

juliana
**THE QUEEN
OF THE BEES**

MAKENA BRANDON

CHAPTER 1

A Morning of Trees and Tea

It was on the seventeenth, just after we had finished the official launch of Utu na Mazingira, that this story truly began. We had just wrapped up a tree-planting ceremony, and when I say “we,” I mean the whole team, along with several notable guests: Al-Amin Kimathi, popularly and affectionately known as Babu; Cynthia Achieng, his personal assistant; Christopher Sanya, the Utu Heritage Project Lead; John Maigua, the Utu na Mazingira coordinator; and many others who had come out to support the day.

Afterward, Cynthia and I sat down for a cup of tea and guacci — sweet potatoes, as they are known outside Kikuyu. Cynthia complained that the tea had far too much sugar in it and could barely finish her cup.

Once tea was done, we took a few photographs, some as a group and some solo, before Babu announced that we needed to leave for Doldol. All the picture-taking and tea-drinking, it turned out, had been a way of passing time while we waited for a young lady named Juliana Loshiro, whom I had never met.

Babu called out that it was time to go, and it was only then that I discovered Juliana was already waiting for us inside the car. I dashed back to collect Babu's books and his coffee mug, and then, at last, we set off on our journey to Doldol.