



# *A Bundle of Joy*

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In the witchy hours of night, Kendi stirs frantically in bed, her eyes forcefully shut. She had lost count of days and months altogether; in fact time as concept ceased to exist for her completely. She now stumbled through life in a lost daze, hoping sleep would descend upon her and end her misery.

She is startled awake when her younger sister suddenly whispers, “Kendi? When did things fall apart?”

Lying in bed, she slowly reflects on the string of events that led her and her younger sister, Raha, to sleep in foreign beds. These beds were in unfamiliar homes and smelled of familial bonding and love, the lack of which had unraveled the delicate fabric of their family.

It had to have been when that woman, with a bundle wrapped sturdily in her arms, came looking for Mama. Mama asked Kendi to bring a seat and a glass of water. The woman sat down heavily, thanked Kendi, and stared at the glass, not once touching it.

Mama came out to the verandah, greeted the woman in a cold voice laced with distrust, and sat on a low stool opposite the woman.

“*She is not from here*”, Kendi whispered to Raha, as they watched mama and the woman through the crack of the open door. “*Maybe she is a witch.*”

They spoke in low tones, Mama first, and then the woman. The exchange began to intensify when Mama raised her voice and stood up, her arms held akimbo, and wagged a fat finger at the woman face. *“Go back to where you came from! You will not bring this thing to my house!”*

The woman roughly shoved the bundle into Mama’s arms, cursed harshly in an incoherent dialect, spat on the ground, and left their home—disappearing into the waning embers of the evening sun.

It was then that the carefully wrapped bundle let out a sharp cry. Mama held the baby close and stood fixated for hours, waiting for Papa to come home. From their room, Kendi and Raha could hear mama whimpering: *“This thing has his nose, beb! This thing has this man’s nose.”*

The baby stopped crying but Papa never returned home. Kendi knew he had been warned; he was going to let Mama cool-off for a few days. He should have known better.

Over the following days Mama flew into a murderous rage. She wandered around the estate tearing at her hair, taking her clothes off, her hard tears running down her face to the nape of her neck and onto her bare breasts. The neighboring women ran to cover her—it was cursed for a woman to walk around naked chanting a man’s name in rage.

When she finally calmed down, she began to pack; reluctantly at first and then frantically, as if fleeing from an invisible danger only she could see. She took the Bible first. Kendi was not surprised: Mama would saw off her own hand if the preacher told her it pleased God. It came as no shock when she wrapped the Bible carefully and placed it in the corner of her bag. She did not take many clothes, only the kitenge which she wore to church and when visitors came.

With that, she balanced the bag on her head and briskly walked away from the compound. From the verandah, Kendi and Raha watched Mama until she disappeared into the horizon.

Papa came back two days later. Eyes heavy with guilt, he darted unnervingly across the room until he finally gathered the courage to ask: *“Where is your mother?”*

*“She took the Bible, the mwiko, her church clothes, and she left.”*

*“Did she say where she was going?”*

*“No.”*

*“The woman?”*

*“Mama screamed at her; she gave the baby to mama and went.”*

Papa stood fixated in the exact same spot Mama had a few days earlier. He too spiraled into a frenzy of worry and anger. When the delirium got the better of him, he too quickly exited the home. But he returned. With a can in hand, he ordered Kendi and Raha out of the house, scooped the baby up with his free hand and began pouring the kerosene around the living.

Kendi and Raha saw the smoke before the fire burst out the front door. The sun was a beautiful golden yellow, on its way to set for the night. Neither Papa nor the baby screamed or made a sound as the orange fire swallowed them whole.

Kendi turns in bed, moving as far to the edge as possible. She opens her eyes to rid her mind of the image of the charred remains of her past life. “I don’t know”. Meanwhile, her sister draws long deep breaths that cut through the night’s silence. She has fallen asleep.