

“LIKE A HINGE ON A GATE”

“He’s not new to Africa,” the Old Man said. “He’s just done his teaching diploma at Makerere. But he’s new to Kenya, and he’s new to teaching. Would you be so good as to take him under your wing when he arrives?”

“Yes sir,” I said, “I’ll be glad to. Where is he from?”

The Old Man’s eagle brows contracted, which always made him look like the Cambridge Don he would have been, if he hadn’t opted for the Church Missionary Society, and Africa, thirty years before.

“He’s . . . an American,” he said reluctantly. “But I’ve had a talk with him, and he’s . . . a *good* American, there are some, you know.”

“What do you suppose the Old Man means by that?” I asked Julia when I told her.

“Perhaps he’s respectful,” she said.

“Perhaps he talks quietly,” I suggested.

I was dead wrong. Julia was wrong too, in a way.

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Jedediah Framingham was a tall New-Englander, twenty-three, with a wave of sandy hair and a ruddy face. When you told him things, he listened, nodding, with a steady frown. He took matters seriously. I used to think it had something to do with the five divorces his parents had racked up between them. (I remember, years later, when he was running for political office in Vermont, listening to him answer a question on a radio interview:

"Mr. Framingham, would you be in favour of impeachment proceedings against President Nixon?"

"I uh —" he began, and sitting out in the lobby of the radio station, I could visualize Jed's frowning face bobbing around in a figure eight as he swung his body in the chair to address the grave issue.

"I believe in the principle of innocent until proven guilty."

"So —"

"So I would have to look at the full evidence before I could answer you."

"Then —"

"BUT . . . based on some of the things I have heard, IF they turn out to be true . . ."

"You —"

"I would impeach."

"You —"

"I would impeach."

Needless to say, the voters of Vermont didn't pick Jed Framingham. In all his moral seriousness, he sounded a bit too much like Nixon himself.)

No sooner had Jed arrived at the school, than he got into conflict with the Vice-principal. It was at the first Staff meeting. The Principal, the Old Man himself, swung his gaze round the room at the end of the meeting, and asked if there was any other business.

"Uh. . ."

"Yes, Jed?"

"Sir, the urinals . . . the School's urinals. . ."

"What about them, Jed?"

"They're absolutely disgraceful, sir. They smell very bad."

Vice-principal Arthur Jamieson cleared his throat deliberately. He'd been there over thirty years, from the time when the school consisted of two wooden shacks, and the only toilet facility was a two-by-four bar set over a trench in the wattle forest. Now this Yank, with two weeks under his belt. . .

"I would not have thought this an *appropriate* discussion." Jamieson rolled his R's.

The Old Man considered for a moment, then nodded. "Let's close in prayer," he said.

That night, Jed marched back and forth in our living room, his voice growing louder and more rhetorical, till the dog started barking at his heels, and woke the baby.

The following Staff Meeting, under "any other business," Jed raised his hand and got the nod.

"I'd like the School's permission to spend 350/- shillings on maintenance."

It was a fair sum of money, about half a month's pay for a junior teacher.

"On what, Jed?" the Old Man asked. Jamieson's face was grey as a church stone.

"Paint, sir."

"Paint?"

"I have arranged with Shivji Brothers to seal the walls of the urinals with waterproof paint. Here's the contract, I just need your permission." He waved a piece of paper in the air.

"It's an in-*or*-dinate sum," Jamieson declared. "There are higher priorities."

"I am prepared to pay it myself," Jed said. "I just need permission."

The Old Man blinked slowly, twice, and his face cracked half a smile.

"Let's close in prayer," he said.

Afterwards, he took the paper from Jed, and the school paid. The smell ended. But the war was on.

Next Staff Meeting:

"I underr-stand, there is a plan af-oot, for *mixed singing*!"

Jamieson said the words slowly, as though "mixed singing" was the name of a rare disease.

In the silence that followed, people began slowly to focus on one person.

"Jed?" said the Old Man.

Jed's red face went even redder. His brows knit, and his face bobbed, as he shifted in his chair.

"I uh . . . I have been in consultation with Miss Merival in the Girls' School, and with Dr. Taylor at the Conservatory. We are all

agreed that a choir drawn from the two schools would be of great value. With a choir of mixed voices we could greatly expand the repertoire we can perform. At present we are limited by the artificial division. On an experimental basis, we propose rehearsing one evening a week."

"Evenings!" cried Jamieson. But Jed got his way.

The next incident concerned furniture, which brings us to Bwana Mdogo.

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It would not have surprised me if Jed had refused to have a servant. The British expatriate teachers all had servants as a matter of course — why deprive yourself of the convenience, given how cheap they were, and anyway it created employment. But as an American Jed saw emerging Africa differently. Julia and I had resisted having an inside servant, and we were thought quite "modern" for this. I would have expected Jed's Yankee egalitarianism to have revolted against the idea of personal service. But he surprised us all.

"This is Solomon," he said, introducing me to a small, very black man who was seated in an armchair in the living room. "This is my friend Alistair."

"How do you do," I said, and reached out a hand. I spoke in English, taking Solomon to be a teaching colleague, or one of Jed's fellow-students from Makerere who'd dropped in for tea.

"I'll get you a cup," said Jed, and made for the kitchen.

Solomon let go my grasp and said quickly, "No, no, Bwana Mkubwa, I get it." He moved swiftly and beat Jed to the doorway.

"You've stopped by at the right time," Jed said. "We were just about to discuss wages. Perhaps you could give me your advice."

"Yes," I said, "perhaps I could."

Solomon returned with my cup, and poured it. "Soogar?"

"*Sucari mbili, asante.*"

"Oh!" Solomon beamed. "*Bwana najua kiswahili msuri sana!*"

"Thank you," I said in Swahili, "and your English is good, too. You're not from around here, are you? What's your tribe, Muluhia?"

"Yes!" His coal-black face positively shone. I had taken a risk guessing on this sensitive subject.

"Listen, Solomon," I said, still in Swahili, "we don't say 'Bwana' around here very much any more."

"Oh yes Bwana, I understand."

"What is all this 'bwana' business?" Jed said. "What do you call me, 'Bwana' what?"

"You are Bwana Mkubwa, Bwana. It mean you big man." He held his hand above his head to indicate Jed's height, and smiled innocently.

I laughed. No fool, this Solomon. He laughed with me.

"And you," Jed said, looking down seriously on Solomon's head, "you are very short. How do you say that in Swahili?"

"*Kidogo*," said Solomon.

"If you put it with 'Bwana' it becomes *Mdogo*." I said.

Jed held out his hand. "*Jambo, Bwana Mdogo!*"

"*Jambo, Bwana Mkubwa!*" said Solomon.

I watched them shake hands, grinning, and I realized that neither of them knew what sort of pact they had sealed with one another — nor, for that matter, did I. Later, I tried to explain to Jed the subtlety of Solomon's humour. In 1961 no black man still called any white man "Bwana Mkubwa," except perhaps tongue in cheek. Solomon, having done it, and then embarrassed by my presence, now pretended it referred to height.

"It would be like some man in India addressing you as 'Mighty Sahib'."

"I don't know, man," Jed knit his brows. "I think it's quite literal. The tall man, and the short man."

"Oh sure," I said. "Abbott and Costello."

They settled the details: wages, rations, days off. The house had three bedrooms, and Jed suggested Solomon use one of them.

"Oh no, Bwana Mkubwa, not here. This one out here." He pointed to the small servant's house at the back of the lot. "This good for me."

"It's very small," said Jed. There was one room, and a shower stall with a flush hole, and a kitchen recess. "It's too small."

"I am too small," said Solomon. "It's good for me."

"Alright." Jed frowned. "Now, what about furniture. Bed, table, chairs."

Solomon shrugged.

"Why don't you take the furniture out of my spare bedroom?" Jed said.

"Thank you, Bwana."

But when Solomon went next door to borrow a wrench to undo the bolts on the bed, the information fed into the grapevine, and quickly reached the ears of the Vice-principal. Jamieson drove over to Jed's at once, and delivered a stern harangue on "setting bad precedents," and pointed out that the furniture belonged to the school, and the school could "in no wise countenance" its being loaned to a servant.

An hour later, Jed was tramping back and forth on our living room floor, re-enacting the harangue, with an accurate imitation of Jamieson's thistly accent. He ended, on the moral zenith of his lungs: "So Solomon, man, is OUT there, SLEEPING ON A COLD CEMENT FLOOR! TO AVOID SETTING BAD PRECEDENTS!"

The dog barked, and fainted at Jed's knees. The baby woke. Julia sighed.

Poor Jed.

"Always there is this grey and unimaginative presence, telling me that I cannot do the things I want to do. The same at Harvard, man! The same at Makerere!"

Later, I learned that at Harvard he had been forbidden to use the props of the dramatic society for a play he was producing, so he sent his actors and stagehands to steal scenery, from various amateur companies, or wherever they could. This brought the Cambridge police to the opening performance, but the play did go on. And at Makerere University, in Kampala, Uganda, he had wanted to put on *Macbeth* in Maasai tribal dress, and had been refused by some University authority who said the show would not attract a large enough audience. Jed wired friends and relatives in the States, and raised \$500, and rented the National Theatre in Kampala. They put the show on, in tribal dress, and repaid the \$500. "And *made a profit*, man! We *made a profit*! Two-hundred and eighty shillings."

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Jed's relationship with Solomon settled into a routine, but it took a while, and it took some learning on Jed's part. The fact is, he needed a servant, more even than some of the bachelor teachers who at least cooked for themselves. Jed's mind was usually on a project, the choir, the Drama Festival, even the blessed urinals, and he forgot about the humdrum details of life. Cutlery, for instance, cooking utensils, an iron. Once the bed problem was solved — I had taken him down to the native market, and he bought Solomon a hand-hewn thong bed for 10/- shillings — Jed left the rest to Solomon. And Solomon took care of things, borrowing an iron from us, pots and pans from Mary Greene; sheets, pillow cases, towels, etc., Solomon found them all. I learned that he had bought plates in the *boma* with 10/- shillings of his own.

It was the coffee pot that clarified the relationship. Jed had met a young teacher at the Girls' School, and after much fretting, had invited her to dinner, followed by a movie in Nairobi. He brought her home at midnight, for coffee, but was unable to find the coffee pot. It had been there at dinner, and now was gone. He pondered all the possibilities, and eliminated them, and then stood confidently on the back step and yelled into the darkness:

"Bwana Mdogo! Bwana Mdogo!"

At length came the sleepy answer, "Ye-ees Bwana."

"You have my coffee pot?"

"Ye-ees Bwana."

"Well, bring it back, right now."

"I sleeping, Bwana."

"Yes, and I want to make coffee."

A few minutes later, the pot was pushed through the back door.

"Your coffee pot."

"Damn right! And I would appreciate it if you would not borrow my things in future without asking."

The next evening, Jed found Solomon packing all the plates into a cardboard box, in the kitchen.

"What are you doing?"

Solomon shook his finger. He was angry.

"You no lend me your coffee pot, I no lend you my plates. *Where* you get iron? *Where* you get fry pan?"

For the moment, the "bwana" language was forgotten.

Jed was embarrassed. He looked into Solomon's face, and saw only resentment. "This is a serious matter," he said. "Let us sit down and discuss it."

They sat down across the kitchen table from one another.

Then the actor in him took over. I would not have attempted what he did, and risk compounding the injury. Somehow, Jed created a transformation. One minute, the two men, master and servant, offender and the injured party are sitting across the table from one another, deadly serious. The next minute, the two of them are dancing about the kitchen with knives, a long bread knife and a carving knife, whooping and slashing at the air beside one another's heads.

"You bad man! You bad man! I *kill* you! *Aieee!*"

"Don't take the plates! Kill me if you must, but *don't take the plates! Aaooorr!*"

Suddenly, there is a face at the window. Jed catches sight of it in the middle of a turn, with his knife arm raised high. A hand cupped over the eyebrow, the face peering in through the glass, and then the tap-tap of a car key. Vice-principal Jamieson.

Jed puts down his knife and straightens his clothing. He walks through the living room and opens the front door. Solomon begins quietly unpacking the plates and putting them back on the shelves.

"Jed, er," says Arthur Jamieson, "the Principal has authorized me to speak to you on the matter of . . . visitors." He coughs loudly. "This school does not encourage overnight visitors of the opposite sex."

Jed stares in amazement.

"Last night," Jamieson's voice is stern and slow, "you were seen driving a young lady in . . . but not out."

"Last night," Jed shouts, with a stupendous frown, "last night, Arthur, I brought Jane Merival in for a cup of coffee after going to the cinema, and then I walked her home to the Girls' School. If you're going to spy on me, you might as well do the job thoroughly!"

Jamieson retreats, mumbling. Jed returns to the kitchen, half angry, half giggling. "God Damn it, Mdogo!" He seizes his knife and lunges. Solomon leaps into the air with a loud scream, and the dance continues. In the driveway, Jamieson shakes his head and mutters, then starts his car.

"You clown!" I said. "Perfect hams, both of you. You found the right man there."

"Solomon?" Jed says. "He is one smart guy, man. You know what he said to Maurice Bowles?" Jed shrinks down to Bwana Mdogo's size. "He said: 'Meester Bowles, how many shildren you got?'"

"Bowles says, 'I g- I g- I got two, Mdogo.'" (Jed imitates Maurice Bowles' Lancashire stutter.) "'W- w- why?'"

"'How many bicycles, Meester Bowles?'"

"'Th- th- three, Mdogo, w- why?'"

"'I got *four shildren*, Meester Bowles! And no bicycles. *Not even one bicycle!*'"

"Now Solomon's got a bicycle, man. You've seen him riding around on it? Says he's going to send it to his children. At Christmas." Jed broke into a loud, American belly laugh.

"Oh Jed, you might as well stay to dinner," Julia said. She loved his stories. The later it got, the louder and more exaggerated they became. And then, of course, the dog.

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Jed's experience in theatre was a problem for me. I had just inherited the school's dramatic society from a teacher who'd gone back to England, and I was damned if I was going to give it up. The school had developed a tradition of putting on a Shakespeare every year, using the entire dramatic society in the cast. It was a public event, and got write-ups in the Nairobi papers. The dramatic society consisted of 120 or 150 boys who had signed up for the short play readings at the start of each year. Putting on a Shakespeare with a cast that size was a challenge that appealed to me. We had multitudes and battle scenes alright! At one performance of *Henry IV Part 1*, when the armies clash, a woman in the audience got up and ran out of the theatre, shrieking.

Jed helped me with the production, of course, but it wasn't the same thing as running the show.

"'And *under him*,' Jed bellowed, on our living room carpet, shaking his finger at me, "'and under him / My Genius is rebuk'd, as it is said / Mark Antony's was by Caesar.'"

I recognized the quote: Macbeth rationalizing the need to murder Banquo.

"This territory ain't big enough for the two of us, pardner!" I made to blow off his head with my Smith and Wesson. We all laughed, but as usual the horseplay expressed a truth.

I thought of suggesting he take over the short plays, but that was no good. The readings at the beginning of the year were adjudicated, and three or four winners announced, and the winning plays were then produced. But the whole point was for the students to do these productions on their own, and so develop their initiative. The only help we gave them was with costumes. To have Jed take over production would defeat the main intent.

The problem was solved unexpectedly, by the announcement of a new event, the Kenya Schools Drama Festival. Jed leaped at the opportunity. And the first year, they won every award, Best Producer, Best Actor and so on. The second year, I forget what happened. The third year was typical Framingham:

It was 1964, the quartercentenary of Shakespeare's birth. Jed came to me looking serious. "I want to invite you to participate in a project, man; I'm seeking your collaboration."

He wanted to enter a dramatic collage called "Shakespeare 400." There would be three scenes, representing the three types of play.

For the Histories, he had chosen *Henry V*'s Saint Crispin's Day speech, and for the Tragedies, a selection from *Julius Caesar*. For the Comedies, he wanted me to produce Falstaff's narration of the robbery, in the Boar's Head tavern. And all of this, within the strict time limits of the Festival's regulations: one rehearsal and one lighting rehearsal at the National Theatre, an hour each; ten minutes to set the stage, and five minutes to strike it; maximum performance time of forty minutes.

"Christ, Jed!" I said. "Aren't you missing something? Why not throw in a few of the Sonnets as well, plus maybe a scene from the Dark Comedies? Forty minutes, fellow!"

"I think it can be done, man." (Long, serious pause.) "I want you on board."

"'On board' hell! Up all night painting scenery is what you mean!"

Jed laughed at the dig. The first time he entered the Festival, he had chosen to stage a Roman comedy in West African dress, set in a village of square mud houses. I had spent the night painting scenery, and even then I didn't finish, and had to continue after class the next day. The Principal drove down in his Volkswagen at one minute to four, to bid the cast a ceremonial farewell, and had to wait a few minutes while I finished off a wall, which we then hoisted and tied on the roof of the school lorry.

"Best of luck!" the Old Man intoned. "Everyone pull his weight! Never mind if you win or lose! Everything done properly!"

Off went the lorry in a cloud of dust, Jed and cast waving, the Old Man standing with arm upraised, like an ancient Norse king sending warriors to battle. Then he turned to where I stood, paint-spattered and with bags under my eyes, and he began doing what the students called "stepping." It was his way of expressing rage, and had something to do with blood pressure. He'd lift one foot, then put it down and lift the other, where he stood, stamping slowly, his whole body stiff and quivering.

"When you announce at Parade . . ." (step; step) ". . . that the lorry will leave at four o'clock, . . ." (step; step) ". . . then it *leaves* at four o'clock! If you mean five past four . . . SAY SO!" He ended with a shout. I stood there numb, as his Volkswagen whined angrily back up the hill.

"FRAMINGHAM!" I shouted into the thinning dust. "NEXT TIME MAKE YOUR OWN FUCKING SCENERY!"

But then they came back with all the trophies, so what could I say?

Everybody thought "Shakespeare 400" was a wonderful idea. Julia and Mary Greene immediately offered to do the costumes, and my actors were delighted at the chance to revive the Boar's Head scene from last year's production. Four or five nights in a row, Jed had his casts for *Julius Caesar* and *Henry V* rehearsing past midnight, and not a peep out of Jamieson. When I mentioned scenery, Jed said all I'd need for the tavern was the huge "Boar's Head" sign, and it was true. With a couple of chairs and a table, it created the tavern, easily portable. But there was no mention of the rest of the scenery.

"I need to envisage it," Jed said.

Our combined casts for the three segments totalled forty boys, plus stage hands, and we knew we could only ask for one trip in the lorry. And you couldn't leave scenery at the National Theatre. It was going to be some trip! I wished Jed would hurry up with envisaging, so I could start planning how to pack everything into the lorry.

At the lighting rehearsal we still had no scenery, so that trip was easy. We were last to rehearse, and the technician asked me to throw the main switch and lock the doors when we left. It was against the rules to take extra time in the theatre, but I didn't care. Jed was not going to stall any longer, I'd damn well see to that. I went looking for him. I was striding across the lit stage, when suddenly his voice boomed from the dark auditorium, telling me to stand where I was.

"Move to your left, to your left, TO YOUR LEFT, MAN! Right there! Mark it. How high's the fly there?"

"Oh, fourteen feet."

"Write it down, now come forward, FORWARD, TO YOUR RIGHT, there! Mark it. How high?"

Three times this happened, and finally I said, "What the hell are you doing, Jed?"

"For *Henry V* all we need is a big rock, man, there's one out in the parking lot. It's bleak, it's bare, it's like the battle. He puts his foot up on it."

"What am I marking here?"

"PILLARS MAN! For *Julius Caesar*. A Roman temple, huh? Great, big, white, marble, *pillars*, man! Fourteen, eighteen, and what did you say, twenty-three feet? It's perfect, it's *strong*! Fluted white marble. Add a couple of feet to those dimensions, because we mustn't be short of the fly. Three tremendous *pillars*, man, rising out of sight!"

I shielded my eyes against the blinding lights, and tried to see his face. "Envisaging" was one thing; this was madness.

I shouted towards his dark outline at the back of the auditorium: "Jed, this is Friday night. We go *on*, on Monday afternoon. And you're talking about fluted white marble pillars that are longer than the lorry itself. You're off your cotton-picking rocker, you crazy Yank. You've got to *make* them, and you've got to *carry* them. How are you going to do it?"

"Come down here and look, man. It's *strong*! I think it can be done."

I decided to steer clear of the whole project. I was not about to waste a frantic weekend manipulating bits of bamboo, and¹ chicken wire, and *papier maché*, only to have Jed arrive and start guffawing and making smart remarks ("That is not marble, that is *macaroni*!")

Perhaps I was in a huff, I don't know. I just rehearsed my actors and kept out of Jed's way, and he didn't come looking for me.

Monday morning, there they were: leaning against the front of the school theatre building, as I crossed the² playing field to morning parade. Three gigantic white pillars, straight and strong, and gleaming white in the morning sun.

"Who made the pillars for you, Jed?"

"Peter Jones."

"*Peter Jones!* He's the guy that asks me to come over and show him how to jack up his car!"

"He builds model airplanes, man. It's the same principle as an airplane fuselage, struts and skin."

They truly were beautiful pillars. They tapered slightly, to enhance the perspective, and later, when they were in place on the stage of the National Theatre, they created exactly the right atmosphere: a sense of public spectacle, of noble men, and traitors. I was very impressed, and all the more because the construction was so simple and light. A single stagehand could lift one, and put it in place. Peter had used segments of corrugated cardboard, evenly curved, and jointed to look like segments of marble, along frameworks of plywood and lath. He had got them perfectly straight, so they looked heavy and solid.

Standing ten feet from one, you'd swear it would stop an ox. The actual danger was that an actor might nudge one, accidentally, and knock it over. We couldn't lash the tops to lighting rails, because of our quick scene changes, so the actors were warned to be extra careful. This slowed the pace of their movements, and in their sweeping togas, their actions became most graceful, and suited the play.

I got the lorry loaded without any problem. The longest pillar overhung the roof, front and back, by several feet, but it was firm. Jed and I packed students into our Morris Minors, and followed the lorry. I had talked to Mwangi, the lorry driver, and said we had lots of time, and he should go slowly and carefully. We had allowed an extra fifteen minutes to get to town.

It was as though I had not spoken, or had irritated Mwangi and provoked rebellion. He swung the lorry out of the school driveway, not left, down the smoother, longer road to town, but right, down the short-cut route. He went bucking through switchbacks, and slid into winding, corrugated corners, and over potholes and ruts. As I followed, smothered in dust, Mwangi stepped on it. We hurtled round a corner into Dagoretti Village, and the next thing I knew bodies were flying in the air. One landed with a sickening thud, on the hood of my car.

They were sheep. Mwangi had driven into a herd of them spread across the road, and had been unable to brake in time. It's a detail that has no apparent connection with Jed Framingham, but whenever I recall the sight of that clotted grey corpse, spinning up in the dust from the two left rear wheels of the overloaded lorry, and landing *thud!* on my car, I think of Jed. It wasn't so much that he was a comic in himself, but genuinely ludicrous and exaggerated events always seemed to happen around him.

We didn't win everything at the Festival, but we won some. Best Actor, Best Producer, Best Set Design.

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I didn't learn from Jed immediately. Perhaps I am a slow learner, or perhaps my British colonial upbringing had drilled too much moderation into me, and I stood in awe of this American who frowned up projects and then set about accomplishing them. My father taught me how to be polite, and to know my place. From Jed I learned another view of life entirely: envisage things, and do them; but recognize that always there will be "these grey and unimaginative presences, telling me that I cannot do the things I want to do." In that war of repression which the grey presences wage unceasingly on the creative, a camaraderie grows. So Jed Framingham became a reference point, a major figure in my imagination for the past twenty years and more. He taught me that you have to occupy your own life, stake it out, damn it, and tell the nay-sayers and the trespassers to go to hell.

I began to realize what I was learning, when I saw Jed deal with his own problem of unwanted visitors. Because he had been posted to our school, just outside Nairobi, other Americans from the Teachers for East Africa programme would write and claim friendship. Their postings were out in the boondocks, and they needed to get to town once in a while. Why not pay a visit to Jed Framingham, in his three-bedroom house? Tootle around Nairobi all day, and come back in time for dinner, courtesy of Bwana Mdogo. One of these freeloaders sent a letter announcing his arrival from Uganda with girl friend, for a three-week stay commencing two days after the letter arrived. "You may not remember me," the letter began, "but we spoke once in the rain, outside the library, at Makerere. . . ." Jed was pissed off.

"What am I going to do, man? Even if I hid out at your place and pretended to be away, they'd just occupy my house for three weeks. Good God! Listen to it: 'My girl friend and I will be arriving some time on Friday 22nd. to visit with you for three weeks. . . .'"

"What nerve!" I said. "Send the bugger a telegram."

Jed drove over to the Post Office and sent it: "NO ROOM IN THE INN STOP FRAMINGHAM."

It worked that time, but he had to find a more permanent solution.

"The answer," he said, "is to move. Some place that's literally too small to accomodate people." Fine, but where was such a house? Jed went looking, and found it. Stuck away behind a hedge was a cottage that nobody noticed. A bedroom, a living room, a small dining room, and a bathroom. The kitchen was a small back porch. And nobody had noticed the place, because for years it had been lent to the Red

Cross, to house a field worker. Right now, it happened to be empty. Best of all, it had a servant's house out back which was larger than the quarters Bwana Mdogo now occupied. They moved in.

"I don't quite see how it's going to work, Jed. Surely your American tourists will insist on sleeping on the dining room floor?"

He looked at me, puzzled. "Oh, you haven't been over since we moved? Come and take a look."

It was marvellous. Jed had been taking piano lessons in Nairobi, and getting quite serious about it, so he'd bought a piano. It was a grand. It occupied the new dining room, roughly wall to wall. To enter the room, you had to crawl between the piano's legs.

"How the hell did you ever get it in here?"

"We had to make some adjustments," he said, and did not elaborate.

And that was the end of Jed's unwanted visitors. His real friends, when they came, slept anywhere a body could fit. And mice made nests in his underwear and socks, but what can you expect in an old house hidden behind a cypress hedge? Jed was happy there, and might have stayed forever. He was a good American alright, and brought his music, drama, basketball and a dozen other contributions to the school. I notice in the school's official history, Arthur Jamieson has shrunk my own time there in half, and attributed all my main achievements to Jed. Touché. "Under him / My Genius is rebuk'd." To be honest, I don't care. It's quite appropriate that Jed should have my measly honours tacked on to his own. His was always the larger, more inventive imagination. Even the Old Man knew that. The Old Man might have relied on me to fix a visiting team's lorry, or rid the library roof of bats, but for Jed he had a special kind of fondness and respect.

I'll never forget an incident one morning at Parade. The Old Man had been to visit Jed's class, to evaluate his teaching, and had nothing bad to say; but he did point out, in a friendly way, an error that he had spotted. Jed, to explain the meaning of the word "mutual," had told the class that the Old Man was "their friend" and also "his friend," and therefore their "mutual friend." The Old Man said it was an incorrect usage: two parties can have a third party as their "common" friend, but "mutual" means reciprocal between two parties. Jed argued, and cited Dickens. The Old Man slipped Fowler into Jed's mailbox to prove the point — the page was marked. Now, at Parade, with the Old Man looking formal and donnish despite his khaki shorts and bush jacket, Jed handed back Fowler with a note: "Dear Sir," it said, "You were right, and I was wrong. You are no longer our mutual friend. You are common." The Old Man cracked up and had to hold his forehead to still the laughs, before three hundred serious students, and a dozen stern-faced staff.

* * *

After I left Kenya, Jed stayed on at the school for a couple of years. From time to time we corresponded, ten years of letters, with theatrical gesturing and crude cartoons. Once, when he had moved back to North Carolina and I thought I might be passing by, he sent a Xeroxed drawing entitled "Shower." Underneath, in Jed's unmistakable scrawl: "I think we can offer you superb accommodations here." The picture shows a naked man scrubbing his back with

a long-handled brush, and pissing a fat stream down onto a fan that is raining it back on him.

After ten years, we met again, and then comes another ten years of letters, and drawings, and cartoons. Once I sent him a story I had written, and he wrote back referring to my "literary posturings." Once he wrote a poem, and sent it in to *Atlantic Monthly*, and when he didn't hear from them in a few days, he travelled down to Boston, and knocked on the door at 8 Arlington Street, to find out what the editors thought of his poem. I wrote telling him he was extremely naive.

Then, we both go through divorces and marriages and other relationships, problems over children, and contemplations over the state of civilization, and our letters reflect it all. We meet again, then once again, and sit around the fire telling stories among our latest companions. The story of the pillars, of how Bwana Mdogo got his bicycle. . . . The laughter doesn't change, and after the first few hours of reacquaintanceship, it's all talked out. The relationship will go on like this forever, I suppose.

Our women friends are puzzled, a bit jealous perhaps. "Why don't you and Jed just get it on together?" one said to me. And, another time, "You won't do things for *me* when I ask, but you'd bend over backwards for Jed. What *is* it about you two?"

This riled me, and I went to the file of his letters, which I never throw away. I found one letter in which he refers to me marking student papers in the staff room, in Kenya. "You were able to sit there, and get the goddamned papers marked while the rest of the faculty was exchanging ridiculous gossip. I envied you your concentration, that you could isolate yourself in a public space and achieve your objectives." It's himself he's talking about, not me. I've always been distracted by any fly on the window.

In another letter, he writes this: "The happiest and best relationships, am I wrong, seem to be those in which the roles are not constantly being renegotiated but which have been defined, not perhaps fairly, but defined, and the thing works, like a hinge on a gate, it functions."

* * *

I called Jed up last year. I hadn't seen him in two years, and because he can never be bothered to relate the details that are mundane to him but informative to anyone else (job? companion? births and deaths?) I couldn't imagine his life; and I wanted to know right then. It was midnight, and I was drinking wine. I dialled, thinking "3 a.m. in Vermont — so what," and got the "not-in-service" tape.

"Oh shit, he's not dead is he?" The last I knew he was happily reconciled with his second wife and had bought a house, and was working his butt off for an environmental agency that even paid him a little.

Information had another number, so I called it, and he answered on the third ring. He sounded muffled, drugged.

"Are you alright," I said.

"No man, I'm not alright."

"What's the matter?"

"Anh," he said. "Anh, man, why don't you put your phone down and let me call you back. I'd like to talk with you."

"Go ahead and talk," I said.

"I mean a long talk. Maybe an hour."

I said, "Talk."

He said he was exhausted, terribly tired. That's why he had sounded drugged. Everything had gone wrong, and he was losing the war on every front. The grey presences were winning.

"I'm forty-two years old, man! I don't have a marriage, I don't have a house, I don't have a job, and I don't have any money."

"Where are you?"

"You know where I am. I'm in Vermont. *You* phoned *me*, man."

"Jed, where are you *living*?"

He brushed the question off, and started telling me again about his father's death. I asked again, and he brushed me off and told me all his friends had "crapped out" on him. He said I was the only person left in the world with whom he could claim friendship.

"That's only because I'm three thousand miles away," I said. "If I was there, you'd probably say I'd crapped out too."

Jed laughed, for the first time.

"Where are you *living*?"

"Man, anh, I'm living in a room. A decent couple. They paint their fence. I rent a room in their house, and they're sleeping in their bedroom down the hallway. They have a garden, with rose bushes, you know?"

I asked him to think, and tell me one thing in his life he would like to change right now.

First he said he'd like a job. Then he said that wasn't the problem; he'd like to have a sense of direction, for the future.

"Well, Jed, you quit teaching school in Vermont because the Vice-principal took the door off the girls' can, so he could look under and see they weren't spending too long standing in the cubicles."

"Do you *believe* that, man! I'm not going back into teaching. It's all about repression, and they're probably still doing it, goddamn flag in every classroom."

I felt I had him on the assertive.

"Alright, Jed, so where is your project? Theatre, environment, politics, what's it to be?"

"Listen, man, I'll tell you something. I always find a project, that's not the problem." He spoke rapidly, and his voice rose. "It's not my father's death, or a job, *you know what it is*?" It was as though we were back years ago in Africa, Jed pacing back and forth on the living room carpet, and the dog going at his ankles. But it wasn't. At the other end of the phone, in Vermont, it was 3:30 in the morning, with a decent couple lying in bed down the hallway, Jed yelling into the phone:

"The problem is, I like to FUCK!"

"I know, Jed, but — "

"I mean, I LIKE TO FUCK SOMEONE WHO LIKES TO
FUCK!"

"Yes, but — "

"SOMEONE WHO LIKES TO FUCK *ME*!"

I imagined the decent couple's eyes, bulging wide as soup spoons
into the darkness of their bedroom.

"Jed," I said, "Listen, is there a dog there?"

"What do you mean?"

"Is it barking?"

He laughed his big American belly laugh.

"Listen," he said. "I've got a story to tell you."

VERSIONS

When an ignorant person becomes enlightened, where will the clever one then go? He will be in trouble! — traditional Kiswahili saying (from a speech of Jomo Kenyatta)

Their names have not entered mainstream history: Kahuthu, son of Kamau; Mwema, son of Kinuthia; Ngungu (also given as Ndungu), son of Kibaki (also Kidaki) . . . and the other eight. They died at a place called Hola, at a Detention Camp for hardcore Mau Mau detainees. “Hardcore” meant a total refusal to co-operate with the white officials and their black warders. They had taken their oath, and they stuck to it, despite the fact that the fighting was all over, Kenyatta languished in a remote jail, and detainees were being repatriated to their now tranquil villages. It was 1959. Still these hardcore, these *hika-hika* resisted their captors, refused to work as instructed. One day, ten of them died. Later, an eleventh.

What caused the deaths? Contaminated drinking water? Scurvy? They “willed themselves to death”? Which is the version we can trust? (The uncertainty about the name of Mr. Ndungu/Ngungu could possibly be related to the pathologist’s report: “. . . cerebral contusion and laceration of the Pons and Medulla.” Perhaps he tried to give his name and his speech was slurred. Perhaps not. There are many stories, and for each story, different versions.)

* * *

On 11th April 1960, one year after Hola and some three and a half years before the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya became independent, the British Governor and Commander-in-Chief, Sir Patrick Renison, KCMG, wrote a foreword for an official report entitled *Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau*, by F. D. Corfield. With the weight of his plumed office, Sir Patrick commends Mr. Corfield for "zeal and industry," and "such an attractive style [that the Report] makes absorbing reading." Corfield's own brief preface outlines his "formidable" task: "... I have found it necessary to examine almost every aspect of the social, economic and Governmental problems which arise when a new civilizing influence impinges with suddenness on a primitive people who had stagnated for centuries." Heavy words, after a heavy task.

Eight years before, Corfield, then 50, had retired from a long official career, including Governorships in the Sudan; he was living in the Nairobi suburb of Karen, and had already been put to work on another report for the Kenya Game Policy Committee. He was well educated (Cranleigh School; Exeter College, Oxford, Honours in Natural Science), and the Governor says frankly the Kenya Government "was lucky to be able to obtain his services." The Corfield Report, Sir Patrick declares, "supplies an answer to the oft repeated question 'why did it all happen?'"

* * *

Law-abiding by nature, I've always secretly admired those ill-disciplined persons who must scrawl their heartfelt comments in the margins of library books. As I turned the pages of Vancouver Public Library's reference copy of The Corfield Report (their other copy has mysteriously disappeared), I found, to my surprise, no graffiti. Twenty years ago, when the Report was published in Kenya, my black students tore the school library copy to pieces — literally, I found pages ripped and scattered under tables and chairs on the cement floor. On the other hand, certain white friends set the book on the mantelpiece like the Bible.

("Any of those English Labour Party MP's come nosing around now," I can hear my father saying, "tell 'em to read The Corfield Report.")

But then, as I was walking to the Reference desk to trade back Corfield for my ID card, I glanced again at the Table of Contents. Above a crude arrow which points down through all the Chapter headings, some hand has pressed in blue ballpoint, nearly tearing the paper: "ALL JUNK!"

So much for the official version.

* * *

The year that Corfield was published, I began to notice in marking my weekly Form Four English compositions (free choice of topic) the emergence of an unfamiliar stereotype — unfamiliar to me, anyway.

"Europeans consider dogs more important than people. . . ."

"Do not to go near a whiteman's dog or he will kill you. . . ."

("How?" I wrote in red, in the margin of the latter exercise book, and got the answer the following week: "With a gun.")

"Where do you get this idea about white people's dogs?" I asked one class.

"It is well known, suh."

My own small Sealyham wagged his stubby tail throughout the school grounds, much petted and played with, and lay, at that moment, curled asleep on the rubber foot scraper by the classroom door. I wondered how the stereotype had arisen.

"Must be the Poole case," Simon Kithenge suggested, in the Staff Room. I realized at once that he was right, though the details had gone fuzzy, since that was the year I was meandering round Europe and the papers were full of Kennedy vs. Nixon. Poole lived . . . where? A Nairobi suburb? Or a country plot?

Imagine that the feet of women walking to dig their gardens in the early morning have worn a path across the corner of his lawn. Imagine that Poole puts up signs, plants a Kei-apple hedge, pushes wattle stakes crosswise into the ground — all to no avail. So he leaves his Alsatian or Doberman loose. The women arm themselves with sticks. At six one morning, somebody beats off the dog. Standing in the doorway of his house, in slippers and dressing gown, the white man shoots the woman dead. It could happen as clearly as that: a faceoff of cultural logics:

"We walk to the gardens singing, at dawn, along the natural contours of the land."

"You angle round my property line, by God, or you pay the consequences!"

the gardens, the land vs. *my property*

"And is it true," I asked my students, "of all white people?"

"It is true of all those who have dogs."

"How about me? I have a dog."

"Oh suh! That is not a *dog*!" ("White people . . . such jokers!")

* * *

Poole went to jail for life — or, no, I think they hanged him. That's something I'd better research in the library. I'm sure there's an official version of the event, and its wording and composition may nicely (precisely) fit the times. After all, white men have killed black women before in Africa, many a time, and not hanged for it; not even gone to jail.

("At that point, the deceased lost control, and, giving every appearance of succumbing to the witchcraft she believed to have been practiced on her, she advanced towards Mr. Wilson, wildly swinging a sharpened panga, and ululating in the tribal manner. Despite two warning shots fired over her head, the woman showed no sign of abeyance but closed ever more frenziedly on her victim. Mr. Wilson stood his ground, and called on her repeatedly in Kikuyu to stop where she was, but in vain. All other measures having proved useless, there was no alternative save the shot fired in self-defence, aimed low, at the woman's knees. Mr. Wilson escaped, badly shaken, but unharmed, and the woman unfortunately succumbed to wounds, and died that night in the Fort Hall Hospital." District of Fort Hall, Inquest Case No. 9 of 1923.) Well . . . that was in 1923, long before the Official Version of things could come under hostile, nit-picking scrutiny from people like the British Labour Party MP's. Wilson was a gentleman, and had behaved like one in the face of savagery. To his credit — commented the Coroner — Wilson, "Bwana Tumbo," as he was affectionately known among his labour and the neighbouring farmers, went to visit the woman's father after the incident, to express his profound sympathy, and his readiness to assist the family in any way possible. It is not disclosed why the woman was upset in the first place. "Witchcraft."

Poole . . . 1959/60, with Uhuru on the horizon . . . it's a different kettle of fish. Circumstances change; official versions keep pace with the times.

* * *

The Official Version — and those who wrote it. Who were *they*?

Imagine, if you will, a neat Preparatory School classroom in England in the dead of winter 19— (or, for that matter, 18—, or even 17— . . .). Methodically, the split-nibbed pens dip into small ceramic wells and scratch away. Latin translation, “versions” (O.E.D.), under the watchful eye of “Ruggles” or “The Beak,” M.A. (Oxon.).

“Corbett Minor.”

“Sir?”

“Read your version.”

“Yes sir. ‘Meanwhile Labienus, having been badly wounded by the arrows of the barbarians in a former battle — ’ ”

“ ‘Former battle?’ ”

“Previous battle, sir.”

“Did I invite you to speak, Satterthwaite?”

“No sir, I’m sorry sir.”

“Then wait until you’re asked. But yes, you’re right. A ‘former battle,’ Corbett Minor, would be a battle that *was once* a battle, but that is *no longer* a battle. Now it’s become something *else*, a tea party perhaps, or a bowl of goldfish. Yes, ‘previous’ is the best word. Quiet everyone, and continue please Corbett — no, *you* go on, Satterthwaite.”

“Yes sir, ‘previous battle, now commenced a fresh assault on the rabble.”

Oh Caesar, Tacitus, Livy! Who could have imagined the training for which your complex syntax and diction would be used, centuries later? The playing fields of Eton may have been vital to some functions of Empire; those snot-nosed scribes in the Latin class had their part to play too.

* * *

Actually, it was a common term among us as I grew up. I remember sentences spoken under arched eyebrows (in which there was the intimation of other, more privileged knowledge) : "The *Official* version is . . ."

And when Michael Battersby was pulled from his desk on his sixteenth birthday, for training in the Kenya Regiment, followed by Special Assignment, it came to us down the grapevine that he was on the detachment assigned to guard Jomo Kenyatta and co-accused at Kapenguria during the trial. When he came to visit the school, on leave, we asked: "What is it like Mick? Do you put leg-irons on them at night?"

"Well, that may be the official version. Actually we leave the bloody cells wide open."

"Why?"

"Ah man, British justice is such slow bullshit. 'Shot whilst trying to escape' would be one hell of a lot quicker and more to the point!"

(*There's* an official version that might have changed the course of history.)

* * *

It used to puzzle me, growing up, that we did not speak about the times with one another. I could go months at school or at home, and have no intelligent conversation with my brother, parents, or friends about current history. We talked of arrangements for a trip to Lake Naivasha, or how Geoff Bompas saved a friend from a leopard and a buffalo in Longonot crater, or whether Halex combs were really unbreakable as claimed, or whether it was better to kill a dog that you had run over, or try to save its life. Which rugby team was going to win the Enterprise Cup, Nondies or Eldoret? Was the East African Safari Rally muddier this year than last, and did you know Gordon Gobie would've won last year if some fool hadn't tipped a can of water into his gas tank by mistake?

But you did not ask questions like: "What is going on in this country?" "Who exactly are the Mau Mau, and why are they killing people?" If you tried to discuss such a subject, emotions flew out of control, and, as often as not, you'd end up with a cut lip (or, as happened with my Great-Aunt, a stinging slap across the face that I can still feel several decades later). So we remained silent. Collectively, we were like Conrad's Winnie Verloc, the anarchist's wife, who took the attitude that "things do not bear much looking into." Leave it to the adults, to discuss in private. Even the adults' motto was: Wait till the official version comes out.

So, one element of Kenyan society gasped with relief at the appearance of Mr. Corfield's report, with its assurance from the Governor that it supplied an answer. And another element ripped it to pieces. "ALL JUNK!"

(I wonder who wrote that, in the Vancouver Public Library.)

* * *

The content of The Corfield Report is predictable. The Agikuyu's pre-revolutionary war, or War of Independence, is put down as a savage and ill-conceived rebellion, in which oath-crazed peasants are manipulated by sinister political extremists who got out of hand. The words "rife," "insidious," "fanatical" are sprinkled through the pages like pepper. What did take me by surprise, reading it now, is the specific focus that the report adopts. Not so much "what happened" or "why," but "how did it happen without the Government stopping it?"

Corfield's Terms of Reference were:

"To examine and report to H. E. the Governor on —

- (a) the origin and growth of *Mau Mau*, including the circumstances which permitted the movement to develop so rapidly without the full knowledge of the Government;
- (b) any deficiencies which made themselves apparent in the Government machine."

In other words, "How did they do this to us and get away with it?" and perhaps implying: "Can we prevent it next time?" No wonder he found the task formidable! The Government of Kenya, with the Colonial Office keenly peering over their shoulder, had put to Corfield the key question about the British empire: "Looking at this rebellion, can you say whether or not we can stop the rot? Must Empire end, or can we learn to tune the machinery more finely, and so keep the remaining colonies?"

What is the official answer? Poor Corfield never does answer. For three hundred pages in the (shortened) published version, he documents and records oathings and meetings and letters from X to Y, and every now and then breaks out in loathing ("The hard core of fanatical Kikuyu nationalists . . ." etc.). We get a version of "origin and growth" alright, but how it all happened "without the full knowledge of the Government," and the "deficiencies" in the "machine" are questions beyond Corfield's reach. (Perhaps he had wrestled with their prototype, years and years before, at Cranleigh School, or Exeter College, Oxford: "*In a well-reasoned composition of five to ten pages, argue ONE side (but not both) of the proposition: The British Empire is finished.*" I can see the poor boy squirming, longing to ask: "Sir, could we possibly have a *choice* of questions?" but not daring.) Maybe he would have been happier back on the Kenya Game Policy Committee. Or maybe not. After a full life of Colonial Administration, perhaps it was satisfying for him to sit down and blast "the natives." ("*Mau Mau* . . . was developed by Kenyatta as an atavistic tribal rising aimed against western civilization and technology, and in particular against Government and the Europeans as symbols of progress.") Perhaps he believed that his report would seal the fate of "the movement" as he calls it repeatedly, and keep the country still, at least until he lived out his days in Karen.

If still alive, Corfield would be 81 this year. I wonder what memories he might have of his "formidable task." The compilers of Kenyatta's official speeches graciously praise his work as an administrator; but as for the report: "It is doubtful whether any more pretentious document — or anything more blatantly fraudulent in design and conclusion — could be found in all the archives of Government sponsored appreciations. . . . Corfield made a fool of scholarship, and of himself."

As for Sir Patrick Renison who contributed the supportive preface, the British kept him on as Governor for a while. Then they began moving Kenyatta through graduated stages of release. From his isolated incarceration at Lokitaung in the Northern Frontier District, he was shifted to Lodwar, and then Maralal, where he was permitted family and political visitors. Renison couldn't stand it. He went on the radio and we all heard him denounce Kenyatta: "This leader to darkness and death. . . ." But soon, Jomo was out and speaking to mass rallies. He marched right into the wasp's nest of white opinion, at Nakuru, where he addressed a crowd of settlers and got a standing ovation. The suave and modern Sir Malcolm Macdonald took over as Governor, and adapted so well that Kenyatta personally asked him to stay on as British High Commissioner after Independence. Kenyatta was elected Prime Minister, then President. "Let us not dwell on the bitterness of the past," he said. "I would rather look to the future." With 13,547 lying dead and 3,595 officially wounded, it was a reasonable sentiment at the time.

At the Uhuru Day ceremonies, the moment of transition came when the Duke of Edinburgh handed to Kenyatta a thick, symbolic, buff-coloured book entitled *The Instruments of Government*, which the President then raised aloft to the cheering multitude, before beginning his speech ("This is the greatest day in Kenya's history, and the happiest day of my life . . ."). But as we all stood cheering in the stadium, I saw the blond Duke lean down and whisper in Kenyatta's ear. There is no official version of what he said. But according to the unofficial version it was one of the most deliberately silly remarks ever credited to him. The Duke is said to have said: "Are you sure you don't want to change your mind?"

* * *

Don't believe everything you read in the newspapers, we say, believing still. (Why else read them?) Here's a story from March 1959: *Vancouver Sun*, *Toronto Globe and Mail*, *New York Times*, *The Times* of London . . . I've checked about a dozen microfilms, and they all carried it.

REUTERS Nairobi. An inquest is to be held into the deaths of ten Mau Mau detainees which occurred yesterday (March 3) at the Hola Irrigation Scheme camp on the Tana River in the Coast Province of Kenya.

The men were in a group of about 100 who were working on the digging of furrows in the Hola Irrigation Scheme. The deaths occurred after they had drunk water from a water cart which was used by all members of the working party and their guards.

Two of the men collapsed and died at the site of work, and the European officer in charge immediately stopped all work on the site and returned the other detainees to camp, all who were suspected of being ill being taken in a lorry. Eight more detainees died either in the lorry on the way to Hola hospital or very shortly after arrival there. The matter was immediately reported to the European Medical Officer, who is regularly stationed at Hola, to the Police, and to the local Magistrate.

For those who remember the story, let me ask, How was your understanding altered by any subsequent story, or by reflection? (25 words or less) For those who don't remember it, What in your opinion happened?

While you're writing, I'll put another log in the pot-belly stove and read through some Xeroxes from the Vancouver Public Library of the transcript of the enquiry into the Hola incident. For once, the British Labour MP's won. They made such a hullabaloo that an enquiry *was* held, and eventually a new official version replaced the first ones. I didn't have enough cash on me at the library to Xerox the whole report, and it interests me to see which of the 217 pages I picked to copy and study. They all seem to have the words "subcutaneous haematoma" on them. "Fractured patella" runs a close second.

Well, what is your answer?

* * *

They didn't know what to do with the "hardcore" detainees at Hola. Stuck out in the arid semi-desert north of Lamu, will against will, the white officers with non-Gikuyu warders, and over two hundred *hika-hika*, about a third of whom were defined as "recalcitrant." More than 77,000 detainees country-wide had been repatriated, and camps were closing rapidly. Still, these hardcore at Hola were adamantly non-co-operative. Nobody could get it through to them that the war was over. A stalemate, and the mercury in the hundreds, day after day, and no rain.

Chap arrived from Nairobi to look the situation over, and decided it was a bad show. Local Prison Superintendent acquiescing in what amounted to a sitdown strike! Chap from Nairobi'd run across this sort of obduracy before, and he had a technique to recommend, break the impasse.

"Problem here," he told the Superintendent, "these bozos are bound by their oath, 'not to assist any European' *etcetera*, and 'if I break it, this oath will kill me.' They truly believe this rubbish they've sworn themselves to, grant them that. Don't look on it as a problem of breaking them down; instead, help them break the power of the oath."

"How do you propose we do that, sir?"

"Split them into groups of five, ten warders to a group, two to a man. Run 'em down the road a spell, order them to dig, or weed or something, but hands only, no tools. Naturally, they refuse. Then — and here's the beauty of it — one warder on the left, one on the right, you have your men put their hands over *their* hands onto the weeds, Pull 'em up! Doesn't take long, five, six weeds in my experience, they *realize* they've broken the oath. End of their morale old chap! Broken the oath, they're going to die. They give up. Weeding, digging by hand, what you will.

"Big thing Gerry, is: get 'em to do what they've sworn they won't. Co-operate with Europeans. Whole spirit and power of the thing gone. This is '59, old man! Psychological approach."

In preparation for that day, the Superintendent warned the warders there would be resistance, and later, the court of inquiry paid scrupulous attention to finding the exact words that he had spoken in his orders. The court made him say it in English, and then in Swahili: "*Piga yeye, lakini hapana piga kabisa*," pigeon for "hit them, but don't hit them completely."

In later evidence it comes like this (in capitals, still pigeon) :
“*KESHO ASUBUHI SAA MOJA TUTAPELEKA MABUSI
KAZI NA NGUVU NA KAMA NA KATAA TUTA PIGA
MIGUU NA AMBIA ASKARI YAKO KAMA WATU NA
KATAA KAZI PIGA MIGUU AU MIKONO LAKINI SI SANA.*”

“TOMORROW MORNING AT SEVEN, WE WILL TAKE
THE PRISONERS TO HARD LABOUR, AND IF THEY
REFUSE WE WILL HIT THEIR LEGS, AND TELL YOUR
WARDERS IF THE PEOPLE REFUSE TO WORK, HIT THEM
ON THE HANDS OR THE LEGS BUT NOT TOO MUCH.”

Well, I haven't finished my story yet, let alone applied to Sir
Patrick, Knight Commander Saint Michael and Saint George to help
me out with a Foreword. But the drift is there.

It interests me how the medical people tried in a deadpan way to
protest — or is that my imagination? A *post-mortem* pathologist,
examining someone who's supposed to have died a few days before
from poisoned water puts in a list like:

“Dissection:

Head: Subcutaneous extravasation of blood 6 inches by 3 inches over
forehead above eyes.

Chest: Anterior bruising over sternum 2 inches in diameter near the
supra-sternal notch.

Posterior: Extensive subcutaneous and intramuscular bruising with
haematoma from shoulders to buttocks.”

Isn't he or she trying to signal a message?

You go back to the Press Release and read the bland phrases: “all
who were suspected of being ill,” “the matter was immediately
reported,” “the men were in a group of about 100,” and the very
reasonableness of the language smells worse than the stink of the
truth.

* * *

The Hola incident occurred on 3rd March and the press release, attributing the deaths to drinking water, appeared the next day. The *post mortem* reports are dated 9th March (the bodies had been flown to Nairobi and frozen). One after another, these grisly, scientific descriptions of bruised and battered corpses accumulate into a scene of terrible violence: shattered kneecaps, fractured ulna, frothy fluid in the trachea, broken teeth," "death due to shock and haemorrhage." Many of the warders were from tribes traditionally hostile to the Agikuyu detainees.

On 12th March, the Department of Information issued another press release — the official version begins to slip a little: "The medical reports indicate that there were injuries on the bodies which may have been due to violence." "*May have been due to violence!*" Jesus Christ, how else do kneecaps shatter, and windpipes fill with blood, and teeth break? A slip while weeding? (One witness suggested that the knees might have been "grazed" while the bodies were being taken in the back of a lorry over a bumpy road to the mortuary.)

At one point, they found a couple of live prisoners with bleeding gums, and when the Medical Officer named the condition as "minor scurvy" the camp officials leaped at the chance. "Scurvy, scurvy, not drinking water!" That didn't work. Ten or eleven people don't suddenly die together of bleeding gums. They had to find an official version that would stand scrutiny, and it eluded them. It reminds me of an old High School Principal standing on the touchline calling out "Finish well, School!"

Perhaps the most revealing paragraph of all is in the Prison Superintendent's first report, commenced at 1:30 p.m. on the day of the incident, and signed before a CID officer at 9:15 p.m. that night: "At approximately 1230 hours, Mr. COUTTS arrived in the District Officer's office whilst I was present talking to Mr. Marsden, and reported that some of the detainees appeared to be 'willing themselves to death,' by literally falling on the ground and apparently dying in his presence after drinking water." And "other than this," he says, "I have no idea of the nature of the illness which caused the deaths."

Stubborn bastards! "Willing themselves to death." And to compound the insult, right "in his presence." Volitional suicide, without the decency of waiting till he'd gone to have his lunch.

Ten Gikuyu men and one Turkhana died. Nobody was ever charged with their deaths. When the final report of the court of inquiry came out, the Camp Superintendent was given early retirement, with benefits.

A year later, Mr. Corfield issued his report on Mau Mau ("... when a new and civilizing influence impinges with suddenness on a primitive people..."). By the time it was published, he had returned to England, where he retired once again.

Sir Patrick Renison ultimately achieved Cabinet rank in the British Parliament. The Conservative government appointed him Minister of Sport.

* * *

Postscript: I wonder where I dreamed up that story about the women trekking off to work across Peter Poole's "property." A figment? Or did it come from a student's composition? After hours in the microfilm section of the library, I make the following correction: it wasn't a woman Poole shot, but his "houseboy."

Poole was a Briton who had gone to Kenya in 1953 to fight Mau Mau. On October 12th, 1959, his wife came and told him that the houseboy was throwing stones at the dog ("dogs" persistently in *Newsweek*), and Poole (28) went out and, in due course, shot the man. At the trial before an all-white jury (a *second* jury, because the first had to be dismissed when a juror stood up before the evidence began and declared a conscientious objection to any guilty verdict, and the trial had to begin again), Poole pleaded self-defence. He was convicted and sentenced to hang. Appeals, all the way to the Privy Council, got nowhere, despite one ingenious lawyer's argument that since the proceedings had been stayed once, because of the objecting juror, it was improper to have continued without going right back to repeat the preliminary examination.

Poole languished in the Nairobi jail, awaiting execution, while his family returned to England. His wife flew out to visit him, and he is reported to have spent time writing letters to his young children and friends. A petition circulated, begging Governor Renison for clemency, signed by black, white and brown races. Even Tom Mboya, while declining to sign himself, declared that he would not urge fellow blacks to refrain from adding their names to the petition. The London *Daily Sketch* used an entire front page to cry out: "**STOP THIS HANGING!**" But they hanged him anyway, at 8 o'clock one night in August, 1960. By one report, his body was "heavily shackled" when it fell through the trap door. Round the world, the headline announced that for the first time in Kenya's history, a white man had been executed for killing a black. One anomalous reporter observed that the crowd which gathered outside the prison gates on execution day consisted mainly of Asians, "many accompanied by small children."

Poole — and Hola. You wonder about the connection between the cases. A year before Poole hanged, the Hola inquiry closed, with no charges pressed. The London *Times* reported the British explanation, off the floor of Parliament: "SIR REGINALD MANNINGHAM-BULLER, Attorney General (South Northants, Conservative) said that murder was a foul and terrible crime and the colour of a murdered person's skin did not reduce its gravity. [*Why bother to mention that, you wonder.*] It was a terrible thing that as a result of March 3, 11 detainees met their death. It would seem almost certain that some if not all of them did so as a result of illegal blows, but as some of the violence used by the warders at the site was justified, it was not possible to establish that any particular injury was the result of any particular blow. (Opposition cries of "Oh.")

"It was not possible to establish that any particular injury was the result of an illegal blow, that any particular death was due to the use of illegal force, or that any particular person struck an illegal blow."

"Murder by death" then. Sir Reginald probably read *Julius Caesar* at boarding school, and knew the effectiveness of collectivizing a murder. No such "particular" loopholes existed for Poole. In another time and another place, he could have pleaded demon-possession, or simply, "The woman told me to do it."

An interesting comment appears in *Africa Digest*: "Probably one of the strongest reasons why the Governor, Sir Patrick Renison, was unable to accept the petition for clemency signed by 25,000 people was the fact that seven Africans were recently hanged for the death of a European farmer, Mr. John Hutson. There were at least as strong grounds for commuting their sentences since Mr. Hutson did not die until many months after their panga attack on him." No petition for them. No *Daily Sketch* front page.

As for me, I have the privileges of a Canadian immigrant and citizen now. And if I spend my time in the libraries of Vancouver, poring through old official reports and microfilms, that is because, after all these years, I want to be able to know and say finally what in the hell was going on, not that constant lie from the officials, but a version I can trust.

