The van turned off the highway and sped along the dust road to the prison. It was late afternoon. The driver was tired after another long day of waiting outside the courthouse. Ignoring the speed bumps, he flew down the road leaving clouds of dust in his wake

Some way down the road, he came to the first gate in a heavily fortified wall topped with razor wire and watched over by armed men atop watchtowers. The gate swung open and the van proceeded through another gate to the prison offices. Three warders, two of them armed with batons, came out to the van.

"How many?" asked the unarmed one.

"Affande, just one today," the driver said.

One of the warders walked to the back of the van, pulling a bunch of keys from his pocket, selected a key, inserted it in the lock, turned and swung the door open.

"Umefika," he said to the prisoner. "Your are home."

When the man made no hurry to step out of the vehicle, the Affande stepped up and looked inside the van.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Barracuda," said the prisoner.

"Barra ... who?"

"Cuda."

"What sort of name is that?" asked the Affande. "Kamba?"

"No, Affande," said the driver. "Barra kuda is a fish that eats people."

"Like papa?"

"Papa is nothing," said the prisoner. "Barracuda eats glass."

"It is a gang name, Affande," the driver said, amused by the look of awe on Affande's face. "A bad-boy name."

"Is that so?" the Affande gestured at the prisoner with his stick. Come out here then, let me see how bad you are."

The man took his time getting out of the van, moving deliberately slowly, his handcuffs jingling, all the time eyeing the warders. When he stood on the ground he towered over them. The Affande had to step back to have a better at the prisoner.

He was a mountain muscles, chiseled out of black granite and stuffed inside buffalo hide. He had a neck like a bull and dreadlocks down to his shoulders. His eyes were black too, as night, and he was the meanest convict the warders had handled in recent months. "Where did you find this one?" the Affande asked the driver.

"You know I do not find them, Affande," said the driver, with a weary laugh.

The prisoner was strange enough to behold, but the blanket he wore, that barely covered his torso, was something else. It was clearly Government property and made him look like an escapee from the city's mental hospital.

"Where did you get the blanket?" asked the Affande.

"A policeman gave it to me," he said. "To wear to court."

Affande turned to the driver and lowered his voice.

"Are you certain you brought this one to the right place?" he asked.

The prisoner laughed.

"I told them it was all a big mistake," said the prisoner. "I do not belong in prison. I am really a good man."

"Really?" said the warder. "We shall see about that."

Other prisoners, watching through the barbed wire fence separating the administration area from the cell blocks laughed shouted comments at the giant in a blanket. The man smiled unconcerned and let the blanket blow in the wind exposing his nakedness.

"What did you do?" asked Affande.

"Nothing."

"You say Affande to the Affande," said a warder. "To me you say *yes sir*, you understand?"

"Yes, sir," said the prisoner. "It is all in the book, Affande."

Van Driver reached inside the van for the file and read out the name.

"Also known as Barra ..." he read.

"Barracuda," said Meja. "That is with two ..."

"Never mind," the Affande said. Here we shall call you Kamongo. I am told that fish too eats everything."

He gestured at the warder to receive the file and started off. He led the way to the office, followed by the swaggering prisoner and the two warders.

"Affande?" said the driver. "The police want their blanket back."

"Wait for it," said the Affande.

The prisoner let go of the blanket, stepped over it, walked on. The driver picked up his blanket and returned to the vehicle.

Inside the office, Affande flopped in a chair, turned to face the prisoner and was startled to find the man stark naked.

"Blanket?" he asked.

"He gave it back, Affande," said a warder, slapping the file on the desk.

"What happened to your clothes?" asked Affande

"Police took them as evidence, Affande."

"Your underwear too?"

"Did not have any, Affande."

"Have you been in prison before?"

"No, Affande."

"Then you have a lot to learn," said Affande. "It is a whole new school here. Some of your peers call it the University of life. To start with you must show respect everyone here, warders and prisoners alike. Do as you are told and, if you do what we tell you, your life here will be easier. Do you understand?"

"Completely, Affande," said the prisoner.

"Do you have any personal property?"

"No, Affande."

"No watches, rings, wallets or mobile phones?"

"Not anymore, Affande, the police took everything."

A warder pulled on a pair of surgical gloves.

"Bend over," he said.

"What for?" asked the prisoner.

"Rules," said the warder.

"Body search," said the Affande.

A warder positioned himself behind Meja and attempted to bend him forward. It was like trying to bend a sculpture.

"I don't carry anything there," the prisoner insisted.

"Bend over, Kamongo."

"Barracuda."

"Kamongo, bend over."

When Meja did not budge, Affande spoke up.

"Kijana," he said. "You are in prison now. You do as you are told. It is for your own good."

He had a quiet authority, a fatherly voice that did not need to be raised. Meja submitted and the warders got to work. They searched him thoroughly, poking and probing, until they were satisfied he had nothing on him or in him. "We don't like to do it but," said Affande, "Last month a prisoner smuggled a mobile phone into the cells. A huge Nokia thing you would not think could fit inside a man. The best in town, I was told. Stolen, of course. Until then I did not know a man could carry so much back there."

"Affande," laughed a warder, "if we did not search them, they would hide a television in there."

"Next thing you know, they bring an AK 47," said the other.

The Affande was looking at the prisoner with growing interest now. The man's right arm had a long shiny scar running down from his upper arm to the back of the hand. The hand was a massive thing frozen in a half-open position like a claw. Another scar ran down one side of the body from above the buttocks and down to the knee. The skin was so tight that the hip and thighbones were visible underneath. The Affande now realized that the arrogant swagger was a cleverly disguised limp rather than practiced badness.

The prisoner smiled, and waited while they argued about the size of his uniform. Finally, they gave him the largest uniform they could find and he squeezed into it. Then they gave him a blanket, a plastic mug, a plastic plate and a plastic spoon.

The Affande gave him the welcoming speech, grave and sincere words of wisdom to which, the prisoner paid no serious attention. He just nodded and smiled, as Affande told him of the waste that was a life of crime, and how this was his chance to learn and reform so that he could become a useful and respected member of society. There were several courses and trades that they taught at the prison. If Kamongo was ready and willing to exert himself he would leave prison with an education that would certainly guarantee him a job and a new start in life. The prisoner smiled and nodded and smiled until the Affande had said all he had to say. It was not clear to Affande whether he had heard or understood any of it.

The warders led him out to the prisoner's compound, shoved him through the gate and locked it behind him.

"Cell nine," they said, "Follow the smell."

The prisoner remained at the gate, in his ill-fitting uniform and, for the first time looked uncertain. Up until then he had not stopped to think how long eighteen months was. The prisoners

were going back to their cells. Some stopped to stare but most hardly noticed him.

"Go join them, Kamongo" said one warder from behind the gate. "Do not be afraid; make friends. They are all bad boys like you."

The prisoner showed no sign of having heard. He searched among the criminals for a face to be friends with. He needed to find his cell, but he had to find his cellblock first and they had neglected to tell him. He was standing there uncomfortable in his ill-fitting uniform, when someone called out his name.

"Meja!"

A prisoner left the others and ran towards him with outstretched arms.