

What Love Has Done  
By Elizabeth Cain

8

NOVEMBER

The first real cold began to seep into the cracks in the house chinking and in the barn at the edges of windows. The horses grew shaggy with winter coats; down jackets and insulated work clothes lined the hooks on the outer wall of the tack room. Hank informed Susan and Kivuli at the dinner table that he couldn't take the remaining guests that had signed up, admitting he was exhausted handling the wild horses and gathering cattle from the high pastures that were already threatened by snow. Susan got up and massaged his shoulders, saying he worked too hard just like his father had, that she remembered Julian weeping with fatigue during the last year of his life.

"I miss my father...so much," Hank said, and he put his head in his hands.

Kivuli thought instantly of all the years her father had searched for his father and had grown up without him. And her mother, of course, had never known her father. So many years without fathers who might have saved them some grief. She looked at Hank and asked him what she could do to help. He told her she could be in charge of blanketing five of the horses when the temperature dropped below zero. After her homework was finished, he added.

A few days later, she rushed to the barn after school as the gauge plummeted. She did Lazo and Tom's grulla mare; they were easy. Then she struggled a bit with two of the spoiled dude horses, but she got it done. The last horse was a challenge. He was not mean or scared, just determined not to have that *thing* on his back. Kivuli would sling it over his shoulders, and the gelding careened to the back of the stall, leaving the blanket on the ground. Finally, she tied him up. He pawed and carried on until there was a huge hole in his bedding exposing the lowest beams of the paddock.

That's when she saw the marks in the wood. At first, she thought they'd been made by horses' hooves or the pitchfork, but when she knelt down to get a closer look, she felt faint. There was a crudely-etched heart with these words scratched inside: Hank and Liana forever.

*Oh my God. Oh my God.*

Kivuli pushed the straw back up against the stall wall and leaned against the horse. He seemed to empathize with her and let her finish buckling the blanket which she had finally gotten on his back. She felt stricken. It was just a long-ago trouble, a forgotten inscription, but the consequences still stabbed at them all. Then she wondered if Hank had ever seen it. Maybe it was just another fantasy of the woman who took his child. How could she sit at the dinner table that night with Hank and Susan?

But she did. She explained that her shivering was from the severe cold and the time it took to get the horses blanketed. She felt a little better after a couple of Susan's Indian tacos. Later that night, she laid out a black turtleneck, jeans without holes, and her new black boots to wear the next day. She piled two quilts on Askay's bed and wondered if she would ever get used to such bitter air or the discoveries of secrets that didn't belong to her.

The week after that, the debate team was scheduled to travel to Reno for a four-day event. Before she left, Kivuli made Thomas promise to blanket her five horses. She clutched his arm in a pleading way and said, "It must be you, Mr. Sentinel. There's a reason." He promised he would do it.

The topics at the event were hard for Kivuli, and she stumbled on an aspect of immigration. The life of undocumented immigrants was a tragedy in the whole of Africa where hundreds of thousands of refugees constantly streamed across borders ahead of terrorists, revolutionaries, and the next drought. How could choosing a new, friendlier country, if there was such a thing, be illegal?

Her emotions got the best of her, and she couldn't speak very convincingly. Her team lost that round.

"Hey, Kivuli!" Trace said as he caught up with her for the lunch break. "Cheer up. The next topic is gay marriage!"

But Kivuli had already declined to debate that topic. Trace won with personal testimony about his life with Tim and Stuart. It seemed more convincing than anything Kivuli could say. At the end, Ochala High had enough points to make the state finals in January. Mr. Glen said with emotion that it was the first time his team had done that. He even hugged the boys. He didn't seem to know what to do with the girls, or maybe he was just being respectful of the rules. A few girls shook his hand. Kivuli hung back, unsure of herself. She and Mr. Glen had hung back from each other since that day in his classroom when she had flung her arm around him. Her heart raced a little thinking about it now. She had not expected there would ever be this much feeling between them.

The night Kivuli got home from Reno, it was minus thirteen degrees. She made it to the barn and was surprised to see four of her horses already blanketed. The fifth, in the stall with the illicit heart, was not. She tied the horse and managed to place the blanket on him with the first try. With her boot she kicked away the loose bedding and looked down at the bottom board. It had been sanded clean.

Kivuli had only been home from Reno two days when she went back to see Liana. Trace had to wait in an outer room at the prison because it was too cold to sit in the car. Just before she went through the heavy door to the visitors' room, she heard Trace talking to one of the men about the musical, *Head Over Heels*. The guard was telling Trace that his daughter was a member of the dance ensemble, but the big door locked behind Kivuli, and she didn't catch any more of their conversation.

Liana was already sitting at the bare table. She was handcuffed.

"You just don't give up, do you?" Liana said.

"Too much pressure for you?" Kivuli asked.

"You are an interesting child."

Kivuli pulled out the metal chair and backed it a bit further away from the place where Liana sat glaring at her with eyes as hard as the furniture. She sat down.

"Since I've seen you, I've kissed a girl," Kivuli told the woman.

Liana's eyebrows went up, and she folded her shackled hands together on the gray steel.

"You are a surprise a minute," she said.

"Well, don't get excited. I didn't like it."

"Was it a pretty girl?" Liana asked.

Her mouth softened and even her eyes.

"Yeah. But she has a girlfriend. She was just trying to prove a point."

"Which was?"

"I'm not gay."

"I could've told you that," Liana said. "You mean you didn't know yourself?"

This was not the conversation she wanted to have, but she guessed she had started it.

"I knew. But Sunny didn't want me to go to the girl's house."

"What'd Sunny say?" Liana asked. She suddenly sat up straight, and the whites of her knuckles showed in her clenched hands. Liana always became anxious when Kivuli used Sunny's name.

"She was afraid the girl might hurt me," Kivuli said.

"But you might have had some fun," Liana said.

Kivuli felt frustrated and tired. "I think I'm losing the battle here. I had so many ideas of how things would go when I first came to see you, and none of them are helping anyone."

The prisoner drummed her fingers nervously on the table. She seemed to have a catch in her throat, but she managed to say, "You're wrong, Africa." She paused again and glanced at the officer. "You're helping *me*."

"They must have upped your meds," Kivuli said.

"Actually, they reduced 'em to see if I could handle regular therapy. I think I can only handle being me because I know a real good person like you hasn't given up on me. A person who was willing to kiss a girl to figure me out better."

Kivuli started to interrupt, but Liana waved her hand.

"Oh, I know, I know, you were trying to figure yourself out...and maybe your mother, right? But I'm still the missing piece to one of your puzzles. And I appreciate it, Africa," she said. "I've never been anyone's missing piece."

"There's something else. Speaking of missing pieces," Kivuli said. "I had one of your stabs deleted. Just for the record."

"What're you talkin' about? I can't throw a stab too far from here."

"But you left one in the barn at the ranch. Won't hurt anyone now."

Liana's eyes widened, and her face blanched. She tried to stand, but one arm was cuffed to the table. The guard yelled at her to sit down. She collapsed in the steel chair as if she had been deflated from the inside out.

"You got me, Africa," she said. "I thought that little ol' heart would last longer than any of us, longer than my real heart, for sure."

She actually smiled then as if she didn't mind that the joke was on her.

"I wish I had erased it, but I didn't," Kivuli told her.

"Who did it then? Who cancelled the best part of my whole life?" Liana asked, some of her fire returning.

"Thomas Heart-of-the-Hawk Sentinel—Sunny's husband."

"Hah! Serves me right, I guess. Better than justice, I guess."

"I thought so. But I believe the best part of your life is ahead of you, Liana. What do you think?"

She looked Kivuli right in the eyes, maybe for the first time.

"I think I'm going to prove myself to you," she answered.

"I don't think I'm the one you need to prove yourself to," Kivuli said.

"Well, I'll start with you and see how it feels."

The woman and the girl stared at each other across the divide of age, the choices they had made, and the locked cuffs.

Kivuli spoke first. "If I was sure there was a god, I'd ask him to help you."

Liana laughed sharply.

"Oh, there's no god, just a little ol' African girl who lied to get herself in here," she said.

"Blessings have come from stranger things," Kivuli said.

"Well, aren't we a pair—damned and holy at the same time."

"It seems so."

The guard came to get Liana. Kivuli stood up and turned toward the exit.

"I wouldn't do it again, Africa," Liana said to Kivuli's back. "I mean, take the kid. She was so scared. Sometimes I was glad I had Dog to help her through."

"Dog?" Kivuli faced the kidnapper again.

"My German shepherd, a not-too-distant relative of the puppy I stole from Hank. But that wasn't the dog's name. His name was *Paraíso*," she said.

"A Spanish word?" Kivuli said. "I don't know that one."

“Ask around.”

The minute she got outside the prison with Trace, she asked, “What does *Paraíso* mean?”

“Paradise,” he said.

Paradise. Something on Kivuli’s mind all week. Someplace everyone wanted to go. But if everyone could be redeemed, then everyone would meet again—killer and killed, abuser and abused. How would that work? Since she had no answers, she was glad to see Father Azenwa one night at a church dinner. She had gone with the Sentinels because Julia said she wouldn’t go unless Kivuli did.

She watched Father A as he circled the room and finally chose a seat at a table with only one other person. Just as Kivuli pulled out a chair next to Azenwa, the man recognized some friends and went to greet them.

“That was too easy,” Kivuli said.

“Looking for me to be alone at a church dinner?” he asked.

“Hoping,” she answered. “But I guess I shouldn’t expect you to be my personal confessor.”

“Do you have something to confess?”

Kivuli looked around the room and then back into the priest’s eyes.

“I’ve seen Liana.”

He didn’t look shocked at all, but kept his eyes on hers.

“How did you manage that?” he asked.

“It’s a secret,” she said.

The priest sighed and straightened a piece of his garments, and Kivuli was almost sorry she had told him. He probably had been hoping Liana was behind him, that maybe Kivuli wouldn’t be able to visit the prisoner.

But he asked in a resigned voice, “What did she say?”

“She said she’d never kidnap a child again. I don’t know if I believe her.”

“You should be careful, Kivuli,” he said, more sternly this time. “I think you’re playing with fire.”

“Like half the people I know, even the priest at St. Joseph’s,” she said.

“But you are still a child,” he replied.

Kivuli was feeling less like a child every day. There were still those unanswered questions that troubled her. She had to trust the priest with her darkest thoughts.

“My mother was only a year older than I am when she fell in love with Safina for real. That’s where the biggest fire began, right there in Arusha, mostly because Safina was sleeping with Mvua. And that’s where their biggest trouble ended—with Mvua in the fire pit at the coffee plantation.”

“What can I do for you, Kivuli?” he asked, as if not wanting to hear *those* details.

Kivuli knew this was not the best place to bring up these things, but she felt her year in America melting away. Father A was the only person with whom she could be herself. Azenwa pressed his hand to his forehead and then stared at a large crucifix hanging from one wall of the dining room. Maybe he was going to ask God what he should do with her.

“Go on,” he said.

“What if you don’t know whether something makes sense or not?”

“Do I want to ask ‘like what’?”

“Like me being friends with Liana,” she said.

“It might not make sense to most people, but then God is not most people. He may be working through you both, for a healing that has no other explanation.”

Kivuli searched her memory for the exact words. She closed her eyes. She had not eaten a bite of the dinner that had been served during their conversation; she wanted to tell this story right. The priest leaned forward slightly, waiting for her to speak as if no one else was in the room.

She opened her eyes and said, "One time, Safina's father, Dakimu, asked the priest how he would know if he were on God's path. Father Amani said that there would be a sight or a sound that had no other explanation. That night a wild leopard appeared at Dakimu's door. Then one time, my father asked Dak about God's way for himself, and Dak told him that story. In the afternoon, the leopard returned to our compound after a long absence, and he had brought his male cub. Don't you think this is a weird coincidence?"

"God is a great inventor of coincidences," the priest said.

But they could go no further with these philosophies when Thomas and Sunrose came over with their desserts and joined them.

"So what did you two have your heads together about?" Sunny asked.

"Whether a particular path one might choose is God's way or not," Kivuli said.

"Pretty deep discussion," Sunny said.

"Where better than at a church dinner?" the priest replied.

That night, Kivuli dreamed about Chui the leopard, who had died when she was seven and living in Dar es Salaam. The leopard's son, Jumanne, still hung around Shanga. In her dream, both leopards cavorted down the coffee tree rows. Rabbits bounded everywhere, but the cats didn't kill them. Then, there was Julia hugging Chui and Jumanne. "You let them go! You let them go!" she cried in the shimmering vision. In the background a smoldering slash pile flared up. The leopards began to pull something from the edge of the pit and stretch it between them like a rag doll. A ghostly Mvua shook off the gray tape that wrapped her, some of it hanging in strips from her burned body, and struggled to her feet with a savage cry. The cats slunk away, and the woman wandered off into the eucalyptus grove beside the plantation.

The winter sun broke through the window. Kivuli shook off the dream and thought about the coming day. It was Thanksgiving, an American holiday. She could smell celery and onions and sage. She could hear pleasant voices drifting from other parts of the house. The Roses were going to have their traditional meal without her because she was going to the Martins. She began tossing outfits on her bed and imagining conversations with Trace's dads.

When Trace invited her for dinner, he had said, "I've told my dads so much about you, they said they wouldn't believe any of it until they saw you in person!"

"Did you leave me anything to say about myself?" she had asked.

"Well, a *lot*, as you can imagine," he'd replied.

Kivuli chose something simple to wear, something that would complement Trace. He always looked just right wherever they went together. She would ask Susan if she could take some roses from the greenhouse, Askay's roses. When she went into the living room, Sunrose was sitting quietly on the couch, not taking part in the preparations.

"Where are you going today...in a very alluring outfit?" she asked.

"To her boyfriend's! To her boyfriend's!" Julia cried.

"We're just friends," Kivuli said.

"Do I know him?" Sunny asked.

"His name's Trace. He was adopted by Tim Long and Stuart Martin."

"Oh my goodness! I know Timothy quite well. We went to school together. I had no idea he maintained his relationship with Stuart. I was very close to Tim's first boyfriend, Andrew, and kind of hurt when they broke up," Sunrose said.

"Why did that hurt you?" Kivuli asked.

"I don't know. Changes of any kind back then upset me. And relationships were confusing to me. I wanted them to be permanent, stable, and unquestionable," Sunrose tried to explain.

"Yeah, me too," Kivuli said. "I thought your mom had told you about Trace and his dads, or that you knew them from St. Mary's, although they haven't gone in a while."

"Dads? They're married?"

"Yes."

"Well, good," she said. "People should heed their heart's calling."

"That's a nice way of putting it, Sunrose," Kivuli said.

Sunny's face lit up at that. Kivuli thought maybe the woman just needed to be appreciated more.

"Turn around. Let me check you out," she said.

As Kivuli twirled in her flowing silver blouse, black tights, and shiny silver boots, Susan came in, and she and Julia clapped their hands. Sunny made a thumbs-up sign.

The little girl sighed and said, "I can't wait until I have a boyfriend."

"Don't even think about it for about ten more years," Kivuli warned her.

"Why?"

"Don't even ask for about five more years," Kivuli said.

Julia put her foot up next to one of the bright boots and shook her head as if realizing it would be a long time until she could wear them.

"Kivuli, you'll need a jacket," Susan told her.

"I don't have one that exactly matches," she said.

"Oh, wait, I have just the thing!"

Susan returned from her room with a cape-like shawl. It was woven with strands of different kinds of yarn: blacks and purples and silver hues, with a border of long fringe of various lengths around the edge. "My grandmother made this. I've never worn it," she said.

"But why not?" Kivuli asked. "It's gorgeous."

"I had to say goodbye to her when I was eight. She put it in a box and said when I was older I would appreciate it, to wear it in her name, but I couldn't do it. I would just cry and wrap it up again. Some memories are like that. It pleases me very much for you to wear it. Looks somehow African, on you anyway."

"My grandmother Iyeala brought a loom with her when she came off the rim to live in Arusha. She made different kinds of sweaters for the orphans and useful items for the vendors to sell in her community, and a handbag for me. She also said those same words to me, that I would enjoy the purse later in my life. She had to give it to me when I was five because she was dying. I brought it with me, but I don't use it. It's hard for me to think of her hands on the yarn," Kivuli said.

She and Susan Rose looked at each other and gasped.

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" Susan said.

Kivuli flashed her a knowing smile and raced back to her room. She brought out the colorful handbag and held it out to Susan. "The best trade I've ever made in my life," Kivuli said.

The doorbell rang. Julia ran to answer it and jumped up and down when she saw Trace. He was standing there with an armload of flowers—chrysanthemums, gladiolas, carnations, and tulips—all white.

He entered with a flourish. "I brought some for everyone. They're from Stuart's greenhouse," he said.

Trace was dressed in pressed jeans and an indigo silk shirt with white, yellow, green, and black beads sewn in vertical stripes down the front. No one had the image that was in Kivuli's head—the Indian Ocean tossing the colors of the Tanzanian flag across its blue expanse.

Susan took the blooms. "You are a sweet boy," she said. And then to Julia, "Come help me with these."

Sunrose held out her hand. "I'm Julia's mother, Sunny Sentinel," she said. "Your father Timothy and I were good friends in high school, but we lost touch after I went to the convent. I'm glad he found what he needed...and found you, of course."

"Thank you, ma'am. My dad Tim has mentioned you many times. Maybe you could visit sometime, get caught up, you know?"

"I'll try," she said. "Julia keeps me on the go, and I'm still active in the Church. Why haven't I seen Tim and Stuart there?"

"You'll have to ask Father Azenwa," he said. "Something to do with the Church rules."

Sunrose hesitated and then said, "I'll ask Father A to suspend his rules as a personal favor to me, what do you think?"

"I think that would be very generous of you, but probably something the priest couldn't do," Trace answered. "We'd better go, Kivuli."

"You young people have a good time," Sunny said.

"Oh, wait. I want to cut some roses for your dads," Kivuli said.

"If there are some reds or yellows, they would be perfect. That's their theme for the day," Trace said.

"Yes, just the Tim I remember!" Sunny said. She smiled finally for the first time that morning. "I'll go find some for you."

Hank and Ace came in the front door.

"Trace Martin. You clean up good," Hank said. "Nice to see you again."

Kivuli remembered Mr. Rose had met Trace at the fair.

"And, Miss Tanzania, you look pretty good yourself," Hank added.

Ace wagged his tail.

"And who are you?" Trace asked with the good manners he had.

Kivuli answered for the dog. "I am Ace, for Flying Ace, an African hunting dog—no, really, I'm a whippet, but mostly I race in my sleep on the couch."

"Very funny," Trace said, and he stroked the brown and white coat. "We'll see you later, Ace the flying hound."

Sunrose returned with two red and three yellow hybrid tea roses.

"Oh, thank you, Mrs. Sentinel! Don't tell me their names. I'll see if Tim or Stuart can guess!" Trace told her.

"Okay. I'll bet they will," she said. "Now, have a wonderful day."

"Drive carefully, son," Hank said.

"Yes, sir," he said.

Trace and Kivuli were silent going down the long drive to the highway and then turning north toward the Crossroads. Kivuli looked west and let sundown fill her with light. It seemed to define the whole sky and everything she was feeling—layers and layers of the colors that made up her life. She let herself fall into the painting on the American desert, with the scent of red and yellow roses framing everything.

"What are you doing, composing a poem?" Trace asked.

"Sort of," she said.

"We're almost there," he said. "Are you ready for another first?"

"I'm ready for anything," she answered.

They pulled onto a gravel lane that led to a white-washed, sandstone house with a muted, red tile roof. Kivuli put one hand to her heart and cried, "Oh, Trace, it's just like our house on the coffee plantation in Arusha!"

"Really? It's a good desert house—warm in winter, cool in summer," he said.

"If I lived here, that's the house I'd want," she said.

The rays of the fading sun feathered the structure with ruby pink. They went through a sturdy gate. A German shepherd dashed across the yard to greet them. Another dog held back a little but appeared friendly.

Trace greeted the purebred-looking dog by name. "True Passion, here is my true passion—a girl from Africa," he said. "We call him Pass."

Kivuli punched his arm, and the other dog growled but wouldn't come closer.

"That one's part wolf," Trace said. "My dads were breeding for a certain shepherd bloodline but fell in love with a neighbor's captive female wolf and couldn't resist crossing the two. It's a very good wolf-dog, but the poor thing doesn't know who she is. We had to build this high fence to keep her in. Even so, she's escaped through the gate a few times when people aren't careful coming and going."

"But what is a wolf-dog, anyway? Is that like a farmer's or hunter's dog mated with a hyena or a jackal?"

"Kind of. I think wolves and dogs are probably more closely related than dogs and hyenas. It's a controversy anyway. My dads have some great books about the subject if you're interested," Trace said.

"Maybe Mr. Glen would let us debate about it," Kivuli said. "I'd always choose an animal issue over anything else."

"I wouldn't have guessed that!" he replied.

"I suppose it depends on my soap box of the day," she said.

"Let's see what that is when you leave today," he teased, then coaxed the reluctant female to her. "Miner! Come here girl!"

The wolf-dog trotted up and put her nose on Kivuli's outstretched hand, seeming to forgive her for hitting Trace's arm. Then she did a little dance in the air with her front paws.

"I knew she'd like you," Trace said. "She's good with people usually, but she's already killed a little rat terrier someone brought into the yard, not knowing there was a wolf there who was picky about who came through the gate. It's a hard life for a half-wild animal who doesn't understand her boundaries."

Kivuli had overstepped those boundaries herself recently. Maybe she was half wild too.

The dads came out on the front porch. "Hey, we live here too!" one of them called out.

Kivuli noticed one man was quite tall with short brownish hair and a welcoming smile. The other had wavy black hair and an athlete's body. Both were lean and fashionably dressed, she supposed, for desert-dwelling dads. The dogs leaped around them.

The tall gentleman leaned down and kissed Kivuli's cheek. "I'm Tim," he said, "and this is my husband, Stuart."

Kivuli handed them the roses.

"Oh my—*Beloved*," Tim said of the red rose.

"And *Sunny Sky*," Stuart confirmed the yellow one.

Trace and Kivuli exchanged grins.

"*'Sunny Sky*,' really?" Kivuli asked, the metaphor crashing down around her. Of course, now she knew why Askay had grown that particular yellow rose. And the red one too. But what she didn't know was whether or not her great-grandfather had started the yellow rose before there was ever a Sunny in the world.

"Come on in, girl from Africa," Stuart said. "Remind us of your name."

"Kivuli," she said.

"Which means?" Tim asked.

"*'Silence*,' in Swahili," she said.

"Nice," Stuart said. "I'm betting it doesn't quite suit you."

"You'd be right," Trace said, and he led her into the house.

In the living room were three gorgeous cats. Two hid immediately, but the third, lounging on the couch, rolled onto its back to reveal dark spots on a pale gold belly.

"Oh, you are a little Jumanne!" Kivuli cried. She put her face in the clean-smelling fur.

"Who's Jumanne?" Stuart asked.

"A leopard I grew up with," she answered.

"A wild leopard?" Tim asked.



“Oh, yes, but there were two of them,” Kivuli said. “But the first leopard that came into the Shanga compound was called Chui. He died a few years ago, and his son, Jumanne, took over as *mlinzi*.”

“Mlin...zi?” the dads said at the same time.

“Swahili for ‘guardian’,” she told them.

“A leopard guarding humans. I would like to have witnessed that,” Tim said.

The domestic cat purred and stretched out, half upside down. Kivuli caressed the feline and almost cried; she missed Chui and Jumanne. She didn’t think even people who were crazy about domestic cats could understand what those leopards had meant to her. Suzanna had told her how the older leopard would block the porch steps of the plantation house to prevent Kivuli, as a toddler, from tumbling down.

Stuart said, “Tell us more about your African life while we serve dinner.”

Trace and Kivuli pulled up chairs to a walnut table set with red and gold square china plates, gold utensils, and tall drinking glasses etched with three gold horizontal stripes. There were yellow, red, and white carnations in a milk-white pitcher and white linen napkins. Tim added the rose stems to the bouquet. It was so elegant and surprising Kivuli could hardly speak.

“If I were in the rural parts of my country tonight, I’d be eating on an oil drum under a grass-thatched roof. I might feel a raindrop on my face. I might be sitting on a stool made from woven leather scraps. If I drank from a glass, it most probably would not match the one next to it. Nearby would be sleeping hammocks with nets to block out the mosquitos. The dinner plates might be tin but sometimes ebony, if the tourists hadn’t bought them all that day.”

Tim filled the square red and gold china bowls with a mixture of baby greens, yellow tomatoes, cucumbers, green onions, pieces of avocado, crumbles of white cheese, and dried cherries. It looked more artistic than edible. Stuart offered a choice of dressings that matched the decor—red wine something and yellow-gold honey mustard.

“This is a fantasy,” Kivuli said.

They ate their salads. A sudden wind rattled the windows and then died away. The shepherd barked outside, and Miner began to howl in her unique way. Tim got up to see what had disturbed them. He came back and told them it was just a runner with a headlamp.

Stuart loaded their plates with garden vegetables, chicken dipped in egg and coconut bits, cornbread, and honey from local hives. The two scared cats reemerged and circled under their feet. Kivuli couldn’t resist putting small bites of chicken on the floor, and the cats rubbed on her legs. She thought again of the leopards and the way they bumped their heads against people’s legs for food treats. No one seemed to want to break the silence.

“Tell us how you like American school,” Tim said finally.

“It’s good. I like all my teachers, although I didn’t start off well with Mr. Glen because he didn’t have Tanzania on our study guide. I think he liked that I was outspoken about it, because he quite favors me,” she said. “Put me in lead position on the debate team.”

“He’s *my* stiffest competition, for sure,” Trace told them.

Kivuli grabbed Trace’s hand under the table. She preferred her easy relationship with him. She didn’t need the complication of a crush on a teacher, especially one who seemed to really like her back. But it was what it was. She took a few bites of cornbread with the golden honey and tried to relax. Being with two men who were married to each other was so new for her. They were extremely attractive and complemented each other in such a natural way.

“You live with the Roses, right?” Stuart asked.

“Yes. Oh, I’m supposed to say hello from Sunrose Sentinel! She’s glad you’re both happy,” Kivuli said.

“Sunny Rose,” Tim said. “I haven’t talked to her in ages. We were very close in high school, and I spent many weekends at the ranch. She taught me how to ride and let me hold her hand at school so no

one would guess I was gay. I missed her a lot when she went off to St. Mary's Convent, but I understood why she did it. That terrible woman surely damaged her sense of herself."

Kivuli didn't mention she had been visiting that terrible woman and that Trace was driving her to the prison. She didn't tell them about her mother and Safina. Perhaps she would before the year was over, but right then, she just wanted to be "American Kivuli" and leave the African part of herself, with all her own family drama, far from these lovely men and their settled life.

Kivuli ate slowly, wanting to draw out the meal and the conversation with Tim and Stuart. They asked her so many questions that it was easy to do. Then it was time for dessert. Stuart dished up homemade vanilla ice cream with strawberries from the Farmer's Market. He gave each cat a dish with some of the ice cream. The leopard-looking cat tried to push the others away, and a few hisses erupted under the table.

"They won't fight, will they?" Kivuli asked.

"Oh, no. Their whole life is one big game," Tim assured her.

After that, the dogs were allowed in, and they all moved to the living room with their second helpings of dessert. One of the dads had built a fire in the fireplace, and the room glowed with soft light. Trace got Kivuli talking about horses, but the dads were interested in her mixed heritage, so she had to allow Africa back into the room.

"I can tell you the simple story or the more complicated one," Kivuli said.

"Start with the simple one," Stuart said.

"My father is Maasai and my mother is British," she said.

"Oh, that's not nearly enough," Tim said.

"Well, my Grandmother Felicia, my mama's mother, was married to a British soldier, David Sommers, and living in Dar es Salaam. His father, John Sommers, had been killed in the sixties Massacre by a black warrior named Dakimu Reiman, when my country was still called Tanganyika. I have to go pretty far back to get it all straight."

"The farther the better for my taste," Stuart said.

"About three months before my mother, Suzanna, was born, that same black man murdered her father, my grandfather, David Sommers."

"This Reiman fellow killed your grandfather and your great-grandfather?" Stuart asked.

"Yes, but then, Felicia married a major with the British Air and Ground Patrol, Fulsom Farley, who felt sorry for her carrying the dead man's child. After Suzanna was born, Farley never told her that he was not her real father, nor did he ever tell Felicia or anyone that he'd been seeing a Maasai woman for many years, and that woman never told him she had borne two children by him."

"I'm trying to follow this, but don't ask me to repeat it," Tim said.

"One of those children is my father, Askari," she concluded, letting that astounding fact sink in before considering what else she might say.

The dads looked at each other as if their problems were nothing compared to what they were hearing from Kivuli.

"But how did the truth come out?" Trace asked.

"One night when we all lived in Arusha, the night before I was to be christened, my father found his mother, Iyeala, in a hut with Major Farley, and the next day, the major stood up in the sanctuary and revealed the truth to everyone." Kivuli hesitated, but only for a moment. "And in that church that day was the man Farley had hunted all across Tanzania for many years—the fugitive, Dakimu Reiman."

"Really? Is there more to this?" Stuart asked.

"Today my Granpa Farley and Dakimu are great friends," she answered, her strong redemption theory bursting in her heart.

"If only the whole world could discover that kind of forgiveness," Stuart said.

The silence in the room after that was not uncomfortable. Kivuli tried to think of questions she could ask the dads, things she could say to thank them or compliment them, but Tim spoke up.

"What about your grandmother's other child?" he asked.

The leopard-looking cat jumped into Kivuli's lap and she stroked it, wondering if she had meant to tell so much, but she answered.

"Iyeala's other child was a daughter after whom I was named, but my Great Aunt Kivuli was shot by one of Farley's soldiers when her partner wouldn't tell him where the fugitive was. Later my Granpa Farley caught that soldier, and he's still in jail."

"Wait. Her partner?" Tim said.

"A woman," Kivuli answered.

Stuart reached over and patted her hand. "Perhaps this is why you are the only friend of Trace's who has stayed more than ten minutes!"

"I like all the gay people I know, and I love two of them—my mother and Safina Pavane," she said. She had told them after all.

Stuart stared at her. "Your mother is gay?" he asked.

"Well, she's still married to my father, and we all live together. I don't have a lot of details to add to that, if you know what I mean," Kivuli said.

"Does it bother you?" Stuart asked.

"I've known about them my entire life. Their relationship hasn't been easy for them, or for my father, but real love makes up for a lot of trouble, don't you think?" she asked Stuart.

"It surely does," he said.

Then the only sound was the clink of spoons in the china dishes. Stuart got up and piled more logs on the fire. It blazed up, and Kivuli was grateful for it. She was feeling chilled, maybe from the ice cream, maybe from the convoluted past she was having to recall.

"But how on earth did you end up here, in Nevada?" Tim asked.

"Do you know who Askay is?"

"I do remember Sunny talking about an old African who had lived on the ranch and become a dear friend to her whole family," Tim said. "She was very young when he died."

"Askay was my great-grandfather," Kivuli said. "He left his family and came to America with Henry and Helen Rose. I'm following in his footsteps, to thank the Roses for loving him and to finish something he started but didn't live long enough to do, if he was ever going to do it."

"More and more mystery," Stuart said.

And they didn't know how deeply their son was into it. She would have to tell the rest of the story soon. Maybe they could help her. Maybe they knew something about Liana's Dog.

"Mr. Long, do you remember when Sunny's dad was breeding German shepherds?" she asked. She put her hand on Pass's head. "I think they had a sad history."

Tim brightened suddenly. "Oh my, Kivuli, there may be a happy ending. That boy right at your feet is a descendant of Hank's female Paraíso!"

*There are two Paraíso's?*

"I thought Pass was the grandson of a *male* from Mr. Rose's ranch," Trace said.

"Yes, that's true, a male called Dog. But Dog was the grandson of Hank's first *female* shepherd—the first Paraíso." Tim said.

Kivuli pretended to be confused to find out more.

Tim sighed. "Maybe it's not such a happy story. You see, I knew about Dog after Sunny returned from California with him, but she told everyone the kidnapper had called him Paraíso, so it stuck, and no one wanted to have to tell Sunny that the awful woman had poisoned Hank's original Paraíso years before."

"But shouldn't Sunny know about True Passion, at least?" Kivuli asked.

Pass turned his dark eyes up to hers, and Kivuli thought maybe Liana should know about him too. Even though she was warming up, it chilled her again to imagine that scene.

"It's hard to know what's best for people sometimes," Tim said.

"Hey, it's getting late," Trace said. "I should get Kivuli home."

Kivuli told the dads it had been the best night yet in America. She and Trace carried their dishes to the kitchen and got their coats. A sharp wind had risen, and they rushed down the walk. The dogs followed them to the gate, vying for their attention.

"I'll be back, you beautiful creatures. Dogs with *history!*" Kivuli said to them.

They had driven a mile when Trace said, "You are up to something now, I'm sure."

"Think so?"

"What's your plan, Miss Tanzania?" he asked.

"To see Sunrose, Liana, and True Passion in the same room," she said. "Oh no! That didn't come out right!" she said.

"You *are* crazy," Trace said.

"Just get me home, Indian," she said.

She collapsed against his shoulder, and he put his arm around her. It felt way better than Avery's kiss. She couldn't help wondering just for a moment how Mr. Glen had felt when she put her arm around *him*. Another unanswered question that might or might not keep her awake later.

At the ranch, a light was still on in the kitchen. Hank had waited up for her.

"How'd it go?" he asked.

"Those dads treated me like a princess...and you wouldn't believe how they can cook!" she said. "But the dogs were the best thing—a wolf-hybrid named Miner and a gorgeous German shepherd, True Passion."

"German shepherd?"

"You know, don't you?" Kivuli said.

"Know what?"

"That shepherd is related to Sunny's Paraíso," she said. "The one called Dog."

Hank looked at her as if he trusted her not to be just a kid anymore. Then he went to the coat rack by the front door, and came back with a black leather collar. He handed it to her. Engraved on a smudged, bronze nameplate on the frayed loop was the name "Paraíso." It didn't matter to Kivuli which Paraíso it had belonged to; Hank had let her into a special place in his heart.

Later that holiday weekend, Kivuli hiked out across the white fields with Ace tramping in her tracks. She had never been in snow in Africa, even though Mt. Kilimanjaro often had snow in the coldest months. She wanted to go all the way to the graveyard and talk to Askay, but it was too far, and she shouldn't attempt it alone. Of course, it would be too hard for the whippet, who had never fully recovered from his accident with the wild horse.

She circled back to the barn and went in to look at Helen's painting. The answer was there. What was the hand offering the disobedient colt? Maybe only the scared horse could tell her. Ace nudged her knee and pressed his nose into her gloved hand. The horses champed their hay, and chickens huddled in a heated pen. Why could she not find comfort in such simple things?