

NAIROBI, KENYA · 1975 – 2025

THE SILENCING OF

J.M.



*The True Story of a People's MP, a Hilton Car Park
and the Report a President Rewrote*

LAST SEEN AT THE HILTON. NOBODY EVER TRIED.

GRAHAM KASINDO

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“It is unjust for a few men with rank, opportunity, and power to use these opportunities to make profits.”

— J.M. Kariuki

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Prologue

NGONG HILLS. 3 MARCH 1975. LATE MORNING.

Two Maasai elders, **Musaite ole Tunda** and **Meja ole Nchoki**, were out in the forest below the Ngong Hills when they found a body.

It was a man. He had been shot several times. His face had been burned. His eyes had been gouged out, and his hands were gone.

They reported it. The police took their time. The body went to the City Mortuary in Nairobi, recorded as an unidentified adult male.

For more than a week, it lay there without a name.

In that time, a newspaper reported that the man was alive and well in Zambia, staying at the Intercontinental Hotel.

He was not in Zambia.

He was **Josiah Mwangi Kariuki**, the Member of Parliament for Nyandarua North, and one of the most popular politicians in Kenya. Everyone called him **J.M.**

He had once said that Kenya had become a country of ten millionaires and ten million beggars.

To understand why that sentence may have cost him his life, you have to go back to a boy, a horse race, and seven years behind the wire.

CHAPTER ONE

The Detainee

He was born on **21 March 1929**, at Kabati-ini in the Rift Valley.

His schooling came in pieces. In **1946**, the story goes, he won a bet at the Nakuru races and used the money to go back to school. He finished primary school in 1950, then went on to King's College Budo in Uganda.

He came home in **1952**, just as the colonial government declared a State of Emergency. He joined the Mau Mau.

From **1953 to 1960**, he was held in the British detention camps, among them Kowop and Lang'ata. Seven years.

He came out and wrote about it. His book, *Mau Mau Detainee*, was one of the first accounts of the camps written by a man who had been inside them.

CHAPTER TWO

The Insider

After independence, J.M. rose fast. From **1963 to 1969**, he was President **Jomo Kenyatta's** private secretary. From **1968**, he served as an assistant minister.

He was rich and charming, and he was popular in a way few politicians are. He spoke for the landless and the poor.

And he started saying things the men around the President did not want said.

“It is unjust,” he said, “for a few men with rank, opportunity, and power to use these opportunities to make profits.”

In **1974**, he won re-election in **Nyandarua North**.

CHAPTER THREE

The Bombs

NAIROBI. EARLY 1975.

That February, leaflets appeared in Nairobi claiming to come from a group called the “Maskini Liberation Organisation”, the liberation organisation of the poor. They carried J.M.’s name.

He had not written them.

Then came the bombs.

NAIROBI. BEGINNING OF MARCH 1975.

A bomb exploded on a bus. Twenty-seven people were killed and a hundred injured. It was the worst of a series of blasts in the city.

The leaflets and the bombs pointed in the same direction, at J.M. Kariuki.

A friend would later say that in the last days of February, J.M. noticed he was being followed.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Hilton

NAIROBI HILTON. SUNDAY, 2 MARCH 1975.

According to the reconstruction later pieced together by the *Daily Nation*, it went like this.

J.M. had been out late the night before and came home at dawn. At about **half past nine**, the commandant of the paramilitary General Service Unit, **Ben Gethi**, came to his house.

At **half past twelve**, J.M. went to the Hilton and tried to cash a cheque for four thousand shillings. The hotel gave him one thousand. He went to the races at Ngong, and came back later for the rest.

At about **five o'clock**, the usual crowd outside the hotel, the parking attendants and taxi drivers, was cleared away.

That evening, J.M. was having tea with a friend in the Hilton's coffee shop when Ben Gethi came in and spoke to him. They left together. A security guard saw them get into a Peugeot station wagon behind the hotel.

J.M.'s white Mercedes, **KPE 143**, stayed in the Hilton car park.

He was never seen alive again.

Gethi would later deny parts of this account, including that he had followed J.M. to the races.

CHAPTER FIVE

Kingsway House

The accounts that emerged in the years afterwards, from the parliamentary inquiry and later reconstructions, say J.M. was driven to **Kingsway House** on Muindi Mbingu Street. It was the headquarters of the Special Branch.

There, those accounts say, he was confronted by senior security men. The CID director, **Ignatius Nderi**, was named. So was **Arthur Wanyoike Thungu**, the commander of the President's bodyguard. The questioning was said to be about the bombings.

What was said in that building, and what was done there, has never been tested in a court.

What is known is how he was found.

The post-mortem recorded **five gunshot wounds**: three from a 7.62mm Tokarev and two from a .38. His body had been dumped in the forest below the Ngong Hills.

CHAPTER SIX

Zambia

The man was missing, and the state said nothing useful.

Instead, the newspapers were fed a story. J.M., readers were told, was “alive and well in Zambia, lodged at the Intercontinental Hotel.” The *Saturday Nation* ran it under the headline *JM in Zambia*.

Meanwhile, at the City Mortuary, the unidentified body lay unclaimed. The police had not taken its fingerprints until **6 March**, three days after it was found.

7 March. The *Daily Nation* published a new headline: *JM Kariuki is Missing*.

11 March. An anonymous tip reached his wife, **Terry Kariuki**. She went to the City Mortuary.

The police had told the family he would be impossible to recognise.

She recognised him.

12 March 1975. The body was officially identified as Josiah Mwangi Kariuki.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Committee

Parliament turned on the government.

A **Select Committee** was set up to investigate the disappearance and murder of the Member for Nyandarua North. Its chairman was **Elijah Mwangale**. The motion had been driven by **Charles Rubia**. Among its members were **Mark Mwithaga**, **Waruru Kanja** and **Dr James Muriuki**.

It found that “investigations carried out by the police have neither been thorough nor genuine.”

Before the report went to Parliament, Rubia and his colleagues took it to State House to show the President.

Rubia would later tell the story of what happened in that room. The report named, among others, the President’s own bodyguard commander, Wanyoike Thungu, and his Minister of State, **Mbiyu Koinange**.

“If you include my bodyguard Wanyoike Thungu,” Rubia recalled Kenyatta saying, “and you include my minister of State, Mbiyu Koinange, why don’t you include me?”

And then: “If you can remove my minister’s name from that list, you can publish the damn thing!”

Koinange’s name was taken out of the published report.

Rubia kept an unredacted copy. He gave it to the publisher **John Nottingham** for safekeeping.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Vote

PARLIAMENT. 11 JUNE 1975.

The Select Committee tabled its report. For four days, Parliament debated it.

The government tried to water it down. It lost, **62 votes to 59**.

Three ministers voted against their own government: **Masinde Muliro, John Keen** and **Peter Kibisu**.

Kenyatta sacked all three.

He took no action against any police officer or politician named in the report.

In the months that followed, two of the loudest voices in the House, the Deputy Speaker **Jean-Marie Seroney** and **Martin Shikuku**, were arrested inside the precincts of Parliament and detained without trial. Shikuku had said in the House that KANU was “dead”. He was not released until 1978.

The message was not subtle.

CHAPTER NINE

The Men Who Were Named

The committee recommended further investigation of several men, including a Nairobi councillor, **John Mutung'u**, and **Wanyoike Thungu**.

None of them was ever charged.

Across the years that followed, the men whose names appeared in the story died one by one, without ever answering in court. **Mbiyu Koinange** died in 1981. **Patrick Shaw**, the police reservist said to have been trailing J.M. in his final days, died in 1988. In 2006, a newspaper headline marked the death of yet another: *Another Witness Goes to the Grave With Secrets of JM Murder*.

Jomo Kenyatta died in 1978.

When the University of Nairobi students marched in 1975, riot police broke them up and the campus was closed.

CHAPTER TEN

The Widow

Terry Kariuki had walked into the City Mortuary in March 1975 and recognised her husband when the police said nobody could.

She spent the next fifty years refusing to let the country forget.

She did not go into politics. She went to memorials. She received visitors. Presidents came and went, four of them, and she kept asking the same question.

“All I want is justice,” she said. “Not for me, but for Kenya.”

In **2018**, she attended the renaming of Ol’Kalou District Hospital as the **J.M. Kariuki Memorial Hospital**.

“They can forget him if they want,” she said, “but I will not.”

30 October 2025. Terry Kariuki died. The question she had asked for half a century was still unanswered.

Epilogue

Fifty years on, the file is still open.

Everyone knows how the evening began: a cheque at the Hilton, a cup of tea, a Peugeot behind the hotel, a white Mercedes left in the car park. Everyone knows how it ended: five bullets, the forest below the Ngong Hills, and a body with no name in the City Mortuary.

Parliament named names. The President had one of them taken out. Three ministers were sacked for voting against the government. Two MPs were detained.

Nobody was ever tried.

J.M. Kariuki had warned that Kenya was becoming a country of ten millionaires and ten million beggars.

Fifty years later, the country still does not officially know who killed him.

THE RECORD

VICTIM	Josiah Mwangi (J.M.) Kariuki, MP for Nyandarua North, 45
LAST SEEN	Nairobi Hilton, evening of 2 March 1975
FOUND	Ngong forest, 3 March 1975, by two Maasai elders
IDENTIFIED	11–12 March 1975, by his widow, Terry
CAUSE OF DEATH	Five gunshot wounds (Tokarev 7.62mm and .38)
INQUIRY	Parliamentary Select Committee, chair Elijah Mwangale; report tabled 11 June 1975
VOTE	Government amendment defeated, 62–59
CONSEQUENCES	Three ministers sacked; two MPs detained
CHARGED	Nobody

Ten millionaires. Ten million beggars. Nobody tried.

A Note from the Author

If this story stayed with you, you can buy me a coffee. It keeps the research going and helps bring the next one to you.

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PAYBILL	522533
ACCOUNT	8129965
CLICK MTAA TECHNOLOGIES	

Asante sana.

— *Graham Kasindo*