

Chapter One: Roots of Resilience

Navigating womanhood is no easy thing, especially when the world insists on calling you “tough.” But if I’ve grown into that label, it’s because of the quirky, colorful, and sometimes comical way I was raised. Growing up in a standard Kenyan family in the early ’80s, and as the last born in a family of four, my story was written in the middle of laughter, strict rules, mischief, and plenty of life lessons. I was born into a home where books were almost sacred, discipline was non-negotiable, and love was expressed not just in words, but in the quiet, bold actions of my parents.

My Dad, a firm believer in empowering his children regardless of gender, defied the odds of male chauvinism long before it became a public conversation. At a time when the world insisted women belonged in the kitchen, silent and serving, he chose a different path. He empowered his wife to rise, to thrive, and to lead. One of his boldest acts of defiance was affirming me and my sister into an attire that was completely forbidden for girls in the village, trousers. Yes, in the ’80s, a girl wearing trousers was practically a scandal, an unspoken rebellion against cultural norms. But my dad not only approved, he financed it! Looking back, I realize that in those simple gestures, he was tearing down barriers and teaching me that my worth was not tied to outdated traditions.

For him, my mum was not just his wife, but the cornerstone of our family’s empowerment. His actions spoke louder than words: he supported her career in the

chains of education, ensuring she rose as he also rose to the top ranks of the country's education system. To ease her mobility in the village, he gifted her a car, a rarity at the time. With that one decision, he gave her wings to fly. My dad carried himself with the dignity of a man who understood the power of learning, the kind who had seen firsthand how far education could take you. And in empowering his wife and children, he passed that vision to us like an inheritance more valuable than land or wealth.

My Mum, with the doors of empowerment opened for her, had her own legendary approach. She was an academician, a primary school head teacher with a sharp eye for detail and a heart that believed education could alter the course of destiny. Having been gifted a car, she became the very first woman in our village in the early '80s to drive. People were so impressed they nicknamed her *"Nyina wa Shiku wa VK"* after her car's license plate. Imagine being so iconic that your car's number plate became part of your identity!

But her road to becoming the village's "first lady driver" was not without comic drama. Mum trained by literally hitting every fence pole along the road. Each trip was a mix of screeching brakes, startled chickens, and neighbors running out to watch the spectacle. Yet she never gave up. Every dent on the fence was a badge of resilience. And when she finally mastered the art of driving, it was as though the whole village had also graduated with her. From then on, she drove with a confidence that turned heads and stirred conversations—

a moving testimony that no barrier was too high for a determined woman.

She, too, believed in firm discipline, oh! And her hands were famous. They could cradle you in comfort one moment, and the next, they would squeeze your fleshy laps with a grip that made you sit upright in an instant. That “pinch of correction” was her silent lecture: sharp, unforgettable, and needing no follow-up explanation. Combined with my dad’s unyielding cane, I quickly learned that actions had consequences. Yet looking back now, I realize their discipline and dedication were not simply harshness—they were building blocks, shaping me for the future. Living up to the scripture: *“He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly.” (Proverbs 13:24, NKJV)*

Together, my parents wove academics into the golden thread that held our household together. Truly, they were *“training me up in the way I should go” (Proverbs 22:6, NKJV)*, laying a foundation that still speaks loudly in my life today.

Growing up as the last-born in a family of four came with its own brand of drama, laughter, and endless life lessons. I was the family’s little project, the one everyone felt entitled to guide, tease, or “train” in their own way. My elder brother quickly crowned himself my official lookout officer. He had a knack for appearing at the very moment I tried to sneak a mango from the kitchen or laugh too loudly. To him, it was all part of keeping me “on the straight path.” Then there was my sister, the only girl in the family besides me, and my

immediate elder. She was quick to remind me that she ranked above me in both age and authority, and she didn't let me forget it! If my brother was the police, my sister was the judge, ensuring I "towed the line" whenever my tough-headedness tried to rise.

Meanwhile, my other brother took a completely different approach; he was more indifferent to the drama, perhaps because we shared a creative mind. While the others enforced the rules, he was busy sketching blueprints in his imagination. No wonder, in my little adventures, he would often come in handy, either as my quiet ally or as the one who truly understood the thrill of a wild idea and would help me craft it.

Looking back, I see how each of them shaped me: one enforced discipline, one demanded respect, and one quietly fueled my creativity. Together, they toughened me up, kept me in check, and, without knowing it, helped me discover the stubborn yet imaginative spirit that would carry me through life, living to the scripture: *"As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend."* (Proverbs 27:17, NKJV)

Chapter Two: The World Beyond the Walls

School wasn't exactly smooth sailing for me. Being the youngest in almost every class, I looked like I had accidentally wandered in from the baby section. My classmates, especially in 7th and 8th grade, were taller, louder, and far more "grown-up." Whenever I joined their conversations, they would suddenly pause and switch topics, as though they had to protect my "innocent little ears." When Mum didn't give me a ride home, I learnt to trail behind my classmates rather than walk with them, pretending not to notice the gap. To cope, I often found easier friendships with the lower graders, where my small physique fit right in.

Being the headteacher's child didn't help either. To the teachers, I was expected to be a model student. To the students, I was a suspected spy. Each time a classroom secret somehow reached the headteacher, I could almost feel the daggers in their angry whispers, with my name the unspoken conclusion. So, I drifted into solitude. But loneliness has its strange gifts. While others whispered their secrets, I began to create my own worlds: stories, adventures, and games that filled the silence and made me forget what I was missing. My imagination became my closest friend, and in it, I discovered a freedom that no suspicion or whisper could take away.

At home, you were either reading or reading. There wasn't really a third option. Books weren't just encouraged; they were woven into the fabric of our daily routine. My parents set up strict academic timetables for us, complete with neat columns for subjects, revision,

and scheduled breaks. Reading and studying weren't luxuries—they were the air we breathed. But for me, those “breakout sessions” were not merely for stretching or catching my breath. They were my windows to the outside world, my small license for adventure. While the timetable said break, I translated it into chasing butterflies, climbing trees, running barefoot on dusty paths, or sneaking into experiments of my own imagination. It was during those short escapes that I discovered freedom, curiosity, and the kind of learning you couldn't find between the covers of a textbook.

Since my peers didn't quite “get” me, I found my tribe elsewhere, mostly in the animal kingdom. My cat, Mellisa, was no ordinary feline. She was a genius who actually understood commands in my mother tongue. (Yes, I proudly raised a multilingual cat.) Bosco, my dog, was just as brilliant, loyal, sharp, and as protective as a bodyguard on steroids. Together, they made the most unlikely superhero duo. One afternoon, a stray dog dared to wander into our compound. Big mistake! Bosco and Mellisa pounced into action like Batman and Catwoman, tag-teaming with such precision that the poor intruder bolted for its life. That day, I was convinced I owned the first interspecies crime-fighting squad.

But the real comedy came another time when my imagination ran a little wild. I decided Bosco needed a wardrobe upgrade. So, I squeezed him into shorts and a sweater. The instant I stepped back to admire my work, Bosco caught sight of himself, panicked, and tore outside the compound, down the main road as though

being chased by... well, by himself. Pedestrians scattered, farmers froze mid-hoe, and people gawked in disbelief at this sprinting dog-in-clothes, a four-legged streak of confusion. Unable to keep up, I watched helplessly until my equally adventurous brother finally caught Bosco, undressed him, and led him back home. Still catching his breath, he burst out laughing and asked, “What on earth were you thinking, dressing a dog?” I could only shrug. After all, who needed cartoons or neighborhood friends when you had a dog, a cat, and an imagination wild enough to script your own circus?

Television was a rare luxury, and in most homes, nonexistent. We’d only watch TV freely when we went for visits to town, where Kenya Power’s steady supply kept screens alive. Back in the village, there was no electricity at all—the place was remote, quiet, and almost cut off from modern trappings. In our home, however, we were considered “wealthy” because we had a TV. It ran on solar power, carefully preserved for the evening news. In those days, even the sight of an antenna sticking out of your roof—TV working or not—was enough to brand you as rich. But my curiosity often got the better of me. Whenever no one was around, I would sneak into the living room, sit close to the set, and lose myself in the then-iconic Derrick series or Walker, Texas Ranger. The thrill of watching them outweighed the risk, but the evidence always betrayed me. By nightfall, when everyone gathered for news, the screen would blink and go dark without warning—the solar battery completely drained. With a guilty conscience, I would blame the sun for “not shining enough during the day,” all while knowing too well that it was my stolen

moments of entertainment that had robbed us of the evening broadcast. My parents never failed to deliver a stern rebuke, reminding me in no uncertain terms that books—not TV—were meant to be my closest companions.

When I couldn't get the thrill from TV, I lost myself in books: *The Famous Five*, *Treasure Island*, and so many others that sent my mind into a creative whirlwind. Our home bordered a forest conservation area, with a river acting as the natural boundary. That forest and river became my playground. I enjoyed herding cattle, not because no one else was available, but because it gave me space to think, read adventure books, chase birds, and spy on monkeys. Herding cattle quickly became my favorite chore, not because it was easier than the rest, but because it gave me freedom—freedom to think, to read under the shade of acacia trees, to chase birds, and to spy on monkeys. Of course, the monkeys, especially the baboons and colobus, didn't always appreciate my curiosity. They often brought the fight to me, and for some mysterious reason, these two apes seemed to hold a personal grudge against females. No matter how boyish I dressed—shorts, trousers, mud on my face—they always singled me out, as though their sixth sense betrayed me.

One day, a massive baboon chased me from the riverbank, across the farm, and straight into our compound. Heart pounding, I thought it was over, until Bosco, my fearless dog, stepped forward. He planted his paws like a king guarding his castle, chest out, teeth bared, and locked eyes with the intruder. Just then,

Mellisa, my cat, slipped in behind him, pawing at the ground as if daring the baboon to make the next move. It was a standoff: wild versus domestic, jungle law versus homestead order. Seconds stretched into an eternity as they held their ground. Finally, the baboon blinked, admitting defeat, and slunk back to the trees. From that day on, whenever they gave chase, the baboons and colobus would retreat at the edge of our compound, as though Bosco and Mellisa had drawn an invisible boundary line they knew better than to cross.

Even the animals, though they do not communicate in our language, clearly deliver messages to one another. The communication between my two domestic friends and the wild chaser was clearly understood and respected. They perceive distinctions beyond what human eyes can see. I marvel at how the baboons and colobus recognized I was female, though dressed in trousers or shorts that, to us, signaled masculinity. Their discernment lay beyond attire, echoing the truth of Scripture that creation itself testifies of Him: *“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead” (Romans 1:20, NKJV).*

But I wasn’t just herding cows or dodging primates; I was collecting treasures. Bones bleached white by the sun. Stones shaped like miniature sculptures. Feathers that looked like relics from forgotten kingdoms. Each evening, I lay in bed replaying the day’s finds, weaving them into stories, and sketching blueprints in my mind for the next expedition. To me, I wasn’t merely a child

in the countryside; I was an explorer, a treasure hunter, an inventor of worlds yet unseen.

It was during these riverside wanderings that I discovered nature's theater in full glory. From the unoccupied farms across the water, herds of zebras and gazelles would return to their habitats. The zebras walked with calm, regal dignity, like kings and queens draped in striped robes. The gazelles, by contrast, performed with unrestrained brilliance, bounding so high it seemed they were chasing the clouds. Each leap was pure poetry, a fleeting sculpture of strength and elegance suspended in air. The sight brought fulfillment of Scripture: "*The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein*" (Psalm 24:1, NKJV). The wonders of His creation remain unfathomable—who can truly understand the mind of God? "*For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?*" (Romans 11:34, NKJV).

Watching them stirred something deep inside me. Their leaps weren't just about survival; they were daring acts of defiance, as if saying the world may be vast, but we were born to rise above it. And in those moments, I felt the same. Every book I devoured, every story I wrote in my head, every treasure I pocketed from the earth, they were my own leaps. As I grew older, these moments echoed in my system, and with a clearer understanding of God, I was confident: If God could care so tenderly for the birds, the gazelles, the zebras, and even the monkeys and baboons that knew how to read my presence, how much bigger were His plans for me? For

truly, *“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope”* (Jeremiah 29:11, NKJV).

They neither knew how to read nor work, yet He could always lead them to greener pastures. *“Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them; Are you not of more value than they?”* (Matthew 6:26, NKJV).

When it came to games, I was “one of the boys.” Climbing trees, running wild, and building chicken and rabbit houses were my specialties. I learned to whistle, even learned to ride a bicycle at a time when it was considered a “boy-only” thing. But I didn’t just learn; I mastered it. That bicycle became my royal chariot, my express transport system, my badge of cultural rebellion. Strangely enough, while people frowned at other girls trying to ride, they shrugged at me and said, “Well, if it’s her, it’s fine.”

Books. Ah, yes, books. Our parents seemed convinced they were magical keys to success, while to us they were just heavy bundles of endless assignments. Yet slowly and quietly, they shaped me. Between dodging my brother’s discipline patrols, sneaking peeks at TV dramas, and inventing games with my friends, I somehow fell in love with learning. Those books became more than ink on paper, they became doorways into a creative world, a world I never imagined I would one day walk in.

That balance, the rigor of academics inside the house and the thrill of exploration outside, formed my rhythm of childhood. Books disciplined my mind, while adventures nourished my soul. And though my parents may have thought they had me completely caged in by the timetable, those breakout sessions became the very spaces where I carved my personality, independence, and sense of wonder.

Sundays brought their own rhythm. After church, the whole neighborhood felt alive, with children running in their “Sunday best,” mothers catching up as they walked home, and fathers gathering in trading centers. Faith was central in our upbringing. The Bible was not a distant book, we recited verses and sang them. Stories of Joseph, Esther, David, and Daniel weren’t fairy tales to us; they were blueprints of courage and destiny. We acted them out in Sunday school plays, and they convinced me that even a village child with no electricity could dream beyond the horizon.

Yes, it was in those times that I walked the path from Sunday school ordination to youth ordination. Though I didn’t yet grasp the fullness of salvation, my moral biblical upbringing kept me in check. Mum was doctrinal and prayerful, and I learned prayer through her. Even at a young age, my leadership skills were noticeable—I was made Sunday school leader, competing at parish-level events, sharpening confidence I didn’t even know I had.

Looking back now, I can only smile. My parents weren’t harsh; they were shapers of resilience. They were

sharpening an arrow for their quiver; *“Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one’s youth.”* (Psalm 127:4, NKJV). Even the feeling of being an outsider at school pushed me deeper into my imagination, where creativity had no limits.

And yet, in the midst of those humble days, I wouldn’t trade the experience for anything. The mix of innocence, discipline, faith, and discovery created a treasure chest of memories. Even now, when I pause to reflect, I realize that the lessons of that small remote village continue to echo in my life; lessons of simplicity, endurance, faith, and hope.

All the goofy adventures, animal friendships, scraped knees, and whispered nicknames sculpted me into the woman I am today: strong, imaginative, and just a little mischievous. My mind still works much the same way it did in those forests—wandering freely, weaving stories in the silence where others hear nothing, sketching meaning in the spaces between words. You could be narrating a tale to me, and while my face remains still, my mind is busy crafting the untold version you left unsaid. Perhaps that is why long stories test my patience; I crave the ending first, the heart of the matter, the why more than the how. Yet God, in His wisdom, keeps training me in the art of listening, teaching me to silence my racing thoughts long enough to hear His voice. No wonder my mentor, Rev. Monicah Mulinge, often reminds me to quiet my thoughts and still my spirit.

And in those quiet wrestlings with His whispers, I have learned this unshakable truth:

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28, NKJV).

If He could care for the zebras that leapt across the river, the gazelles that danced in the fields, and the monkeys that recognized me beyond my clothes, how much more had He planned for me? My childhood was but the prelude to the greater plan He has for my life. As Jeremiah reminds us,

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.” (Jeremiah 29:11, NKJV).

Even when we falter or stray, the Lord remains merciful: *“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.” (Psalm 103:8, NKJV)*, ready to restore, as David testified:

“Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.” (Psalm 51:12, NKJV).

As you close this chapter, remember this: every adventure, every challenge, every moment of curiosity in your life is shaping you, just as the forests, rivers, and playful companions shaped me. Your past, your trials, and even the “little things” are part of God’s careful design for you. Step boldly into your own story, trust His timing, and watch closely, every chapter is leading you exactly where He intends.

Chapter Three: Scarlet Letters and Silent Battles

Amid this chaos, my teenage years raged like a storm. My small frame and delayed puberty set me adrift in a prestigious high school where privilege strutted proudly and sophistication was the unspoken currency. My classmates, children of affluence, carried themselves with the air of entitlement, their polished English flowing like music. I, too, had been the best English student in my division in my grade 8, but here, my accent betrayed me. It became my scarlet letter. Even my English teacher, the one meant to nurture my gift, weaponized it against me. She often summoned me to the front of the class, not to honor me, but to parade my “flaws” before sneering faces. Each word I spoke drew laughter, and every laugh chipped at my confidence.

At home, the storm howled louder. My father had lost his well-paying job, and the weight of our survival fell squarely on my mother’s weary shoulders, three children in high school and one in college. Yet in her, I saw Proverbs 31 in flesh: *“She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come”* (Proverbs 31:25). With quiet courage, she became our anchor, holding the family together when everything else threatened to unravel.

But poverty has a way of sharpening humiliation. Visiting days came with both relief and sorrow, my parents arriving with small envelopes of pocket money, born of sacrifice. It was enough to let me sit at the feasting tables, but only for a fleeting moment. Then came Muthee, our cook, who ruled the kitchen with an

iron hand and the dreaded *mwiko* (cooking stick). To sneak food was to invite punishment. Yet hunger lingered like a constant shadow. Despite three meals a day, appetites of growing teenagers knew no satisfaction. And so, when accounts ran dry, we turned our eyes to the sufuria of leftover lunch placed in the center of the cafeteria during supper. There, those of us who could not afford canteen luxuries would scoop from the remains, disguising desperation as routine.

But hunger was not the worst torment, I could endure an empty stomach. It was ridicule that cut deeper than any pang of need. The Christian Union seemed a refuge, a family where perhaps I would find belonging. Outwardly, I fit the mold, I was Presbyterian. But inwardly, I sought not Christ, but acceptance. And so, I reasoned, the only way to belong fully was to get saved.

Yet even here, mockery found me. During evening prayers, when I was called upon to share my testimony, laughter met my words. My faith became their entertainment. The sacred turned sour. My self-esteem crumbled, and I slipped into the shadows, preferring silence to humiliation. For an entire year, I took a vow of silence from public participation. My spiritual “mother,” a senior in Form Four, kept me under her watch during devotions, but my heart had long disconnected. To me, this so-called family felt no different from the crowd outside.

During my vow of silence, my inner ears were opened and I could now hear my English pronunciation flaws. I took this period to perfect my speech within that year.

To the outsider I may have looked humble and quiete, little did they know that I had taken a vow of silence to perfect what was causing entertainment to them. My salvation was gone, the need to belong to CU gone, but no one could know because I was silent but with a spiritual parent manning me I had to behave. My spiritual parent graduated, and with her departure, I felt something I hadn't known in a long time, freedom. Like a bird unshackled, I spread my wings. I flung myself into extracurricular activities, and to my astonishment, respect began to follow. I was no longer the quiete gal, my speech had changed, I now was not the joke of the school. Slowly, my body shed its boyishness and began to blossom with femininity. Talents I had buried beneath shame and fear emerged, bright and undeniable. But even as new life broke forth, one shadow remained: academics. My grades, battered by years of ridicule and silence, betrayed me. This continued to my graduation year in highschool and when I returned to the village, I carried more than failure, I carried shame. I could feel the weight of failure pressing on me from every side.

Everywhere I turned, it seemed as if eyes followed me—eyes that said without words, “*She failed.*” My parents, both respected educators, carried silent disappointment, and my neighbors who had expected brilliance looked at me with pity. I felt branded, not just by poor grades, but by shame.

In my despair, my mind wandered to dark places. *Maybe marriage could hide my failure*, I thought, *but to whom?* I didn't even have a boyfriend. The second thought was even darker—*what if I ended my life?* One evening, I

made my choice. I took ten tabs of Piriton and went to bed, expecting never to wake again. But instead of death, I found the most restful night's sleep I had ever known and I woke up the next morning as though nothing had happened. No scars, no sign of the darkness I had battled through the night before. That morning became my first true encounter with the **watchful eye of God**. I realized that though I had given up on myself, God had not given up on me. His word says: *"The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."* (Deuteronomy 31:8)

It became clear to me that my story was still being written by hands greater than mine. My plans had crumbled, my dreams shattered, but God was whispering, *"My plan still stands."*

Yet at that time, I could not see myself beyond the borders of the village. Everywhere I turned, my shame stared back at me. My grades were too low for university, unlike my peers in the village who marched proudly to the next stage of life. For me, the options were narrow, perhaps a diploma or a certificate course, but even those felt like mountains I had no strength to climb.

I wrestled with the question: *"Lord, what could You possibly do with me?"* The scripture in Jeremiah 29:11 kept nudging my heart even when I did not want to believe it: *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a future and a hope."*

Broken For Divine Reshaping

At the time, hope was the hardest thing to hold onto. Yet that morning, when I woke up alive, I realized my life was not mine to throw away. God had preserved me for a reason I had yet to discover.

Chapter Four: From Shamba to Lecture Halls

The village became my cage and my refuge all at once. For the first time in my life, I was no longer a student but a farm girl. Books were replaced with jembes, and my dreams—once lofty—lay scattered like the dry leaves I swept in the compound. I buried myself in shamba work, not because I loved it, but because it kept me busy, invisible, and spared me the piercing stares of my parents.

My father had now secured a new job, but unlike before, he commuted daily. This meant I could no longer escape his constant, unspoken look of disappointment over my failure. My siblings were all away in college and work, leaving me as the sole object of attention. Every day, I wore the shame of failure like a second skin. I stopped caring for my looks, and in no time, I mirrored every other weary village woman—sun-scorched skin, calloused hands, and dust for dreams.

Six months felt like six years.

Then one fateful morning, as my father left for work, I sighed with relief at the prospect of brief freedom. But he returned only hours later, his face unreadable, his voice commanding:

“Dress up. You’re accompanying me for a college interview.”

My heart froze, fear and excitement tangled within me. Could this be the door of hope I had prayed for? The Scripture whispered in my spirit:

*“Behold, I will do a new thing,
Now it shall spring forth;
Shall you not know it?
I will even make a road in the wilderness
And rivers in the desert.” (Isaiah 43:19 NKJV)*

The interview was a success, and within weeks, I was no longer a forgotten village girl but a college student stepping into a new world.

A New Beginning

College was unlike anything I had ever known. It was a rebirth. Suddenly, I was independent, self-assured, and sharp in ways I hadn’t realized before. My years of isolation and being surrounded by boys had shaped me, and unlike many of my peers, I wasn’t fragile or naïve. I carried myself with a quiet strength, and soon, that strength became magnetic.

Still, college was its own labyrinth of light and shadows. I found myself surrounded by young women eager to explore their independence, many stumbling down paths of immorality. They confided in me their secrets, their escapades, and their reckless pursuits of quick money. Weekends left them drained, hungover, and empty-handed. Though their stories repulsed me, I found myself curiously listening, drawn into their world secondhand.

They would often return bearing tokens of their adventures—sachets of whisky, bottles of spirits—and though they tried to lure me into their lifestyle, my values held firm. “*Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits’*” (1 Corinthians 15:33 NKJV).

Instead, I was introduced to something less scandalous but equally new: beer. It became a small, almost innocent rebellion, but my moral compass remained intact.

Fear as My Fuel

College was not just a playground of temptation—it was an intellectual battlefield. The course I had chosen was grueling, with exams every six months that mercilessly cut down half the class. Failure hovered constantly, whispering reminders of the shame I had carried from high school.

I could not—*would not*—endure my father’s disappointed look again, nor give neighbors the satisfaction of seeing me stumble. That fear became my fuel. While others drowned in distractions, I stayed rooted, eyes fixed on the prize.

Each exam I passed became a stone of remembrance, building a new confidence within me and lighting a spark of joy in my parents’ eyes. No longer was I labeled a failure, I was becoming a testimony of success.

One moment remains etched in my heart: in stage two of my course, out of a class of ninety-eight, only twenty-

one students made it through. Of those, just two were girls, myself and my close friend. Suddenly, we were no longer hidden faces in the crowd; we were the talk of the institution.

My name, once mocked for its collapsed syllables and odd pronunciation, was now spoken with respect, attached to words like *resilient*, *brilliant*, and *unstoppable*. My parents could not hide their pride when the dean of students highlighted my achievement. For the first time, I felt what Scripture had promised all along:

“The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.” (Psalm 118:22–23, NKJV)

Love Found Me

Then came an unexpected turn. By my second year, my heart—once numb—began to awaken. Suitors came and went, none stirring me beyond polite disinterest. But near the end of that year, one young man appeared, and something within me shifted.

It was instantaneous. We became inseparable, studying together, sharing meals, walking hand in hand as the campus buzzed around us. Rules forbade us from visiting each other’s dormitories, but the boundaries only made our bond stronger. Everyone around us admired the obvious love we shared.

This was my first true experience of love, raw and untainted. Together, we stumbled into its mystery, both of us inexperienced, both learning as we went.

For the first time, love was not something I watched from afar or read about in books, it was mine. College, once a battlefield of shame and fear, became a canvas of discovery: of independence, resilience, and now love. It was a rollercoaster of adventures, temptations, and awakening. And I was ready for it all.

Chapter Five: A Shattered Innocence

Life in college was a delicate scale—freedom on one side, responsibility on the other. Unlike high school, here you determined your own rhythm, and your results loudly declared whether you were disciplined or wasteful.

For me, a naturally creative spirit, it was paradise. No longer caged by rigid timetables, I studied when my mind was fresh, took long walks when I needed space, and embraced the independence that hung in the air like morning dew. The freedom favored those who could steer themselves, but it was also dangerous for those easily swayed by the tide.

For me, independence was fertile soil. I thrived in it.

A Stranger at the Gate

One afternoon, an elderly man, ten years my senior, walked through the college gates asking for me by name. He wasn't lost. He knew me, and, to my surprise, he knew my siblings as well. Though I had no recollection of him, curiosity drew me to meet him.

Cautiously, I allowed him to treat me at the canteen. He bought me food, pressed small pocket money into my hand, even carried shopping bags for me. He made no demands, at least not then. With no mobile phones at the time, he left, promising to call from the public booth.

And he did. A week later, his voice echoed through the receiver of the college call box. He said he had returned to work after visiting his mother, and he missed me. He promised another visit. I brushed it off with a shrug, it all felt like a mysterious soap opera. Yet, two weeks later, there he was again, this time with even bigger shopping bags.

That day, he asked me to invite two girlfriends to join us. In the canteen, with boldness, he announced to them that he was in love with me.

I froze, caught between disbelief and mockery. *How could I date such a man?* He wasn't my type, not even close. Yet, curiosity whispered, "What harm is there in accepting the goodies if I owe him nothing?" My friends cheered me on—a *goldmine*, they called him. Part of me agreed, though unease curled inside me like smoke. God speaks to us in whispers, when your spirit is uneasy, listen carefully and be sober in spirit. **"Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."** – 1 Peter 5:8

The Nyama Choma Outing

Weeks passed. His visits continued, sometimes I refused to meet him, other times I agreed but only within the safety of the campus. Then one Saturday, he arrived with an irresistible offer: he wanted to take me and my girlfriends for nyama choma in a nearby town.

The idea was too tempting to resist. We boarded a matatu and found ourselves in one of the town's most famous joints. As we waited for the meat, he ordered drinks. By then, I had been lightly introduced to alcohol, so I chose Smirnoff Ice, considered an "entry-level" drink. My girlfriends confidently ordered beer.

At first, I paced myself, sipping slowly. But after a brief trip to the washroom, I returned, took a few more sips and suddenly, the world spun. My control slipped away. My friends, oblivious, merried and drank on.

The last memory I clung to was of myself on the dance floor dancing. After that; darkness.

The Night of Horror

I woke up in a dimly lit room. The air reeked of alcohol. Pain tore through me. A huge man was on top of me, robbing me of my innocence.

The shock sobered me instantly. My soul convulsed with rage, shame, and disbelief. I cried uncontrollably.

The gift I had preserved for marriage; something sacred between me and God, something promised to my boyfriend; was ripped away. He tried to console me with empty promises: *"Don't worry, I'll marry you."* His words felt like knives cutting through my heart.

In the morning, he handed me pills, claiming they were "morning after." I swallowed them blindly, unaware they were nothing but Piritons. Later, I would learn he

had spiked my drink while I was away at the washroom. Be careful because the enemy has nothing free and he **comes only to steal and kill and destroy.....** John 10:10

The Weight of Shame

Back at college, my silence screamed louder than words. I couldn't face my friends. I couldn't face myself.

When I alighted from the matatu, the first face I saw was my boyfriend's. His eyes searched mine, but I looked away. For a week, I withdrew into solitude, drowning in guilt and fear. *What if I was pregnant? What if I had been infected? What had I done?* The questions clawed at me day and night.

That weekend, my father visited. He found me weak, my body betraying the sickness of my soul. Alarmed, he rushed me to the family doctor and left me in his care.

The Longest Wait

In the examination room, I finally whispered the truth. The doctor listened without judgment. "We must run tests," he said gently, "to rule out pregnancy and infection."

The samples were taken. Then came the longest wait of my life. Every tick of the clock hammered against my chest. I glued my eyes to the lab door, desperate for an answer.

At last, the technician walked out with a file and handed it to the doctor. When he beckoned me in, my legs felt like stone.

The doctor looked me in the eye. His words thundered through the room:

“Irene, you are very lucky. Everything is negative.”

Relief broke me. I wept, hugging him, unable to hear anything else. In that moment, I knew, God had given me a second chance. Indeed **“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”** – Psalm 34:18

A Second Chance

When my father returned, he found me miraculously healed sitting in the reception. He must have had a million questions, but I had no answers.

Back at college, I carried one resolve: *Never again*. My innocence had been stolen, but my life had been spared. God had preserved me from pregnancy, from disease, from deeper ruin.

It wasn't easy to share with my boyfriend, but when I did, his reaction stunned me. Though disappointed, he held me with compassion, offering me a shoulder of solace. Our bond grew stronger, like gold tested in fire.

When the man dared to visit again, I did not face him. My boyfriend, with a few loyal friends, chased him

away for good. He never returned. That day, I saw love in action, protective, fierce, unyielding.

This incident stung me for a long time. I carried the weight of blame, convinced I had betrayed my boyfriend, even though he never accused me of anything. The guilt gnawed at me from within, quietly corroding the bond we had built. What was once an admired relationship began to fizzle out, not because of his actions, but because I could not silence the voice in my head that whispered, *“You failed him, You went against the vows.”*

To me, ending things felt safer than living with a constant reminder of my mistake. And so, a year later, our three-year relationship came to an end, not with fireworks or a storm, but with a quiet fading, like a candle burning out in the night.

Years later, I realized the truth: I was not to blame. I was a victim of another’s wickedness.

To every person who has endured such pain, hear this: **it is not your fault.** Do not suffer in silence. Seek help immediately. Visit a clinic, Visit a counselor. Take PEP. Ask for the morning-after pill. And above all, cling to God, who heals the brokenhearted. **“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”** – Psalm 147:3

And I learned: though innocence may be stolen, God restores hope. Though shame may whisper, His grace speaks louder. **“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to**

**harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.” –
Jeremiah 29:11**

Chapter Six – A Vessel Leaking Pain

Having broken my three year relationship with my boyfriend, I felt the deep need to stay alone. My heart was weary, my soul bruised. Every night, I would lie awake rewinding the events of the day I lost my innocence. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't brush off the thought that it was my fault. I couldn't silence the haunting image of that man on top of me. The anger would surge suddenly, and at times I found myself slapping my own face as if to punish myself for a crime I never committed.

Shame was my silent companion. Guilt sat heavy on my chest. The laughter of others in the hostel only deepened the silence in my own heart. I often wondered, *“If they knew the truth about me, would they still see me the same?”*

In college, immorality was like the accepted standard. To share my little secret with anyone would have been laughed off as child's play. My former cubemates had already left college after failing their levels, and I now shared a room with a new cubemate who was even more reckless than the rest. She was in a lower class, but she carried herself with no sense of worth. On weekends she would sell her body to strangers for money, numbing her shame with alcohol until she couldn't remember who she had been with.

Many times, her devoted mother would visit on weekends only to find her absent. I had to craft lies; “She went on a school trip” or “She’s studying with friends.” Watching her mother’s worried eyes made me ache inside. I pitied her daughter, yet I saw a reflection of myself in her. She was bleeding outwardly; I was bleeding inwardly. She numbed her pain with bodies and bottles; I numbed mine with silence and pretense.

It was easy to feel “morally upright” when compared to her recklessness. But the truth was, I was no better. We were both broken vessels, leaking pain in different ways.

“Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7)

And the Lord could see my heart cracked, weary, confused, angry.

The Seed of Alcohol

The truth is, when you find yourself a victim of rape or incest, and you never get counseling, you can swing to extremes: you either withdraw completely from men, or you give yourself to them, trying to drown your guilt. For me, I chose neither. Instead, I found myself strangely attracted to the very thing that once betrayed me: alcohol.

I convinced myself that I would master it, not let it master me. If a drink had been used to control me, then I would now control it. That became my twisted mission.

So my drinking journey began quietly, secretly. At first, I drank alone in my room, pouring small amounts, measuring carefully. I studied my body's reactions, training myself in how much I could take without losing control. When I gained confidence, I joined friends, carefully sticking to my rehearsed limits.

Several times I was invited on dates where men hoped to get me drunk to take advantage of me. Instead, I watched them collapse into drunkenness while I remained standing, proud that I had “outsmarted” them. I thought I was winning. But in truth, I was already losing; losing focus, losing purity of mind, losing myself.

“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.” (Galatians 6:7)

A Relationship Built on the Bottle

It wasn't long before I attracted a circle of drinkers and eventually a boyfriend who loved the bottle as much as I did. Every weekend was another round of parties, funded by his salary. Clubs, neon lights, loud RnB, careless laughter, this became our rhythm.

But with every sip, I drowned the faint whisper in my spirit that told me, *“This is not you. This is not your life.”*

My academics suffered. In one year of dating him, I failed both semesters. I stared at my results sheet in shame. *Failure outside, failure inside. Brokenness manifesting everywhere.*

Deep inside, I knew I didn't want marriage, not with him, not with anyone. Losing my innocence had twisted my view of men into something threatening. My boyfriend became a companion for escape, not love. He was not the problem, my unhealed wound was.

I was a vessel leaking pain.

The Turning Point

At last, I took a bold step. I went to my Dad and told him I wanted to transfer to a city college. I believe he already suspected the destructions in my life, because he quickly agreed. For me, the shift wasn't just about education, it was about escape. Escape from the boyfriend, from the bottle, from the haunting whispers.

“Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” (2 Timothy 2:22)

Moving to the city was a shock. I had never imagined leaving my district town. My vision of the future was so small, so confined. But God's vision for me was far bigger.

I remembered how my grandfather once told me that one day I would drive a car and live in a coastal city. At the time, I laughed it off. But as I walked into the new city, though not the coastal one, I felt the faint stirrings of a destiny I could not yet name.

A Place of Refuge

In the big city, I was welcomed into my auntie's home, where she and her husband embraced me like their own daughter. They gave me a safe space, a home filled with love, a second set of parents who restored a sense of belonging.

For the first time in a year, I rushed home from college not to hide in shame or drown in drink, but to find peace. I would sit under a tree, enjoying RnB music or reading a book returning to the childhood heart of adventures which would allow me to forget the cracks in my soul.

But even in this new environment, challenges awaited. Their home, a beacon in the neighborhood, had drawn the attention of armed robbers. As if my past wounds were not enough, new nightmares were about to unfold.

Reflection

Looking back, I see how my brokenness shaped my decisions. Guilt whispered lies: *"You deserved it. You are dirty. You must control what hurt you."* And so I tried to control alcohol, relationships, even my destiny. But all the while, I was digging deeper into despair.

The truth is, emotional sickness is just as real as physical sickness. It clouds judgment, alters vision, and weakens resolve. Until healing comes, we walk half-blind.

"The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9)

So many young women are like I once was beautifully dressed, smiling on the outside, but bleeding silently within. Some sit on club floors with empty eyes, others stroll down streets waiting for suitors who will never heal their ache. Some hide behind office desks, some in church pews, some even serve in choirs or lead prayers. Yet behind the voices that sing and the lips that intercede are hearts that quietly crumble. Many remain in the place of intercession not because they are whole or holy, but because prayer has become their only refuge from the storm of unspoken pain. And worst of all, there are those who have grown numb faces hardened into masks that tell the story of wounds too deep for words.

But healing is possible. God does not leave us in our brokenness. His word promises:

*“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”
(Psalm 147:3)*

My transfer to the city was not just a change of schools, it was a rescue mission orchestrated by God Himself. It was the beginning of my reshaping, though I didn’t know it then.

Chapter Seven : When Fear Knocks Twice

Ongata Rongai in the early 2000s was under siege. Criminals roamed freely, turning the once-serene Maasai suburb into their hunting ground. Nights were pierced by whistles, sirens, and terrified screams. It was as though Nairobi's most ruthless robbers had moved their headquarters to our doorstep.

Every home looked like a fortress—stone walls crowned with electric fences, gates guarded by fierce men wielding rungs and pangas, some reinforced with the growls of dogs bred for intimidation. No parent needed to enforce curfews. Fear itself was the warden. By 7:30 p.m., every street was deserted, the narrow paths between plots swallowed by overgrown flowers spilling across stone walls. Without streetlights, only the occasional headlights of passing cars and the glow of security lamps at the gates cut through the darkness.

It was into this climate of fear that I, a young girl trying to rebuild my life, found myself.

One evening, as my auntie and uncle returned from their business around 9 p.m., I heard the sound of their car pulling up to the gate. I noticed the guard delayed in opening, but I dismissed it as a routine exchange of greetings. As usual, I unbolted the main door to welcome them in. I returned to the couch, resuming my favorite cartoon—*The Adventures of Coyote*.

Then the door creaked open.

My auntie stepped in first—her hands raised high. My uncle followed in the same posture. Confused, I turned, only to see the guard—who had never stepped inside before—trailing behind them, hands lifted too. In a flash, I understood. My childhood nightmare was replaying itself. This was no place for screams or running away, four masked men stormed in, their presence heavy and terrifying. They were armed with pistols, pangas, and the cold steel of AK-47s. These were no TV cowboys like Walker, Texas Ranger. These weapons breathed death.

My heart froze. I dropped to the floor, face down, whispering a trembling prayer.

Commands barked across the room like gunshots. Because I was the youngest—the cousins were all away in boarding school—the robbers chose me as their errand runner. My uncle tried to intervene, but his masculine frame made him look like a threat. I obeyed every instruction, my hands shaking, my body trembling. My auntie, I remember, whispered fervent prayers the whole time. I believe it was her intercession that kept the robbers' eyes on property and not on us.

Time felt like an eternity. Finally, the men sped away, our electronics and phones stuffed in their bags. We lay on the floor long after the silence returned, terrified they might still be watching. When at last my uncle rose, against my auntie's pleas, the coast was clear. The house was empty—but we were alive.

“Items can be bought again,” my uncle said firmly, his voice resolute. “Lives cannot. We are healthy, and that’s what matters.”

The police came. They took notes but gave little comfort. Their words, though well-meaning, cut deep: *“You are lucky. In the last home, they raped and killed.”*

Was I to be grateful—or angry?

Three months passed. Life resumed, the house filled with replacement electronics, and the neighborhood adjusted to its new normal. The male cousin had joined me at home after finishing high school, and for the first time, I wasn’t so lonely.

But then, it happened again.

One evening, as my guardians returned, we heard the familiar sound of the gate. This time we followed protocol. We never opened without confirming. My cousin rose to the door, peeked—and instantly raised his hands.

Not again.

My body reacted before my mind could. I fell flat to the floor, heart pounding, tears stinging my eyes. “God, why us? Why me?” My spirit cried in silence.

The robbers rushed in, more aggressive than the first. Their words were sharp, their movements restless. This

time, delays in finding what they wanted made them agitated. Rage simmered in the air, and death felt close.

Suddenly, as though inspired together, my cousin and I volunteered to help them disconnect the electronics. The robbers stared at us for a moment, then agreed. With trembling hands, we unplugged the machines, carried them outside, and loaded them into my uncle's car—obedient slaves to fear. When the job was done, we returned to our positions on the floor, faces pressed to the ground. Again, my auntie's was in fervent whispers of desperate prayer, a shield between us and violence. Again, they left without touching us—though the house was stripped bare once more.

The same police returned. The same words fell from their lips: "*You are lucky.*" By now, the phrase cut like a curse. Lucky? To be robbed twice? Lucky? To live in fear that they might come back a third time? I realized then the truth of Psalm 127:1: "Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain."

We had every human precaution, fences, guards, lights, even vigilance. Yet danger still found its way in. What kept us safe was not locks or gates, but the unseen hand of God.

That night, staring at the empty spaces where our possessions once stood, I wrestled with the same question that haunted me since girlhood: *Why us? Why me?*

And though I had no answer, I felt a small whisper rise in my soul: *Because even in your fear, I am teaching you that I alone am your refuge.* “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear...” (Psalm 46:1-2)

Chapter Eight: The Splinter's Race

For over a year, life seemed calm, almost deceptively so. The scars of past robberies were still fresh in our memories, yet our compound had grown fuller, new tenants arriving with their laughter and lights. The neighborhood was growing too, with more people occupying their previously vacant plots. With the increased number of families, we felt safer, less vulnerable. It seemed the robbers had shifted their hunting grounds elsewhere. What lingered were the lone thieves who haunted the narrow paths leading from the road.

From the narrow one-way street that wound between plots and led from the main road to people's gates, sudden, piercing screams often broke the silence of night. Women were ambushed for their handbags or phones, while men lost wallets and mobile phones to hands that vanished swiftly into the shadows between fences. That stretch belonged to the thieves once evening fell. It became an unspoken rule: as dusk approached, you either sprinted through it like an athlete running for dear life, or you risked arriving home stripped of your belongings. The nightfall favored the swift; walking calmly was for the foolish. Some residents waited at the roadside until they found companions, gathering in twos or threes for courage. But even in numbers, safety was never assured. The narrow street seemed to breathe fear, and fear became everyone's companion.

Those fortunate enough to own cars had their own strategy. They would inch their way down the road with

their full beams blazing, flooding the entire kilometer-long stretch with light. For a moment, the darkness scattered, and the lurking muggers fled into the corners like frightened rats. Neighbors on foot would sometimes pause and wait for a car to blaze the lights, then seize the chance to borrow its light and dash in front of the car the rest of the way home. It became a rhythm of survival, footsteps timed with headlights, courage kindled by fleeting bursts of brightness. The street was no longer just a path between homes; it was a battleground where fear and survival wrestled each night.

By then, I had secured my first job while awaiting my results. I often arrived home at around 8:00 pm, just brushing against the dangerous hours. We had an agreement at home: if I thought I might be late, I was to wait for my guardians so we could drive home together. Yet, I was a disciplined “splinter.” I rarely stayed out late. My coworkers quickly learned I was the timekeeper; come what may, I had to rush home before the shadows claimed the night.

Of course, by this time, drinking had woven its way into my life. Friday nights and Saturday nights were our signature days with my colleagues to go out, and Sunday was the resting day to unwind in bed. I had mastered it, hidden it even, so that my guardians rarely suspected anything. If they did, they kept silent—perhaps because I was still respectful, well-behaved, and carried no outward scandal. Some Sundays I would accompany my aunt to church; other times I would excuse myself, hiding under the umbrella of time to study. But beneath that quiet exterior, my studies were trailing, and I knew

it. CPA Part Three was not for the fainthearted. My parents and guardians understood and urged me to quit my job, to dedicate myself fully to studying. Their advice was wise. I was young, and they wanted me to build a future that wasn't compromised.

When the day came to say goodbye to my workplace after one year of work, my colleagues—who had become close friends—insisted on a farewell party. It was a Friday, the city buzzing with the pulse of Furahi Day. Nairobi's heartbeat was wild, unrestrained, alive. We gathered at Zanze Bar, a rooftop club known for its energy and lights. Yet, like clockwork, I rose at 7:30 pm. My timekeeper's alarm rang silently within me. I had to go. My colleagues, now used to my rhythm, made no resistance. One of them even escorted me to the matatu stage, a gesture of care and friendship.

The ride to Ongata Rongai was uneventful, almost comforting. At home, my younger cousins were on holiday, so I wasn't worried about supper. They would cover that. My mind was at peace, perhaps too much at peace. I didn't know that peace was about to be shattered into pieces I would carry for years.

When I alighted, I sprinted like always—my splinter's race toward safety. Along the path, I caught up with a neighbor, a man from the area, gigantic and confident. His presence felt like a shield. He walked with a defiant boldness, unlike the rest of us who ran. It was as though his size alone could wrestle danger to the ground. I exhaled in relief as I walked beside him.

Chapter Nine - The Night The Street Stole My Voice

My walk home with my neighbor felt safe. We strolled leisurely, exchanging stories and catching up until we reached my home gate. His place was further down, in a more crowded apartment compound. At the gate, we paused for a few more words before saying goodbye. I glanced at my watch; 8:10 p.m. Ten minutes late. Not bad. I was safe, and all I needed was to enter home, shower, and sleep after such an eventful day. With my little cousins at home, supper was already taken care of. I was on “kitchen holiday.”

Just as I was about to buzz the gate, shadows materialized. Five masked men emerged, armed with runguns, a sword, and an AK-47 glinting in the dim light. My heart stopped.
“Open the gate!” one barked.

I froze. Memories of past attacks flashed before me, but this time something else struck terror into my soul, my little cousins. They were inside. Innocent. Vulnerable. If I opened that gate, I would be ushering in death and defilement. In a flash, my mind painted it all: the screams, the violence, their innocence stolen. *Not them. Not tonight*, I whispered in my spirit.

A stinging slap jolted me back. “Open the gate!” the leader roared again.
My voice trembled but came out firm: “This is not my home.”

It was a dangerous gamble, but I clung to it. The robbers, knowing the neighborhood's strict security routines, seemed to believe me. My neighbor confirmed quickly, pointing them to a crowded compound further up the road. As they deliberated, a car turned into the street, headlights blazing, scattering shadows. These were no ordinary muggers, they were the gang that had once terrorized the neighborhood. The leader ordered us to move away from the light, pushing us into an unoccupied plot swallowed by darkness. There, he announced that since we were of no use, we'd be tied up so they could continue their raid.

Then the nightmare began.

What began as ropes biting into my wrists became something far darker. My captor decided that bindings alone could not cage me. With a twisted eagerness, he tore away his mask, as though unmasking would somehow grant him power, and with trembling breath he ripped at my trousers.

I screamed. The sound was swallowed by the night, beaten back into my throat with fists that rained like a storm until my body betrayed me, resistance dissolving into weakness. To him, nothing mattered but conquest. My terror, my cries, my humanity, all dissolved into the void of his mission. I slipped into numbness, a place where pain and horror intertwined into the unspeakable.

One after another, they came. Each left wounds deeper in my soul than in my body. I was no longer a girl, no longer a voice, just silence wrapped in flesh, desecrated

in the shadows. When the third was done, another moved toward me. But the leader's hand cut the air. "Enough," he said, his voice cold, detached, as though he were pulling back from the edge of something monstrous yet familiar.

But it was too late. The damage was done, why didn't he stop them earlier? They left us tied face down. I groaned, I could no longer cry. The pain was too much, more in my heart than in my body. And then, as if the heavens themselves had turned against me, rain began to fall. It mixed with my tears, my blood, my shame and the mud. I lay tied, broken, muddy and soaked, asking questions heaven would not answer. *Why me, Lord? Was I cursed? Was I not already broken enough?* At that moment, I wished they had killed me. Nothing mattered anymore.

Hours later, I gathered the strength to move. The ropes on my hands weren't as tight as my neighbor's. Somehow, I freed myself. My suit was muddy, torn, and bloody. My neighbor, equally shaken, I followed him numbly to his house, where I changed before being rushed to hospital. The clinicians treated my visible wounds and referred me to Nairobi Women's Hospital. But before going, I insisted on returning home, I knew my guardians were worried sick. It was 3 a.m. I had never been late before; my curfew was 9 p.m., and I always got home an hour early. They must have tried calling me countless times, my phone now in the hands of my captors.

When I arrived, I saw they hadn't slept. Their faces were etched with worry. The only questions they asked were:

“Are you okay? Were you harmed? Should we take you to hospital?” They knew there was more than I admitted, but shame silenced me. I only told them of the capture, not the rape. I assured them I had been treated. They agreed, though their eyes betrayed disbelief.

The next morning, after they left, I took the long journey to Nairobi Women’s Hospital. I was anxious, I had no money for consultation, and I dreaded having to explain. At reception, I didn’t have the energy to engage. I asked to speak to a nurse. The receptionist must have read my battered face; she beckoned another lady nurse to attend to me. Her words pierced: “Yes, how can I help you?” In a shaken voice, I whispered that I had been referred from a hospital in Rongai. She asked, “Were you raped?” Her words cut me open. I couldn’t answer, I only nodded, staring blankly. She held my hands and led me away. “Wait here. You don’t need to pay anything. You’ll see a doctor shortly.”

In the doctor’s room sat two women: a police officer from the Gender Violence Unit and the doctor. They told me I was safe now and invited me to speak. One of them held a folder with my name printed across the top. My eyes caught the bold letters stamped on it: **GVU**. In that instant, I realized what I had become; an official statistic of gender violence in Kenya. My story, my body, my pain, reduced to a file. I was 23 years old.

And then, for the first time, I spoke the words I had buried inside me: *I was gang-raped*.

Their eyes carried my sorrow, though their professionalism forced them to withhold their tears. They guided me gently through the process, counseling, samples, medical examinations. The first results offered fragments of relief: no STDs, no pregnancy. But HIV lingered like a shadow over my future. They prescribed a month of PEP and urged me to return weekly for counseling.

But I couldn't. I was too shattered to sit in another room and repeat my story. Instead, I withdrew. I barely ate. My room became my world, and silence my only companion. The pills became my daily cross, a bitter perfume that marked every heartbeat with fear. Each day felt like a century. The month a lifetime.

And then it ended. The last pill swallowed. The last page of my calendar marked with trembling hope. I returned for my final test. The doctor looked up from the papers, and at last I heard the words that let me breathe again: *Negative for HIV.*

I had been handed a glimmer of hope by the HIV results, but inside I bled in silence. My studies crumbled beneath the weight I carried. I had quit my job just a month and a half before the June exams, believing this season would be for focus and preparation. Instead, I locked myself in my room, telling my guardians I was studying, when in truth I was drowning, sinking deeper into the quiet suffocation of depression.

The exam date came quicker than I had prayed for, cruel in its timing. That morning in June, on a matatu at

Ongata Rongai Stage, my world tilted, I thought I saw him. The first man. My captor. He was a tout now, shouting destinations as if nothing had ever happened. Our eyes met, and terror shot down my spine like lightning. I could never mistake that face. My body knew it before my mind did.

The fear of him recognizing me began to haunt me, whispering threats only I could hear. I didn't report him, cowardice, some might call it. But I knew it was fear. Fear that worse could follow, that silence was safer than being seen.

Inside the exam room, I couldn't see the paper, only his face, stamped across every question, every answer. I shifted seats in matatus for the rest of the exam days, hoping to hide from shadows that trailed me. As I left the exam room that June, I already knew the verdict written across my paper. An F. Yet I chose presence over absence, as if showing up was the last fragile act of defiance I could offer against the wreckage of my spirit.

The roads that once brought me peace now felt like hunting grounds. My trust was fractured. My mind, bruised and weary.

Back home, my friend, the one who had been with me that night, knew. Knew everything!. What if he told? What if the secret I buried was dragged into the light? Shame coiled around me like chains, pressing me into silence, teaching me that survival sometimes looks like disappearing.

At the time, I was dating a man serious about marriage. We'd been together and this was to be the third year. He had gifted me a phone, and we were planning our union after my CPA exams. He was building a house in Githurai, and I often managed payments for him. But after the rape, I avoided him for a month, waiting for my HIV results before telling him. When I finally confessed, his first reaction was caring. But weeks later, he changed. His words grew cruel. He mocked me, mishandled me, treated my scars as shame I had brought on myself. He weaponized my pain. Three months after confiding in him, I ended the relationship. I walked away. I refused to chain myself to a man who saw my wounds as weapons. I vowed never to risk another relationship. Better single and broken than exposed and wounded again.

That horrific night, though consumed by fire and drowning in floods, I survived. My cousins were spared. My life, though shattered, was preserved. God, though silent, had still been my shield. I did know the Lord as a saviour and a friend. The Haunt continued

At this time, I knew I had to shift from this environment. The fear and shame inside were eating me alive. There was only one way out, *secure a job*.

I had walked through fire, through shadows of shame, but somehow, I was still standing. My story was not finished, my identity not destroyed. No wonder my heart kept reaching upward, believing my escape was hidden in something higher, a job, a chance, a new beginning.

Hope had not fully died. Looking back now, I believe God was already near me — even though I didn't know Him, even though I wasn't saved or going to church. In the middle of my chaos, He must have been whispering into my soul:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (Jeremiah 29:11)

Though I was far from Him, He was close to me. If there was still a future, then perhaps there was still reason to fight. Perhaps there was still reason to breathe, to rise, to live again