

My Family and Home

I still remember the days when the sun rose upon a tranquil world, and beamed down upon the peaceful region of Kismayo like a benediction. And as I stood there his figure would emerge towards the daylight carrying a huge big fish. As he got closer he would say, 'Here grandchild, just for you'. I would lower my head down and almost cry then wish I had been given sweets instead.

With my grandfather, I led a charmed life. I was happy. He was a very wonderful, kind man. For me, the hardest part after his disappearance was waiting for any news that came about him. I prayed he was alright, for he was my only joy. I couldn't imagine facing life without the person who was closest to me of all. To me he was like my mom, dad and the best friend anybody could ever have.

That summer was bright and fresh, and brimming with life. There was a song in every heart, and if the heart was young the music issued at the lips. The evenings were long. It was not dark yet. Little did I know that that night, every corner and crevice was going to be thoroughly searched; that wherever one wandered through the maze of passages, lights were to be seen flitting hither and thither in the distance, and the sound of shouting and pistol-shots heard everywhere.

All the tedious night our family waited for news of my grandfather's whereabouts, but when the morning dawned at last, all that came was, 'He isn't found, he may be dead'. My mother was almost crazed, and me also. Relatives sent messages of hope and encouragement, but they conveyed no real hope.

Close upon the hour of noon the next day, there was a knock on the door. My uncle walked in with an embroidered head cloth — the very same one my granddad had worn whenever he went fishing; it was a gift from his only daughter. Mother cried over it. To her it was the last relic she would ever have of her father, and no other memorial of him could ever be so precious, because this one had been parted last from the living body before the awful death came.

It was a sickening shock. My grandfather was found in a terrible state, his body covered in blood and horrifying wounds. No one dared to imagine what had happened. Many couldn't believe that it was actually the work of their fellow human beings because only the devil himself could have caused such devastation.

Did I cry? I can't remember, but I must have felt that I had some kind of illness that would never be cured unless I died. Three dreadful days and nights dragged their tedious hours along, and the region sank into a hopeless stupor. No one had the heart for anything.

Every day or two during this time of sorrow, many wounded and more dead were brought back to their families. It was hard for them to believe that they had lost loved ones. Mothers would run out from their houses screaming, cursing those responsible. Children would fall down to the ground, grabbing their parents' hands, commanding

them to wake up. Pity would want you to give up your own life and offer it to that child's mother, wondering if the poor orphan would survive without her. There was not hope enough, strength enough either, for people were gone, not just for a second but forever. Forever.

Our region was suddenly electrified with the ghastly news. No need of the as-yet-undreamed-of telegraph; the tales flew from man to man, from group to group, from house to house with little less than telegraphic speed. People were moving. I wished I had a chance to feel that time again of peace, but I knew that I would only continue to wish. People were moving. The cheer that was once on every face disappeared. Only the trees were in bloom, and the fragrance of the blossoms filled the air. In my house, the situation was the same, everyone feared to stay. My mother, too, decided that it was better to leave. Although it was hard for her to even think of going away from the country that she had so dearly loved, it was more painful to see all her family slowly taken to death.

There was no turning back. We were hurt and my mother wanted to go forever. But what could she be crying about? Indeed, for us all it was like torture to leave the home we had all been born in and all the relations we had. It was never going to be easy.

Coming to the United Kingdom seemed like the only option, and to my mother it seemed like the only place that she was sure we would be sound and safe. For us all, the United Kingdom was a place that we only heard of before. We were scared and unfamiliar with most of the things going on in the country.

At first we weren't sure what to expect. The weather, for instance, was one of those things; we were used to living in a country where sunburn is a small price to pay for the dazzling, sunny weather, but now in the UK we had to learn to live with the damp, wintry seasons that seemed so unnatural. Also we wanted to fit in, learn about the culture and the people as well. But before long we settled down.

Today, only the memories of what used to be are left with me and to me that is a treasure that I will always cherish and keep. I thank God for every precious day I live, for I have happiness and peace too. I only wish that my beloved grandfather were here with us still, but I suppose he is with me; in my fond thoughts of him.