



SYNOPSIS



As the income gap in Africa widens and class mobility grinds to a standstill, the national dialogue around wealth disparity has surged to the foreground. According to a recent News poll, “Africans are broadly concerned about inequality of wealth and income...Far from a strictly partisan issue, inequality looms large...suggesting that it will outlive the presidential primary contests and become a central theme in next year’s general election campaign.”

Amidst the dialogue and debates one thing is clear: nothing amplifies the issues or humanizes the impact more poignantly than personal stories. But the vast majority of stories are told from only one side of the income gap. Imagine the benefits of adding to the dialogue a personal account of the experience of growing up in both privilege and poverty within one’s own nuclear family. Imagine a story that taps into Africa’s widespread discomfort with poverty and the social norm that encourages those with means to distance themselves from those who have less. Enter *Tee’s Biography*, a provocative memoir that explores the author’s emotional experience of crossing back and forth over the income divide as a teenager and the unmistakable influence of that crossing on his choices as an adult.

Wealth disparity has driven a wedge among teenagers’ worlds and many educators and parents of prep school youth are worried their teenagers are growing up in privileged silos that prevent them from identifying with anyone who lives on the other side. Today’s youth are tomorrow’s leaders, so cultivating in them the

ability to identify and empathize with all people – across the class divide – has never been more critical. *Tee's Biography* provides a bridge between worlds and a leaping-off point for reflection and discourse.

As the author enters adulthood and faces life's increasing complexities, he gets trapped between a culture that urges him to leverage his pedigree and a quiet yet pervasive instinct to hide from it. Although the author's story is unusual, many of his feelings are not. His journey is one from resistance to acceptance; from resentment to forgiveness; from feeling like something is missing to feeling whole. It's a journey in which layers of distortion are peeled away -- distortions within our culture, within his own family, and within himself. It's a journey that gets beneath the surface of how we show ourselves in the world and how we see others – even those we pretend are invisible.

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PROLOGUE

In a world full of impatient people, rushing on their own pace, Tee is like a constantly struggling wave crashing against the shore. I know Tee as a client, a mere acquaintance but his existence has left an impact on me. Where blood has become thick and people prefer to remain self-centered, he tends to value morals. I have realized that the more struggles one goes through, the more humble one becomes and Tee is a living example of this belief. After reading Tee's biography, I have developed a staunch faith in believing in one's ability to overcome all the hurdles. Everything eventually turns out as a trial which could be lived with courage.

Reading between the lines of this book, I found freshness of humanity. Till you reach the end of this book, you will find a connection between Tee and yourself. There might not be much relatable content but you will connect to the lifelong struggles and the happiness in between.

The best thing about this book is that the family is its crux. Be it parents, siblings, spouses or the friends who become family. Every aspect of Tee's life reflects that he has always weighed his relations with his kindness. Even as a mere contact of Tee, I have witnessed his ethics. He is utterly patient and kind. He believes in second chances and understands human logic. The world needs more people like Tee to become a better place. People who ensure to pick others up, people who know how to forgive, people who have the ability to love

unconditionally, people who give their everything to achieve their goals, people who are humbled by their success and people who value people.

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CHAPTER 1

1

Where do the unanswered prayers go?

Do they become the stars;

Burning on our helplessness and desire

Do they reach the concerned beloved, friend, stranger;

How shameful, if it reveals

The desperation on them

Do they compose emptiness of eyes,

The hollowness of heart.

You tell me, wise saint

Where do unanswered prayers go?

They all go to heavens' backyard

The angel writes it as a debt to God

What's better than to have Him in-debt?

The all owning, owing to you.

Everything owing to Nothing. ~Jasir

~A LETTER TO MY MOTHER

I am going to introduce myself to you all by talking to the one who brought me into this world, my dear darling mama.

Dear Mama.

I still fail to comprehend God's plans at times, but, I understand why you had to let go. Somehow, I think of it this way, your death moulded me into who I am today. Someday I hope you will tell me that you saw it all, my struggles, my triumphs, my tears, my joys, my imperfections. Someday you'll tell me you that you were there with me the whole while and that I never was alone.

I never imagined a life without your warm cocoon around but this is what was in store for both of us; an eternal separation; a parting that we could not have avoided at any cost. But at the same time, this gut-wrenching sense flows through my body when I feel like I've started forgetting your face, your voice, your existence. Have you forgotten my face?

From all the good things that you have taught me, I am a better man now. And I am grateful for all the times you defended me even when I was at wrong. I now have a clearer picture of why you did what you did as I am also a parent now.

When you were taken away from me, I was still very young, and it was hard for me to come to terms with your passing. The grief still stays with me as my shadow.

Thank you for preparing me for these times, these times of you no longer being here with me. Thank you for being my mother, I wouldn't have had it any other way. Thank you for being my rock, my pillar of strength. I have broken the societal norms and have become the best and happy version of myself and I hope you can see that. I hope you see the happiness in me most of the times. I also hope you see the sadness during the days and times when I am at my lowest.

When I received the news of your departure, I really couldn't fathom the pain. It felt as if a part of my heart was being ripped off while I was looking into oblivion, I felt as if someone stabbed my heart, I felt as if I was hit by a bus but I was still breathing. I started thinking that I should end my own life, I also prayed to God and wished that I should as well die. I know if you were there, you would have told me that it is not a good thing to say or wish but I thought that maybe it can express the hurt that I went through. I just wanted to sleep and never wake up from it. Sometimes, I wished that it was just a dreary dream and I wanted to wake up in a reality where you were as safe and sound as my heart always wanted you to be. My life seemed meaningless without your existence in it.

I often find myself thinking that how lucky are those who haven't lost any of their loved one to death. All I can think is that how they are unfamiliar to the country of grief.

Where you count plates twice before setting the table and still take out an extra;

Where you are afraid to look up from food because you want to avoid the empty chair on the dining table;

How you come out of bedroom expecting the person to sit in their regular place, and not finding them, makes you feel you have lost them again;

On family dinners you count who all have left and your fingers are full of loss;

You wake up in nights to ensure everyone you love is alive; you bring your hand close to their nose to feel the breath- the only sign of life.

You look at your loved one and try to lock their features in your memory because you have learned: no matter how hard you try, you would struggle to picture, the features you have touched, kissed, hugged and held.

Death like love has to be experienced to be believed.

You can sit and divide your life, before and after it because it's never the same once you meet death.

You spend your whole life not only in its memory but also in anticipation of things ending in seconds, life diminishing in your hands, any day of the year, any hour, and any moment.

I might not remember the exact words, but I remember when I visited you at the hospital and you could not see me because you had lost your eyesight. I am very happy that I did come to visit you that day, because it was the last time that I would have seen you. I remember when I walked down the hospital corridor, straight to your bed. You told me that you couldn't see me. I remember asking you that if you didn't see me then why you called me by my name. I was quite young at that time and I couldn't make sense of it all. But you said, "I can recognize you because you are my son, I know you, I know your voice and I felt your presence." The conversation we had that day is long gone, but those words are the strongest memory and also the last words spoken by you. When I said goodbye that day, little did I know that it was our last goodbye. Should I have known that it was your last day, I would have opened my heart and said everything I would have wanted to say, only that I had no idea that it was time. It was time for you to leave. I will always treasure the moments that we had together.

After your death, life wasn't easy as I never stopped grieving. I did learn how to live with the pain but that pain of losing you became scars. Just for the fact that I didn't allow myself to grieve, it still hurts as if it happened yesterday whenever emotions kick in. I do however manage it from time to time. It hurts most when I count my blessings because I would love to count you as one of the blessings so it just happens that I will just need to be grateful for the time I spent with you. Losing you had taught me how to deal with things, how to take care of myself and how to be loving and compassionate to others.

I have many things to tell you, mom. Do you remember that before you left I was about to finish high school? It is indeed very sad that I didn't complete high school that year because I had no money. I had no one to take care of me and I had no one to pay for my tuition, but your words stuck with me, even in those hard times. You said, "*I will be fine, it is only a matter of time before things fall into place.*" Eventually, things did fall into place though not on record time. I had to wait for what seemed like a lifetime to live my dream of completing high school. I might have done things that I am not proud of, things I know you wouldn't be pleased about but from where you have always stood, even in my early years, I know you would understand.

Still, I have a few things to be proud of. Firstly, before my academic progress I got to represent Team South Africa at the Glasgow grand prix 2015. I

came back home with a bronze medal while I continued to believe that a silver or a Gold medal would have been great. I also made it to the world championships in London but I could not compete on the final race because of the injury I incurred the day before. I also won quite a number of medals from Races such as the London Marathon, Amsterdam Marathon, New York City Marathon, Dublin Marathon, Cape town Marathon, Vienna City Marathon just to name a few. I know you would have wanted me to focus on my academics before fame. But at that tender age I got carried away and I didn't have anyone to put me back in my place. Above all I made it to the Nike London, New York and Portland Billboards during the 2015 and 2016 sports years. Being on the billboard representing one of the biggest sporting brands in the world was one of my biggest highlights in the career as an athlete.

When I got tired of the spotlight, I remembered that I always wanted to be a lawyer and I decided to register with Varsity College for a year and since then I have now moved to the University of North West. I have undoubtedly missed you a lot. Indeed, time keeps on dragging us indifferently losing bits of ourselves & others but it can't take away what we are holding on to: Kindness, Grief, Nostalgia and Love. I wish you were here but I hope that you are at a better place than this world.

Long story short, I am a happy soul now. Everything that happened in the past, is in the past now. Still, I often find myself revisiting my actions. I am contemplating the outcomes of my doings mostly at the back of my mind. Maybe we always need reassurance of how far we have come, just like:

When mothers make growing kids stand against a wall and make pencil marks to trace time. But we can't hold time and keep it on palm to examine so we invented stopovers, to force ourselves to think, how much has passed but it all seems futile.

Moreover, we also want to be sure about how far we can go. We plan every event of our life to always be on the safe edge. We are also recommended to invest in a retirement plan. They say that if you start saving little by little at 25, you won't be sad at 60. Well they don't say, "Sad" but what good is money, if it can't buy happiness. Retirement plan sounds too boring, how could I save. Whenever I think I have free time, there's an inexhaustible list of pending tasks staring at me, each one seducing, to finish it first. You know how scared I am to make choices. I hope that you know how my thought process works.

I know I hardly said this when you were here with me.

But, I love you, mama, always have.

And, well, I miss you.

I shall see you again.

Your Only Surviving Son.

Growing up, I would always write a letter to my mother, that I now believe never made any sense. Even these little gestures meant a lot back then. I don't know when life became this complicated and things started to seem just like a puzzle. I have always wanted to write a normal letter to my mother because she was the one who taught me to write. Maybe I wanted to make her feel proud that she had done a great job at teaching me. I clearly remember the time when she used to teach me how to write. I promised myself as a child that whenever I grow up, I would write a letter to her and I knew she would be proud. Oh, how such small wishes seemed a big deal in our dear childhood. As sad as it is, I am jotting down this letter when she is no more between us. Even though I am well aware that she will not read it, I have still poured my heart out and tried to make sure that my feelings get translated into words.

She was my only sample of humanity. I might not know how to play a musical instrument to serenade someone or to paint the curves of her lips to preserve her smile for eternity to witness. But I know the art of holding a conversation. The ones in which people share what they wanted to be all their lives

but weren't able pursue it. Where they speak of their first love, and how they still miss that feeling of being wholly vulnerable. Where they mention how they never learned love from their parents for there wasn't any to find and how the idea of living under the same roof bounded only by an obligation still scares them. They talk about their innocent childhood fears, which have grown along with their bones. They all are miracles walking on the face of earth, is what I have learned from my mother's existence. I considered the world a better place to be in but after she left, reality kicked in.

Let me reflect on my life after the passing of my mother in a more vivid practical perspective. Just after the passing of my mother, I started to learn about people when I was only turning 16, in a month. I didn't know there existed way more ways than I had imagined, to miss one's home. There are obvious ones like family, friends, food, books and home but what about the subtle intimacy of walking up to any person and holding a conversation, because you speak the same language. Because they can understand pain before you mention and understand desire before you express. The unnamed bonds you make with people without names. The owner of the small restaurant near home knows your favorite orders. Hence, as far as I am from home I am still near my mom

Over the time I have realized that I have inherited the silence of my mother.

The kind of silence which adjusts itself within words;

The loneliness which creeps into crowded spaces;

You don't ever tell anything to anyone, beyond the things which don't matter;

You only give away the secrets which are public knowledge, you only tell pain, which is visible; you only share illnesses which are measurable like body temperature.

When someone asks, "how you are?" You never tell you stay silent for so long that eventually everyone forgets to check on you.

I believe that our faith in fate plays a major role in shaping our ideologies. The way we look at what life throws at us is what defines us. Few days ago, while saving a boy from being run down, I bumped the car in a motorbike. To my surprise the bike slipped and the rider, a man in mid forties came crashing on the road. I went to him to make sure he is fine and apologized for hitting his bike. He said, "It's okay, this accident was written in my fate". His words doesn't vindicate me or lessen his pain, but recognizing that there's something bigger than us, which holds us in it's grip.

At times even without trying, we can end up hurting someone, or get ourselves hurt while minding our own lives. There are punishments for which you can't think of any crime. Usually, when something bad happens to someone, people always think of things that might have brought it: Disobedience to parents, stealing from a business partner, betraying someone or anything which makes you deserving for a misfortune. But at times there are people who have done nothing to deserve this, their self evolving illness, loveless marriages, loss of loved ones, won't they turn crazy in thinking what exactly brought this ordeal. Days have passed since the accident, and I find comfort in thinking that it was fate. Similarly, I have made my peace with the fact that I was destined to lose my mother. We could not have avoided it and there was no one to be blamed as it was purely destiny at its play.

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CHAPTER 2

Obriel Ndhlovu aka Dodo: A Memoir

Goodbyes that were never said

"Dear old friend, there are no goodbyes for perpetual separation, there is only guilt, to carry memories of a person, you can no longer recognize."

If we come to think of it, no tragedy seems great enough to stop us from living. If you mention a tragedy at dinner, there would be always someone who would share something worse, as tragedies like currency notes, come in all values. But if you think of your own losses, each one of them look devastating enough to make you pause for a while, and not go on living. When you find letters in your parents' clothes, or photographs of people, you don't recognize, hidden in old wallets. To think they once were loved, had friends who meant everything to them, wrote verses at end of letters, but these people are nowhere to be seen in their lives. How rare it is to find someone who makes you feel loved, who makes you think that you are not another breathing machine on this planet, but everything about you, matters. Who would remember to play your favorite songs during drive, or would remember the name of your favorite third grade teacher. How often it happens that you meet someone, and you feel you have come from same place,

wherever it is. All the things you found peculiar about yourself feel at home. It's sad how effortlessly we lose them and without a dramatic story to tell. We keep drifting apart, first by cities, then countries, and at times even within cities by circumstances and relations. The time keeps on sweeping us away, and we fail to hold each other in same spot and then we do what we know best, we go on living, as nothing has happened. Tonight I sit here, thinking of the day you left this world, leaving for a different world, and maybe nothing will ever be same, even when you return to meet me in my dreams, and all I am doing is peeling an apple. While something breaks inside me, I cut the apple in four equal parts.

Growing up we all need someone to look after and someone who would look after us. From my birth until the age of 11, I was always wishing for a brother as I was the only child of my parents and that period was very lonely for me. Then finally the universe decided to answer my longing and I got what I always wanted; a brother. There is an obvious 12 year gap between me and my brother but we got along really well. Since, his birth I and my brother were inseparable. The time spent together is now bits and pieces and foggy memories. I remember when he was a little kid, he was quite fragile and he was always getting sick, more times than ever he would be hospitalized and that brought us closer all the time.

I have a clear memory that he was spoiled for choice in everything and he was treated like a prince. Although he was still very young and needed all the

guidance that he can get but my parents loved to pamper him. My parents made sure that he gets whatever he wanted and never lacked a thing. Before I left he was attending a nursery school called *BUSY BEE* in our local area, I remember walking with him there to drop him and later fetching him from there. The rest is now a blur.

I clearly remember when my mother threw him one of the biggest birthday parties ever; he was turning five at that time. I do believe that birthday party was one of the biggest highlights of his life and I suppose that even at the time of his death if this memory flashed in front of his life, he would have left assured that he was indeed loved.

I also remember his fondness towards some dairy products and that he was allergic to wool. Even at that tender age he had a great relationship with my mother, until the time that my mother passed away, he also had a good relationship with his dad too. After I left I have no idea how things worked for them. He was raised to be a very respectful child. I do believe that even at the time that he passed; he was still very respectful, loving and tender hearted. His memories at school are a bleak but I only remember the time he was at nursery. He was my little bundle of joy and the apple of his parent's eyes.

People who matter the most to us are separated from us in an utterly unexpected way. Though we all know that life is uncertain but we are still not able to learn the art of losing. I still have the urge to meet him and relive our comfort zones but unfortunately life doesn't work that way. The universe seems empty without that one person. It seems as if we don't have anything left to live for. Even though the time spent with my brother is one third of my life, still it overpowers all of my other endeavors. My brother was someone who defined peace to me and rest is only a hustle of survival.

But I wasn't going to remain as lucky as my little bundle of joy has made me. My mother's death marked our separation. My brother was just 6 years old and probably he did not know how things work in this cruel world but I was mature enough to understand that I will have to take my leave now. Because my brother's father was my step father, it was illogical for me to continue living with them. So I had to unfortunately, move away. We still saw each other from time to time. But communication wasn't so great. I thought of him every day. Then about a year or two years later I started travelling globally and that was the last time I saw my brother.

Although we spoke on the phone here and there, I continued to regret leaving when my mother passed away. I still regret not being there for him when he was sick. When he got terribly sick I was in the United Kingdom. The thing

about regret is that it doesn't visit for only sleepovers. Once it arrives, it is there to stay for long, at times for weeks, at times for years and at times for our whole lives. You can't weed it out, or pluck like an unwanted hair. It grows inside us like a tumor, or an old tree that has spread roots in the ground.

At times we are born with grief, and with time it grows with our bones, and you can only recognize it when you see it on someone else, like shape of noses in your family. And I wish we didn't carry this sadness everywhere, like birthmarks. I hope every time we meet friends, they would ask us to leave sadness at the gate, but they don't. It creeps in even inside the seemingly happy moments. Everyone at the table would be laughing and for a second you would zone out. Focusing on an imaginary thing on the wall, but your mind will keep on reminding of a difficult memory, even when you are entertaining laughter on your lips for the rest of group. You would be singing songs with friends on rooftop of a restaurant in the mountains and suddenly you will keep on repeating the word love, under your breath, until it starts tasting like a medicine left on your tongue and your mouth is full of bitterness and regret.

I sometimes wish to remember only the good times that we shared. I want to remember happy moment for the rest of my life, where we are dancing in the car, completely oblivious of the traffic on road, and my brother has the infinite smile on his lips and no recollection of sadness. The thing is that unlike grief, happiness is

too ephemeral and we have to remember it again and again to assure ourselves that no matter how hard it seems to imagine there was a moment when we were only happy. But then suddenly the reality hits us and brings us down to our knees. Grief and time exist in parallel universe. Some of us are mourning loved ones lost a day, a week, a month or a year ago. While some of us are missing loved ones lost over the years. There are days when I feel guilty that I'm not remembering my brother enough, at times I can't even imagine his face with ease.

I clearly remember that it was the first week of August when I received a call about his condition. I decided I was going to take a flight to South Africa in the coming week because I had to make some emergency preparations as I had just signed to the *Nike*, UK Team as the brand ambassador. However my plans fell short as I was preparing I got another call that told me I should come over immediately if I want to find him alive. That was the moment when my world shattered. I vividly remember when I received that phone mail it was the afternoon of the 11th of August. I decided to drop whatever plans I had take the earliest flight on the 12th of August 2016. When I got to the London Heathrow Airport on the morning of the 12th, I received that final devastating phone. My brother was gone and it was all over. 8 hours late.

I had spoken to him on the phone the previous day. He was very excited about seeing me when I arrived. I was over the moon too. He told me what I needed to buy for him in London and I did but it was too late and it was all in vain.

I was now headed to my brother's funeral. It was the worst day of my life, ever.

It is rightly said that nothing prepares you for departure, no matter how much time you have to plan. No matter how sure you are about the certainty of it. You cannot fully experience the hurt of separation until the finality of never meeting again hits you. The feeling that you will not be able to hear these voices so close to your ears, that you will not be able to observe the shape their mouths make when they laugh, that you will not be again in company of people who don't ask you to explain your pain, before they offer love. You will no longer have the comfort of arms, which hug you on every difficult day. That meeting each other will require elaborate planning, good fortune and will no longer be as effortless as breathing. It's so rare to find people who make you feel whole, who don't demand you to be anything, who allow you to just exist naturally. Even if fate grants you another chance of reunion, the same feeling will never return. Time keeps on changing us as rust keeps on distorting the features of statues left to mercy of rain. But still no amount of loss stops us for getting too comfortable with new people, from sharing our most protected secrets, from making ourselves vulnerable.

There's something so cruel yet beautiful about human heart. No matter how much you prepare it for eventual separation, in the moment it chooses to love as the moment is to stay forever.

At the age of 12, I went through the pain of losing a father. At the age 16, I went through the pain of losing a mother. I never imagined having to lose the only brother, the only link to me and the only person I called immediate family. The pain was excruciating and I was officially an orphan. This was the time my world fell apart.

During this time I was a professional international athlete preparing for the Glasgow Indoor Grandpax 2015. I was emotionally and mental broken, nothing made sense anymore. My life was meaningless. Nothing I did or nothing I said made sense. I constantly went for counseling after his funeral but nothing helped. I took depression medication but nothing helped. At one point I attempted to take my life because there was nothing to live for. That also didn't work.

They say that life goes on. If you are serious about change, you have to go through uncomfortable situations. We have to stop dodging the process. It is the only way to grow. One must create one's own joy. Your life is yours to live. No one else is going to live it for you. One must find some strength within oneself and

get back on track. I was a mess after my brother's demise. All I wanted was some peace but it seemed as if I won't find peace in my life ever again.

I realized that the memory of a loved one always comes to us like a cloud in scorching heat, like a green signal when running late for the class. We have to live with whatever little we have and think how that's still more than what anyone else does. While mourning for dead, we shouldn't forget to love, kiss, celebrate those who are still alive, still in the reach of your touch, still responsive to your voice. I thought maybe positive ideology will help me escape the bitter truth.

But nothing worked. Sometimes I would drive to the middle of nowhere just to cry.

Yesterday, I met a 13 year old kid in a workshop, who belonged to a far flung area of Northern England. He lost his mother & father in span of 6 months and was forced by poverty to move to a strange city. I think over and over again what a privilege it is to mourn our losses, to have the luxury to not have any other losses cloud the loss of a loved one.

Death is inevitable, in larger scheme of things someone is dying every moment but life is fragile. In mourning we have to remember and cherish each good moment spent, each happy memory made, each joke shared and each song sung and be grateful for them. There are women who lose their children in

pregnancies, all their lives they imagine features of the children they never had, there are kids who never saw their parents and in each sorrow they feel as only human being alive.

My brother never told me what country he would have loved to visit so I have visited almost 20 countries just for him.

The world moves on footsteps of love, with so much patience and tenderness.

The gap left behind by my brother was never filled, and that gap will never be filled by anybody. If you have ever stayed up whole night to watch sunrise, you would have noticed, the day doesn't show up out of nowhere. The night slowly melts into the day, until it is no longer recognizable. With each passing moment, the sky turns a lighter shade of black, until it starts looking dark blue and then it appears as if night never existed on this sky. The day doesn't turn up immediately; there is no switch in sky to be turned on and off. The other day, while watching sunrise, I thought nothing else can explain my love for my brother. How gradually his existence occupied mine. From casually using his words in sentences, to listening his favorite songs on drive back home, how my hands make same movement while holding a cigarette, how my muscles subconsciously move to smile, every time I think of him, even when he is not there to see my smile. But it

doesn't matter, for I have become just like him, as night becomes day-indistinguishable.

I have only come to realise that pain never stops but you learn how to live with it. My brother told me once when he was young that he would love to be a lawyer and since he is not around to live that dream. I decided to enroll into law school and do it for him. As a result of the depression I had a car accident that got my car written off. I also lost my endorsement from Nike London due to non performance and not meeting the expected time. I had to start afresh. I traveled the world looking for opportunity—and finally found it through Career Online High School and the Los Angeles Public Library. I worked from 8-5pm then studied from 8pm to midnight. I then called my family—my partner and our son—who were back home in South Africa, to connect with them for an hour. It was grueling. That was my life for one year—and it was the most difficult year of my life. My academic coach was a lifesaver—there is no way I could have done it without her. She was so helpful and encouraging. She sent emails and called to check in on me. I struggled a lot with the math, but she wouldn't let me give up. It was exciting, stressful, and really hard work. I couldn't believe it when I graduated! I was so excited to go back home to South Africa and celebrate with my family. I start law school soon and I hope to become a family court advocate to help orphaned youths facing similar challenges.

Twenty two years and more than twenty funerals down the lane; I still haven't mastered the art of consoling a bereaved friend. I refuse to use the typical expressions made for these occasions, the expressions older than death itself. I have lost loved ones and I can't remember any words that brought me solace in that moment. When, today I want to mourn your loss, I'm not sure which words to use and which to avoid. Should I trivialize your pain by mentioning the people with bigger losses, should I tell you that time will heal, should I tell you to stay strong. I will not offer you any of these words but my silence. I will offer you my silence to have the sanctity to bear your individual loss, the loss only you can measure and bear through the years to come.

“Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is to try just one more time.”

Sometimes all we can do is to be patient because we have to go through the worst to get the best. And surely one day you will thank yourself for never giving up. You will mostly find yourself doubting that how far you can drag yourself but all you got to do is remember how far you have come. Just remember everything you have faced, all the battles you have won and all the fears you have overcome. Keep faith in yourself and always remember that you were given this life because you are strong enough to live it.

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CHAPTER 3

LIFE AND WORK: A constant struggle

In advance calculus class when things will get a little too boring for my liking, I would start making roses on the top corner of the page, the way the art teacher in grade 2 taught us. Similarly, when the temperature drops a couple of degrees, I eat a boiled egg and sip on my coffee while sitting in a blanket, the way my mother used to feed us in childhood.

That's the irony of life. We travel miles to remember, what we thought we had already left behind.

Life tends to surprise us when we least expect it to. It was a striking contrast among the drastic times of a young boy surviving through tough times and on the opposite was a golden era, promising a bright future. I never had a wild idea that after whatever I had faced in my life, I will see such heights. After the passing of my mother in 2001, I started to learn about people. She was my only sample of humanity and I considered the world a better place to be in but after she left, reality kicked in. I lacked the support of family, I lacked resources, I lacked a proper skill set to earn enough money to make the both ends meet. What do you expect an orphan child to do in his early childhood but to lose hope in success?

The paternal side never welcomed me and I did not want to be a burden on the maternal side of my family. I was only 16 when I had to move out of my stepfather's house due to the unlikely treatments on his end. When you lack every other basic necessity of your life, safeguarding your self-respect becomes a major priority. I had no other option but to move on from the humiliations that were hurled towards me for being another mouth to feed. Towards the end of the year I moved to my grandmother's house to live there briefly. Although, I had my own freedom, waiting for handouts was not the way to live. I was constantly at the mercy and the receiving end of my maternal family. At that time I was nearly completing my high school but my fate decided to test me with major financial problems: I needed a not so large amount of money to pay for the exam fee. That's when life unfolded its card that it has served to me in the shape of my namesake family.

Even after receiving almost everything that the maternal side could afford, I was still living from hand to mouth. No one was able to help me out or to pay my fees, the minimum amount to appear in the exams. When, I realized that it's a dead end on the maternal side, I had to ask my paternal side to play their part. Although it was clear and a known fact that my father was upset with me till his death. I was 12 at that time. Still, I was his son and my innocent and immature mind couldn't hate him. I felt his presence even though his role in my life was bare minimum.

Later, I saw my father in dream

He was watching tv

And I felt bad

for thinking him dead

all these years.

After waking up

I ran to the tv room

The room smelled of him

the sofa seat

still warm from someone

sitting there for years.

Maybe in the dream

If he didn't look so alive

I could have asked,

If he was happy

We keep delaying this question

until it doesn't matter.

I feared that it was evident that my father wanted nothing to do with me and I might not be welcomed but I had no choice but to ask my paternal family for help. Since, my father had passed my inheritance to them owing to the distance we always had between us. It was under the protection of my uncle or so I thought (father's brother and his wife). These were the people who made me realize that they didn't need me. Even though I was at the most difficult stage of my life, they refused to provide me with my father's inherited cows. They claimed that they needed them for farming and hence they advised that I will have to postpone my final year in high school for the following year. They were of the opinion that they were not going to need those cows later. I somehow thought that it was for my own good and these people will be playing the part of my family one day. As funny as it sounds now, I honestly loved them from the bottom of my heart. Their behavior towards me at that tough time of my life changed everything. It changed my perspective and my feelings about them. I vowed that I will never see them again because they were the reason that I witnessed my dreams of completing high school go up in flames.

Indeed our perceptions overshadow the behaviors of people towards us.

People don't look the same

When you are in love

Or when they speak of grief

Or share biggest fear

Or after they are done making love

People don't look the same.

Photographs lie constantly

You can keep seeing a face

no longer desired

and not find what made you mad

for the most ordinary face.

Similar is the case with the faces we love. We don't know what made us love them so much and despise others with all we have but deep down we know that it is the role they played in our lives at our testing times. In 2004, I moved to live with my aunt Anita in Malvern. Aunt Anita was my angel, she was my life savior.

To me

She will always be the most beautiful face

In the world

No matter

How many faces

How many worlds.

She worked hard to fill the gap that was left by my mother. She took me in & she took care of me in all the possible ways; financially, emotionally and physically. She never gave up on me. As I continued to live with Aunt Anita, I grew older and worked better jobs.

Aunt Anita always woke up before everyone else in the house. In winters in the really early hours of morning, she would come to our room, adjust our blankets or add another layer. Sleeping in the extra warmth for those few hours was something else. One can get used to anything, forgetting if an alternative ever existed. Maybe that is the only way to survive. Years have passed but last night around the same early hours of a really cold morning, I felt another blanket on my body, and I knew it was her, the room smelled of her and I thought of it as any other winter morning. I love how magic allows us to exist in a time no longer

available. Similarly, my mother has never been to this room on the first floor, but love reaches us in unimaginable ways.

It was quite an unfortunate time of my life as I was not able to sit for my Matric exams due to financial and personal reasons. I kept hanging on a thin thread of hope. I continued to work and Aunt Anita continued to take good care of me up until the age of 21. During the first year I lived with her, I remember looking for a job on Jules street in Malvern with the hopes that I will put myself at school and complete my high school. Although Aunt Anita and I never had a conversation of me going back to school; I made my intentions and my actions clear that it is what I will be aiming for. She introduced me to a Nigerian church which was owned by Pastor Vincent. This church became my spiritual home, during my time in Malvern I became a spiritual person. I prayed every day, I fasted, and I did everything a perfect Christian will do. My life was around the gospel; I even practiced praying in tongues, which led me to believing that one day I was going to be a pastor. But one never knows what life holds for you and I was also unaware of the fame and challenges that awaited me.

It was at the same church where my Aunt succeeded in helping me to find a job. It was with one of the church members, Brother Isaac; at that time he had a shop and because I was young they offered me 20\$ per week and it was amazing for me at that time as it happened to be my first job. It was enough especially for a

young person who didn't have to take care of anything but I knew that it shouldn't have stopped there. Hence, I kept my hopes high, my spirits up and about a month later, Aunt Anita introduced me to her boss and I started working at the kitchen, in the restaurant, "*Crost*", as a breakfast chef. It was also an amazing experience for me. At that time I had restarted my grade 11 at St. Georges College, Johannesburg. I studied between Monday and Friday because I had to work on the weekends. It wasn't a hard routine as I had not to work long hours. But the salary wasn't enough as it hardly paid for my tuition. Hence, I decided to move to a retail shop and worked there for 2 years. It was a nice working environment and I enjoyed most of it.

I was fortunate enough to make few friends. At that time I worked with Abigail Beker whose mother used to provide me with pick and drop service as in the transport whenever I was on duty in Good Faith. Her mom, *may her soul rest in peace*, used to put everyone in her car and then dropped us all off. I was mostly the last one to be dropped as we used to live quite a few blocks away from our working place. It was the same place where I met with Mokete Mokone, who was yet to become my world's number one best friend. I also worked with Paulina, Yvonne, Thato and many others including Jackson Ncube(who also became our friend with whom we did a lot of dodgy things). Lina was added into our friends

circle as well, who was very unique in her own way. These people became my family and I loved them dearly.

One day, I was running late for work when an autumn leaf landed on my coat and I took a moment to absorb everything around me. I know few years down the lane I'll look back at this day, at this freedom, at this moment of minor inconveniences and no overwhelming tragedy. I have learned over the years how ordinary moments appear to be extra ordinary in memory, how we constantly yearn to go back to these days where nothing much was happening. How we yearn for the night we just stared at stars, we sang beside the river, we stayed up all night talking about childhood crushes. I know with ample certainty of experience that tomorrow I'll miss this day so I'm making an extra effort to love it while it's here. I stop every few minutes, and take a look around, to preserve as many faces, as many trees, as many fallen leaves, as my eyes allowed. So when memory will knock on the door of nostalgia tomorrow I would know that I loved today before it became yesterday.

I looked up to these people and from where I was at that time; things looked pretty good for them. They spoke English with a Twang, they seemed to have everything planned and then on the other side there was me. I had no parents, I was devoid of my Metric Certificate and basically I seemed to have no future. None the

less, life at Stratford was amazing. I wasn't having an idea what life holds for me, no one does.

As I was working with Mokete (thereafter referred to as Mo) I realized that we had a lot of things in common: we were the same age, we enjoyed the same things, we both loved John Legend and one important thing that sparked our friendship was that we were both positive about life. I looked up to Mo. Mo was a first year Student at Wits and I wanted to walk his footsteps. He inspired me inside out. His heart seemed so genuine and his conscious was crystal clear. I knew we were going to be great friends. And so it happened when Mo had to take some time off work for medical reasons. He lived in a massive double or triple story house in the flashy suburb of Kensington. I called him on his house phone where I used to call literally everyday because I had free minutes all the time. It was one such call when he told me that he was sick and had a minor surgery. I informed him that I was going to visit him and true to my words I did. That one visit was the start of our long lasting friendship.

I can't pinpoint the things we spoke about but what I remember vividly was the conversation we had about the type of people we would like to become or images we would like to create on our selves. We were going to get educated and become successful individuals who make an impact in communities and most of all

remain humble. This was particularly true for Mo, because he was done with Metric and already studying at the second largest and successful institution in the country and also in Africa; Wits University. This pushed me to be a better version of me but a lot was still yet to happen till I get there. It still is. We all keep moving on a slow and steady pace in the hope of reaching somewhere, one day. The people we meet and the lessons we learn just help us to be one step near to our destined success.

At the age of 21, I decided that I am probably making enough to be able to help Aunt Anita with the rent because she has been the sole person responsible for all the household stuff till then and she took care of everything. It was quite a big house for the two of us hence she decided to sell the property and to get another smaller one. So that is when we moved from Marlven to Kensington which was not too far from where I first lived, and the schools that I attended in my adolescence. It was at that time when I started developing a staunch belief that everything was working out well.

I lost the job that I was having in the process of shifting and I again had to start job hunting which was easier at that time. I went through a couple of tough situations which included finding a job at a marketing company, which was quite far from where I used to stay. And it was quite an experience because I was not somebody who would ask. I believed that if I had to make it, I was going to make

it on my own. So even though I had people who were caring and loving and those who would do anything for me, I still decided that I don't want to bother my aunt at all, so I will take it up on my own hands and I will continue looking for work so that I would be able to help. But it looked as if it was a dead end because the place that I was working at was Lee Morgan Direct Marketing. It was not as far but I would try to get there either on foot or by bus.

I would go to work and come back from work which would put a lot of strain on me. It was not only far but it was also very expensive. It had no retain as it was a commission based work, so it was from that time that I found another job at Monte Casino as a waiter which was an absolute amazing thing that happened to me at that time. I worked there for quite some time and made some friends. And I remember much of the people that I worked with. But it was quite an experience to jot down the gist. I remember Tshepo Mothoaga (now a Policeman), Mlu (The Gangster) his whereabouts unknown, Vusi (Now a Lawyer) and Collin (Also a Police man but in the Traffic department).

No matter how many people I met in my life, the list never exceeds few people when I sit down to count my close friends. No matter how many acquaintances we have, only few enter our heart. Moreover, many know us as an individual from the direct interactions but the intimacy of calling one home is surreal.

Gatsby threw parties for whole town

in the hope that one day

his beloved would show up.

It looks cute in the movie

Love of this kind

must only exist in books.

But everytime I'm imagining

hosting my friends for lunch

the list never goes beyond

few names.

I imagine how the first thing they would notice

be the marigolds in the lawn,

no matter which season they arrive,

The flowers will bloom for them.

I want to show them how I invented ways of remembering them,

which only make sense to me.

I want to show them all the places in this house,

Where I have missed them,

how small things left unattended on tables,

are clearly crafted signs to think of them,

A keychain, a journal, a dried flower,

all once touched by one.

I know many of them have never existed inside

these four walls

But everything in this house

has known them for years.

The way story tellers in villages

remember and recount

stories of lovers they never met.

A decorative graphic featuring a light green watercolor splash in the background. Overlaid on the splash is a dark green leafy branch with several pointed leaves. The text 'CHAPTER 4' is centered over the splash.

CHAPTER 4

No, I do not want to understand

Mangoes only grow in summers

This restaurant does not deliver in my area

They have ran out of my favourite sundae

Marigolds only bloom in winters

You can't write letters to dead

I can't spend my day exploring a foreign city

And sleep in my bed at night

No I do not want to understand

You live on other end of city

And without a promise of meeting tonight

But I want to meet you

And eat mangoes in February

I have understood things all my life

Tonight I only want to desire.

The struggle behind my education

My motivation has always been an amalgamation of two very alternate ideologies but they have helped me to stay grounded; an optimistic approach with hopes for a better future and a pessimistic one fearing regrets. I hope it would be safe to say that my hatred for regret is always a strong motivation to stay on track because I am not a big fan of those who cry over spilt milk, hence, I can't afford being one. I must add that I come clean to myself and do not keep myself lingering over false hopes. One must work hard in the first place and then hope for a bright future. I believe that sitting idle won't get you anywhere but down the road of regrets and then there is no way back. I would prefer to do the smart work instead of blaming my fate for my failures later.

I did not complete my high school in time for reasons that were beyond my control. Before I became a professional athlete I always wanted to go back to high school. That opportunity was not given to me for more than one reason: lack of finances, mismanaged time, absence of emotional support, too much commitment in other things, procrastination and above all red taping. When I made enquiries there was too much red tape as to the requirements and that pushed me into giving up not knowing that my destiny awaits me not in South Africa but in the United States.

They say that everything happens for a reason and we are always rewarded for each and everything we do. Every step leads us somewhere. Nothing is meaningless. My ideology came to life when my reading habits led me to achieving my degrees. I have always been an avid reader. I used to read as much as I can, whenever I can. So, even during my travels, I would make sure that I pick up a book at every airport that I get to. That led me to possess a library card for every country that I frequently travelled to.

When I got to New York, United States, my first stop was at the New York Public Library. Later, when I moved to Los Angeles, where I spent a couple of years, training at the University of Southern California, I as usual decided to get a library card.

This step was a life changing moment for me.

I joined the library and got a library card issued to my name, checked out a few books, returned them before the due date. It was a monotonous routine for me. Picking books, surfing through them and returning them just to replace them with a new one. This one odd Sunday I saw a flyer that advertised High school for working adults and it sparked my interest. I took the flyer to my house, read it through and decided that I was going to dial the number at the back. When I called the number 2 days later, the lady told me that they had bursaries too, she

encouraged that I applied for the bursary, which I did and was approved about two weeks later.

This happened at the time when my running contract with Nike was at the time of termination due to my injuries and non performance. The timing was just perfect.

Time is a hoax;

as all units of measurement are

inventions of convenience.

How many moments in a day?

Without having to think much about it, I was a registered student at Smart Horizons Career Online High school (Florida). Just like that. When I called home and told my family about it they just laughed it off and thought that I was not going to finish it just like everything else that I had started but never finished due to one reason or the other.

The response of my family kind of discouraged me but deep down my heart, I knew this was different. I spent sleepless nights trying to complete this diploma in record time. As, I had ample time in LA so I made sure that I worked hard,

mostly to show everybody else that nothing is impossible and also to prove it to my family that I can finish at least one thing.

How long can one keep

the firefly fixed?

A moment smaller than moment

has spread over all my years.

As they say luck can't be trusted. When I was at least 80% done, my time in the United States was up and as a result of that deadline I had to pack my stuff up and come back home. One of my biggest fears at that time was that I was not going to be able to complete it once I get home. Eventually, I got back home; I relaxed and forgot about my studies in the chaos of settling in the old space. If it wasn't for my partner Charles, I wouldn't have done it. He encouraged me and even fought with me when needed for making sure that I finished what I started and yes I did. I not only completed it but also averaged 85% on all my subjects and graduated with a GPA Score of 4.0 which was a great achievement.

I also became a salutatorian (2nd Highest in the class of 2019!)

Now that this hurdle was overcome by me, I sat back and diverged back into a slow and steady life. I didn't have the slightest idea that there were greater things ahead. I didn't really value the American High school diploma, and I thought I have received my high school diploma, it is American and I am in South Africa so it is over.

During the same year that I graduated, 2019, I started applying for colleges to study medicine in Australia, United States and Canada and funny enough most of my applications were successful but because studying abroad as an international student is very expensive I decided to try at home.

I followed all the university rules, the certifications and evaluations. The entrance test and everything else also went perfect but I got rejected by all the public universities in the country. It was another hurdle but it was smaller than the one Covid poised into my life. Everything seemed to fall apart but it was also not the end because *every dark cloud has its silver lining*.

A decorative graphic featuring a light green watercolor splash in the background. Overlaid on the splash is a dark green leafy branch with several pointed leaves, extending from the bottom left towards the center.

CHAPTER 5

Every Sunday

I lie in bed for an hour

Dreading the work expecting

To be done, next week.

New work will appear out of nowhere

While old one keep cluttering

To-do lists.

Living is exhausting.

Everything needs to be done,

Over and Over

Brush your teeth every morning

Your hair everytime, you leave home

Pay bills every month

File taxes every year

I already know

There's more work coming

Anyway

Life doesn't seem too exhausting

Love makes everything look

Such a cheap bargain.

What Covid took away from me

Anybody who met me towards the end of 2019 would understand how excited I was. I had completed and graduated high school from the United States. I also got published in major online platforms in the United States for my educational achievements. I got accepted to study law at Varsity College in Johannesburg South Africa. It seemed as if the lady luck was working in my favor but only till lockdown happened. 3 months into the year and we were barely beginning to enjoy university life when we had a hard lock down and all things fell apart.

In March of 2020 we had a hard quarantine situation which interrupted movement, business and training. In May, 2020 I had financial problems which I thought were temporary but they led to my College Debt skyrocket. I couldn't afford to pay rent. I couldn't afford to pay tuition. I had to start over again.

I ended up de-registering myself from the institution because all the odds were against me. Covid didn't just affect my studies, it ruined my entire life. I had to pick up the pieces of my life right from the bottom because during Covid, my life collapsed just like the dominos. At that time I just wished to exist but without any worries and woes. It was one hell of a testing time for me.

I seldom find myself thinking that why life can't be easy just like that in movies. My favorite scenes from a movie are when the characters just exist in the moment. They are meeting a stranger for the first time in a cafe, and are already falling in love or when they are being too happy before a tragic scene, completely oblivious of what lies ahead of them. On each birthday when we blow candles, equal to the number of years we have spent on earth, we think of life as an accumulated sum. As if doesn't matter what happened in a day and in the end it just adds another 24 hours to your age. Maybe, that's why I struggle to follow a routine, to continue a job, to pursue an interest, to remain smitten by a lover. I reject to feel each day as same. I demand from life to be felt. I let the grief take over my heart, I mourn each sadness no matter how small it is but I also let my heart be filled with happiness. I make myself feel as if I am the character who doesn't want to know what lies ahead or what's left behind.

Mustering up all the courage and guts after the fallbacks of Covid, I applied again in for the 2021 academic year. Surprisingly so, I was given hope by some

universities which eventually declined me later to relieve me off my surprise. I then realized that 2021 was going to be a very long year. I got enrolled at a distance learning institution Stadio, which helped me to stay busy. I had applied for a higher certificate in paralegal studies. During the same year, 2021, I applied again for the next academic year, 2022. I graduated in 2021 from Stadio; successfully with the highest score in class. Later, I got accepted at North West University which is where I am currently studying for a Bachelor of Laws.

Life has changed in so many ways. As we grow up, we surprisingly learn to love the art of learning. In school we yearned for holidays but now we have a yearning to leave our comfort zones and to learn from our instructors.

Every day I wake up to gray clouds and think to myself, “Should I skip classes?” I recall from my childhood, one day Grand Pa told us whenever there would be clouds in sky, he would pray, Grand Ma will let us spend the day with him and take some time off school. But Grand Ma’s clock always ticked right at 6:00 a.m. We never skipped school unless someone died in immediate family or we got sick, almost everyone died after I finished school or in summer vacations. And only my brother always got sick. Only if Grand Ma is not at home, probably at some church conference, then Grand Pa will let us skip school just for a day she would let us skip school but whole day I would be torn with guilt even though I enjoyed spending time with him telling us stories:

Our bus driver would have waited for us to show up.

My science teacher who always looked at me for reassurance

After completing each sentence

Would have stared at an empty chair

Or another face, who wouldn't know his role to nod.

My best friend would have reserved the seat with his bag

And he might had to sit alone.

Now, I can skip school without asking Mom.

But I still go to each class

For there's an instructor who looks at me,

Whenever she is struggling to organise a sentence.

Everyday I tell myself

One can go past the grey clouds

If someone is waiting on the other end

For you.

A decorative graphic featuring a light green watercolor splash in the background and a dark green leaf branch in the foreground.

CHAPTER 6

Shadows in my life: *The family that I chose*

A family is an essential part of our life while we are growing up. We realize that we are all dependant on either paternal or maternal support from our family but actually it is just a myth that we are conditioned to believe in. A traditional concept of family includes mother, father, our spouse, our children, grandparents, aunts, uncles and also our cousins. I would call them all as faces or shadows whom we know as our family. These are all blood relations that are bestowed on us by God. Still, I don't confirm to this definition of family. To me family is not only about our blood relations but it also includes the ones who help us in our ups and downs. In our life, we interact with many people who are strangers to us. But we feel sincere vibes from them and we are attracted towards them. We are ready to spend all of our life with them and are comfortable to share a lot of secrets with them. We always want those people to stand by us. And we are always there for them too. Their support and motivation always matters in every decision of our life. Their choice to be with us depends upon our feelings and connection. These people are undoubtedly our friends.

When we live with only our relatives we are ultimately abandoned by them due to differences, hatred, conflicts, and sorrows. Moving in a toxic family circle

makes us feel more disgusted towards them and it is all in all an annoying experience. Unfortunately, we know the nature of every member of our family as we grow up with them or we assume that we do. When the agreements and disagreements vary from the maternal and paternal sides of family, it brings about huge conflicts and disguises amongst the members. Living with the relatives does have its own consequences; broken hearts, hating each other for no good reason and as people grow old, they drift apart sometimes within a few miles and sometimes within few cities and sometimes regions apart. Your immediate family must be loved unconditionally according to our upbringing. We must put our trust in them as they are related to us by blood but I have quite bitter experiences that don't let me believe in such ideologies anymore.

My definition of family is something different. Family is not just about people who we are born into; I believe that family is made up of people with whom you establish a strong bond and a very good relationship. A relation based on the terms of give and take. You take care of me and I take care of you. A surety, that I will always be there for you as you would be for me. You don't bother the shape, size or form of individuals necessarily. It can be friends you meet when you have already lived a quarter of your life.

Families are meant to take care of each other, emotionally and financially both. They are the clothes that cover you and dignify you. They are the food for

your soul when it feels drained. They are above all the shelter and shield that protects you from all the adversities and hardships. Families provide you that fresh breath of hope when you have lost all the courage. They are the pillars that help you stand tall, no matter what. They are the medicines that take your pain away or at least help you to get some rest in the testing times of your life.

Family is the people that you choose. There are narratives that say you can't choose family and blood is thicker than water but I don't have the same thoughts anymore. Family can be chosen from the people you love amongst your relatives and also from the people whom you meet later on in life. The consequences that the narrative of traditional family brought into my life are huge. At some point I had to decide that am I going to continue with the hatred and should I continue to subject myself to such toxicity, humiliation, heartbreak and gossips causing me pain just because I am related to them by blood?

As I grew up, I selected the peace of my mind above the traditional family. I will not subject myself to pain and will stay with my chosen family. I had loved the paternal side of my family dearly, but those few individuals chose wealth over me and my love for them. The reason I am talking about all this is because their choices made my life a little uncomfortable and a little difficult. My maternal side of the family was not amongst the wealthiest but they also weren't among those who lived from hand to mouth. So when I had financial problems, I had to subject

myself to the mercy of the paternal side of my family, where they had to provide for me financially.

Final exams in the high school are the most important for every teenager, and as an aunt or uncle they had the means available to provide the child with the education but they choose otherwise. When my father passed away, he did leave certain things behind that were meant to take care of his children. So, the whole reason why my paternal side of family decided to abandon me was to earn happiness from something that wasn't entitled to them. The money that was left behind by my father and some other resources like some cows which could have been sold to buy us some ease were taken over by the paternal side of our family. They were supposed to pay that amount to me and my siblings but that never happened because they used it up before we reached them. I then decided that I would never want to see them again because what they did to me was unbelievable. Their behavior showed me that I was never a part of their family. Imagine being told that you are indeed a part of the family and are addressed as their child and then at a turning point of your life, they discard you as if you never belonged to them. It is like the scariest nightmares of your life and you have to trust me when I say that it was an eye opener for me. As of today, 25 years later, I have not seen them after that and I believe that you don't do that to your family.

Everything was working fine with me being a waiter at Monte Casino. I was helping at home. I was in touch with the maternal side of my family. I made a few trips towards my grandmother and my uncles who played a big role in taking care of me. They made sure that I become the best version of myself. Things were working out quite well. Everyone was happy. My uncle Mike was the closest person in my life at that time. We were not that close as we were when I was growing up, but in my childhood he used to be the closest person. He was that one male figure in my life who took me as a son because he never had a son, as he only had two daughters. He would come and visit and vice versa.

He worked for SIPC. He was a sound and lighting engineer for all the prime time shows. At that time I didn't have interest in broadcasting, sound and everything that he did but we remained as thick as thieves. His daughters, Evelyn and Sylva, were also very attached to me but as we grew older, we grew apart. I still love them very much although we don't talk frequently via phone or meet ups. After sometime Uncle Mike's health started deteriorating, it was a moment that saddened the whole family as he was an ever happy soul. I still remember the drives we used to take when he was hospitalized, I would visit him almost every day. It was one morning when my cousin gave me a call, and she told me that her father has passed away. It was indeed a very sad moment for all of us.

Growing up as a kid, for 12 years, I never had a brother. After twelve years, my younger brother was born. I did have a father, who didn't play a big role in my life. At that time I got to know that I also have an elder brother and younger sister & brother from my biological father but they had another mother. My younger brother was the son of my step father, but we shared the same mother. At that time I decided that I will go and live with my aunt Anita, and then go and find my brothers. I wanted to meet my siblings from my biological father. As much as I knew that I had two brothers and a sister, I had never met them.

One day, I visited their house and that is where I met them. My elder brother was very enthusiastic at our meeting. He already knew that I was his younger brother. And just like that I had an elder brother that I thought I never had and our relation grew stronger and stronger with time. We are very close today, and he is married now. He has got one child, a very beautiful daughter.

About a year later, I went out to find my younger brother and sister from my father. My older cousin brother gave me a number and all I knew was they lived somewhere in petria. My cousin brother lived almost near my siblings and through him I had a hope to meet my other two siblings as well. He told me the address of my step mother and that is how I went to visit them. I took it up to myself, and without informing Aunt Anita, I took a taxi and went to visit them. Most probably, it was one of the longest distance that I had ever travelled. I wasn't able to go back

home as it was already late, and it gave birth to a conflict with my maternal side of the family. They thought that I had started visiting people who really never cared about me. I was only visiting them because I wanted to meet my siblings. I had made up my mind hence I had to meet them. It was quite an emotional time. My brother was very young; my sister was almost around my age. We exchanged numbers and promised to stay in touch.

When I left that place, something in my life had changed and I felt happier about it. I had finally met my siblings and we were no more just mere strangers for each other. Now I had two more brothers and it was an amazing feeling. We stayed in touch through the phone. My sister drifted apart, from talking every day, to talking once a week, to talking once a month, then once a year and never talking again. But luckily my relation with my brothers remained strong.

A decorative graphic featuring a light green watercolor splash in the background. Overlaid on the splash is a dark green line drawing of a leafy branch. The text 'CHAPTER 7' is centered over the splash.

CHAPTER 7

The summer never arrives

When I lose the extra pounds

To achieve the ideal body

The weekend too

Never comes

When I fix sleep schedule

A prefix to fix life

Eating alone on a weekend

I think

Life might never become

How I imagined it to be

I gulp down futility of everything

With coffee

Until I reach bottom of cup

And remember

I am just a point

In a huge universe.

IDENTIFYING MY WORTH:

My Experience as a Nike Athlete

Being an athlete came as a surprise to me. Honestly, it didn't really feel like a big deal at that time. Although I was pretty much celebrated and well known across the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States, still it didn't excite me that much. I guess that confirms the saying, *you don't really know what something means to you until you lose it*. That's the exact same case with me.

The best thing about this experience was that it left me with a realization that I was selling myself short and was capable to do much more by using my strengths wisely. Being a young athlete out in the world taught me to understand and appreciate people of different cultures and it opened a lot of doors for me because I could get whatever I wanted at any given time which sparked my life as a blessing.

Moreover, this experience gave me self confidence or maybe it uprooted all my insecurities if I ever had any. I was complimented on my self- confidence and charisma by people. I believe confidence in oneself and one's powers and abilities can work like magic in achieving goals.

Through all those years, I felt more at home during my travels. I think that's why I kept on travelling, because I was always more welcome by strangers out in the world than back at home. I do have a staunch belief that that was a great opportunity for me to make lifelong friends, although I might not see some of them again but they will definitely stay forever in my heart. I guess another reason why I loved to travel was that it widens the horizon and I believe it helps people to widen their perspective of the world as well. Travelling is more of an exploration for me rather than a vacation. It helped me understand different cultures and regions.

It won't be a wrong analogy if I say that I am a lodestone to kind souls, hence, I always aspire to be kind. Whenever I observe a trait I like in others, I appreciate their personality and try to work on it myself. Mostly I am attracted towards kindness in people but keeping my best personality traits in mind, I believe that I always try to be kind so there is not a particular attribute that I am trying to acquire as of right now.

I am proud of how far I have come, but I don't think I have reached my full potential. I still have a long way to go and many more lives to touch. My biggest fear is to die and to be forgotten. I always find myself wondering that I am just an individual like a tiny point in the whole universe. I always wonder what I can probably do to make myself worth remembering.

Lawyer aspect of my life

It's not about the human you loved, for love was never the answer to the complex questions life poses for you. It's not even the friend you lost over time, for everyone is replaceable, and the memories do eventually fade away. It's not the boring job, for a passionate job is an oxymoron, anyway. It's the inability of each man to die at the precise moment he gives up- the moment he realises that nothing in life will ever be the way he has imagined. All the dreadful years of living a life, where you do everything, you once said you will never do.

I have never imagined myself as a lawyer even though this was one of my childhood dreams. Even my mother will probably be shocked if she were alive to find out that I have taken this route. Most people are shocked who looked down on me growing up because I was never a child from a rich family. Even one of my family members was shocked that I was able to use a computer which made me shocked and angry at the same time because I then understood how low they thought of me.

The lawyer in me was motivated by the injustices that I have seen and that I have come across. I have a long lost uncle, Mr Vusi Khumalo, who was imprisoned a couple of years ago and was sentenced to 20 years in prison for a crime he has always denied that he committed. Honestly, the truth is between him

and his conscious and if I was a lawyer at the time of his trial or his sentencing, I would have fought to either get him acquitted or to get him a lighter sentence. This is because, I am one of the few people that believed him and I realized that the sentence handed down to him was rather unfair.

The law degree has taught me to be more humble, patient and treat others the way I will like to be treated. Studying law has never been easy since the beginning. The law degree has taught me to be more grateful to what life has to offer. My entire experience has been great and has brought me very much closer to God. My relationship with God has been greater than ever before.

I have met amazing, intelligent and super smart people and for that I am super grateful. These people have been the breath of fresh air for me. Imagine you are sitting by the lake, with a person. I can't name the relationship as a lover or friend. This is the dilemma of our age. We need everyone and everything to come under a definition. But there are people who escape these labels, like a person you only drink coffee with, the one who reads the same books, the one who appreciates your taste in music, the one you admire from a distance in anonymity, the one you love openly, the unnamed stranger, who is companion of your secrets, the one who only make way into your imagination for a fleeting second, the one who has resided in your nostalgia like an old heirloom, too important to ignore but too out

of fashion. These are people and emotions, relations and sentiments which can't be caged under one of the synonyms for a loved one.

Today, they reported in news that the black hole ate a star, the size of the sun. I'm not a science enthusiast and can't figure out the significance of it. But it occupied my mind for a long time: The black hole swallowed a star. A whole star; can be a whole planet, can be earth. How during wars they bombed whole cities to death and life ended in a brief second. Life as we know it, with its unending anxieties about future and regrets of the past. How in life we expand our problems to give ourselves a feeling of importance. We keep on over thinking about each decision. Where would this job lead me? If I pursue this degree, what kind of work opportunities it will open up, if I commit myself to this one person, how it will affect every other plan. How we keep on going in circles. With inexhaustible plans for near and far future. Every night we sleep with a list of tasks, we have delayed for tomorrow, the people we are going to meet, the messages we are going to send, the places we are going to visit, the love we are going to hide, the love we are going to express, and the love we are going to forget. And out of a nowhere life as we know it ends, in the briefest second. It either ends for one of us, for some of us or all of us. We worry, save, regret too much for a life, which can't survive even

one second.

When I pass on, I wish to be remembered as a giver and a good human being who strived to find good in all situations and most importantly as a man of God.

No matter what we plan, our actions define our destiny, that's why; I would rather stay focused on my notion of smart work. Meanwhile, I will also make sure that I am helping people around me and doing welfare through which I will always live in the hearts of people, long after I am gone. Whatever we do in our life defines us but the good deeds help us to be remembered forever.



CHAPTER 8

How after meeting you

I kept on smiling alone

All the way back home

That day

I understood that

Joy is the happiness

We can't contain

And what about love?

Well love,

Love is the reason

We continue to be

Good deeds taken for granted & Parenthood!

We all have met the raw versions of ourselves. The person we are, the unfiltered thoughts, the sorrow hidden behind that smile and the things that make us cringe instantly are only known to our personal self. Some colors are for our own perceptions, some pains are way too personal to be shared, some thoughts are

way too clichéd to be talked about in front of the world. I also would like to keep most of it to myself and I shouldn't be sounding like a narcissist as a matter of fact but I stand on a pedestal which allows me to spill some beans about my thoughts about my own self. Here goes nothing.

I believe that I have been the most genuine person that I have ever met in my life, my heart has been so pure and I have invested more of it for others with generosity. I go all the way out to help others even though I know that I don't have much myself. It gives me pleasure knowing that even if I don't have enough, others have enough. It takes a lot of courage and forbearance to give out your all to people without expecting much in return.

I remember the first word I looked up in the dictionary was "courage". I love dictionaries, they give meanings to random arrangement of letters. I don't think anyone ever opens a dictionary and looks up the meaning of the word "love". We make our own meanings of the word, like when the teacher said, "It takes a lot of courage to tell a truth", I knew courage will mean something along the lines of strength, but love kept on changing its meaning over time. When I saw women making their marriages work through constant sacrifice, I thought that's what love should be, to give up your own comfort for happiness of others. When the nurse told the old lady, that she has few days left, and her equally old husband let a silent tear run down his wrinkled cheeks, I thought that was love; To be sad, for another

person's grief. They don't teach about love in school, so we all grew up with an idea of love and thought this is it. In movies they showed that if you love a girl, you need to protect her, like anything else you own, and many men confused love with possession. The others confused it with violence that women loved the heroes who would beat others to reach you. With our own versions of love: inherited, learnt, absorbed, watched, read we kept on trying our luck in life. But with time, I learned that love has no meaning of its own. Love is the shelter you both seek on rainy nights, and it's the tears you cry on individual tragedies of other. You can't say what love is, but you know when the other person makes you feel loved. At times it is not romantic songs on the riverside and roses on date nights but it is the feeling of being accepted exactly the way you are.

It is almost impossible for one person to understand the other completely. Nonetheless many out there hold the capacity to make one feel heard, understood and trusted. Still, there is a dearth of such people on the face of earth. We hardly meet someone whom we can call our love, with whom we are ready to be our vulnerable selves, to carry more than just each other's baggage, to share dreams and to find home within each other's arms. It is not just about the comfort we find in a specific person's presence, it is more about what we have to offer. I am someone who can be kind unconditionally but over the time, I do feel like relationships have taken away my kindness to some extent. Mostly, I felt used,

exploited and taken advantage of. I don't mind helping people in need but it kills me inside to find out that my help was taken for granted, as if it is expected and if I don't show up then the expecting side will be angry with me, funny enough or they will feel that I have let them down because in their head they felt that I was obligated to be their saving grace. How stupid is it to be liable for someone else's problems and eventually that help manages to succeed in getting forgotten in a blink of an eye as it was never considered as a favor. I am unable to understand the logic behind counting on someone else to make amends to the mess you created because as far as I remember, we have always been taught that we are responsible for the mess we create.

For instance, in 2019, my partner decided that we should help my partner's cousin who at that time lived in Nigeria. The cousin had obviously good references from most of the people which I thought was great. It then appeared that he had spent his entire teenage life at boarding school so his mother and the rest of his family only knew his quiet side of life. I helped him to apply for his visa to South Africa, I paid for his flights and upon arrival I gave him a job in our company. This was the beginning of 2019 which was the year that Covid-19 started. During that same year, things started showing signs that business was going down but we hung on. During the year 2020, we had a hard lockdown. He lived in my house, I bought the food and still I paid him a salary. During the entire year of 2020, with

no work at hand, he still got paid. At the same time, he never spent a night without food, even at times when there was no enough food. He will eat whatever he needed to eat and when there was money and we felt the need to go and eat out, we will take him with us.

Anyway, he decided to turn against us and decided that he was no longer family and chose to be just a worker. From then he has chosen to torment us by his ungrateful behavior and he tends to want more than he actually deserves. During this entire time he has spent with us, he has never bought anything in the house but he still lives under our roof. And for such reasons, I do feel like he is taking advantage of me and the situation and that is bad. But I have no other choice but to forgive him because that's who I am and my stay at the states had instilled this hospitality in me. If I had to say something to him, it would be these verses:

I often forgive you

Not because you deserve it

I know it only encourages

you to disappoint more.

I often forgive you

Not to make peace with myself

I know regret will keep pinching

till I become bitter.

I often forgive you

Not as an equalising act

Each mistake has its own remedy

Guilt can't produce forgiveness

I often forgive you

Thinking of times when He forgives

Infinitely, Unilaterally, Certainly

Tonight I borrow kindness from Lord

To lend it to you.

There are things that make us feel sour but then there are blessings that make us forgive and forget all for granted behaviors. Like mothers love the child in their womb even when they haven't seen them, then they continue to go through the morning sickness and the pain and sore feet just to meet a teeny tiny human who rules their heart. They say labor pain makes you feel as if someone has broken all the bones in your body at once and still you stay intact to bring that bundle of joy

into the world. You yourself know that the pain was worth it because the bliss that follows is out of this world. The mother dotes on the child and eventually the child also finds his universe encompassed in the warmth of his mother's arms.

With the passage of time, the dependence on the parent increases and the growing child learns life in the comfort of the home. I believe personal traits are a gift to be precise. I often wish I could compare myself with the younger version of myself but I can't solely for the reason that I buried the younger version of myself when I lost my mother. The younger vulnerable version of me does not exist anymore. Still, I do prefer the younger and carefree version of me than the older responsible me.

As a child I had ambitious dreams. I always imagined myself to be either the Prime Minister or making a big scientific breakthrough. Later, I learned about the Nobel Prize and a desire was set in my heart to win it. Every day, when we drove past beautiful old houses in the town or when I visited well kept personal libraries, I had the desire to only accumulate. I would constantly question that how people were content with their average lives. I would see the gatekeeper sit in the same chair for whole day and leave for his house in the evening, with an unmistakable sense of discipline and boredom. It would keep me up at night that how people randomly die and no one would ever know about their existence. But after living through small and big tragedies and breathing in moments of intense beauty and

*intimacy, I have learned that it is okay to live our ordinary lives. Everyone won't
be President or next Nobel Laureate.*

*But if you find the courage in your heart to forgive someone in the moment
of anger,*

if you set aside your own tragedy and help someone suffering,

*if you love another human to the extent that you pray for them before you
seek your own selfish desires,*

*if you have laughed in the moment as it was the last moment of human
existence,*

*if you were kind to someone you would never see again in life without an
expectation of return.*

You have lived your life.

***The candle can't make the whole forest bright but it's content to produce
infinite light for the ones near it.***

Parenthood was rather unexpected for me. It came to me at the most testing times of my life and I had never known bliss before that. My sister with whom I shared my childhood at Aunt Anita's residence gave birth to her second child whom she named *Siyabonga* meaning (Thank you) and I later renamed him as

Tshepo which means (Hope) and indeed he was my hope in goodness. At that time when she gave birth to this bundle of happiness, she was traditionally married but after the birth of her son, the marriage collapsed. There were many factors like the infidelities, the burden of emotional and physical abuse from her husband and a bunch of trauma.

She died two years later with that pressure of depression, and the never ending confusion after she got separated from her husband. Her husband was unable to associate himself with their small beautiful boy, he was given a chance to take care of the child but that lowlife messed it all up by abusing the child physically and emotionally.

I believed that my sister's child was like my own child so I had to take the matter with the authorities and the courts. Then the child was legally and luckily placed under my custody and after that day no one ever caught a sight of his father.

I was and am in a very healthy and committed relationship with someone who loves me for who I am, understands me better than I understand myself and we share a very special bond. My partner is my number one fan, my biggest supporter, and the loudest in the crowd to cheer for me. Although, like all the other couples, we do have our problems in life but I will not trade my partner for anything or anybody in the world.

So, when the child's father vanished from the scene and no one heard another word from him, I and my partner decided to legally adopt *Siyabonga*. He is now our son, who is doing his ninth grade and is an academically excelling child with a dream of being a Neuro-surgeon. Our son makes parenting so much easier, he is unlike any other child, he is very responsible, polite, kind, caring and he always puts other people first. I love him with all my heart.

We are always so engrossed in asking for more that we never pause and think that things can go even worse. Being grateful is not a response to only receiving something good but it is also being thankful for absence of bad. To believe that you fully value and treasure what you have today, till you have it. In life even if nothing extraordinary happens you can always value your health, family and friends.

A decorative graphic featuring a light green watercolor splash in the background. Overlaid on the splash is a dark green leafy branch with several pointed leaves, extending from the bottom left towards the center.

CHAPTER 9

Everyone lies to you

The government

When it says

Its your war

The back of skincare products

When it says

Guaranteed result in 8 days

The cookbook

When it says ready in 20 minutes

Your lover

When he says

Will be always there

Your friends

When they say

They are fine

The Chains of Abuse

Talking about abuse has been a taboo for long. In contemporary world people has become more expressive and more aware. What seemed like a curse that held the ability to jinx life in the past, is now talked about openly. People embrace their scars as a medal; it is like a war that they won singlehandedly. I am also going to grab this opportunity and pin down my personal experience of bullying, harassment and abuse. Surprisingly so, I have been exposed to all kind of abuse. And abuse is abuse no matter what we choose to call it. It goes on and on if we don't break the chain. Some like me grew up being exposed to all kinds of abuse: both emotional and physical. I was born and raised at a time when physical abuse was being normalized and sometimes glorified by the society.

Looking at it from where I am today, I feel that those abusive relationships back in the day were more traditional and justified while at present it is not only disgusting but makes me want to vomit at the mere thought of it. How horrendous is the idea of normalizing something that can become a cause of someone's mental breakdown. Still, it happened. Men felt entitled, they believed that they own their wives and children. They held an upper hand and they didn't want to be challenged. Someone challenging them simply meant that they will be seen as someone who is weak. I can now clearly understand that those abuses were

initiated by narrow minded beings and possibly continued due to lack of information. Lack of awareness has always led societies towards their downfall or hindered the progress of individuals of that society.

Although my stepfather and my uncle are highly educated individuals but they followed what the society wanted irrespective of the consequences. Education is not only about holding a degree, it needs to enlighten you, teach you the difference between good and bad and also make you a human with conscience. Still, all that those men of my family were worried about was; “**WHAT WILL PEOPLE SAY.**” Although abuse was not solely in my family, everybody knew about it, everybody saw it but nobody did anything about it.

Men would beat woman and children, and nothing will be done about it. Children were subject to being beaten up and that was normal. Woman were beaten up and labeled as the ones that provoked their abusers. They were mostly bread winners; hence, they felt very powerful. They will toy around with other people's emotions, and remember an abusive person is not usually violent to the world at large but they hurt those closest to them especially they hurt people that they are supposed to protect, people that love them the most.

I witnessed my mother being physically and emotionally abused. She was beaten down by my stepfather to a point where she had to take up measures to

defend me, her own self and my younger brother. Although my stepfather never laid his hand on me, I was constantly angry and disappointed at his actions.

Although I knew that his abusive actions were wrong, I wouldn't have dared to do a thing against it because I was not only young but physical abuse and violence was seen as some kind of discipline especially towards woman and children. We know that women and children are always vulnerable and easily abused by men because they can't defend themselves.

The abuse I witnessed traumatized me.

I witnessed my aunties being abused. Even one of my cousin-sister with whom I grew up with died in the hands of her abuser, her husband. The husband cheated on her when she was pregnant. When she found out about it during her pregnancy that's when her troubles started, she was constantly beaten to a point that she almost lost her child. When the child was born she was severely depressed to a point; where she suffered a lot from confusion; until she passed away. Leaving behind two children (Princess and Siyabonga) Siyabonga whom at the time was 2 years old whom I now call my son. I continued to witness abuse in the lives of my family members and that didn't sit well with me. The problem is that I didn't know what to do and little did I know that I would be next.

At the age of 20, I met Zakes Phala who was way older than me. Let's just get this clear that I am attracted to people much older than me. Zakes was very loving at first but as time went by he started to exhibit extremely abusive signs. I started realizing them when he started checking my phone, when I was half asleep. I was young and naive and I saw the signs but I stayed in the relation anyway. That man was very abusive in nature, he would make me feel loved and wanted for a day and abuse me for the next whole week. It was like beating up a child and giving them a candy. This continued time and time again until being in a relationship with him was no longer love but a comfort zone.

The concept of beauty is overly romanticized. We are raised to believe that beauty has to fit some ideals: the perfect facial features, or nature at its best or an impeccable architectural design. But, there is beauty in abundance in everything around. There is beauty when an infant holds tightly to your finger. Without knowing you through any of the labels, the sense of security and belonging a human being feels towards another human being. There is beauty when a stranger speaks about love. His eyes turn into stars with mention of his unfamiliar beloved. But you are happy for them, you are praying for their union, unconditionally, wholeheartedly. To live in waiting to find Beauty is a miserable condition. You will be always disappointed because nothing will ever fulfill your ideals of beauty.

There's a small prayer that I say for you all, that may you have the eyes, which can spot the smallest of beauty in times of despair.

Same was the case with your author, he was always been living in a façade. I thought that love was meant to be this way. That someone controlling you was you surrendering in front of love. That love meant to kill your desires and self respect for the person of your dreams. More importantly I could not distinguish between love and mere attraction. That's how flawed our idea of beauty and love is. Love and beauty are subjective. It varies from person to person and I realized it quite late in my life.

Things turned ugly when Zakes would attempt and sometimes succeed to cheat on me in my presence, but I stayed in the relationship. Later when I realized & complained was when he started beating me up. Still I stayed. One day, he told me upfront that if I want a relationship with him then I will have to do whatever he wants and desires me to do for him. Then, he followed me to work, and spied on me the entire day. When I returned home that specific day, he interrogated me with the events that happened at work. My narration was a bit hazy, hence, it wouldn't have been exactly the same way he saw things so he believed I was lying to him. And the beatings continued.

Still I stayed.

My problem was that I grew up seeing these types of things, and our elders used the term (in Marriage or in a relationship you have to be patient). I was conditioned to stay no matter how abusive or toxic things would get. But the funny part is that I was not married to this person, still I did allow him to come to my place and treat me the way he wanted. I am still trying to figure out that what was the reason behind me being this clawed in his hands, even though, I was financially stable. This man had the nerve to tell me that I have to be with him for at least 2 years in our relationship then I can start learning how to drive. I was going to pay for my own driving license- what in the hell was wrong with me.

Thinking of it now, everything is wrong with that statement. And if anyone has said that to me during those days, I will make sure that they never see my face again. Zakes was actually a fraudster. He kept all these under the carpet and I had no idea at all, until he was arrested. The question is, with all the abuse that was going on, would I have still loved him if I knew he was a criminal. If you asked me then, my answer would have been possibly different. But if you ask me now, knowing things that I know now, I wouldn't have stayed and I would have made sure that he is taken away from the society in an attempt to make him pay for the trauma, anger and abuse towards me.

Well, when he got arrested, it did hurt because I loved him but I feel like that was the universe talking.

It sounds ridiculous to my ears now but even after he got arrested, I didn't believe that he was a fraudster, I attended every court case and I believed he was innocent. I visited him in prison almost every week with food and toiletries. He didn't even confess or admit guilt.

He spent about two years in prison and was later released. At that time I had already moved on. We never spoke of our relationship. Though, he made efforts to get me back but it was a little too late. The unanswered question is that did he know he was abusive towards me. Was he abusive in his previous relationships, will he continue to abuse others after me. That question will never be answered because 6 months after his release he was involved in a car crash and died on the scene. May his soul rest in peace.

I thought the memory of love outlives everything. But I'm already forgetting the way I used loved. I can't remember how their each last word left me restless for days and how their smile evoked in me an urge to preserve it. Perhaps we all deserved a better lover, someone who has the patience to see plants grow, someone who has the dedication to learn a new instrument. I took two lessons of playing guitar and it was too much effort. You deserved someone who doesn't hold love from a goodbye to a new hello, someone who doesn't leave the poems incomplete and books unfinished.

My relationship with him was meant to be. It was meant to teach me a few lessons although in such an unfortunate way. We all have to go through hurdles to reach the finish line. We have to see the lows to finally get somewhere in life and achieve our share of highs. My experiences have left me with hope. I am an older and a wiser human being now. I know better and I choose better.

The thing about living with anxiety is

You forget the days, when your mind lies to you.

*You only consider it a lifelong friend, who has kept you alive for a quarter of
century.*

While sitting in the office, my mind says

One of my eyes is not seeing properly,

I blink it twice, thrice, but the thought keeps coming back,

“Your left eye is not working fine”.

I put hand on my right eye, and only see from the left,

And it was working just fine.

On some days it says

I have missed a call.

*When phone is right there in my hands,
And I keep on telling myself that there was no call,
But then why would my trustful friend lie to me,
I check my phone, and there are no calls missed for the day.*

*There are days when mind flies to future
An indistinguishable age, but somewhere not too young,
It shows a picture of a man, sitting alone at the table.*

It asks again and again to recognise the man,

To internalise his loneliness,

To scan the room to find any lover.

But, I cannot find any other soul in the room.

And my heart panics.

My mind says

If you don't find love by the end of this day,

You will be that man- the man in a large empty room with no lover.

I keep looking for love in all the wrong places, till my mind forgets to tell me

the lie

That we all have to find a lover by the end of this day...

A decorative graphic featuring a light green watercolor splash in the background and a dark green leaf branch in the foreground.

CHAPTER 10

It would be so much fun

if we ever visit a city together.

We would miss our train stations

But not leave our conversations hanging in the middle.

We would explore the city without any map or tour guide,

And will turn as each street will turn into narrower alleys

And would wonder when we will come across any monument,

As pure coincidence.

We would count stars in the night,

Completely unaware of how far we have come from home

And spend our night in a small cafe run by a family,

Who don't print their menu for customers.

We would lose our tickets to bus back home

And will be grateful to the city for extending our stay.

We would be lost but too happy to notice.

Travelling Around the World

The immortal Greek philosopher Aristotle said,

“Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom.”

Knowing oneself leads to understanding one's journey. My journey of self-discovery began when I started travelling around the world. As we have entered the last chapter of my book, I am going to bring it down to self-actualization. When I travelled around the world, I met a lot of people, I wouldn't lie that majority of these people were very nice to me. Let me take the liberty to talk closer to home and start with my trip to Nigeria. Travelling indeed opened my third eye or is it even a term? Do they say it just an eye opener of an experience. For me it is not just an experience, it is a whole set of growing patterns which helps you appreciate people of different cultures, different beliefs, and people from all walks of life. When I travelled to Nigeria, a couple of years ago, it was probably one of the best trips that I ever took in my life because, I feel as if Nigeria is home away from home. That's where my partner is from and it is always exciting for me to plan a trip to Nigeria and meet my other family. I tell my partner that regardless of us being partners or not, I would have visited Nigeria at some point of time in my life as it was my travelling highlight in my career as an athlete.

I went to Nigeria somewhere between 2015 and 2016. And WOW (sighs) the love, the generosity, the kindness of the Nigerians was memorably beautiful. Although I was super excited about visiting Nigeria, the reason of my recent trip was unpleasant as my partner's brother has passed away and we were there to attend the funeral. When we reached the airport early in the morning, the power went out and it was my first time, experiencing power outages at an airport and unexpectedly, I found it hilarious. The border security was very friendly, right from the beginning. They welcomed me at Lagos international airport. My partner was waiting for me and we took an extremely long drive from the airport to Ekene's(my partner's brother) place who was yet to become one of my favourite people in Nigeria. The reception that I got from the entire family was amazing. My partner's mother loved me the minute she set my eyes on me. The first time that she saw me, she uttered in igbo *Obere nwa nwoke* which meant **small boy**. I was also told the meaning of this later.

I had a hidden agenda as a lover of African food to enjoy almost all of the Nigerian cuisine. I wanted to make sure that the month of my stay there should be registered with me enjoying each and every delicacy. I explored the whole area with awe in my eyes and welcoming all the love coming my way. A resident asked me that *if I had white parents?* It was funny in itself because I am a black person and he mistook me for being white. Later, I realized where that question came

from. They mistook me for a white person due to my fluency in English. (Still bizarre right) who would have thought.

Lagos was one of the most chaotic places I have ever seen still I loved the loud city. The traffic there is crazy. It will take you three hours to reach a place which could otherwise take merely half an hour (thirty minutes). I once had an appointment with a doctor but I had to miss it because I had already spent 4 hours just to reach there. Firstly, we would hire a car to get somewhere and then get stuck into the vicious cycle of an unending traffic. We got a chance to ask a local that how do they navigate around and we were told to use motorbikes or an auto named *OKADA*. When I first saw that thing, I resolved that I was never going to sit on it because I was certain I would fall. But later I got used to it and riding it was fun.

Everything was smooth until Ekene's wife (Obi) host made the biggest mistake I will live to regret for that entire. OH MY WORD. She took me to the meat market - I was flabbergasted! I still had a couple of weeks for my stay there but the scene of the market made me to take my words back of eating all of Nigeria's cuisine. The meat market was buzzing with flies, the most unhygienic site I will ever witness in my entire life. People were touching the meat with filthy hands. It all made me sick to my stomach because I had never seen such a health hazard in my life. I stopped eating completely because at that time I didn't trust

anything. At that moment I decided that now that food was an issue, I will unfortunately have to move from their place which felt like home. They treated me well but because of the food situation I just had to leave. I would have been better off at a place where I knew that the food will be at least somewhat bought from a place I am more comfortable with. I know this might have made me look like a snob, I know some people might have felt offended which I still regret to this day but for my own health I just had to move out. So my partner and I, moved to a hotel. But still because of what I had seen, I got sick so my return date to South Africa had to be pushed back a little. I was very sad to leave before my desired time.

All in all Lagos was a good trip.

I will live to cherish and respect the lives of the people I met in Nigeria, both part of my partner's family and mere strangers who showered me with love without even knowing. The people who smiled at me genuinely without holding back, people who genuinely showed interest in my country and people who wanted to know more about my family. All my love to Mama(My Partners mother) Angela and her children, Uche and her Children, Ekene, Obi, Tochukwu Elochukwu's mother, Adira, Jesinta and many others. Since, I met you guys my life has never been the same.

The many trips that I took to the United States turned out to be the most defining or landmark trips of my life. Such one trip of my life which was undoubtedly life changing. The story that will unfold here is my time in LA, where I met the best people in my life. Starting from the time where I used to stay at a hostel, it was called “Paradise Bag-packers”. The hostel was very close to Los Angeles, Tom Bradley International Airport.

I arrived from New York at that airport and found my residence in that hostel where Samuel became a very good friend of mine. We did life together and helped each other in ways that I never knew existed. He was a kind soul and he was as generous as one could possibly be towards a friend. Sam’s family was back in Ghana. He introduced me to his family over the phone. We shared ideas and one day I told him that we can join part time jobs to sustain ourselves in the meantime. I introduced him to Craig’s list, an online platform which posts jobs, and on one fine morning, one of the advertisements that we contacted, replied to us. We had to travel from our hostel, Inglewood to our workplace which happened to be a furniture shop, also called Joy Bird Furniture. We reached there on the prescribed time, did what we were demanded to do. They kept on calling us again and again. This went on for a long period and it was really good. Until, there came a time when they stopped calling us and we did get an explanation for it later.

Now, it was time for Sam to go back to North Carolina due to the given conditions in LA. Just after he left, my phone rang, and it was this gentleman, who used to call us for the furniture shop. His name was Harrison Albert; I will never forget him as he was the most generous person that I have ever met. He asked me to come along with my friend but I told him that Sam left for North Carolina and I can only come by myself. I visited the furniture shop and they offered me a full time job. I met the Joybird furnitures owner at that time, who was known as Mr. Alex. He was the most humble person, I ever came across. He made sure that everything was done to my advantage. This was one of the most significant moments in my life, as someone was trying to do good for me without any rewards. Even at a time when everybody opposed his opinion of keeping me there, he stood his ground of giving me a chance when everybody else couldn't. He saw potential in me when I myself was not able to find potential in me. He stood by me through my imperfections; he supported every idea that I brought forward and tried to provide me with everything that I asked of him. His girlfriend was also very kind and they both made sure that I was at ease. They gave me enough opportunities, promoted me, making sure that I become the best version of myself. They came up with solutions to my problems and always sorted out the ways how things were going to work.

Then I met Nelson, a very cooperative co-worker and Gifty, a beautiful soul. I was working under Mr. Eric Walner, he was my manager and I reported straight to him. Mr. Walner made sure that I will be given shifts that allow me to have the liberty of free time to talk to my family. I used to use his bath as my place was far and sometimes I will be so tired due to studying through nights and mornings, evening would go in trainings and using the day for work. Mr Walner, bought me a car. I was overwhelmed at his gesture would be an understatement because no one has ever did anything for me just out of goodwill. He handed the keys to me and said that *"These are yours and you should stop using public transport or buses."* I could not believe it myself at first but it had happened. While working there, I changed hostels, living at one place to another and even though I was still at that store, I was doing some gigs here and there as well.

One day, somebody replied to my advertisement on "Craig's list" and that person was Mr. Jayson. Jayson was a school teacher or maybe he worked in LA schools. I went to his place to help cleanup one of his son's room for 100\$. I did my job and got paid and exited. But we still stayed in contact, we would talk through phone from time to time, and it happened at that time when I was having no one to turn to. I asked him if he could accommodate me, because I was only getting paid at end of each week and accommodation was quite expensive and I had to pay on daily basis and with that I was unable to save any funds. He

welcomed me with open arms and said that he will give me his son's room and I can stay there as long as I want. His son, Avan was a beautiful kid, 9 years old. He was a very bubbly and joyful kid. They lived with Ryan, who was mostly off to work. They took care of me, they brought food, and they brought clothes & celebrated me on my birthday. They understood how difficult it was to be far away from home and they always tried to make me feel at home. They gave a roof over my head for free and I can never be thankful enough for their kindness towards me. I still owe them my gratitude to them for everything. They would take me out on lunches and dinners, we would go to the beach, and they introduced me to their families.

I also met one of my long time friend, Jesse there, he was a Mexican-American and he was of the very same age as mine. He turned out to be a very intimidating person at first, due to his personality. He can turn out to be a type of threat to most people and he is the most misunderstood person in the room. But to my good luck, he turned out to be a very good friend of mine. He became my supervisor later. He groomed me and put me at the right place. Not only did he taught me good things but also bought me *Mexican food*. He gave me driving lessons and our relation upgraded from friends to family. He also introduced me to his father and wife, along with the rest of his family. He made sure that everything goes smooth for me and he would always vouch for me. I remember twisting my

hand once and he took me to the hospital immediately. He could talk some bullshit sometimes; he can intimidate somebody right to the core but he will always remain that good friend to me. I really appreciate his presence in my life and it was very fortunate that our paths crossed.

While at Joybird, I met Michelle, a photographer and I always enjoyed working with her because she was super professional. Then there was Michael, the bullshitter. He was the most humorous person I ever met. He would light up the entire place with his hilarious remarks. Michael had a very big personality, he didn't care about anything and he had no filters in his conversations. He will say whatever he wants to say to anybody regardless of your position in the company. I stayed in touch with him and we became very good friends. Then there was Chuyi, who made everything feel like a competition but he was still very kind to me. Instead of being his colleague, he only cared about winning and losing and that's how I saw him. Maybe I sound wrong right now. We had our moments and managed to work together. Though as a team we weren't performing well but as a competition. When everybody works in a team, the goals are common. And Christ, he drove me crazy. We had serious fights and wouldn't even talk. Just because the owner and manager favored me, he was always considering me as a threat. He was pushed to the edge as he had to take care of his mother. He has one of the most inspiring life stories as he bore a lot of hardships. He is still working there and

going strong. He is an inspiration for me because he is doing better with a good position now.

I know, I might have bored many of you by talking about my experiences, how I went about with my life, how I maneuvered through the tough times but if you have made it to the last chapter, I am sure you have found the hope in between the lines. You have seen your vulnerable selves in me and you have found the solace of catharsis.

I am writing this book because I would like everyone, who wants to know more about me and my life, to hear it from me. I will not forgive myself if I died and then people create my story according to their like. I will like my children and the next generation of my family to know that I lived, I did the best that I could and I gave it my all. It is best that they read my exact words.

A legacy is an important part of a well-lived life. After all, a legacy is an indelible memento that lives on for generations. As the great poet Maya Angelou put it, *“If you’re going to live, leave a legacy. Make a mark on the world that can’t be erased.”* Undoubtedly, a legacy can serve as an enduring fingerprint. Indeed, future generations can recall truly remarkable lives. Nevertheless, memories tend to fade with time. Eventually, these amazing lives may get lost in the sands of time. Thus, it is crucial to chronicle such lives in a lasting format.

Consequently, the foremost reason for writing an autobiography is to set the record straight. As far as my autobiography is concerned, it should serve as a personal, first-hand account about valuable life experiences. An autobiography allows these pearls to move from generation to generation. After all, words recorded on a page cannot fade away easily. It is highly common for people to feel disconnected from their identity. After all, it can be somewhat difficult to carve an identity without understanding the journey leading up to the present.

Every person that has ever existed occupies a place in history. Sadly, the vast majority of them lose their voices over time. Memories fade and die away with each passing generation. And over time, each current generation forgets the contributions their ancestors made in shaping who they are today. Writing this autobiography will enable me to claim my rightful place in history.

Of course, there are times in which the past is murky at best. However, clarity can come from an autobiography. I believe an autobiography is an exercise in self-discovery. It allows the author room to explore their journey. As a result, knowledge of oneself emerges as the journey comes into focus. The written chronicle enables the reader to glimpse into the magical path of self-discovery.

Hopefully, this path will also help the reader discover their path.

Names have the strangest way of preserving memory.

What are the odds of hearing familiar full names

during flight announcements, lottery lists, official records

assuming this might be the person you know.

But parents gave me a unique name

with apparently no namesake

when you will come across my name

in obituary announcements, hospital hall, news ticker

you would know,

That's it.

The only one you knew by this name,

the only one who never forgot to amaze you.