distance has not kept us apart either, thanks to the letters, parcels, postcards and faxes we exchange.

One year, I hit upon the idea of typing up our letters to share with interested friends. I asked Hastings what he thought of the idea. “Maybe you should just write a story,” he said, being an avid lover of stories. It took me five years to compose *Journey of Dreams*, as the story expanded far beyond Hastings’ original vision. I decided to write about Kenya itself, about friends and family members, and about some of the issues facing Kenyan teenagers.

There are a few strands of fiction in *Journey Of Dreams*, but on the whole the story holds true to the people, places and events it portrays. Some names and descriptions have been changed to protect the identity of people depicted. Hastings' name, for example, is not an African name at all, but a British one, dating from Kenya’s colonial past. These and Christian names are quite popular in Kenya even today. So you won't find Hastings in the phone book (even if he had a phone!) or by his street address (he doesn't have one of those either), or be able to spot him on a Nairobi sidewalk (he looks quite different now). But rest assured, Hastings is as real in the details as a fingerprint.

Greenfield, Massachusetts

A Word About Language

Swahili and other foreign words are used throughout the story, where they appear in *italics*. The meaning is usually explained when they are first used, but not always, in which case the reader must turn to the glossary for explanation. A pronunciation guide may be found below. The reader may also find some of the story's British-English vocabulary somewhat different from American-English. This was done to add authenticity to the story. For further facts about Kenya please see the included fact sheet.

About Swahili

Swahili, Kenya's national language, emerged centuries ago in the coastal region of East Africa as an international trading language. Today Swahili is spoken by over 50 million people eight African nations as a primary or secondary language. Properly known as Kiswahili, it is a creole language, combining African Bantu, English, Arabic and Portuguese to form its own distinct language. Swahili is a relatively easy language to learn and to speak because every word is spoken exactly as it is written, with few exceptions. Vowels are pronounced as follows:

a = ah
e = ay, as in “say”
i = ee, as in “bee”
o = oh
u = oo, as in “shoo”

Most Swahili words are derived from Bantu and Arabic words, but below are some that come from English. Try saying them aloud using the vowel pronounciations above.

skuli	school	*posta*	post office
klabu	club	*redio*	radio
motokaa	car	*teksi*	taxi
dola	dollar	*dimokrasi*	democracy
voti	vote	*picha*	photograph
sinema	cinema	*filmu*	movie
polisi	police		

Dedication

For Bwana Labda, a friend who helped me to see.

He who begins a conversation cannot know where it will end.
— Mauritanian proverb

The *Soko*

Hastings Kamau yawns while stretching his arms in the warm morning sunlight. Carefully threading a needle, he begins a long day of stringing bead and brass necklaces at a *soko*, or open-air market, in Nairobi, Kenya. Early in the morning, under a cloudless blue sky, the *soko* is already teeming with early morning bargain-seekers. At his hillside stand made from cardboard, corrugated metal sheets and wooden poles, Hastings' jewelry is displayed next to his Aunt Wangui's collection of second-hand clothing. The young farmer-turned-entrepreneur looks up from his work as his first customers approach.

"*Hamjambo, dada zangu?*" Hastings calls in greeting to the young women. "*Hatujambo*," they reply. "We are fine."

"*Ninataka kununua koti*," "I would like to buy a coat," one of them says, pointing at his Aunt's selection of imported denim jackets.

"How much for this one?" she asks. "What's the discount?"

After 10 minutes of bargaining, the young women choose two jackets. Hastings smiles with relief. Business, he says has been much too slow lately. "It's the inflation," Hastings. "Every week prices go up, so what costs me 20 Shillings today might cost me 30 Shillings tomorrow. Food prices are rising, too, so people have less money to spend on things here at the *soko*."

Seventeen-year-old Hastings spends about 10 hours a day, six days a week, peddling his jewelry and Aunt Wangui's clothing. Her most popular items are imported denim jeans and jackets, and sweatshirts from major American universities and sports teams. His jewelry caters mostly to foreign *watalii*, or tourists, who wander off the beaten path to visit his "real African *soko*." A nation the size of Texas, with a population of 28 million people, Kenya lies astride the equator on the mid-eastern coast of Africa (see map). Its diverse and colorful landscape attracts tourists from all over the world who come to enjoy its beaches, grasslands, mountains, forests, lakes, and abundant wildlife. But even the *watalii*, says Hastings, are few and far between, due to recent political violence in Kenya and to economic hard-times in the tourists' home countries.

A tall, slender young man, Hastings wears pleated trousers and other dress clothes from the stall's collection, and a shiny brass and copper *bangeli*, or bracelet, on his wrist. With a relaxed manner and an athlete's build, Hastings cuts a handsome figure. His hair is cropped short, and his face reveals the rounded, confident features of his father, a *Kikuyu*, and the more sharply defined appearance of his mother, who is a *Maasai*.

Forced to grow up fast, Hastings comes across like a streetwise adult. Soft-spoken and genuine, prone to infectious laughter, I trusted him on instinct when I first met him. But underneath his sophisticated, yet fun-loving exterior, is a sensitive young man concerned by the worsening living conditions in his country. By day, in the midst of this seemingly modern city, Hastings often feels that the world is at his feet. But in the evenings, when he returns to his aunt's home on the outskirts of town, he pauses to reflect on his life in the city, and begins to long for the rural home of his boyhood.

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Meeting Hastings

In the late 1980s, along with 11 other young Americans fresh out of college, I journeyed to Africa as a community-service volunteer. Our group had flown six hours from New York to London, and another eight hours from London to Nairobi. Exhausted by jet-lag, we waited at a youth hostel in the Kenyan capital for visas which would allow us to work on a farming project in neighboring Tanzania. During the three week respite, we spent some of our days exploring the city.

My co-worker, Joan, and I took up the habit of visiting Nairobi's famous indoor city market to buy fruit and souvenirs. As white-skinned people in a primarily black-skinned nation, we were an easy target for Nairobi's ubiquitous and persistant street sellers, who figured we were just another couple of wealthy tourists. As we climbed the steps leading into the city market, a handsome young man approached us and quietly asked if we would like to buy a bracelet from him.

When he realized our financial limitations, Hastings struck up a conversation with us, sharing stories of how we had each wound up in Nairobi, Joan and I from the U.S., he from a farming community north of the capital. As the hour passed and the equatorial sun dipped below the horizon, Hastings pressed shiny copper bracelets onto our wrists, saying "Please visit me again before you leave." Until we left Kenya for the southern African nation of Zambia, (the Tanzanian government, in one of its anti-American moods, denied us visas to work there), we visited with Hastings and his circle of friends almost daily.

We kept in touch while I was in Zambia, where I was working to establish a rural health clinic and Joan was laboring to launch a tree-planting project. But five months later, when the Zambian government fell into one of its own anti-American spells, I decided to fly back to Kenya and enjoyed Hastings' hospitality again for two weeks before returning to the U.S. But this all happened some time before Hastings began working in the *soko*.

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Home

Two years before arriving in Nairobi, Hastings left his mother, Alice Kamau, and his two sisters, Faith, 14, and Wambui, 12, at Guthera, their ancestral home near Murang'a, 50 miles north of Nairobi. It's a small compound of floor-level earthen buildings housed at the end of a long ochre footpath about a quarter mile off a dusty back road. There's a two-room rectangular hut for Hastings' mother and sisters and another for Hastings and the family kitchen. One of the huts has a rusty tin roof, while the other is made of woven grass harvested from nearby fields. In between the huts is an earthen courtyard, complete with a handmade patio set (the umbrella is made from sheet metal, the table and chairs from branches). The Kamau's two dusty-colored dogs and scruffy (but beloved) cat amuse themselves chasing the family's brood of chickens, which roam the compound scratching for food. The Kamau's also have a hand-pumped water well, pens for 3 pigs, a cow, and two goats, and an elevated storage shed on stilts to keep grains and other foodstuffs out of the reach of varmints.

Guthera is in the midst of a lush and hilly forest, accessible only by a series of narrow dirt footpaths and roads which wind uphill from Murang'a, two miles below. The air is cool, moist and

refreshing. It's heavy with the fragrance of the Kamau's hundreds of food-bearing trees, bushes and plants, and with the smell of freshly tilled soil and cooking fires. The silence is broken only by the chatter of birds, the conversation of family, and the echo of firewood being cut in the forest.

Before Hastings left it, Guthera was his own world. He enjoyed freedom, comfort and belongiing. But it wasn't a secure or easy life. After his father's early death when Hastings was five, and before his initiation into manhood at 14, he worked hard to help his mother maintain their dwellings and tend the family's crops and livestock. He also worked every day after school picking tea on a nearby estate.

"In those days, we were very, very poor," Hastings recalled.

"My mother and I together made only 25 shillings a day (about $1.00 U.S.), so we ate mostly what we could grow on our *shamba*. We were lucky if we had anything left over at the week's end."

He speaks in English accented by the twang of his native Gikuyu, the language of the Kikuyu tribe, and one of the several dozen languages spoken in Kenya. As he shared his past with me in a mixture of English and Swahili (which he taught me to speak with basic proficiency), I was reminded of what I learned about this region while I was preparing to go to Africa for the first time.

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***Kikuyu*land**

The Kikuyu, Kenya's largest ethnic group, have lived for centuries in the highlands surrounding *Kirinyaga*, or Mt. Kenya, a snow-capped mountain of 17,000 feet. They hold the mountain sacred as the dwelling place of God. With dense vegetation, a moist climate, and rich soil, the highlands are the most productive agricultural region in Kenya, especially important because only 15% of the nation's land is even farmable.

Traditionally, most Kikuyu were farmers, growing grains, fruits, vegetables and small livestock on their *shambas*. In times of peace, they traded baskets, rope, pots and surplus crops with neighboring tribes, like their sometimes friends, the Maasai, for cattle, gourd containers, tanned leather, and other goods. But the arrival of the British in the 1800s changed their lifestyle consideably. The *wazungu*, or Europeans, first came as Christian missionaries and traders, later as settlers. A popular African story tells of this encounter: "When the *wazungu* came to our land, we had land and they had bibles. Before long, we had bibles and they had land."

The *wazungu* seized the most fertile *shambas* of Kikuyuland to grow tea, coffee, sisal, and other cash crops. Roads and railways were constructed to transport the crops to the coastal city of Mombasa, where they were exported to Europe. Postal services, banks, shops, and other amenities and services for the *wazungu* soon sprung up, and large numbers of Kikuyu found themselves working as servants and laborers on the new homesteads and plantations. In a few generations, Kikuyuland was transformed into a Europeans-only area, dubbed by the colonial government, the "White Highlands."

The colonial rulers mposed a "hut tax" on every African residence, to be paid in British currency. The only means of acquiring such money to pay the tax, however, was to work for wages on European-owned estates or emigrate to towns in search of jobs in shops or factories. Family farmers unable to pay the tax were forced from their *shambas* onto "Native Reserves," lands too

steep and barren to produce sufficient food. This meant that families who had grown their own food now had to buy a portion of their provisions from the *wazungu*. Again, this meant working for the *wazungu* to earn the necessary money.

The extreme injustice of the British colonial system in Kenya sowed seeds of rebellion among many native Kenyans. Several tribes, including the Kikuyu, launched a lengthy guerilla war in the 1950s against the British, known as *Mau Mau*, which sought to drive *wazungu* from African soil. Though eventually defeated by the British—and the African troops they hired from rival tribes—*Mau Mau* played an important role in winning Kenya's *uhuru* from British rule four years later, in late 1963.

But troubles of most Kikuyu did not end with *Uhuru*. Though many British settlers reluctantly left Kenya for places such as South Africa and Zimbabwe (then known as Rhodesia—named for British miner-millionaire, Cecil Rhodes), the estates and factories went on as before under the management of domestic and absentee *wazungu*. A few Kikuyu families, loyal to Britain, did manage to acquire and control large parcels of land and small industries. They had little empathy for ordinary Kikuyu families who continued to suffer the consequences of the colonial days. Consequently, most Kikuyu never did regain their land. And to know Africa is to know that for most Africans, the land holds the soul of the people.

Today peasant families grow their crops on the poorer soil of small, often rented, plots. As large estates grow larger and small family-owned plots are sub-divided among increasing numbers of family members, the pressures on the fragile highlands environment are mounting at a frightening rate. The countryside is being scoured for firewood, every acre is farmed to capacity, and forests are being cleared to make way for more farming.

Like the precious topsoil washing down the ravines of Kikuyuland with the rainwater from *Kirinyaga*, the region is being drained of another precious resource: its young people. With few opportunities, the majority must leave to the region survive.

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The *Safari* Begins

Soon after his initiation, Hastings' family could no longer afford his public school tuition and books because the rent of their small plot had increased when their Kikuyu landlord sold the property to Lawngo, a large British corporation. The Kamaus decided that Hastings should leave Guthera to find work. They learned from relatives that Hastings' uncle, Godfrey, needed help with his electronics repair shop in Mombasa. Godfrey had been feeling poorly for several months, and needed someone to make deliveries, serve customers and assist with repair work.

It was a difficult decision. Hastings particularly regretted having to quit school. As he explains it, he was only two years away from his high school diploma. “My headmaster always encouraged me to study, hoping that I might go to the university on scholarship. But now this dream is quite impossible!” he wrote of the experience years later.

So Hastings packed his clothes and some highland morsels from his mother and turned down the dirt path to Murang'a. Once out of his village, he stepped into a two-year adventure that would alter his life forever.

Mombasa
Stepping off a hot bus into the heat of Mombasa after a gruelling 28 hour ride, Hastings was immediately swallowed up by a crowd of Mombasans bustling for seats on his bus. Beyond them were a crowd of others trying to make a quick shilling from the newly arrived. "Teksi? Cola? Mango?" The women's bright skirts, the pastel-painted stone buildings, the blue ocean, the hulls of the *dhows* in the harbor, captured his eyes. And the tropical breeze, warm and salty, and fresh from the Indian Ocean was a welcome relief.

A port city of 400,000 on Kenya's southeastern coast, Mombasa's architecture and diverse population reflect its longstanding role as an international trading center. Hastings would read in a book at a Mombasa public library that "East Africa's coastline, some 1,400 years before the coming of the Europeans, was already involved in regular and peaceful trade with the cities of the Red Sea, southern Arabia, the Persian Gulf, India, Ceylon [Sri Lanka] and countries beyond." The constant blending of diverse peoples caused through this trade gave rise to a rich Afro-Islamic culture and a new language, *Swahili*, which took its name from the main tribe who lived on Kenya's coast.

Uncle Godfrey met Hastings at the bus depot and led him to the small bachelor's apartment they would share in the old part of the city. Godfrey, 29, made a favorable impression on Hastings. He was warm, polite, and seemed always to be on the verge of laughter. Hastings was surprised, for he expected the *ill* Uncle Godfrey he had come to take care of.

Godfrey wore black plastic-rimmed glasses, and a loose fitting cotton shirt and trousers, with a low cut collar, short sleeves, and colorful African motifs and patterns. Like Hastings, he was impeccable in his appearance, his short hair neatly shaped, hands clean, and clothes well-pressed.

On first sight, Hastings found Godfrey's apartment tidy but cramped, with the bedroom, kitchen, and living room all squeezed into one room. But with two large windows overlooking Mombasa's busy harbor and the sea breeze blowing in, Hastings found his new home more than comfortable. After a cup of tea he quickly fell into the exhausted sleep of a traveler wearied by the excitement of his first *safari*.

Hastings' first day in Mombasa began abruptly at daybreak, when the singing voice of the *Mu'azzin*, or prayer caller, atop a nearby minaret summoned Muslims to their morning prayers. The minaret's audio speakers seemed inches from his ears as the poetic *Adhan* was called in amplified Arabic:

> *...As salatu khai rum minan naum* (Prayer is better than sleep)
> *As salatu khai rum minan naum* (Prayer is better than sleep)
> *Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest)
> *Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest)
> *La illaha illa-lah* (Nothing deserves to be worshiped except Allah.)

Being from a practicing Protestant family in a Christian-heavy region of Kenya, such a call to prayer was something new to Hastings. But he was to hear it in various versions, five times a day, every day, all year around. Islam, he learned, had spread from its source in Saudi Arabia to Africa

over 1,000 years ago. He would read parts of an English translation of the Koran, Islam's bible, which was said to have been dictated by God to the Prophet Mohammed in the 600s (A.D.) through the angel Gabriel. To his surprise, Hastings found in the Koran many of the same stories and characters he had read about in his own holy book, except in the Koran, God is called *Allah* and the people have Arabian names.

After a breakfast of *uji*, mangoes, and *chai*, or tea mixed with sugar, milk, cardamon, cinnamon and other spices, they went together to Godfrey's shop, just around the corner. *Everyone's Electric* was a room tucked into an ancient looking stone building. Hastings wasn't surprised when Godfrey told him that it had at one time been a cell for African slaves held captive by Arabian and African slave traders. The slaves, Godfrey said, were from inland regions hundreds of miles from Mombasa, in what are now the nations of Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zaire. Sold to coastal traders by rival tribes, the hungry and exhausted captives had waited in this room, anxious for their lives. Those who withstood the ordeal were sold to Arabian traders and taken in *dhows*, or ocean-going sailboats, across the sea to the Saudi peninsula. There they would be servants-for-life to the Sultan of Oman and other Arabian nobles. Few, if any, saw their homes and loved ones again.

When Godfrey took over the space some 400 years later from a bicycle shop owner, he did his best to brighten it up. He painted two walls but left the others uncovered as a reminder of the unfortunates once held here. As his business grew, however, the shop walls disappeared behind stacks of televisions, radios and other items waiting for repairs. Some waited months for spare parts, which needed to be imported from Europe or Asia. Items beyond repair became a convenient source for recyclable parts. Godfrey had a reputation for turning this "junk" into treasure. He taught Hastings his secrets. "Uncle could fix anything" Hastings recalls. "He could take a used coffee tin and some wire from an old TV and make a working radio. He would sell the radios to people who hadn't the shillings for a factory-made item. He actually kept the shop going with these kinds of things."

The work was challenging and usually so absorbing that Hastings forgot his homesickness. In spare moments, he took strolls on the white, sandy beaches of the coast, past old stone forts and boat docks. Of particular interest were sunbathing *wazungu*, a strange sight for a young man from a culture where people are modest when it comes to covering themselves. He was also enjoying his first real chance to use his school-learned English, and Swahili, Kenya's national language. He practiced both in Godfrey's shop and at home in the evenings, where he and Godfrey sat with friends for hours in conversation over cups of homemade palm wine.

For Hastings these discussions were invigorating, and he learned things he was never taught in his school days. Although Godfrey was a high school dropout, he was an extremely knowledgeable man with a dry sense of humor. An avid newspaper reader who also liked to read novels, listen to the radio, and pick up what news he could from his neighbors and customers, Godfrey seemed to know something about everything and was never without an opinion. When conversation came around to the current living conditions in Kenya, for instance, Godfrey was not shy:

> I tell you, Hastings, we can't just keep blaming the whites for our country's problems! That was years ago! When I was your age, I used to think that *Uhuru* would solve all our problems and bring Kenya real freedom and prosperity.

"But what happened, Uncle?" asked Hastings. "We've got so many riches. Surely, things should be better?"

Well, you know the old saying: 'the master's tools never dismantle the master's house'? Well, after *Uhuru*, our African brothers moved into the *wazungu*'s house! Sure, they put up some African furnishings, but basically, they lived the same as the *wazungu* did. Most of them went to school in Britain anyway. And when they graduated, they worked for foreign companies, learning how to get their hands on public funds.

Ah, but it's not enough to blame them. Do you remember the South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, when he said 'If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of oppressor. If an elephant has his foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality'?

Hastings was intrigued. He hadn't given such things much thought. And, in regards to politics, he wasn't even old enough to vote in elections. That would have to wait until he was 18.

In six months, Godfrey had taught Hastings a great deal about life, love, politics, and, not least, the know-how of running a small business. But Godfrey's illness had taken a bad turn. For weeks he hadn't been able to leave his bed, complaining of fever and weakness. And he had been steadily losing weight. Hastings meanwhile, looked after the shop and asked friends to make deliveries for him. Over Godfrey's protests, Hastings decided to close the shop, hire a taxi, and bring him to a hospital. But the hospital waiting list was two days long, so they had to find a clinic instead. By the time he found one, there was little they could do. In a matter of hours Godfrey died.

When he spoke to the doctor, he blamed himself for not realizing earlier why Godfrey had refused medical care. "Godfrey had *Ukimwi* (AIDS)," Hastings told me quietly a few years later. "I guess he was too ashamed to tell me... He probably thought we would abandon him. But I don't understand why. He should have known we would do no such thing!"

Godfrey was one of the millions of African men, women and children to become infected by the virus since the epidemic began in the 1980s. The disease has hit harder in Africa than anywhere else on earth. It is spread largely through sexual contact, tainted blood supplies, or unsterile medical instruments. Of the all the people in the world killed by the virus to date, over 60% have been Africans.

The social and economic costs of AIDS are staggering. Health care facilities, already inadequate, cannot begin to provide appropriate care to those who suffer. AIDS tends to strike young and middle-aged people, i.e. society's most productive members. This means that less food can be harvested, fewer shillings earned; that elders go without the family support they traditionally enjoyed, and that millions of children become orphaned.

Godfrey was perhaps luckier than most. His only dependent was Hastings. As it turned out, however, Hastings discovered that Godfrey had borrowed large sums of money at high interest from local moneylenders to pay for his expensive medications. So after Godfrey's brief funeral and burial, Everyone's Electric was confiscated by these creditors. Hastings was left without a job, and no job meant no place to live. While Hastings was packing up Godfrey's belongings, his mother wrote that it would be best for him to make a new start in the capital city, Nairobi. "Staying alone in Mombasa," she advised, "would be too painful." So Hastings followed his mother's advice and

packed his bag once more.

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Nairobi

People are everywhere. Streets are busy with speeding cars, trucks, bicycles, and buses. Sidewalks are crowded with pedestrians, begging children, shoe shiners, booksellers, and food vendors. From shops and taxis come the vibrant strains of African pop music, blasted full volume from outdoor speakers to attract customers. Amidst car exhaust fumes, the fragrance of spicy tropical food looms in the air. The air is warm and comfortable. The hottest days are seldom above 80 degrees and the coolest below 60 degrees.

Bustling Nairobi is Kenya's center of business, industry and government. Found here are Parliament buildings, government ministries, United Nations offices, the African headquarters of global corporations, and the embassies of nations from throughout the world. Nairobi is also a major transportation center, connected to the East African region by road and rail and to the world by the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, named after Kenya's widely beloved first president, who ruled from *uhuru* until 1978.

With its skyscrapers, wide boulevards and dense traffic, it's hard to imagine that 100 years ago Nairobi (the name meaning *"*place of cold water*")* was just a few simple dwellings connected by muddy footpaths. British architects designed the city in the 1890's for a population of 250,000. Today it is home to over two million people.

Nairobi's population has doubled in just the last decade, mostly due to the influx of rural migrants like Hastings. There haa also been an ebbing stream of refugees, fleeing war and famine in neighboring Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Rwanda. Population growth of over 3.5% a year—among the most rapid in the world—is causing big problems for Kenya. This is especially true in Nairobi, where the city is unable to create jobs fast enough, housing is scarce, health care is unavailable or unaffordable, and social services are woefully inadequate.

The resulting poverty and hopelessness among the newly arrived has also created an epidemic of drug dealing, prostitution and crime. In fact, the fastest growing industry in the nation is the security trade, in which armed guards, dogs, fences, alarms, weapons protect the haves from the have nots. With experts predicting that Nairobi's population will more than double in size again by the year 2000, the city's future is an open question.

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Starting Over

Hastings' first few weeks in Nairobi were thrilling, but the newness soon gave way to frustration. After finding a place to stay with another uncle, named Tobias, he spent long days in search of work. He didn't have any luck. There were very few jobs open, and, at more than one interview he was turned away, he said, by racism on the part of business owners from other tribes and by Asians, who just looked down at his lack of education, and said "Boy, what you have in your brain is *too little*!"

Asians own many of Nairobi's medium-sized businesses, owing largely to the apartheid

policies of the former colonial government. In 1896, the British brought 32,000 workers from their colony in India to East Africa to help build the Kenya-Uganda railroad. Once the railroad was built, about a quarter of their number decided to remain in Africa rather than home. Many took up trading, shopkeeping, and banking, since pre-*uhuru* laws encouraged them to engage in these activities. (The laws prohibited black Africans from doing the same.)

After *uhuru* in 1963, black Kenyans, with a majority advantage, took over all branches of government. But Asians, because of their accumulated financial power and business expertise, continued to dominate the nation's economy. Through the years, the two communities have lived together, though they remain culturally separate. Some Asians complain of political mismanagement and discrimination, while their black neighbors charge them with economic self-interest. But they co-exist peacefully. Perhaps neighboring Uganda's earlier experience of forcing Asians out of the country—and bringing its economy to a standstill—has tempered desires on the part of Kenya's black-controlled government to do the same.

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City Market

Unable to find a job, Hastings joined the estimated 5 million Kenyans who earn their living through small-scale trade and services, or micro-business. These men, women and children, known as the *jua kali,* work and survive on the fringes of the official economy, outside the reach of taxes and laws on wages and working conditions. The *jua kali*, plays a key role in the nation’s economy, employing much of the urban workforce and meeting the needs of Nairobi's poor for low-cost goods and services.

An example of the *jua kali* which I found particularly amusing happened while Hastings and I were eating dinner at an Indian restaurant. A slender old African man came into the dining room with a collection of screwdrivers, scissors, and other hardware. Displaying the wares on and between his fingertips for all to see, he offered “cheap, cheap” prices to us. After one profitless round, he was casually escorted to the door by a waiter.

Hastings began his *jua kali* career by selling bracelets to tourists on the steps of City Market on Muindi Mbingu Street. Made by teenage artisans at a nearby workshop, the *bangeli* were crafted from scraps of copper and brass wire discarded by the Kenyan government's telephone and electric companies. At his new workplace, he joined young people from throughout Kenya who had also left their rural homes for the capital. Street selling, he soon learned, was a tough business. For one thing, vending without a license is illegal in Nairobi.

> *Policemen would threaten to arrest me if I didn't hand over a bribe. They would sometimes even steal my bangles! I usually had to stay away from the market for a few days afterward until things cooled off, which makes my life much more difficult.*

But the street sellers looked out for each other. They shared food and pooled funds to buy their wares. With their help, Hastings survived his first year in Nairobi.

Hastings also considered himself lucky to share his Uncle Tobias' cramped but cozy room close to City Market. The 10' x 10' room was one of a dozen spaced around a cement courtyard. The

courtyard itself was separated from the street by two heavily battered wooden doors, a closet-sized beauty parlor, and the landlord's office. Inside the blue-walled enclosure, neighbors often sat or stood on their stoops, chatting, smoking, playing cards, or washing clothes, which they hung up to dry on clotheslines crisscrossing the courtyard.

The only light in Hastings' room was from a bare lightbulb dangling from the ceiling and the few sunbeams which managed to filter through the room's cracked window. Tobias had furnished all but four square feet of his cement floor space with a single bed, a bunk bed, supply cabinet, clothesline, wash basin, and a small aluminum cooking stove. Hastings barely had enough room for his clothes. He stowed his sizable collection of shoes under his bed and his clothing on the top bunk. Given his penchant for neatness, he made do with it the best he could. At night, while lying alone on his back on the lower bunk, he would listen to the city sounds, and the music and muffled voices coming through the thin wall behind his head. The smell of a neighbor's pyrethrum incense filled the air, keeping malaria-carrying mosquitoes at bay as he drifted to sleep.

A long-distance truck driver, Tobias, 25, was seldom at home. When he wasn't traveling the dusty, bumpy roads of East Africa or resting up in Nairobi from his *safaris*, he stayed with his wife at their family home near *Kirinyaga*. There, he would visit with his four children, make repairs to his property, and pay his respects to his parents and their neighbors.

Tobias didn't have much interest in Hastings and they generally stayed out of each other's way. But there were two things Hastings couldn't stand about his uncle: his drinking and his promiscuity.

“I don't know if I have ever seen him sober,” Hastings says. “When he's not complaining about money, he brags about the girlfriends he meets on his trips.”

One day, Hastings told me, he decided to risk airing his concerns.

“Uncle, I cannot understand the way you live when you travel. Don't you know that bars and hotels along the roads you travel are the breeding grounds of *Ukimwi*?”

“What do you know? Only weak people get *Ukimwi*, weak people and evil ones. If they get it, it's a good punishment for them. If that's what God wants, then who are we to argue with God?”

“You're one to talk!” Hastings thought but didn't say.

“Do you suppose that you have some special favor from God and that Godfrey did not?”

Tobias was caught off guard. To speak so about a recently deceased relative! And from a junior family member and guest in his home! But before he could respond, Hastings surprised him again.

“Uncle, *Ukimwi* is a virus—the same as a cold—which people give to each other. God's got nothing to do with deciding who catches it, only we do. That's why it's *our* job not to catch it or pass it on.”

“If what you say is true, what are we supposed to do? Wear a mask over our heads? Stay indoors?”

“Wear a mask, yes, Uncle,” Hastings replied, now adopting a mischievous grin. “But not a mask over your *face*! It's either that, or staying away from the ladies. And in the unlikelihood of your taking the latter strategy, I'll show you what to do.”

With that, Hastings fished out a condom from among his things and instructed Tobias how to use one by demonstrating on a banana from City Market.

“Are you crazy?” his uncle said of the demonstration. “That won't work at all. It would be uncomfortable! And what woman would want to go around with someone who uses such a thing?”

"You'd be surprised. I think that condoms are becoming quite popular. And think how much safer you'll feel knowing that you and your girlfriends are safe, and that your wife will also be protected."

After losing Godfrey to the virus, Hastings had done his homework. In addition to learning how to protect himself and others, he also knew that recent research had found that truckers are among the leading carriers of AIDS in Africa. The vast distances they travel, together with their unprotected sexual relations with their wives and others back home have ensured that the deadly virus is transmitted across wide regions of the continent. In fact, health officials in many African countries are launching massive educational campaigns to convince roadside prostitutes and other women in trucking areas to refuse sex to any man who won't use condoms.

As a result of their discussion, some tension between Tobias and Hastings was relieved, but not enough, for Hastings soon decided to look for other accommodations. In the meantime, he felt lucky just having a roof over his head. His foam rubber mattress in Tobias' bunk bed was luxury compared to the accommodations of his friends from City Market. Some dozed uneasily on sidewalks in constant fear of the police. Others stayed with relatives in small cardboard and metal huts in Mathere Valley, an illegally settled shantytown of 100,000 people, about a mile from downtown Nairobi. They kept their ears open for the roar of the government's bulldozers which could arrive without notice to destroy their makeshift homes.

Over cups of *chai* at a cafe, Hastings tells me some of his memories from his city market days. The ones he remembers first, being the optimist that he is, are amusing. "There was this group of high school students," he said, grinning.

"They asked me to make a special bracelet with the word "Shhhhhhhhhh!" written on it. I asked them why in the world they wanted such a silly thing. They said it was a retirement gift for their school's librarian!"

Hastings lets out a burst of laughter, shaking his head and then looking out onto the street, smiling.

He also remembers his encounters with some of the 700,000 tourists who visit Kenya each year, most from Europe and the U.S. They come mainly for the "sun soaking" and to see Kenya's wildlife and scenery. Traveling to and from Nairobi, many tourists make a stop at city market to buy souvenirs, or "curios" as the locals call them. And that's where they met Hastings.

"I met a very nice couple from Belgium," Hastings once told me in a letter.

> They live on a sugar beet *shamba* near France. They invited me to go on safari with them to Naivasha, near home. So I spent three days traveling with them there. We saw pink flamingos, a *chui* (cheetah), all kinds of animals. We spent two nights at a game park bungalow. They wouldn't let me pay for a single thing! On our way back to Nairobi, we stopped in Guthera to visit my family. My mother really enjoyed the surprise! We all exchanged addresses and have kept in touch. Someday if money allows, I'd like to learn their language and go to Belgium to surprise *them*!

Although tourists are warmly received by most Kenyans, they can be prey to others, who see theft as the only way to survive. Usually it's just street vendors or taxi drivers taking advantage of tourists by jacking up their prices, but sometimes it's outright robbery. One afternoon, as I was

waiting for Hastings to finish his work at City Market, I happened to be watching people on the street. I saw an African man run up behind a German tourist family and grab a silver necklace from the neck of their teenage boy. "*Wezi! Wezi!*" I heard someone shout, "Thief! Thief!"

Immediately, every pedestrian on the street turned in the direction of the shouter, who was pointing at the man with the necklace in his hand, now bolting between cars to get away. In an instant, dozens of pedestrians, street vendors, drivers, and passers-by began pursuing him. I watched in horror as they overtook the man and pummeled him violently with their feet and hands.

A few minutes later, amidst the wail of police sirens, a young African boy holding the stolen necklace jogged past Hastings and I. We watched as he handed the necklace back to the German teenager, who was too shocked to thank the boy before he disappeared into the crowd.

"What was that all about?" I asked Hastings.

"Why did they beat the thief so badly over a mere necklace?"

"Kenyans are very tolerant people, Tim, but they do not tolerate theft," he answered me, rather sharply.

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Cities of the Mind

At first, Hastings was impressed by Nairobi's skyscrapers, luxurious restaurants and expensive, imported cars. He believed that it was just a matter of time before he would get his share of this wealth. But the glamour of these symbols of progress soon wore off. Nairobi, the "place of cold water," took on a new meaning. Hastings began to understand the old Swahili saying *Jogoo wa shamba hawiki mjini*, or "The country rooster does not crow in town." "Godfrey used to say that cities are like magnets," Hastings remembers of his uncle's explanation of why so many rural people wind up in the cities.

> They pull all the coins out of the farmers' pockets by getting them to buy things they don't need at prices they can't afford: televisions, perfume, life insurance, all kinds of stuff. They get into debt. What can they do? They end up selling or renting their land and running to the city. There they see where their precious coins have gone! Into tall buildings and paved streets, Mercedes Benzes, and foreign bank accounts. They'll never have those coins again!

Hastings frequently asked me about this predicament.

> In Guthera we could at least eat what we grew or trade for what we needed. We got our water from a stream and our cooking and heating fuel from the forest. Although we had no money, I didn't think of us as poor. But here in the city we can't even eat without *shilingi*. If we don't have any, we're poorer than ever.

How do the millions of needy in Kenya who have no land *or* money survive? As with many of his friends, Hastings' own answer points to the obvious source: his family.

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Mama Wangui's Offer
With the grudging assistance of Tobias, Hastings managed to find locate his mother’s sister, Aunt Wangui, who operated a second-hand clothing stall in the *soko*. Wangui, is a short, rotund and jovial woman. Her shiny cheeks are always puffed up from a grinning. Wearing a *kanga*, or colorful, wrap-around skirt, she is professional in her appearance, her hair tied neatly into dozens of small braids. For all her lightheartedness and generosity of spirit, when it comes to business Wangui is a hard-bargainer and a determined entrepreneur.

Hearing of Hastings’ business acumen, she offered her hard-working nephew a job helping her expand her operation. Hastings grabbed the opportunity. He was also very glad when she asked him to leave Tobias' cramped abode and come to live with her family. So Hastings moved from his quarters into his Aunt Wangui and Uncle Joseph's relatively spacious three room home in Nairobi West. Like most Kenyan homes, this one had no telephone, no television, few appliances, and its electric supply was highly sporadic.

Hastings' Uncle Joseph is a kindly, soft-spoken man who always seems to dress in a pin-striped, three-piece suit. A government employee, Joseph works as a clerk at the Nairobi general post office.

The few times I visited his home in the evening, he graciously welcomed me inside. No sooner had he shown me to a chair and asked the women of the house to serve me refreshments, he retreated to his corner recliner and immersed himself in the day's newspaper.

Hastings showed me the room that he shares with his two cousins, Florence, 12, and Nyina, 8. Sheets hung from the ceiling between the beds, createing a wall. Hastings sleeps on one side on an old spring mattress, Florence and Nyina share a twin bed on the other. Written on the wall next to his bed: “If you find our room in a mess, do feel okay. It's not always in that state—sometimes it's even worse!”

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A Day in the Life
I was once invited to spend the night at Hastings' new home. I could have hired a taxi to take me to the youth hostel where I was staying, but it was late, I was tired, and I was curious about Hastings' family life. So I accepted the invitation. After a short night's sleep on the bed Hastings had vacated for me (he took the living room sofa), I awoke with the family at sunrise—6:00 a.m.

We were lucky that day. There was water available at the neighborhood faucet, so we each showered in a roofless concrete stall using a sponge made from stone, a bar of soap, a plastic cup and a pail of cold water. We emerged fresh for our day in the dusty heat of the *soko*. After a hurried breakfast of *mandaazi na mayai*, basically fried dough and scrambled eggs, and *chai* with lots of sugar, the girls ran off to school, Joseph left for work, and Hastings, Aunt Wangui and I began our 40 minute walk to the *soko*. Our journey brought us through a maze of shantytowns and industrial

zones, past the security fences and watchmen guarding wealthy homes. I marvelled at the high cement walls topped by jagged broken glass which surrounded many of them. A rash of housebreaking, Hastings said, has kept many watchmen and masons from going hungry.

Arriving at the *soko* at 8:00 a.m., Wangui and Hastings immediately began unpacking their goods for display as I took a look around. I was fascinated watching the whole market come alive. In African markets everywhere, this is the busiest time of the day, as both shoppers and vendors prefer cool mornings to the heat of the afternoons. I admired the ingenious way in which the *soko* vendors opened their shops. Most store their goods in large wooden boxes, which fold open to reveal shelves, a variety of advertising materials, and products which fold out for easy and effective display.

I wondered how, with such a wealth of products in those boxes, the vendors could sleep at night knowing that only simple padlocks separated their livelihoods from the ubiquitous petty thieves of Nairobi. But Hastings told me that the vendors weren't too concerned about theft because they hired street children to spend the night watching over *soko* property. I wondered about the ethics of this practice. Hastings addressed my concerns thus:

> *These kids have nobody to care for them, Tim. Most times, they're orphans. Their family members are either dead or too poor to support them. These kids might steal food to eat, but they're good kids. They take care of each other. I think that having them watch the soko gives them a safe place to stay, where the cops won't bother them, and they have a chance to earn a few shillings.*

It's apparent that Hastings cared about these children. I watched him on more than one occasion buy treats for them, and once, try to help a child give up his bag of glue. It's a sad but common habit among many of Nairobi's street children to sniff glue, petrol and other substances. They seem to find it an effective escape from the harshness of street life, but at a terrible price. Sniffing results in gradual, irreversible brain damage and temporary mental slowdown and, both of which makes them easy prey for police and thieves.

Long workdays left little time for Hastings to socialize outside the *soko*, so in free moments he enjoyed talking with his aunt and the other vendors. His best friend was Marley Muendo, 21, a colorful young man who sold jewelry, masks, drums and other crafts from a stall across the alley. Marley, whose nickname is borrowed from the late Jamaican reggae musician, Bob Marley, told stories and jokes from a seemingly endless supply. He and Hastings enjoyed a friendly rivalry, each trying to lure customers towards their stalls.

Marley moved to Nairobi from a village near Machakos, a town 30 miles southeast of Nairobi. He grew up in a large farming family of the Kamba tribe, one of twelve children. Like Hastings, Marley quit school to help improve his family's finances.

"I tended our cattle and looked after the maize and other crops," Marley said.

"But one season we had a terrible drought that destroyed most of our harvest."

The famine which followed drove him and many other local people off the land and into Nairobi in search of work. After two years of odd jobs, with most of his earnings going to help restart the family farm, he saved enough money to open his business in the *soko*.

At noontime, Hastings took me to lunch at a local cafe. Amidst the din of other diners, conversing in dozens of languages in a smoke-infested room, we enjoyed steaming portions of

chapati na maharagwe, hot tortilla-like bread and spicy beans in coconut milk. Both were cooked in a makeshift oven, essentially an oil drum cut in half with the bottom rounded out to form a wok-like pan heated by a charcoal fire underneath. They looked just like the musical steel drums of Trinidad.

Hastings usually reads while eating lunch. Today it's a dog-eared, coverless copy of *Matagari*, a novel written in the Gikuyu language by Ngugi wa Thiong'o. It had been Godfrey's favorite book. *Matagari*, the story's main character, is a Kenyan freedom fighter who, like Rip van Winkle, emerges from his Kikuyuland hideaway nearly twenty years after *Uhuru* from Britain. He is shocked by what he finds, a country in which

The builder sleeps in the open,
The worker is left empty-handed,
The tailor goes naked,
And the tiller goes to sleep on an empty stomach.

Gossip about the novel led to rumors that Matagari was a real person, making real demands for truth and justice. Kenya's real-life president, Mr. Moi, believing the rumors to be true, issued a warrant for Matagari's arrest. After learning that Matagari was a fictitious character from a book, he ordered police to seize all copies of Ngugi's works from bookstores and libraries. Ngugi himself, having been imprisoned in the 1970s for writing and performing a controversial play, was not eager to risk his life again in Kenya's jails, and fled the country in 1982. Meanwhile, he lives in exile in the U.S., and books like *Matagari*, banned from time to time in his homeland, circulate legally or illegally from person to person.

After lunch, on our way back to the *soko*, Hastings stopped at a sidewalk stand to treat me to a bite of chilled pineapple and bottle of orange Fanta. I could tell he was feeling carefree and generous because he suggested that we collect Marley and skip around the corner to watch a matinee at the local movie theater. I asked him about the business he was supposed to be conducting back at the *soko*. Could he afford to take the afternoon off? He answered my concern with one of the many baffling Swahili proverbs he picked up in Mombasa: "'Spilled water is better than a broken jar.' Let Wangui mind the shop!"

Before I could ask Hastings what he meant by this remark, another proverb flashed in my mind: "When the fool is told a proverb, its meaning has to be explained to him."

Fifteen shillings, about 75 , admitted us into the dimly lit wooden stalls of the theater. Like many theaters in Africa, this one showed mostly action-packed Hollywood features (which cater easily to non-English speakers) or Indian films which cater to Nairobi's Hindi-speaking Asian community. There are few African-made productions because of the enormous expense involved, a shortage of film producers and technicians, and few financial incentives to build theaters in the countryside, where more than half of the continent's people live.

Once we are seated, half a dozen commercials flickered on the screen, advertising hairstyling products, furniture, and advice on birth control and AIDS. Finally, the featured film, *Terminator II*, was presented. For two hours I accompanied my two friends as they journeyed from their work-a-day lives into the dream-world of cinema. The audience reacted loudly to the film.

"Hey, Hastings!" I overheard Marley laughingly telling his friend. "How is it that that man can

have a metal body and not rust?"

When the feature ended, we made our way back to the *soko* and to the stern figure of Aunt Wangui, who obviously did not appreciate Hastings' tardiness.

"And where have you been, my nephew? Exhausting your little gray cells at the pictures again, eh?"

"Actually, Auntie, we did go to see a film. I thought Tim should see what films look like in Kenya."

"Well, I imagine," she said, turning in my direction, "that they look much the same in America. Am I wrong or right, Tim?"

"You are quite right, Mrs. Wangui," I replied, carefully, so as not to escalate the conflict.

"They are the same at home."

"It is fortunate for you," she said, turning back to Hastings, "that your friend is with us. Otherwise, I'd remind you of your priorities in this life. Now, if you'll excuse him, Tim, Hastings should apply himself to straightening our stock."

As Hastings returned to his labors, I took a stroll through the *soko*. As the vendors smiled at my white face and eagerly invited me to examine their inventory, I marvelled at the range of goods on display: pots, pans, cutlery, locally-produced clay cooking stoves, fruits, vegetables, meats, *kangas*, toiletries, and school supplies. There were also a range of services performed here: bicycle repair, shoeshining, shoe repair, even rubber-stamp making, where a young man carved imprints from scraps of recycled rubber with a pocket knife. I bought a pair of Chinese nail clippers, and chuckled to myself about how fast the vendor's price fell when he heard me speak Swahili, a strategy Hastings had taught me.

"If your Swahili is good, they'll think you're a Kenyan and make you a better deal. But don't talk them down too much—their families have to eat, too."

Most of all, I told Hastings, I was impressed with the fine imported clothing that was the stock in trade for most vendors there. It was of better quality, of wider variety, and more fashionable than any North American haberdashery I had patronized, not to mention more affordable. Hearing my comments, he quickly put his friends to work fitting me out with the most stylish looking suit and tie they carried. I decided to give the suit a walking tour of the *soko*. Watchful eyes and hushed comments followed me; Marley had spread the rumor that the Irish Minister of Finance was scheduled to visit the *soko* that day!

At 5 o'clock, the sun had begun to move closer to the horizon and I meandered back through the colorful, shop-lined labyrinth to Wangui's stall. After locking up the stall and saying good-night to a hysterical Marley, we took a *matatu* taxi rather than make the long trek home on foot.

Matatus, which are typically converted minivans or pickup trucks, are a favorite form of transportation among the Nairobi commuters who can't afford the buses' 50 one-way fare. The brightly decorated *matatus* follow regular bus routes and the passengers are usually packed in like sardines. The *matatu's* musical air horns and flamboyant conductors attract passengers while powerful stereo systems (until they were banned by the government) provided a festive travelling atmosphere.

After a slow, 10 minute walk from the main road where we were dropped off, we made our

way through a network of narrow heavily pot-holed back streets, to arrive at home by dusk. For Wangui, the day's work was not yet finished. She immediately began to prepare dinner for the family. She cooked with a kerosene stove on the small kitchen's concrete floor, stirring the *ugali* constantly to prevent it from burning.

When it was time to eat, we gathered in a circle in the living room. Florence and Nyina helped their mother bring in the two large bowls of steaming *ugali* and chicken stew, which the girls carefully placed in the middle of our circle. After everyone had washed their hands in the basin of water passed around, Joseph recited the Grace.

As the meal commenced, I watched and tried to mimic my hosts as they formed bits of *ugali* into spoon-like shapes and dipped it into the bowl of stew with their right hands. As the food stains on my shirt multiplied, the entire family immersed themselves in storytelling, jokes, and discussion of the day's events.

I was surprised by the levity in the room. Hastings had told me that at dinner several days before, his uncle had solemnly told his family some bad news. An argument had followed. Hastings recalled the quarrel.

“Well, what I feared is true. The government ran short of funds again, so there's no paycheck. Since IOU's won't buy our *ugali*, I pray that God will provide shillings for us this week.”

He turned to Hastings.

“Could you possibly sell more of your trinkets? Maybe your old friends from City Market can help you.”

I'll try, Uncle. But why is it that the humble always pay for the mistakes of their betters? I just heard that the President's son bought a mansion in Europe. I'm sure he used public funds. Like they say in Mombasa, the young of a rat is still a rat. Meanwhile, the government can't even pay its workers because...

Joseph interrupted him with a rare display of anger.

“Hastings, as long as you're under my roof, you are *never* to insult our President! And I suggest you keep your smart proverbs for your friends at the *soko*. Do you understand me?”

“Yes, Uncle,” answered Hastings. There was no further discussion on the subject.

When we were finished eating, the wash basin was passed around again and the girls rose to take the cooking and serving pots into the courtyard for washing. Aunt Wangui boiled a pail of tap water on the stove and then joined Nyina and Florence at the neighborhood faucet. As they washed and rinsed, I heard the women catching up on news with their neighbors. Occasionally a song rang out above the din of clanging pots and pans.

Such a scene is common wherever one goes in Africa. Although women typically do almost all of Africa's household work and an estimated 85% of its agricultural work, Wangui says African women's work hasn't been equally respected or financially rewarded as men's work. She believed that only education and economic empowerment would women earn long overdue respect and freedom:

> Women have always been taught that there are jobs we can't do. I'm bringing up my girls to know that women can do more than housework or secretarial work. My hope is that they can finish their studies. I want them to have their own businesses someday, too!

Hastings and I, meanwhile, had an after-dinner cup of *chai* with Uncle Joseph, whose attention was beginning to drift, again, to the newspaper on the floor. When I happened to mention that I had twisted my ankle on the way home and was in some pain, Joseph suddenly looked at me with a concerned expression on his face.

"Do you believe in Jesus?" he asks me.

"Well," I reply, caught off guard by the question, "I believe that Jesus was a great teacher, but I don't know about Him being God."

"That is fine. I only ask because I would like Him to heal your pain. There are some in our church who believe in Jesus' power to heal our bodies by the laying on of hands. They cite Acts 19:11 in the Bible, that 'God did extraordinary miracles by the hands of the apostle Paul...' and diseases would leave those he touched. Would you like us to heal you?"

"Sure! Why not? I've tried everything else," I said. "What will you do?"

Joseph stood up and asked Hastings to fetch the rest of the family.

"Tim, I want you to stay seated. We'll be laying our hands on your legs and praying for your recovery. If you wish to pray, please join us."

The family circled around me and placed their hands on me and began to ask Jesus to heal me. It felt very awkward, but I tried to summon up a morsel of faith as I closed my eyes and prayed. I began to feel a warm sensation in my legs, but I couldn't tell whether it was divine intervention or just the heat generated by the family's hands as they rubbed my legs.

After fifteen minutes, the praying ended. I stood up and was surprised to find my pain greatly diminished, but not completely gone. Still, it was a kind gesture, and I thanked everyone. Seeing that I was feeling better, Joseph announced in a casual manner, as if nothing out of the ordinary had taken place, that it was getting late and that we should get ready for sleep.

By 10:00 all wa quiet in Joseph and Wangui's house. I was invited to stay another night. Hastings, exhausted, collapsed onto the sofa as I said good-night and retired to his room. He told me that he usually liked to read, write a short letter home, or think about his girlfriend, Beatrix, before he fell asleep. Someday, he said, he hoped to marry and return to his *shamba* to stay. But until then, he had much to do.

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Hastings Stretches His Shillings

Hastings clears about $30 a month at the *soko*, making him fairly well-off by most African standards. Though the cost of living is low when compared to the U.S. (a bottle of Coca-Cola in Kenya, for instance, costs 20 U.S.), the average Kenyan earns far less than the U.S. $360 a year Hastings earns. Living in the city, where everything is expensive, he barely manages to scrape by. After he's paid rent to his aunt, bought groceries, and sent money home to his mother and sisters, he has just enough money left over to see a movie and buy a second-hand book or two.

For several years, Hastings hoped he could save sufficient money to return to school to pick up where he left off in his studies. But his former headmaster said that he would have to repeat at least two years of classes to stand any chance of passing the college-entry examinations.

"In any case," the headmaster told Hastings, "you're now too old to fit in."

"I guess my time for school has passed," Hastings says sadly.

"But like they say," he adds with a sudden smile, "*Kuishi kwingi kuona mengi*!" "Experience is the best teacher." And experience asks for no fees!"

Besides, he's pursuing a newfound passion.

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Crafting a Better Life

It was through his former *bangeli* supplier, Bwana Gitutu, that Hastings first became interested in the craft of jewelry-making. Gitutu, a tall, slender man of 28, who walks with a limp due to childhood polio (a disease now eradicated in Africa), is one of Nairobi's leading artisans. He currently devotes his energies to training aspiring young artisans and preserving Africa's craft traditions.

"In colonial days, crafts were suppressed by the British," Gitutu tells Hastings and me during a visit with us at the *soko*.

"Today they are threatened by imported factory-made goods. Just take a look at most of the stuff around here and you'll see what I am telling you."

Ironically, many of the crafts Gitutu's studio produces—and those of most Kenyan workshops—are created exclusively for the tourist trade or for export. But he can't afford to be too much of a purist; he has a family to feed and artisans to pay.

Hastings often visits Gitutu's workshop to watch a small group of men and women as they shape metal and other materials into bracelets, earrings and necklaces. "Tap! Tap! Thwap!" The whole shop comes alive with the sounds of hammering, drilling and cutting. "You see this *surutia*?" said Alice, 15, pointing to a brass spiral she has just finished.

> This is a Maasai design. It's usually worn by married women. It symbolizes motherhood. When their sons face the knife [circumcision, to be initiated into manhood], the mothers give them their large *surutia* to wear on their heads for good luck. As you can see, we make these *surutia* small enough to fit onto earrings.

Recently, they asked Hastings to help string necklaces and piece together earrings whenever they received more orders than they could handle themselves. Under the watchful eyes of Gitutu, Hastings learned how to work with tools and with the materials of the craft: seeds, wood, glass and clay beads, cowrie shells, and various kinds of metal. According to Hastings, he caught on quickly.

"I guess it comes from when I was a kid. My friends and I used to make our own toy cars, what we call *galimoto* (push toy), from wire and other scraps we found lying around in Murang'a. And, of course," said Hastings.

"Godfrey taught me a lot about using my hands at *Everyone's Electric*."

Hastings' specialty is making earrings from aluminum, which he finds at a dump near the *soko*. The large sheets were used to print newspapers before winding up on the scrap heap. "This is a very fine material," he says, holding up a piece of silver metal he picks up from the floor.

> It's very easy to work with because it's soft. I can cut it, bend it or carve designs into it. It's also

a special metal, because very little Kenyan jewelry is made from this color of material. Real silver is just too expensive to use.

"Look," signaling me to come closer, "you can even read part of the newspaper which was printed with this metal!"

The initial deal the artisans made with Hastings was that he would receive 10% of the retail price for each piece he helped them finish. Soon Hastings was selling the group's jewelry at Aunt Wangui's stand, which complemented her line of clothing. But for Hastings, jewelry-making has become more than just a way to increase his income. Using both ancient and modern designs and materials to create his art, he has amidst the city, found a small link to his village roots. "The work is satisfying," Hastings says.

"It often makes me think about my grandparents and how they lived. And it's nice to think that today people all over the world are wearing bits of our history and my imagination!"

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Urban Life

The capital city is a feast for a country boy's curious mind. Growing up, Hastings rarely read newspapers or listened to the radio. But today, he reads *The Standard*, one of Kenya's two independent English-language newspapers, and listens regularly to the radio. His favorite radio stations play music by Kenyan performers such as Mombasa Roots, Lady Issa, and Them Mushrooms, as well as by international stars like Madonna, Michael Jackson, and Queen Latifa.

"Even if I had a stereo, most of the music they play isn't available yet in the record shops, so I find the songs I like on the radio."

I noticed that Hastings had encyclopedic knowledge of music, much more than I would expect, even for a radio listener. So I asked how it was that he knew so much.

"Sometimes I watch MTV."

"But how? You don't have a television set!" I comment.

"*Hakuna matata*, rafiki. No problem. I watch through a store window."

"But what about the sound?" I counter.

"Haven't you noticed or are your ears plugged? The shops have speakers under their awnings. You can listen on the sidewalk!"

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He Who Runs From the White Ant May Stumble Upon the Stinging Ant

Listening to CNN world-radio, Hastings heard about the Gulf War in 1991 and the sweeping political changes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Such exposure to world events has caused problems for African governments, many of which have been ruled by the same leaders and political parties since independence from the colonial powers.

Although Kenya has been among the more democratic African nations since its *uhuru*, it took many years of citizen protests and international pressure to convince its dictator-like president, Daniel arap Moi, to hold multi-party elections, which he finally did in 1992. President Moi, who has

been in office since the death of Kenya's first president, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta in 1978, has said that multi-party democracy would only divide the nation along tribal lines and result in a civil war, as it has in the past in neighboring countries like Uganda. (President Moi, incidentally, is also the leader of KANU, the Kenya African National Union, which had been the only legal political party in Kenya from 1982 to 1992.)

President Moi was re-elected in the 1992 national election, despite the participation of several new parties and their candidates. But the election created storms of trouble, ranging from charges against Moi of voting fraud, to stirring up violent inter-tribal conflict between the Kikuyu and the President's tribe, the Kelenjin, a small clan of the Luo tribe. The conflict, which took place in rural areas between farming communities, has taken hundreds of lives and left more than 80,000 Kenyans homeless. Many have suggested that the trouble was stirred up by the President as a means to weaken the Kikuyu, who, with their majority status, have long dominated Kenya's government and economy. But such suggestions are unsubstantiated.

Kenya is no stranger to political problems. We learned this the hard way one day during Hastings' tenure at city market. One day in 1987, as we were standing in our usual place on the market steps when we saw trucks of soldiers race down Kenyatta Street. To see what all the excitement was about, we pushed our way up Muindi Mbingu Street against a tide of pedestrians moving in the opposite direction. Turning the corner onto University Way, we came into full view of a riot between several hundred students and dozens of police and soldiers taking place in the courtyard of the University of Nairobi.

“You must disperse!” a megaphone blared.

“Disperse or face arrest!”

Amidst a growing crowd of onlookers, the students were chanting slogans and waving banners which read “FREE OUR 5” and “BALLOTS NOT BULLETS.” Hastings plucked up the courage to ask a female university student what was happening.

“The police have arrested the five student leaders we elected to student government last week. They've been held in jail for two days without charge, and no bail has been set. We want them released.”

“Why were they arrested?” Hastings asked.

“We don't know for sure, but we suspect it was because they demanded more funds for the University and wanted less restrictions on what we study.”

“That doesn't seem like a reason to arrest them.”

> Exactly. But the government disagrees. I think His Excellency became scared when our leaders threatened to organize a rally if our demands were not met. It's odd, because, the student government hasn't made a single demand in ten years. Now that it has, President Moi thinks it's a threat. Of course, he won't admit it. The government television news claimed that our leaders are Libyan spies plotting a coup! How ridic....

Our conversation was interrupted by a blast of gunfire followed by a burst of shrieks. The protesters scattered as tear gas canisters landed in their midst. We turned to run. As we looked at the scene over our shoulders, we happened to see a television camera fall from an overhead balcony across the street. We traced its trajectory to a white cameraman hanging over the balcony railing, his

shirt tainted with blood.

The soldiers were forcibly rounding up protestors, handcuffing them and piling them into black trucks with flashing blue lights. They didn't seem to be particularly careful in choosing who to arrest, because before we knew what was happening, I saw a policeman grab his arm. I ran in their direction. Through the smoke I saw the officer handcuff him. Before I knew it, he hit Hastings over the head with a truncheon and dragged him away.

There was nothing I could do.

When Hastings came to himself—the truncheon had indeed knocked him unconscious—he heard echoing voices and footsteps, and the clanking of metal. His head felt as if it had been trampled by a herd of *tembo* (elephants). It was damp and he felt hungry. He opened his eyes to see the gray walls of a small chamber. Listening to his cellmates talk, he remembered the scene at the university, and someone grabbing his arm. His cellmates, seeing Hastings' painful expression when he tried to sit up from the floor, quickly helped him to lie down again. They used a handkerchief to cleanse and dress the bruised cut on the back of his head. Jail? Hastings' mind spun a terrifying series of fears: "Torture? Unmarked grave in the forest? What about my mother? Nobody knows I'm here!"

He had never heard anything good about Kenya's prisons, only that hunger, torture and deprivation were common. He knew that Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the writer, had languished in a Kenyan prison for over a year. Held in a small cell, unable to speak with others or even to read or write, Ngugi had protected his sanity by composing a whole book in his head. Eventually, he managed to convince a guard to give him a pen, and on toilet paper he wrote his controversial but popular book, *Devil on the Cross*. So bad was Ngugi's prison diet that it took many months for him to recover his health following his release.

Fortunately for Hastings, the police bureaucracy had a rare burst of efficiency when I told them he wasn't a university student; he wasn't even seventeen yet. He was released that day without comment, apology, or offer of a ride home. An hour later, lying on our bunks back in Tobias' room, we read a newspaper story about the demonstration, complete with the government's story about the Libyan spies. President Moi had closed the University and sent the students away to their homes, where they were legally required to remain until the University reopened. This was the eleventh time in eleven years that this had happened. Like many African leaders, it seemed that Kenya's president realized that ideas are more powerful than bullets, and that, if he wasn't careful, he could easily find himself unemployed.

Since the time of Hastings' flirtation with the police, Moi's government has come under increasing pressure from citizens and foreign governments to end the media censorship, human-rights abuses, and corruption which have plagued the country for years. Even the European nations and the U.S., which for decades had supported Moi's anti-communist regime to thwart Soviet influence in Africa, have demanded change. These nations, which hold the purse-strings of foreign aid to Kenya, have now tied their financial assistance to political reform.

History's Strong Hand

In the bustling city, Hastings' life is vastly different from that of his parents and their ancestors in Guthera. In less than three generations, centuries-old African ways have been transformed, first by colonialism, and later by westernization and modernization. It's impossible to understand the magnitude of change which is seeping over Africa without looking back over its history, particularly the last century, beginning with Europe's takeover of the continent. Hastings had learned the basics from his grandfather and from Godfrey. He shared what they had told him:

> A smoky boardroom in Berlin, Germany. The year: 1889. Assembled here are heads of state from England, France, Belgium, Portugal, Germany, and Spain. They're arguing over a large map of Africa on the wall. The pieces of the map they are quarreling about will become "their" colonies. Do you suppose they asked us Africans what nation we wanted to be part of, or if we wanted to be colonies at all? Of course not! They were only concerned with how best to steal our continent's mineral and agricultural wealth and send it back to Europe. They needed it to supply the factories and workers of their "industrial" revolution. But they needed help, lots of help.
>
> The decisions made in Berlin that year affected millions of us. Many of us were forced together or split apart by the new colonial boundaries. In East Africa, for example, my mother's people, the Maasai, who as a herders, constantly move their home throughout the year to find water and pasture for their livestock, were divided in half. Even today, I find that some of my cousins are Tanzanian, while others, like myself and my sisters, are Kenyan. This creates lots of problems when it comes to arranging marriages, trading, herding and conducting our initiation and funeral ceremonies.
>
> Why did the *wazungu* care so little about our traditions and our culture? To know why, you need to know that, to most *wazungu* in the 19th century, we Africans were not a modern people at all. We were "animals," or primitive people who needed to catch up with their civilization. They felt that they had to help us catch up, so they called their task the "White Man's Burden."
>
> What was this "burden?" Well, to the missionaries, we needed to be converted to Christianity. To teachers, we needed to learn about European languages and culture. (My father, in fact, was beaten with a cane by his European school teacher for speaking Gikuyu, his own tongue!) And to government officials, we needed to be taxed for being African. They forced us to pay taxes on our *own* AFRICAN property! In European money! Ha, ha. They were very clever, those *wazungu*, since because we did not have any money, we had to either sell them our land or work in their factories or farms to earn money. If we didn't pay, they sent us to prison or to labor camps.
>
> We tried to fight the *wazungu*, during the *Mau Mau*, and in other times, but they pitted us against each other: the Maasai against the Kikuyu; the Kikuyu against the Maasai—their ancient "divide and rule" policy. Eventually it all turned against them. They found the cost of ruling us—millions of people in a territory three times the size of America—too great. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, we began to break free from them. For some of our countries, we got *uhuru* peacefully, but for many, like Kenya, it came only after months, sometimes years, of armed struggle and spilt blood.

By 1975, nearly all of Africa was independent. But now came new challenges. How would we "re-Africanize" our continent after so many years of foreign domination and influence? Some nations, like our neighbor, Tanzania, attempted to break their ties with the West, but they quickly found themselves isolated and powerless in the global community. Most, like our Kenya, kept their colonial-era institutions much as they were before *uhuru* and entered into a new type of relationship with the Europeans. That's how we continued to receive financial aid and technical assistance from them and kept exporting our food and goods to Europe and the United States.

We called this process "neo-colonialism,"or "new colonialism."
It was during this time that the term "Third World," was used by a *wazungu* French man to describe us. The First World, he wrote, included the western industrial powers, the Second, socialist nations in the east. Today, to be part of the "Third World" is embarrassing, because it now stands for "backwardness." But in the 1960s, it represented the hope we felt in trying to create a new kind of society, *better* than either western capitalism or Soviet-backed socialism!

Most of our countries were unable to achieve their ideals and found themselves, instead, caught between the powers of the First and Second Worlds. In addition to our own internal political problems, and war between different ethnic groups, the Cold War powers created political divisions on our continent; some went to the First World, others to the Second World. We quickly became dependent on aid from these countries through their World Bank and IMF (International Monetary Fund), and as our debt to them grew, our own governments quickly found themselves in the clutches of the *wazungu* once again. You know the old saying: "The more things change the more they stay the same!"

To pay our debts, they told us, we must export food, raw materials and other goods to the West. We must also make our exports cheap so they can buy them for a song! The only way we could do it was by lowering our own wages, removing our subsidies on food and cooking oil, and cutting out all our social programs, like health care and housing. Because of this, we Africans are still being forced to sell our land to work on the large farms or move to the city to work in the *jua kali*. If we don't, we can't survive. It's up to the young people to change things. We are too old and too tired and have seen too much in our time.

The end of the Cold War brought many problems to the surface of African nations. As foreign aid dried up, and demands for political freedom and ethnic autonomy grew louder, the Cold War-era African leaders, known for their dictatorial style of rule, began to fall. Some nations made a bumpy but peaceful transition to democracy. Others, such as Liberia, Rwanda, and Somalia, became mired in inter-ethnic warfare and political upheaval. It is a situation made worse by the existence of a large volume of military equipment poured into Africa by the Cold Warriors to prop up their client states.

It Takes a Village

In Kenya today, its colonial legacy and participation in the global economy as a relatively powerless player have taken a heavy toll on people's well-being and their sense of community and identity. The result is grinding poverty, political corruption and instability, massive migration of people from the countryside to the cities, and the rapid destruction of the environment. But as individualism challenges *ujima*, or collective responsibility, and consumerism threatens *ujaama*, cooperative economics, many Kenyans are beginning to re-assess their values and question their loyalties.

For all the changes within African society, there are indigenous institutions which have resisted change. The family, for example, has weathered most of the storms and remains the backbone of African culture. African families continue to take primary responsibility for taking care of the sick and the aged, and for pooling funds for education, emergencies and other expenses. As for the care of children, this is perhaps best described by an old African proverb: "It takes a village to raise a child."

Often defined in the West as the "extended" family, it includes grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, in addition to husbands, wives, and children. (Hastings never likes me to use the term "extended" to refer to his family. "What would you think," he asked me once, "if I called your family a 'contracted family'?") When family troubles arise—as they do in all families—Hastings often thinks back to the lessons of childhood for guidance. He remembers the stories his mother and other relatives used to tell him about the need to *harambee*, or pull together, as a family, stories such as this one, originally from Zimbabwe:

> A man had four quarrelsome sons. About to die, he did not want to leave them in a state of hatred for each other. So he called them to his bedside and gave each of them a stick. Without any explanation he asked each of them to break his stick, which they easily managed. The old man then tied together a bundle of sticks and asked them to break that. None of them could.
>
> In a weak but calm voice the old man quietly told them: 'I'll soon be gone and I want you to remember this. You can't face the hardships of life if you are divided the way you are. If you cannot live in harmony as brothers, your enemies will break you as easily as you broke those single sticks I gave you. But if you remain united you will be as strong as the bunch of sticks I have just given you which none of you could break. There is strength only in unity.' The old man then died. His four sons remembered and followed the wisdom of their father's last words and lived happily ever after.

Despite his strong family bonds, Hastings still finds himself at the confusing crossroads between the ways of his rural, Kikuyu childhood and his urban, Western-influenced manhood. He wants, for instance, to make his own decisions about marriage, an idea which causes tension among his relatives. His mother maintains that a marriage must be arranged, or at least approved, by the parents, and that the groom's family offer an acceptable brideprice, or payment, to the bride's family. Hastings, while respecting his elders' beliefs, thinks otherwise.

"Marriage," he says "is about love, not economics!"

Hastings' opinions mirror those of a growing number of teenagers, particularly those living

in urban areas, including his girlfriend, Beatrix Ndungu.

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Beatrix

Beatrix Ndungu grew up in Nairobi, one of two children of a prosperous Kikuyu family. Her mother, Mwangi, works for the Ministry of Tourism and her father, Goodson, runs a large automobile importing company. The family lives in a spacious western-style home in Adams Arcade, formerly a “whites only” neighborhood.

I met Beatrix briefly one day when she was visiting Hastings at the *soko*. I do not have a photograph of her, but you can picture her as 5'4,” with dark brown eyes, long braided hair and a radiant smile. Beatrix has difficulty sitting still, and shuffles constantly, avoiding eye contact with me. But, from what Hastings tells me, she's hardly shy when it comes to meeting the goals she sets for herself.

At 17, Beatrix is an honors student, finishing her studies at a private high school in Nairobi and hoping to follow in the footsteps of her older brother, Milton. “I am applying to universities in the United States and hope to get a track scholarship,” she says confidently in English. She intones this casually, as though leaving home, friends, and country is something to be taken for granted.

Aside from her academic achievements, Hastings tells me, Beatrix and her brother Milton are part of the growing number of Kenyan athletes receiving international attention. Milton is a member of Kenya's national track team and Beatrix, whose career is still young, dreams about winning a 200 meter sprinting medal in world-class competition. In a society where most young women never leave their villages, Beatrix has already traveled to track meets throughout Africa.

While she and her teammates have forged ahead in their athletic performance, she says the attitudes of Kenya's sports officials and much of the public have barely left the starting blocks.

“Until a few years ago, this country only trained the boys. Girls were discouraged from competing at all. They were supposed to prepare only for marriage and motherhood.”

Women athletes still receive less financial support for their training than men, but gradually attitudes are changing as Kenya's women athletes gain world-wide recognition.

When she's not training, doing homework, or dressed for school in her neat blue and white uniform, Beatrix dons a loose-fitting rugby shirt and jeans. She looks every bit an American teenager and lives like one, too. She says, “On the weekend I like to relax with my friends. My favorite club is the Wild Tops Disco in central Nairobi. They've got the latest hits there.”

“Yeah,” Hastings chides her, “she's crazy over Michael Jackson. He's all she wants to listen to.”

“Not true!” responds Beatrix teasingly. “You're just jealous! You know very well that I like all kinds of music!”

Beatrix and Hastings met at Wild Tops about a year ago. Since then, they been spending most of their spare time together, which usually means Saturday evenings and a few hours on Sunday afternoons, after church. They both enjoy sports, and sometimes attend soccer matches at National Stadium. Occasionally they run together at the local track, but as Hastings explains, he

usually ends up watching her stride through her laps from the sidelines.

"I used to be a boxer in school. I was in good condition," he says with a grin, pointing at Beatrix, "but her, there's no keeping up with her!"

With Beatrix's plans to study abroad, they've made no firm plans for marriage, though they often discuss it.

"Maybe when we're in our twenties," Beatrix says.

Hastings wants to move back to Guthera. I would prefer Nairobi because I'd be closer to my parents and to the track. And anyway, my career will probably keep me here. When I finish competing we'd like to raise a family, have two or three kids.

As for Hastings, he's worried about his financial situation.

"I want to be secure with money before starting a family," he says.

"As I am now, I'd not be a proper husband and father... I'm too broke!"

But money for marriage is not the only issue which stands in Hastings' way. There's also the money of Beatrix's parents. While Hastings is glad for Beatrix's opportunities and financial security, he's seen too much poverty and suffering not to be angered by the vastness of her family's wealth. He likes to quote Godfrey's quip, a parody of a remembered phrase from his history class in school, that Kenya's was a government "by a few people, for a few people and of a few people."

Needless to say, comments such as this don't sit too well with Beatrix's parents, whom he identifies as members of the *Wabenzi*, or elite class, so called because many drive Mercedes Benz automobiles. And although Beatrix's parents are fond of Hastings, liking his relaxed rural charm and sense of humor, they would prefer that their daughter marry someone of higher social standing and someone who is not so "negative".

Beatrix, however, is intent on overcoming these prejudices, and it is not only her parents who have them, she says.

> Sometimes when Hastings and I go to a party, my classmates ask me how I can be with someone who didn't even finish school. Can you believe such people? Hastings was struggling against many odds while they were being pampered by their parents!

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A New Adventure

Hastings is a dreamer, cooking up all sorts of ideas and plans. A good many have to do with making a better income so he can assist his family back home and eventually marry Beatrix. Several years ago, he had wondered if his jewelry would be popular in North America in the same way as it was with the *watalii* in Nairobi.

After some test marketing, research, and correspondence back and forth, Hastings convinced me to help him establish a micro-business to sell items made by Gitutu's studio in the U.S. We called the business, *Ajabu*, a name derived from the Swahili word for "wonder." Hastings got the name from a conversation he overheard at city market where a beggar, upon receiving alms, commented to a passer-by that "wonders will never cease."

With the help of a childhood friend, Ezekial Thika, a 20-year-old exporter, Hastings and I

learned about the complex world of international trading.

"I never guessed that doing business could be so confusing," Hastings wrote to me one day, exasperated.

"There are so many regulations and so much paper work that my head is spinning."

The experience has generated other firsts for Hastings, notably opening a bank account and tangling with fax machines, which with Kenya's ancient phone lines, makes sending transmissions abroad a time-consuming—and costly—nightmare.

Though these activities add to his busy schedule at the *soko*, he says Ajabu is an opportunity to broaden his horizons.

"With Gitutu, I visited villages in the north looking for beads and the other things we need to make the jewelry," Hastings wrote in a fax.

"That was a fun trip... one of the few times I've left Nairobi since moving from Guthera."

He also enjoys corresponding with a few of his customers overseas.

"It gives me a chance to practice my English writing and to know something about the kinds of lives people lead there."

Hastings knows that Ajabu won't make anyone wealthy. But as long as Aunt Wangui's clothing stall remains profitable and stable, he doesn't mind.

"A certain wise person said, 'Man goes around looking for a loaf when a slice is enough.' What a beautiful observation!"

"If we hadn't created Ajabu," he said in another fax, "how else would we have sold Gitutu's jewelry? How would the beadmakers in the villages and Ezekial earn their livings?"

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Ndoto

Back at the *soko*, I ask Hastings about his other dreams for the future. He looks up from his work stool toward the now familiar glass-covered skyscrapers which loom over the city.

I would like to have a larger *shamba* in Guthera. It would be good to have a nice house for me and Beatrix in the village and another for my mom. But for now, my goal is to buy a sewing machine for my mother's new dress-making business. She shouldn't have to work in the fields at her age. I also must make sure that my sisters and nephews have books and uniforms for school. I don't want them to have to drop from their studies and give up like I did!

> I also want to find ways to help others lead better lives. I think that's what I'm called to do during my short stay on this earth. It doesn't have to be anything grand, just a little bits of 'help' where it's needed.

Are these dreams possible? Hastings shrugs his shoulders in his usual manner. "*Hakuna matata, rafiki.* After all *penye nia pana njia!* —where there's a will, there's a way!"

THE END

Postscript

In the time which has passed since the events of this story, there have been many developments in the lives of Hastings, Beatrix, Marley and the others. Like most developments, they come in many colors.

For Wangui and Joseph's family, life has remained much the same. The girls are still in school, Joseph continues his work as a postal clerk (and to receive late paychecks), and Wangui's business at the *soko* operates, as always, under her competent direction.

Tobias left Nairobi and his job at the trucking company to return to farming life on his *shamba* in Kikuyuland. With shillings saved during his driving days, he was able to purchase enough fertile land to grow a profitable coffee crop.

Mrs. Makau, Faith, Wambui, and Joyce remain on the family homestead in Guthera. Wambui and Joyce are still attending school. Faith recently graduated, and she and her mother have been busy developing a dress-making business. With an ancient foot-powered Singer sewing machine, circa 1942—a gift from Hastings—they're gaining a local reputation for their specially designed ladies dresses.

For Hastings and Beatrix, life has taken an unexpected twist. Beatrix's running career came to a sudden, unexpected end after a Nairobi *matatu* crashed into her mother's car and shattered her left leg. After emergency surgery and several months in a full-leg cast, her leg was still too damaged and painful to allow her to walk. Her doctor, who like many of Kenya's talented doctors is of Indian descent, recommended further surgery by a well-respected colleague in London. Fortunately, the Ndungus could afford the treatment, and flew with Beatrix to England soon thereafter.

Following her surgery, Beatrix applied her usual tenacity to several more months of rigorous physical rehabilitation. Daily letters of encouragement from Hastings, were a big help, too. Beatrix eventually returned to Nairobi on her own two feet but it took her a long time to reconcile her “retirement” from sports. But with her ambitious nature, she's turned most of her attention to other things. Her top results in her high school final exams qualified her for a full scholarship at the University of Nairobi, where she is now studying mathematics.

Hastings is still working long hours at the *soko* (where Mama Wangui gives him an occasional afternoon off to see a movie). He still lives with Mama Wangui, Uncle Joseph, and the girls. This has been especially beneficial since in recent months his jewelry business has been hit hard by inflation and a decline in the tourist trade. Over the last two years, our import-export jewelry trade has been less active, as I have been working full-time and attending university.

Having reached voting age, Hastings was among the first in his Nairobi district to register to vote in Kenya's latest national elections. This was also the first election in over a decade to be contested by candidates from more than one political party. His vote for presidential candidate Mr. Mginga Mdinga, an aging but popular opposition leader, was one of millions against incumbent Moi. Although President Moi handily won the election, and the elderly Mr. Mdinga passed away shortly thereafter, Hastings' hope for positive change in Kenya remains undiminished.

“The struggle for a better Kenya is taking place in our lives every day. It just takes many small steps by many people.”

Realizing the importance of also feeding “the hunger of the soul,” Hastings has found other

young people at the *soko* who are interested in discussing spiritual matters. They meet regularly once each week at lunchtime to read the scriptures and other texts in search of inspiration. These meetings have fortified Hastings' faith and helped motivate him to make the social contribution he likes to talk about. He credits them with helping convince Gitutu to house, train, and employ two homeless boys who were guarding his *soko* at night.

Hastings spiritual strength has buoyed him in other ways, too. Only months after our day at the movies, I received a distressing letter from Kenya. In it, Hastings told me of the tragedy that had befallen Marley. Apparently his *soko* stall had been ransacked by thieves one night, and he had not been able to recover the stolen goods or succeed in restarting his enterprise. Desperate for funds, Marley had borrowed money from a local moneylender. The sum he borrowed wasn't quite enough to meet his needs, so he tried to increase the amount by placing it as a bet on a boxing match. His wager failed and he lost every shilling he had. The next news came as a shock: “I am afraid, *rafiki*, that our Marley is no more” Hastings wrote. “It is thought that he went by violent means, but nobody will say. We must hope he is at peace.”

When I last heard from Hastings (via a cassette he recorded of himself, with African music slipped in between “paragraphs”), he announced that Beatrix and he were finally overcoming her parents' objections and were engaged to be married. They have planned a wedding which both families will attend, and Mrs. Makau and Faith are already designing dresses for Beatrix's bridesmaids.

They had also reached a compromise about where they would make their future home.

“We'll stay here in Nairobi, but only if,” he writes jokingly, “when she wins a scholarship to an American University, she takes me along!”

Knowing Hastings and Beatrix, I won't be completely surprised if I see them on my Massachusetts doorstep someday in the not-too-distant future.

Glossary of Swahili Words and Phrases

bangeli	bangle, bracelet
boma	town
bwana	Mister or Sir
chai	tea
chapati	Indian whole wheat flat bread
chui	cheetah
"Hakuna matata."	"No problem."
"Hamjambo, dada zangu?"	"How are you, my sisters?"
harambee	to "pull together"
"Hatujambo"	"We are fine."
jua kali	those who work as street vendors or at other small businesses (literally means "fierce sun")
kanga	printed cotton cloth used for skirts, baby slings, and other purposes
maharagwe	beans
mandaazi na mayai	scrambled eggs mixed with fried dough
matatu	a minivan or pick-up truck taxi
na	and
soko	outdoor marketplace
"Ninataka kununua koti."	"I would like to buy a coat."
rafiki	friend
safari	journey
safari ya ndoto	a journey of dreams
shamba	farm
ugali	a stiff cornmeal porridge served with vegetables & meat
uhuru	freedom
shilingi	shilling
ujamaa	cooperative economics
uji	a multi-grain breakfast porridge
ujima	collective responsibility
Ukimwi	AIDS (literally "lack of protection in the body")
Wabenzi	Kenya's upper class
watalii	tourists
wazungu	Europeans/white people
wezi	thief

Other African words:

Galimoto (Chichewa)	a push toy made by children from metal & rubber scraps
Guthera (Gikuyu)	a common Kikuyu name
surutia (Maasai)	a spiral-shaped pendant
Kirinyaga (Gikuyu)	Mt. Kenya
Mau Mau (Gikuyu)	the African guerrilla war against the British, 1950s (the actual meaning of the name remains a Kikuyu secret)
Nairobi (Maasai)	Place of Cold Water

Facts on Kenya

	Kenya	United States of America
Land Area:	224,960 square miles	**3,618,770**
Population:	28,176,686	**266,476,278**
Capital:	Nairobi	**Washington, DC**
Independence:	December 12, 1963 (from Britain)	**July 4, 1776 (from Britain)**
Head of State:	Daniel arap Moi, President	**William Jefferson Clinton, President**
System of Government:	Republic, several political parties	**Republic, several political parties**
Languages:	Swahili (official), English, numerous African languages.	**English (official), Spanish, others**
Religions:	Protestant 38%, Roman Catholic 28%, indigenous beliefs 26%, other 8%	**Protestant 56%, Roman Catholic 28%, Jewish 2%, other 4%, none 10% (1989)**
Ethnic Groups:	Kikuyu 22%, Luhya 14%, Luo, 13%, Kelenjin 12%, Kamba 6%, Kisii 6%, Meru 6%, 15% other (African, Asian, European, Arab)	**white 83.4%, black 12.4%, Asian 3.3%, Native American 0.8% (1992)**
Age Distribution:	0-14: 45%; 15-64: 53%; 65+: 2%	**0-14: 22%; 15-64: 65%; 65+: 13%**
Average Life Expectancy:	55.5 years (male); 55.6 years (female)	**72.6 years (male); 79.4 years (female)**
Fertility Rate:	4.45 children born per woman	**2.06 children born per woman**
Infant Mortality Rate:	55 deaths per 1,000 live births	**6.7 deaths per 1,000 live births**
Literacy:	78%	**97%**
Labor Force:	75%-80% agriculture; 20%-25% other	**2% agriculture; 98% other**
Per Capita Income (per year):	$360.00	**$21,082.00**

Source: World Factbook, 1996

About the Author

Tim Cohen-Mitchell, M.Ed., lives in the Pioneer Valley of Western Massachusetts. He has worked with young people as an anthropologist, community organizer, and educator in Ireland, Denmark, Kenya, Zambia, and in the U.S.A. Tim currently works as a community economist and youth entrepreneurship teacher and is pursuing a doctoral degree at the Center for International Education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Tim continues to share his African experiences through a multi-media presentation he produced called *The Seven Pillars of Kwanzaa: What Africa Can Teach Us About Building Stronger Communities.* Tim and his wife Joanie last visited Hastings and family in Kenya in 1996.

The author and “Hastings Kamau” outside the room Hastings shared with his truck-driving uncle, Tobias. 1987. (Photo: Joan Heckscher).

Images

A CHILDHOOD VISIT TO MURANG'A BOMA
Hastings (top right) at age 10 in “downtown” Murang'a, with his mother, Alice, sisters, Wambui and Joyce, and cousin Samson. (Photo: J.K. Macharia)

GO SOUTH!
This advertisement from a 1933 issue of the popular British magazine, *Punch*, encouraged Britishers to make a new home in East Africa, known today as “Kenya.”

KENYA TEA
Most of Europe's African colonies were established to provide Europe with cheap raw materials and products, such as tea.

NAIROBI'S CITY MARKET
A favorite stop-off point for tourists, the city market sells fresh flowers, fruit, and vegetables inside, and a wide selection of handicrafts outside.

NEXT TO CITY MARKET
A schoolboy and his father, a vendor of the popular "*ciondo*" bags, woven by Kikuyu women from sisal, a grass fiber, and leather. *Ciondo* makers are facing stiff competition from weavers in southeast Asia who have copied their designs.

UHURU PARK
Hastings showing off his acrobatics against the skyline of Nairobi, the city which turned his life "upside-down."

HOME
Hastings relaxes on his bed at Wangui and Joseph's home. (Photo: J.K. Macharia)

WANGUI'S STALL Hastings strikes a familiar pose at his place of work in the *soko*. (Photo: J.K. Macharia)

MATIGARI
Hastings defies the law by reading one of Ngugi's novels at the cafe.

MARLEY
Hastings' fun-loving friend in front of his “curiosity” shop in the *soko*.

“THE FINANCE MINISTER”
The author in his new suit from the *soko*, shoes and all.

HASTINGS' HANDIWORK
A few of the bangles, earrings, and necklaces produced in Gititu's studio by Hastings and other young artisans.

HASTINGS & GITITU
Hastings and his teacher relax at a stall in the *soko*, where Gititu's studio sells some of its jewelry.
(Photo: J.K. Macharia)