

Taji La Upendo- The Crown of Love

Tabitha Wangeci Gikingo

Once, there was a man called Gitonga who lived by the slopes of Mt. Kenya with his wife and two beautiful daughters. The daughters were called Makena (Happiness) and Nyambura (Rain). The mornings were icy and cold, but Gitonga worked extremely hard. As soon as he heard the chaffinch birds singing, he would get ready for the day, kiss goodbye to his beautiful girls, and set off to take care of the coffee plantation where all the red berries had to be picked. Every day was the same. The father would care for the coffee plantation and the daughters would go to school. In the evening, the father and his daughters loved to go biking. They would carefully ride down a path that led to the river. The father would fill his watering can, then water the tree seedlings with the help of his daughters. Then they would sit by the bank of the river and together loved to sing to the birds.

Kanyoni gakwa wee hitha hithe –
My little bird, little bird, kindly hide,
If you are seen, you don't belong to me.
Fly, fly, fly up so high,
Dance with the colours of the rainbow.

They would sing to the birds and then ride back home in time for dinner. Their Mama would prepare some delicious *irio*¹. They would enjoy the meal together, then go out to watch the moon before they went to bed. This was a magical moment for the girls. They would sit on their father's lap, listening to him tell a story while mama covered them all in a warm Maasai blanket.

One evening, as he narrated a new story, Gitonga placed a crown on each of his daughter's heads, made from beautiful jasmine flower vines. The story was about a man who loved his daughters so dearly that he gave them everything they wished for, and now the time had come for them to receive very special gifts. From the SUN they would receive warmth to warm their hearts every day; From the MOON they would receive the courage to light up their world every night as they slept; From the STARS, the gift of many friends and family, who would always love them for ever.

Gitonga then told Makena and Nyambura of a long-awaited journey for him to a beautiful place of no return. From here he would watch over them, unseen and unheard, and walk with them every step of their lives. The girls needed to wear beautiful invisible crowns every time they needed their father, and he would always be there for them, on their birthdays and on their graduation and every other special day.

That night, when the father put them to sleep, he placed the crowns by their pillow as he kissed their forehead for the last time and went to bed. That was the last kiss from Papa.... His heart made of gold stopped beating, and sadness filled their home. Every new dawn, the girls would wait for the warm sun to rise, and in the evening for the moon to light up their bed and for the twinkling stars to shine down upon them. From this time forward, Makena and Nyambura forever cherished all the beautiful memories. With courage in their heart, they faced every new day as Papa watched and protected his little girls from Heaven's Gate.

Kanyoni gakwa wee hitha hithe
My little bird little bird,
kindly hide, if you are seen,
you don't belong to me.
Fly, fly, fly up so high
Dance with the colours of the rainbow.

Tabitha Wangeci Gikingo is a Kindergarten teacher and mentor in Nairobi.

This story was written for two Kikuyu girls in Kenya (aged three and seven) written by their Aunty Tabitha. The girl's father had died suddenly of a heart attack a year before. Both girls loved birthdays and celebrations, and this helped guide the story journey. The story and the weaving of garlands, in loving memory, were shared with the girls on the first anniversary of their father's death. Tabitha reported that the gifts from the sun, the moon and the stars made such an impression on the two girls that 'they will forever be in their hearts'.

This story comes from the book from Susan Perrow, [*Stories to Night the Light*](#), published by Hawthorn Press.

¹ Irio is a traditional Kikuyu dish made from maize, potato, and greens.