

A Stranger in Newborn

**One Man's Journey in Search
of the American Dream**

Papa Faal

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Chapter One

The wind blew softly across the small town of Newborn, Pennsylvania. It was a sunny autumn day with no visible clouds in the sky. On Jefferson Boulevard, a faded yellow Ford Crown Victoria Liberty cab slowed down as it approached a blue-shingled Victorian-era house. The right taillight blinked on and off as the taxi pulled away from the road to park on the shoulder. The driver was an African American man in his sixties. His wide brown spectacles sat firmly on the tip of his broad nose; a black Stafford tweed ivy cap on top of his clean-cut head was complemented by a carefully trimmed gray beard. Although the outdoor temperature was almost ninety degrees, he wore a navy-blue lightweight jacket over a polo shirt, which was tucked inside his jeans. His belly encroached over his leather belt. He turned and looked at his passenger, who sat at the far right of the backseat.

Placing his right arm over the front passenger seat, he said, "Well, young man, this is it!"

The passenger, a young Kenyan man named Elimu Okara, looked at the driver and smiled. Clearly overtaken with emotional gratitude, he said, "I don't know how to thank you, sir."

"That is all right, my man. We are all God's creatures, and we must take care of one another. We must take care of those in need."

The driver reached for the lever by his seat and pulled it to open the trunk of the car. Both men got out and walked to the rear of the vehicle. Elimu's six-foot height dwarfed the driver's five foot two.

As Elimu stood next to him, handsome and tall, the driver looked at him for a moment and said, "You will be all right, my son; you will be okay." He reached for Elimu's bag, pulled it out of the trunk, and set it on the ground. He shook Elimu's hand and said, "You take care of yourself."

"Thank you, sir. I will." Before the driver could release his hand, Elimu said, "Sir, I do not even know your name."

"That's quite all right. My name is James Richardson."

"It is very nice to meet you, Mr. Richardson."

"You take care of yourself," Mr. Richardson said again as he released Elimu's hand and got back in his car. He slowly made a U-turn, rolled down the window, and waved good-bye.

Elimu stood and watched until the taxi disappeared around the corner. He looked at his small-town surroundings and suddenly felt out of place. Everything looked strange. Elimu looked to the right of Jefferson Boulevard and saw only a few people along the street. He looked down and grimaced. Reaching inside his pocket, he pulled out a piece of paper. He looked at the paper and then toward the blue Victorian house. His mind wandered as he thought about the stories his mother had told him about Robert Green. He thought of his home village back in Kenya.

Robert Green was a stocky, gray-haired Caucasian man who always had a passion for wildlife. As a child, he had frequented Newborn's zoo every chance he had. His favorite wild animals were lions, tigers, and zebras. He never shied away from professing his special connection with wildlife. Robert's wife, Martha, a tall, slim

blonde, occasionally complained about the excessive time Robert spent talking about or observing wildlife.

“Sometimes I think he is married more to the wild than he is to me,” she often said. Regardless, she loved him dearly.

Robert received his master’s degree and PhD in zoology from the University of Pennsylvania. He became a professor of zoology at the university and a member of the board of zoology at the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum.

Every year, Robert and Martha took a month-long vacation to Kenya for a wildlife expedition. They spent days in the wild observing the behavior of lions and cheetahs. He brought back multiple photographs, developing and displaying the best ones along the school’s zoology department hallway. Some he sent to the Newborn zoo for exhibition. When Robert and Martha’s daughter, Josephine, was born in 1971, they took a few years off from traveling to spend time with their new baby. As Josephine’s eighth birthday approached, Robert felt it was time for him to resume his yearly expedition. The long time off had taken an emotional toll on him. He often became anxious and restless for no reason.

One day, he came home tired from work, feeling as if his whole being had lost value. He entered the house and found Martha setting the dinner table as she did every evening.

“Hello, Robert,” Martha said.

Without a word, Robert walked past his wife and straight to their bedroom. He removed his brown blazer and hung it in the closet. He threw his tie to the floor and unbuttoned the top two buttons of his white shirt. He pulled his glasses from his face, placing them on the side table, and kicked off his black dress shoes, leaving them beside the bed. Robert threw himself facedown on the bed and placed both hands on the back of his head.

Martha walked in and saw how stressed he was.

“Robert, are you okay?”

“No, Martha,” Robert grunted.

“What is wrong?”

“I don’t know,” Robert said, lowering his voice. He sat up on the bed as Martha sat next to him. He turned and looked at his wife. “Martha, it has been a long time since we visited Africa. Do you think we will be able to do that this year?”

“I do not see why not. Josephine is old enough to travel with us. In fact, her birthday is coming soon. We could go to Africa for her birthday,” Martha said.

Robert’s face lit up as if he’d just received the greatest gift of his life. “That is a good idea!” he said excitedly.

“Is that the reason you were down?” Martha asked.

“Mostly, I’ve just been feeling empty and disconnected—as if a part of me were missing. It has been a long time since I visited the wild, and you know how it is important to me.”

“I thought Josephine and I were the biggest part of your life,” Martha protested.

Robert looked at his wife, smiled, and said, “Of course, honey. You know you are the best part of my life.”

“Aw,” Martha mumbled, and she snapped her face away from him. She looked back at him, leaned over, kissed him on the lips, and said, “I love you, Robert!”

“I love you, too, Martha. Where is Josephine?”

“She is downstairs playing.”

“Didn’t she know I came in?” Robert asked as he and Martha both stood up from the bed.

Martha turned to Robert and said, “How could she? You did not even respond to my greeting.”

"Sorry, Martha; it was one of those days."

"That's all right. Come on. Let's go eat. We are all hungry."

Robert walked behind his wife, out of the bedroom and into the dining area. Martha had already set the table for dinner.

"What's for dinner?" asked Robert.

"It's roast beef, vegetables, and mashed potatoes."

"Mmmm . . . yum." Robert walked to the dining table, pulled out a chair, and sat down.

The dining room was located next to the kitchen, with no walls dividing them. Although the kitchen appliances were old, they were well kept and clean. Martha liked everything to be neat. When cooking, she cleaned as she went along so by the time the meal was done, no dirty dishes were left in the sink. She continually cleaned the white-tiled floor, the counter, and the appliances while waiting for a pot to boil or a dish to cool down.

Martha walked toward the door leading to the basement and yelled, "Josephine! Josephine!"

"Yes, Mommy?" Josephine answered.

"Come up. Your father is home. Come, let's eat."

"Okay," Josephine said as she came running up the steps. She ran straight to her father, swinging her arms around him.

"Hi, Daddy," she said.

"Hi, sweetheart."

Robert hugged his daughter in a tight embrace and gave her a kiss. Josephine had on a blue-striped jersey dress, her blonde hair tied neatly behind her.

"How was your day?" he asked Josephine.

"Fine."

"Good," Robert said.

"Sit down. Let's eat," Martha said.

Martha scooped some mashed potatoes onto Josephine's plate and then Robert's. She did the same with the beef after cutting a few pieces from the roast.

"Is that enough?" she asked Robert.

"Yes, dear," Robert answered. Martha walked to the other end of the table and sat before serving herself.

"Let's pray," Robert said. They all bowed their heads and closed their eyes. "Oh, Lord, bless this food to our use and us to thy service and keep us ever mindful of the needs of others. Amen."

"Amen. Let's eat," Martha said.

During the meal, Robert turned to Josephine and said, "Honey, how would you like to go to Africa for your birthday? You will be out of school for summer holiday next week, and I have time off from work."

Josephine raised her head in excitement, her eyes wide open and full of joy. "Really?"

"Yes, really," her mother answered.

Josephine jumped from her chair, ran to her father, and hugged him. She then ran to her mother and gave her a hug, too.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you!" Josephine yelled in excitement as she sat back down. "I am so excited. This is the best birthday ever."

"Sure is," Martha said. "Now, let's finish eating."

The next day on his way home from work, Robert made a stop at the Maximani Travel Agency. As he walked in, a young man dressed in a black suit stood up from the front desk and said, "Good afternoon, and welcome to Maximani."

"Good afternoon," Robert replied.

"How can I help you today, sir?"

"I would like to buy tickets to Africa."

"I can help you with that. Come this way, please," the young man said as he walked to a cubicle behind the desk where he had been sitting. He pulled out the chair behind the desk and sat down.

"Please sit down. My name is Phillip," the young man introduced himself.

"It is very nice meeting you," Robert said.

Phillip pulled the drawer to his right and retrieved a book of travel coupons and a book of ticket vouchers. "Where would you like to go?"

"My wife and I would like to take our little girl to Nairobi, Kenya, in a couple of weeks. It is my daughter's birthday."

"Great!" Phillip said. "When is her birthday, and how old will she be?"

"She will be eight in three weeks."

"That is excellent," Phillip added. "Which airline would you like to fly with, when do you want to depart, and how long do you plan to stay?"

"Well, how about American Airlines, departing next Wednesday? We would like to stay for four weeks."

"Would you like to make a reservation for a hotel, as well?"

"Sure, but only for the first night."

Phillip called American Airlines and made arrangements for the family's travel. He then called his hotel agents and set up the family's hotel reservation.

"We are all set. The cost is nine hundred dollars for each passenger."

"That is fine," Robert said.

Phillip opened the travel coupon and wrote the necessary information on it before handing the booklet to Robert.

"Mr. Green, you are all squared away."

Robert pulled a checkbook from his pocket and said, "Who do I make it out to?"

"Make it out to Maximani Travel," Phillip said.

"Here you are," Robert said as he handed Phillip the check.

"Thank you for your business, and have a good trip."

"Thank you." Robert walked out of the travel agency, got into his white Ford Fairmont, and drove home. He pulled into the garage, grabbed his briefcase, and went into the house.

"Martha," Robert called as soon as he entered.

"Yes, dear?" Martha answered.

Hearing her father's voice, Josephine came running.

"Daddy!" she called and gave her father a hug.

"Hello, honey," Robert said as he hugged his daughter. He released her, walked into the bedroom, and placed his briefcase behind the door before sitting on the bed to remove his shoes.

"Martha, I bought our tickets. We leave next Wednesday," Robert said as he walked from the bedroom.

"That's wonderful. We must start packing."

"Not too early," Robert replied.

"No."

Martha set the table for dinner and then called Josephine and Robert to eat. They sat, ate, and chatted about their impending adventure. For the first time in eons, Robert seemed alive. He was excited for the trip after being away from Africa for nearly eight years.

The weekend prior to their travel, Martha spent the majority of her time packing.

Early Wednesday morning, Josephine woke and ran into her parents' bedroom. She found them still sleeping, so she climbed into the bed to wake them up.

“Daddy, Mommy,” she said. “It’s Wednesday. Wake up.”

“Honey, stop jumping on the bed,” Robert said.

“I am too excited,” Josephine said as she jumped on the bed.

“I know, baby, but you have to stop jumping,” Martha said as she struggled to wake up.

Martha got up to prepare for the trip. After showering, she brushed her hair and pulled it neatly behind her head with an elastic band. She dressed in her matching two-piece pink cotton pantsuit, adjusting her shirt a little as she looked at herself in the mirror. She looked at Robert as he slept.

Martha sat on the bed next to Robert, placing her hand on his shoulder, and murmured, “Robert, Robert . . . it’s time to wake up.”

Robert opened his eyes and looked at his wife. “What time is it?” he asked.

“It’s 2:00 a.m.,” Martha replied.

“Mmmm,” Robert mumbled, turning his head to see Josephine lying next to him. He rolled his fingers through her hair and softly said, “Baby girl.”

Martha walked to the closet and pulled a pair of black pants and a long-sleeved shirt from their hangers and placed them on the bed for Robert. She went to Josephine’s room, next to theirs, and picked out a cute blue dress from the closet and placed it on Josephine’s bed. She walked back to their room and said to Robert, “Please get her ready once you are done getting ready. I am going to make breakfast.”

Robert pulled himself off the bed and slowly walked into the bathroom to shower while Martha made scrambled eggs, waffles, and coffee.

“Breakfast is ready. Hurry up, or we will be late,” Martha said. A few moments later, Robert and Josephine joined her in the kitchen.

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Martha had already packed all the suitcases. At three o'clock, they loaded their vehicle and drove to Newark, New Jersey, where they were to catch their flight. By four-thirty a.m., they had boarded the plane headed for Nairobi, Kenya.