

Title (up to 20 words) - A Daughter's Journey

Strapline (up to 40 words) - How far would you run for safety?

Copy (between 900 and 1000 words) -

"*Mama*, what is happening?"

Breathing heavily, Akinyi clutched her faded rag doll. She turned her dark head of curls back towards the gathering space in the heart of her small village, just visible through the wafting blue cloth that served as a curtain.

Shrill screams pierced the hot, still air; light footsteps of women slipping into their tents mixed with wails from new-borns. The ground shook with a rumble of tanks.

"*Mpendwa*, we must leave." Jana was grateful that Akinyi was no longer a toddler. They'd have a chance.

"But why?" Akinyi didn't understand why her mother was so eager to leave their comfortable abode, especially in the lazy heat of the afternoon.

"Hush." Jana said. Grabbing Akinyi's hand, she gazed with watery eyes at her home. She checked that she had her money, a large canteen of water and containers of *ugali* and *githeri* in her knapsack.

They left through the back flap of the tent, noticing that the rumbling had stopped. Sadly, Jana nodded farewell to the sparse clusters of women with their silent kin. A single wail pierced the air.

A deafening crack blasted in Akinyi's ears. She stumbled as her ears rang.

The wailing was silenced.

Placing a finger to her lips, Jana pointed at the distant mountains. "Not too far," she mouthed.

As they darted away, Akinyi's eardrums vibrated with screams and the echo of bang, bang, bang. Her heart thudded rapidly in fear- *that could have been me* – but also sorrow. Akinyi remembered playing with her neighbour's smiling, gurgling baby. She swallowed.

An expanse of low, flat land stretched out before the duo; the grass was short and yellowed by the sun's harsh rays. The unmistakable Ngong hills marked the capital, Nairobi. Jana had heard that the hills were a safe place to hide.

Tugging at her mother's hand, Akinyi gestured to the ground, indicating that she wanted to rest; her vision had gone hazy with the heat. Firmly Jana shook her head. There was no cover – nowhere to hide if another tank came by. Wiping the sweat from her brow, she held Akinyi's hand and they moved forward.

“What is that, *mama*?”

Jana froze.

Concealed by the shimmering heat, approximately a mile ahead was a line of khaki-patterned tents; uniformed *mzungu* men marched freely in the open space, the sun turning their necks a blistering red. A few stunted brown olive trees, barren of any leaves and olives, lay to the west of the camp.

Pointing to the trees, Akinyi started quietly towards them. Sighing, Jana hoped the officers would be distracted. They ran, light-footed, to the nearest tree; they crouched.

Akinyi's heart pounded desperately against her forehead. She was too hot, too tired, too scared. Wishing to be back at home, she recalled the times when her father bounced her on his knee whilst her mother sang lullabies, smiling into the cooking-fire.

The last time Akinyi saw her father, he was being dragged out of her home by a handful of officers.

“Speak up!”

Wincing, Jana saw that a Mau Mau rebel had been tied to a tree by a *mzungu* officer, the sun hitting his face. Stubbornly, the rebel sat mute.

“Perhaps bullets will make you talk,” the officer grumbled, marching to a central tent in the camp.

Before Jana could take another breath – before she could move – Akinyi had slipped out of her iron-like grip and untied the ropes for the man. A weathered face stared dubiously at her.

“*Mtoto*, what are you doing here?”

Her heart wrenching in her chest, Jana darted behind her daughter. “They attacked our village. Come; we are heading to the hills.”

The man shook his head, "I must take care of my *ndugu* in the camp. I won't abandon them."

"Who are you?" A rough voice called.

The rebel shoved Akinyi behind him, hard. She fell. Once again, a crack like a clap of thunder roared in Akinyi's ears.

The rebel collapsed to the arid ground.

"I had a daughter just like you. Go," he croaked, "go."

Leaping up, Jana grabbed her daughter and raced through the sparse trees, hearing the revolver being reloaded.

Another bang.

Akinyi yelped: the bullet had whistled past her ear. Her blood froze. She sprinted, ignoring the odd twig biting into her feet and the relentless heat of the sun.

"Hurry!" Jana gasped.

Reaching the foot of the hills, they paused briefly before bolting towards the back. They saw a steep path leading to the summit. Mercifully, the sun was setting; it was cooler.

Jana gave some water to Akinyi and gulped some herself. Akinyi raised her eyes up. Wordlessly, she began to climb, no longer drained by the heat.

"We could have saved him." Akinyi whispered.

"I know, *mpendwa*. I know." Jana's eyes filled with tears. "He saved you."

Akinyi said a silent prayer for him.

Mosquitoes buzzed. Soft crackling noises drifted towards them.

"A fire." Akinyi said.

Jana smiled. Up ahead, a small, steady fire burned – as they approached it, shadows emerged with cries of delight and relief.

"You made it!" A neighbour grinned, bracelets jangling. She pinched Akinyi's cheeks.

"Just in time for roast chicken," someone laughed.

"There's someone you should meet." A friend of Jana's said slyly.

A familiar figure developed through the shimmering haze of the fire. Akinyi ran to it, throwing her hands around her father who bent down to embrace her.

“Absko!”

Jana joined their group hug.

“I’ve missed you, *baba*.”

“I’ve missed you, *binti mpendwa*.” Absko smiled.

“How did you escape?” Jana asked.

A solemn light glittered in Absko’s eyes. “I was lucky. Word spread of a safe haven and after planting trees one day, I leaped the fence.” He shuddered. “I have seen men do things I didn’t know men could do.”

“We’re safe now.” Akinyi said.

“We are, *mpendwa*.”