

**From Book 1 of *Babilon Falling* by Billy Kahora: Mrs Karoki, 1994**

The photographs she had put them all over her bedroom floor.

... she arranged them into the goodie stories of her shudren and she started to remember since she'd returned from Mathare Mental Hospital. In one firstborn 'Kang'a's stomach stuck out from under his striped T-shirt. She wrote *Kang'a, age 12. Blueband kwa mkate boy and advertising for the TV.*

Another one of daughter Fi proud and unsmiling like her father and Mrs Karoki remembered her friendship with Night the girl from 419 across 499. *The family of Night went to America and now Fi has gone there. What is the connection?*

Kabugua, even as a toddler why did he have such a strong bull neck? That made her suddenly think of the lion that had come into their lives and changed him. After a very long time all she could manage was – *What is the Time Mr Lion Muruthi.*

Behind them in the photograph she could make out a picture of Jesus with yellow hair on the wall with rays of sunshine from the heavens it was all around him. Jesus is the Head of This Household. She quickly upturned the drawer and all the albums spilled on the floor.

Jesusistheheadofthishouseholdjesusistheheadofthishouseholdjesusistheheadofthishousehold

... with the photographs now everything started to make sense. In one was the wild rose bush that she had brought from Matuko. She touched it and for the first time she could feel something in her fingers because they were no longer rock-hard. She had stopped taking the Mathare medicines dawa-ici. The bush was still young and full of life. Mrs. Karoki went to the bedroom window and looked outside. There was now a ka-small pawpaw tree in the front yard that was no more a garden because later Kimundu had poured cement over the soil. But it was goodie she could remember. And she wrote *Corrugation.* What did it mean?

... as she found many more photos of her beloved Kang'a from before Mathare and they remembered everything for her the Matuko well in her flowed and could not stop.

There was Kang'a when he was one-year old and was still Njenga Karoki – a round-headed brown baby with a ka-small body. When they still lived near State House. 'Fi' as Baby Fiona –

born three years later – dark, her lips in a funny shape like she was blowing hot porridge to make it cool. Pretty and already frowning three years later when she was one year old and was already her father's daughter; Gerald Kabugua Karoki – a giant of a baby born four years after Fi in Buru Buru Phase One Hse no 107. In that house of ill-gotten gains that had belonged to her sister Hannah Mrs Macharia.

And with life in her fingers feeling their photograph faces and remembering. Then, another of all three taken a year after they had moved to 499 outside in the compound. Kang'a was thinner growing into a big boy, with still an unsmiling Fi and the pride that she had inherited from her father that grew every year and Kabugua now a toddler who everyone called Jerry Mouse after the cartoon.

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Mrs Karoki struggled to turn the Toyota to the right because all those years of turning left came back to her. To the left was the route how many times she had driven Fi and Kang'a to Kilimani Junior when they had just moved to Phase Five. Every day escaping Eastlands glory glory but then the shame of returning every evening. Kang'a and Fi they would both sit at the back to keep them safe from the matatus on the road. Kang'a was already too clever that boy and he would start laughing and laughing and she would ask him what is it what is it. And he would ask why she was holding the steering wheel like she was milking a cow with both hands like cucu Euphebia. And then in later years Kabugua started nursery and he was still called cartoons Jerry Mouse and he was also in the car and the other two thought they were too old to sing and so he would join her.

I am Happy Today

So Happy

In Jesus Name I'm Happy

I am Happy Because He Has Chosen To Take Away My Sins.

At the City Stadium roundabout, the policeman in long shorts stopped her almost every day. One Monday morning (she remembered exactly because of the photographs) he walked over to the car and Kabugua continued singing and he waved them on and never stopped them again. Kabugua asked her whether the policeman was building the nation. Jenga-ing the nchi. He

then asked whether the long line of men walking towards Industrial Area were building thenation even if they had not gone to school? This is what Mr Karoki had told them every morning when he had driven them to school before they had two cars. At this Mrs. Karoki remained silent. Buildingthenation. buildingthenationbuildingthenation. His words were stuck everywhere in the car for many years.

When Kabugua said the policeman has shorts like his, Kang'a looked up and said something in the new song-language he was learning outside 499. Mrs. Karoki looked hard at him in the rear-view mirror. No sheng on schooldays. It is not a proper language. She had learnt what this sing song was called at Moi Avenue where it was also becoming a problem.

But Mum, Kang'a laughed and said they are not called shorts. Zinaitwa kinyasa.

If you continue that language, she said, no break-time money. She started singing again looking at him in the mirror and Kabugua joined her and after a while Kang'a and Fi also threw their voices into song because she had said no break-time money and Mrs. Karoki was happy that Mr. Karoki's nation-building had been forgotten. But the shudren tired of singing near Kenyatta Hospital and Kabugua asked whether the car and the roads were in good shape. This is another thing his father liked to say on the rare days he drove them to school. Goodieshapegoodieshapegoodieshape. And again, because of Kabugua repeating his words they became stuck everywhere in the car. She suddenly felt very tired and for the rest of the journey the shudren kept on asking when they saw an old car whether it was in goodie shape. She stopped the car when they reached Valley Arcade and an old pick-up that was clearly not in goodie shape hooted at them loudly. She turned to the shudren and shouted I have a headache. If you want goodie shape your father can drive you tomorrow. And you can also build the nation with him. They'd remained silent till she dropped them off at Kilimani Junior.

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Yes, that's when she stopped being  
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could never remember what year.