

UNCLE FROM MOYALE

He had served diligently, the provost said, shaking his hand vehemently and grinning awkwardly, his sparse teeth glaring into my father's eyes for the provost was just slightly taller. My father nodded enthusiastically and returned his master's grin with a discreet, wry smile. The provost's thick rimmed spectacles slid to the edge of his nose and he pushed them up the bridge with a deft flick of the thumb.

My father, a devoted schoolmaster, had finally reached his retirement age but the group of schools he had served all his adult life had decided to send him to Moyale, a small town in the semi-arid north where he would oversee the construction of a missionary school in a few short years. Finally, we were leaving Nakuru, the vibrant Rift Valley metropolis I had known all my life. The only thing I knew about Moyale was that I had an uncle who hailed from the town, but that was all I knew about him. He had never visited us and my mother's enthusiasm about meeting him seemed a bit exaggerated. As far as I was concerned, all that intrigued me was the relocation into a new townshin and the fact that I was probably going to be the only kid in the entire neighbourh

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We packed through the doorway that had been rotting unused in the old, creaky kitchen cabinet into boxes my father had gotten from school. We pulled down curtains, folded the carpet into a fine roll of beige and white such that it looked like a giant cigar, and threw my pet kitten into a velvet bag. My mother carried a few flower pots, hoping to adorn the balconies in our new Moyale house as she had done in our Nakuru cottage.

On a fine Monday morning, right after the sun's brilliant rays had strayed through the window in the attic and had sprayed my room with streaks of yellow, we left our house for the last time. My father started the engine of the old Volkswagen Beetle which was packed full with furniture, textiles, and electronics, and had several mattresses strapped onto its carrier.

Like we had done countless other times, but this time for good, we drove out of the compound, our pensive little cottage looking on with anguish at the car leaving a consistent trail of smoke as it roared away and into the distance. It was a sad goodbye; I glanced back one last time, my bedroom window almost resembling a swollen eye that was ready to shed a tear, the landing below the window looking like a huge eye bag.