

Chapter One

Like a hunter who stumbles upon a dead elephant in the forest and realizes that he's got no knife to cut meat with, I confronted my dilemma. Like the powerful beam of a blindingly bright flashlight, two choices stared me in the face. The first was something that I had traveled almost halfway around the world to seek. Now, it was being tossed at me, like a free lap dance. My second option was something I used to believe that a real man doesn't really need. Now, that I had it, I wondered how I ever survived without it before. Who was to blame? Araisha's father had only been the victim of a malicious plot, laid and hatched by a cold-blooded bitch whose ambitions occupied more space than her conscience. How could I choose? Making tough decisions about the future could be much easier if we dive deep into the ocean of past events. My story, therefore, began some years ago in a place where I never expected things to turn out the way they did. It was 8 o'clock in the morning when one of the uniformed guards marched up and opened the huge iron gates of the Embassy; a sign that the first interview for the day was about to begin. The air, that had been bitterly cold a few minutes before, suddenly became electrified, like a classroom at the commencement of an important exam. All around me, people were putting on their bravest expressions, in an attempt to disguise the mounting tension inside them, but their darting glances and perspiring faces betrayed these overt displays of false bravado. I braced myself and waited, trying hard not to look at the long queue ahead of me. The first person to be interviewed that morning was an old, bald and wrinkled man, who limped up to the guard and presented his passport as soon as his name was called. The tough-faced guard puffed out his broad chest as he peered at the document. Other visa applicants waited, and a hush descended upon the crowd. The guard ushered the hairless man in, with an air of utmost importance, as if his authority transcended the spot where he stood. The spell of silence was broken. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief, and general conversation resumed. Most of the people were arguing about the old man's chances of getting a visa. "I am sure they will give him the visa," a deep voice behind me boomed. "What makes you so sure?" A female voice countered, almost angrily. "Well," the baritone went on, "he is an old man, and what will a man like that want to immigrate to the USA for?" "You don't know what's going on in America, do you?" The female voice sounded scornful. "What do you mean?" "My sister who lives in America told me that she works alongside women old enough to be my grand mother, and most of them are immigrants. Everyone wants to live permanently in America." Like a street brawl, this argument soon turned into a great debate. More people joined. Some took the side of the man with the deep voice, while others backed the girl. The pros and cons of the outcome of the old man's interview were being tossed around like a verbal war. Without uttering a word, I kept my eyes pinned straight ahead, playing and replaying in my mind the possible questions the Consular Officer might ask me and trying to bring up creative, spontaneous and believable answers to them. I was so busy with my thoughts that I didn't even notice when everyone suddenly ceased talking. I snapped out of my reverie. A deep silence had taken over the atmosphere. I turned around to find out why. The old man was walking out of the gate slowly, slouching so much that he seemed to be bent double. He was carrying his passport and his face was twisted into a bitter mask of agony and disappointment. He had been denied the visa. Some people whispered that this was the third time this misfortune was befalling him. "I am sure they will give him the visa, where is the visa?" The girl mimicked the man with the deep voice, with a sneer on her face. By the time the guard roared my name, it was almost 3 o'clock. The cold morning had given way to a hot dry afternoon, and I was sweating profusely in the scorching heat. I wiped my sweaty face quickly with a handkerchief and approached the main door of the interview room, my heart pounding like a rhythmical bass drum. My tension was caused more by anticipation than by apprehension. I had an Admission Letter plus an I-20 Form from a very renowned university in America. My Bank Statement was ready, and I had even bought my ticket... oops reserved it. With such a complete application package, I was the personification of optimism. Why would anyone refuse to give me a visa? I marched into the room and took my place behind the transparent bullet proof glass partition. The Caucasian man with grey hair and thick rimmed glasses on the other side of the glass cleared his throat and asked to see my file. He spoke in a loud and clear voice, which came out of a speaker that was connected to the microphone in front of him. I resented the fact that he spoke to me in a deliberate slow drawl, as if he thought I was mentally retarded. This didn't bother me, though. I considered his attitude a mere drop of water in an ocean, compared to the visa which I was about to receive. When I came out later, I was almost paralyzed with shock. I had been denied the visa. The Consular Officer's unrefined, dawdling and annoying voice as he eyed me steadily while he counted out the bad news, rang in my head non-stop, like a faulty car alarm. "I- am- sorry- to- inform- you, sir, that- at- this- time- we- will- not- be- granting- your- request- for- a- visa- to- enter- the- USA (pause). We- have- strong- reasons- to- believe- that- you- are- not- qualified- to- visit- the- USA- at- this- time- for- the- purpose- which- you- stated- in- your- visa- application (another pause, while he adjusted the pair of glasses on his nose). You- haven't- demonstrated- enough- proof- of- the- fact- that- you- will- return- to- your- country- after- you- complete- your- education- in- the- USA. I- am- very- sorry (looking grave but not sympathetic)." I didn't wait for him to finish the last sentence. I just assumed that it must have been something to do with, "this- is- not- a- permanent- refusal, of- course- you- can- always- try- again- and- good- luck, blah, blah, blah." I gathered my documents and left in great haste. Once outside, nothing helped my mood. My mind went into hysterics. A thousand questions raced each other in my head making it impossible for me to think clearly. Why? Why? Why? I staggered around, dazed with disappointment and rage, looking for the slightest reason to justify what had just happened to me. Then, I heard some noises. Voices, so loud I thought my head would explode. "Dave! Dave!" I snapped out of my thoughts. It was my name, alright. Someone was shouting out my name. I didn't recognize the fat boy with the thick, bushy beard. He rolled towards me, grinning widely and waving a passport. I searched my pockets, thinking that I might have dropped my passport and he had found it for me, but my passport was in the breast pocket of my shirt. He was almost near me before I recognized him. "Peter? Peter Massango?" "Yes, it's me," he answered, laughing heartily. "What is...? What happened to you?" "I just got a visa to go to the USA!" Peter used to be my classmate in the University. But back then, he was so skinny that we even nick-named him "Walking Bones." "What happened to you, man? You look like you swallowed an elephant." Peter laughed

again, his body bouncing up and down like it was made from rubber and inflated with air. "You think I like being like this? I got fat on purpose. The bearded face is also part of the plan," Peter's voice dropped to a whisper. "What are you talking about? I haven't seen you in a year Peter, remember?" Peter scratched his head and pulled me by the shoulder so that his mouth was very close to my ear. His breathe smelled of spicy meat and mints. "Do you remember my twin brother?" "Yes, the one who won the DV Lottery and traveled to America five years ago?" "Yes, he has grown so fat since he arrived the USA," Peter hissed, "I don't know why they can't control the calories they eat over there," he added with a grin. "Man, you are confusing me. You blame your brother for getting fat but then you go and do the same thing?" "You know my brother and I are very identical but since he gained a lot of weight we don't look alike anymore." "So?" "So, the plan is that I want to travel to the USA and the fastest way to do this is to use his documents. That's why I got fat, so we could look like identical twins again." "Oh!" "Yeah," Peter chuckled, "My girl friend left me because I couldn't tell her the reason why I had suddenly gained weight. But who cares? I am going to the USA!" The last sentence was uttered with the kind of happiness that made his girl friend's decision look like the act of a prostitute who divorces her husband because she finds out that he isn't a virgin. "Congratulations, man," I said. "Meet me at the Recto Night Club tonight, let's celebrate. Drinks will be on me." After Peter and I parted, the irony of the whole thing hit me. I had admission to study in a university and my documents were all in order but just because I couldn't prove that I would return to my country after studying in the USA, I was refused a visa. My fat friend, on the other hand, just had to triple in size and impersonate his twin brother in order to get a visa to the USA. How could honesty be met with rejection while deceit triumphed in victory? Maybe it was true that the eggs we need to break in order to make an omelet mustn't necessarily be a chicken's. At that moment two men walked past me, talking at the top of their voices. I overheard the first one say: "Hey Dockie, it worked just like you said it would." "I told you, didn't I?" The second man answered, somewhat proudly. They noticed me. The man called Dockie smiled at me. Then he waved and walked up to me, still smiling. "Sorry it didn't work out for you today, man." "How do you know?" "I know everything that goes on here at the US Embassy," he answered, without dropping his proud tone. "Thanks, I guess," I answered, looking away. "How many times have they denied you the visa?" "This is the second time." "Do you want to try again?" "There is nothing else for me to do. This is my dream," I answered. "Listen," Dockie lowered his voice, "Have you ever thought about trying something else?" "What do you mean?" "Well, I mean something that cannot fail, no matter what." "How will I know that it is guaranteed to work?" I asked. "Because it will be different from other things you tried in the past." "Different? How?" "You will be using documents that I will make for you," Dockie answered with a smile. "You mean fake documents?" "That's exactly what I mean. You see Colbert here?" Dockie pointed to the other guy who stood a few meters away smoking a cigarette and talking into the mouthpiece of a mobile phone, which he put away hastily, as if he didn't want us to see him using it. I nodded. "He got a visa today without lifting a finger. All he had to do was work with me." "How?" Dockie glanced over his shoulder quickly. "Listen; if you are really serious about traveling to the USA then you need to talk with me as soon as possible. I will be at the Recto tonight. If you are serious, meet me there and we'll talk some more. If we don't meet tonight, call me." He handed me a business card which I put in my breast pocket. Then, Dockie strolled back to his friend and they both got in a taxi and left. To read more click here>>