

## CHAPTER ONE

It was going to be a long day.

Kiprop could tell just by looking at the portion of land yet to be tilled. It also did not help that the sun was already out in all its fierce glory, burning down relentlessly on the dry earth.

“It is only 10am. How can it be so hot!” Kiprop thought to himself, wiping his already damp brow.

“Kiprop!” his father Kosgey called out from the other side of the shamba where he was tilling. “If you keep standing up, you will keep us here longer than is necessary. Get back to work. We need to finish tilling before the noon-day sun sets in.”

Saying nothing, but muttering under his breath, the lanky 13-year-old bent over and resumed tilling.

“Of all the things a person could be doing on a Saturday morning, working like a donkey in the shamba is not the most appealing,” he thought to himself. “I wonder what Koech is up to. I bet he is not slaving like me. He’s probably already at the bodaboda stage taking his riding lessons. How lucky.”

Kiprop considered Koech his best friend in the entire village. Never mind that the latter was 18-years-old. His friendship was however, a huge bone of contention with his parents who could not understand what the two had in common.

“You know that man dropped out of school don’t you,” his mother Chebet had once told him. “Is that what you also want for yourself? To also drop out of school and be a lay-about like Koech?”

“Parents! What do they know,” Kiprop mumbled to himself wishing for the millionth time that they would just lay off him and let him be.

“They are all over my business! Why can’t they just get a life? Or focus the same amount of attention on Kigen and Jepkoech,” he thought thinking about his younger siblings who were also a pain to live with.

Using his hoe to lift and move the red soil, Kiprop found himself day dreaming about being free from parental restrictions and not having to answer for his every move. He imagined having money in his pocket, being able to buy whatever was his heart's desire, go wherever he wanted and be with whomever he pleased.

Ahh..what bliss! Sadly, this was nothing more than a dream.

“These parents of mine are something else. I am surprised they even let me breathe. With the way they keep monitoring me, it is even a wonder they do not accompany me to the toilet,” he thought chuckling to himself, mopping his now damp brow.

Kiprop could feel the sweat trickling down his back and the tattered t-shirt he wore was now stuck to his body like a second skin. Boy it was hot! His hands hurt from the rigorous task and his throat was completely parched such that swallowing saliva was becoming an arduous task.

Throwing his hoe aside, Kiprop stretched his aching limbs and walked towards the spot where they had placed the container with drinking water. It was perched under a tree and the shade was a blessed relief for Kiprop who poured water into a cup and swallowed it in quick successive gulps.

A little trickled down the sides of his mouth and its cooling effect gave him an idea. Putting some more water into the cup, he poured it onto his head letting it run down his face and into his back. What a relief!

“I wish I could take a quick dip in the river right now,” he thought to himself.

Still lingering at the spot cradling the metallic cup in his hand, Kiprop watched his father hard at work and couldn't help feeling sorry for him. He let his eyes rove around their one-acre piece of land, resting on the tiny wooden shack they called home, and he felt pity on his parents that this was all they owned in life.

He heard his father sneeze and proceed to blow his nose, before standing up, hoe in hand, supervising the work done.

“I had better get back, before he starts with me,” Kiprop thought to himself and placing the cup down, he dragged his weary feet back to his spot and reluctantly picked up his hoe.

“This is not going to be the life for me,” he told himself. “By the time I am my father’s age, I will have made a lot of money, enough to hire as many farm-hands as I want. I am not going to be doing such back breaking work. This is demeaning!”

“This is demeaning” he cried out loud hitting the earth with such ferocity it caught his father’s attention.

“Kiprop, are you okay?” he called out.

“Yes.”

“What did you say? I heard like you said something?”

“It’s nothing dad, I was just speaking to myself.”

“Hmmm....” He heard his father say as he continued to till his part of the land, whistling a tune as he worked.

“I cannot be like him,” Kiprop thought to himself, shaking his head. “How can he find joy in doing such mindless work that keeps him, and us, poor. I just cannot be like him...”