

THE INQUISITION

At nine o'clock sharp, Rafiki was standing face to face with the County Security Committee inside the DC's office. The inquisition was chaired by the District Commissioners and comprised of the District Security Committee, DSC, the District Police Chief, DPC, Chief Majengo, CM, head of the Criminal Investigation Department, CID, the head of the District Development Committee, DDC, the Commissioner of Women's Bureau, CWB, the Nanyuki Mayor and numerous other county officials and people he had never imagined would want to talk to him. Everyone had a place card bearing his job initials on the table in front of them. Rafiki had a time trying to figure out what the initials meant.

He knew enough not to underestimate any of them. They could have him tossed in the black hole and *rarua* him in ways that would shock a Trench Town thug. But first, perhaps to put him at ease, they toyed with him. Where was he born and where did he live? How many wives did he have? Did he have children with any of them? How old were they? All of it information they already had, seeing as they were the county intelligence pool. Rafiki answered them non-the-less, apparently correctly, for, after a while, they gave it up and turned to business.

The DC took over the inquisition. He had heard much about Rafiki, all of it so bad he did not care to go into it. He had heard so many allegations and accusations that he knew not where to begin. He had heard, for example, that Rafiki had run amok in Majengo.

"The whole county," revealed the CDO.

"The whole county?" marvelled the DC.

"The district too," said the DO. "I have heard reports that women are beating their husbands demanding transparency, asking proof that they have paid for household appliances."

"Women say they are tired of hiding stuff, whenever you are sighted," the DDC accused. "They want their stuff back and are demanding that their men go pay for it."

"With money they don't have," chipped in the COM. "Families are breaking up over your activities, Rafiki."

"The whole of Laikipia is in danger of a rebellion," warned the CID. "What you are doing amounts to robbery."

He turned to the OCPD.

"This man is as dangerous as a cell full of robbery suspects," he said to him.

“He has appointed himself a lone ranger,” informed the DPC. “He is a law unto himself. He confiscates found and gifted items and holds them for ransom. He has declared war on loan defaulters and turned Majengo into a prison.”

“Not true,” said Rafiki.

Inside every original’s DNA was a yet to be mapped string, a mutant *Mau Mau* gene that instinctively knew when to take cover, when to lie low, be very still and answer only the question asked, when dealing with authority. It also knew to keep it simple and concise.

“Not true,” repeated Rafiki.

“Is it not true you are a bounty hunter?”

“Not true,” said Rafiki.

“But is it not true you confiscate *wananchi*’s appliances willy-nilly and deliver them to Patel?”

“A business which, I might add, you conduct in the county without county license or permission?” added the county Chief Revenue Officer, the CRO.

“Not true,” said Rafiki.

He was a hired man, he added, cutting it to the bare bone.

“I’m a legitimate CRA,” he went on to qualify.

“CRA?” The DC sat up, taken aback.

He looked around the room. No one had a clue what a CRA was. Rafiki had just coined the title on the spur of the moment, inspired by the place cards in front of the inquisitors.

“Chief Repossession Agent,” Rafiki enlightened them.

There was a deep and disturbing silence, while they absorbed it. Several pairs of eyes bored into him, waiting for him to make amends. Then he realized what he had done. By also initialling his dubious office, he had crossed a line, one so wide it was unbridgeable. Now, having so successfully, if rashly, leapt across the divide and elevated himself to their pedestal, he had better start to seriously explain himself.

“That is my job title,” he expounded. “I’m a hired man.”

He worked for a long-established, and well-respected, hire purchase company, doing legwork for its well-known proprietors, Manu and Manish Patel.

They already knew that.

The DC nodded impatiently and motioned him to move his story along.

“We try to be fair and just,” he said. “We may not always be absolutely certain that the appliances we repossess are the exact ones,

due to the fact that the defaulters often destroy the serial numbers to hide the origin of the appliances. Consequently, we have to repossess any and all appliances whose owners can't, or won't, produce proof of payment."

The commission was tongue-tied. The OCPD was the first to speak.

"This man is more dangerous than a carload of bank robbers," he observed.

"No wonder his wife ran away from him," added the CMO.

"My wife didn't run away from me," Rafiki informed him. "She went to her mother's for a short vacation. Hasn't your wife done that?"

The men nodded and smiled knowingly. The CWC, the only woman inquisitor scowled.

"That's not why we are here," she reminded them.

"How do you feel," she asked Rafiki, "when you order a woman your mother's age to stop cooking for her grandchildren so that you can repossess her *jiko*?"

"She should have paid for it," said Rafiki.

"Do you have grandchildren?" the DC asked him.

"Not yet."

"Children?"

"Two grown ups."

"What do they think when they see you taking stuff from old women?"

"They don't see me do it," Rafiki answered. "And I don't take stuff only from old women. I take it from anyone and everyone who has not paid for it. It is my job. That is how I make a living, Bwana DC."

The DC looked round the table and shrugged as if to say, *I'm not getting through to this fool*. Nor were the others. They had dealt with many of his ilk before, troublesome people who belonged behind bars but had yet to fully qualify. Now they studied Rafiki and tried to understand what about him was different. The swagger, they were used to, and the arrogance they had seen before. What confounded them was the apparent brick wall between him and them; his genuine and total disregard for their authority.

Seeing how troubled they were, Rafiki thought he had better set his Majengo caution aside, just for a moment, and explain himself in greater detail. He started by denying that he had ever presented himself, or even imagined himself, as a policeman. If he had, he

would have made his mother proud by ditching his guitar and going to Kiganjo Police Training College.

Then he presented the rest of his case as truthfully, and as correctly as he could remember it. It was all straight forward, he thought, since there were no complainants present and he was not being accused of any specific crime. He repeated his assertion that there was no way he could be absolutely certain that the appliances he repossessed were the right ones, due to the fact that the guilty often filed the serial numbers to hide their origin. He was, therefore, forced to repossess any and all appliances whose owners had no proof of ownership.

The Initials listened keenly, nodding and grunting or shaking their heads and groaning as appropriate, until he had finished saying all that he had to say. But, being an original Nanyukian to the core, Rafiki did not know when to quit. Having said all that was necessary to say, and having done so well to clear himself that they were ready to let him leave, he had to go back and dip in his gene pool once again and come up with something that only an original Nanyukian could field in front of such a fearsome gathering.

“Bwana DC,” he said, to the DC and the rapt County Security Council, “I don’t understand why you have dragged me here from my busy schedule just to answer such simple questions.”

And, furthermore, he went on, he could not see why the CSC was bugging him, and making such a big deal of his work methods, seeing as he used a modus operandi they obviously understood all too well. It was the same procedure that the Chief, his henchmen and the police followed when dealing with difficult customers. Hit them on the head, toss them in the bag and sort them at a more convenient time and place.

There was an even longer silence after he had said his piece. His statement was so outrageous, so wrong on so many levels, that no one cared to go next.

“Do you have a license?” finally asked the OCPD. Maybe they could get him for that.

“License?” Rafiki was genuinely startled.

“To run your business?” asked the DC.

“I don’t run a business,” his patience was wearing out too. “I work for Patel. Ask him for the license.”

The DC frowned at his tone of voice, but turned to the CRO.

“Do you issue such a license?” he wondered.

“Repossession license?” asked the CRO. “Never heard of it until now.”

“You should look into,” the DC suggested. “Could raise revenue for the county.”

And while about it, someone remembered, what about a license for *piki-piki* taxis and donkey cart operators? What about the street preachers and the *mkokoteni* pushers? What about the water carriers and the woodcutters? Who else was getting away with it? It transpired, during the exchange that followed, that there were a lot of self-employed individuals in Nanyuki who were getting away with not paying their share of the county revenue.

Rafiki watched awed, as the men went crazy with new ideas to raise more money for the county, so they could demand higher salaries. They considered, and seemed agreed, on raising death duties for anyone dying within the county. And, while about it, why not charge anyone wishing to bury his dead cow, dog, cat or chicken too? Rafiki listened flabbergasted, as they debated how much to charge anyone slaughtering a chicken, a goat or a cow within county boundaries. How about a charge for anyone wishing to dig a pit latrine on his shamba? Rafiki despaired and thought about his own problems, while the Initials bickered on.

Finally, the DC turned to him and laid it on the line. The whole county community, not just Majengo, was treading on hot coals for not knowing what was right and what was wrong by Rafiki’s Law. Women were up in arms, beating up their men and demanding transparency. Husbands were threatening to give up their marital duties and go on countywide hunger strike. They would not eat at home unless their wives stopped asking for the impossible. Rafiki, the DC concluded, had to cease and desist forthwith, before the entire county went up in flames.

Again true to his Nanyukian nature, Rafiki rose to make his defence, notwithstanding that none was required or necessary. He begged to differ with the DC, in itself a reckless enough move, then went on to present his own position on the matter. He proceeded to expound on his very strange idea, strange not only to Majengo but also to the DC, the DFO, the DDO and the gathered Initials.

“Everyone,” he said, “everyone, big or small, rich or poor, man or woman, boy or girl, everyone must learn to handle his or her financial obligations.”

They looked at one another. He thought he heard someone whisper - “What’s wrong with him?”

“Bwana DC, sir,” he said respectfully. “What example do we set for our children if we avoid doing what is right for fear of the consequences?”

Bwana DC did not know how to handle that one, so he fielded it to the council. They let it sit, while Rafiki informed them again that it was not only right, but also just, that everyone, big or small, man or woman, old or young learn to keep their promises and to fulfil their financial obligations. Otherwise children would grow up believing it was all right to live without working, to take without paying and to eat and run.

The statement was safe enough, but it was not enough for Rafiki. He went on, fired up by their rapt attention, and told them things they had not asked to hear.

“Besides,” he said, “if the Chief himself, the biggest man in Majengo, can pay his debts, why not everyone here?”

That statement was wrong, at least by its implication, and left the meeting confused. It was the Chief’s turn to whisper, “What is wrong with him?”

There was a stunned silence. All eyes were on the Chief. With nowhere to hide, he did not have to be told he had some explaining to do. He rose, hesitantly since no one had said to, and cleared his throat. Then, at the risk of losing favour, and probably his job, he confirmed that he had indeed started paying off his debts.

The room went dead still.

“Bwana DC, Sir,” he cleared his throat a second time. “I ... eeh, it is indeed true that I ... eeh do pay my ... eeh debts, Sir. I do ... eeh believe that ... eeh *Kula na ... eeh kulipa* is ... eeh the best ... eeh policy, Sir.”

The room remained dead quiet.

Still not daring to look any of the big Initials in the eye, he confessed that, deep down in his Nanyukian soul, he did indeed know and believe that *kula na kulipa* was the best policy.

“*Kula na kulipa*,” he repeated in conclusion. “Eat and pay. That simple. I am sorry, Sir.”

There was an even deeper silence. The commissioners avoided eye contact with one another and with the DC. That was clearly not what they had come to hear. They had come to put out a fire, to lynch a rebel and stop a rebellion. The DC had experience with Majengo’s insidiousness, which had once nearly cost him his job. They would grumble and fester until they exploded in action, unless he put an end to their suffering. He looked about the room and cleared his throat.

“Bwana Chief,” he said, carefully. “There’s no need to apologise. I’m sure everyone here present agrees with you on the same thing. It is indeed right and honourable that we, as the administration and the eyes of the central Government in Laikipia County, set a good

example by paying our debts and our taxes. However, we are here to put out a fire and stop a rebellion.”

“What rebellion?” demanded the WBC big mama. “You men like to complicate everything to impress one another. You know that you will do what your wives say the moment they shut the bedroom door. If you decide not to eat at home, they have that much less cooking to do. And, if you boycott our beds, we have that much more rest at night. So, forget the excuses and say, and do, the right thing.”

The big men looked at one another. They were loath to ask what, in her eyes, was the right thing to do. None of them were planning to boycott their wife’s cooking, or anything else of hers for that matter, but that was not what they had come here to debate. They had come to string a dissident. Now, thanks to her, he was getting away unscathed.

Which was exactly what happened.

Rafiki left the place reeling from the experience. He was shaken, bruised and battered, but very proud of himself. He had stood up to the biggest Initials in the County Government, struck a blow for original Nanyukians everywhere, and survived. He was vindicated by the most powerful council in the county. He had a mandate, albeit a tacit one, from the county Initials no less, to continue his campaign to enforce Rafiki’s Law. *Kula na kulipa*. Eat and pay. Justice for all, without fear or favour.