

## **From Book 4 of *Babilon Falling* by Billy Kahora: Mr Karoki Engineer**

Now there were still all the small tasks to be done before elections. Wasps' nests to be burnt, new traps to be set, a fresh coat of whitewash to be applied to the house. This time before the polls was the worst. Because of the waiting he knew that it was only by keeping busy with all these small things that he would be able to decide what to do about the big ones. Mobilisation of votes here. Undermining of his rivals there. Bribing so and so.

Along the fence of the larger paddock the cows were now being sprayed. The animals turned to him with their stupid indifference, comfortable in his presence; they expected his visits every other morning and he walked along the fence reaching out patting one broad back now and then another with an easy familiarity.

His wife and mother of his shudren. Firstborn Kang'a had come to ask whether she was safe in the slums during the elections and the matter had become more elephant. He could not stop thinking that if anything happened to her the boy would never forgive him. Yes, this was the problem about this final period of waiting for the big moment. The brain it liked to play tricks. Find the biggest fears. Making one worry about nonsense things. Making self-created problems important for nothing. Or maybe it was because of the conversation he had had with his friend Kariuki WaJulius about her, the mother of his children. The first time laid his eyes on her he had known he had to have her. He had gone to see her father old man Mutonya her father for his good wishes – explain who he was and get a blessing for him and maitu to continue living on what had once been the Mutonya clan's grazing lands.

He had already been told that old Iram had become a man of the Book, and he was no longer interested in laying claims to lands as far Githaka-ini where him and his maitu lived as the Mutonya clan had once done. But then he saw the girl in the orchard, and she was like the beautiful Nyakio of legend. The thing to be done in such circumstances would have been to find a way to speak her and get her confidence. But he soon found out that her and her sisters never left their compound. Many might have preferred the other two younger sisters – they seemed sturdier. He eventually got an audience with the old man, and he was upfront without hesitation. He did not even ask about permission to stay on the mbari ya Mutonya's lands but just whether he could speak to the old man's third daughter of course supervised. He gave his credentials. Road Engineer Trainee. He was also a man of book. But the old man was sly; he sent him away telling him to make something of himself first. He was not worried about that. He was just about to finish his Engineering course at Kenya Polytechnic. After the years of working on the muthungu Kokoro road where he'd learnt the trade few in these parts had a future as bright as his.

