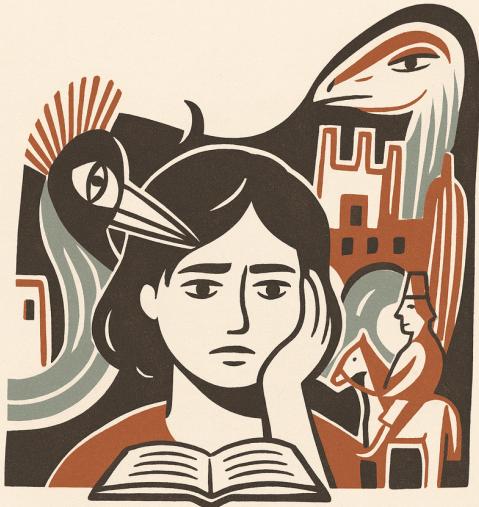


12TH FAIL

HERMENIA



THE 12TH FAIL

ABSTRACT
AFTER FAILING HER FINAL SCHOOL EXAM ,A DETERMINED YOUNG GIRL BATTLES SHAME,SHATTERED DREAMS,AND THE WEIGHT OF EXPECTATION IN A SMALL GHANAIAN TOWN ONLY TO DISCOVER THAT FAILURE MIGHT BE A DOORWAY TO PURPOSE, NOT THE END OF HER STORY.

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TO MY NIECE ANAYA

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TO THE GLORY OF GOD.....

CHAPTER 1

The Wake-Up Call

The morning air felt heavy, like the weight of an unspoken truth. I had just come back from the results center, where I had been handed my math and science scores. I stood there for a moment, holding the paper like it was a message from a world I no longer recognized. D7. E8. The grades seemed almost surreal, as if someone else had written them in some alternate reality.

In Takoradi, people had always spoken about success as if it was a given, a path everyone walked down, some faster than others. But as I stared at the numbers in front of me, I realized that I had reached a crossroads. I wasn't going to get into university with these scores. There was no chance of following the dream I had clung to for so long. Nursing, the field I thought was meant for me, was now an impossibility. For the first time, I felt the ground beneath me give way.

But in that moment of despair, I also felt something stir within me, something deeper than frustration or disappointment. It was a fire, quiet and persistent, that began to grow. I couldn't just let these numbers define me. I couldn't let this failure be the end. There had to be something more. But what was it?

The decision was made: I would retake the exams. Not just to pass, but to prove to myself that failure was not an option. It wasn't about the grades anymore. It was about the strength to rise after you fall.

But the road ahead was unclear. I could feel it in my bones. There was more to this struggle than just academic failure. There were deeper questions I had been avoiding: What was I really meant to do with my life? Nursing, the military, or something else entirely? Every path seemed to pull me in a different direction, but none felt certain. The dreams I had were slipping through my fingers, like sand, and all I could do was stand there and watch.

It wasn't just about my education, it was about everything that had come before and everything that was yet to come. The first step was acknowledging that I had failed. The next step was figuring out how to rise.

I remember standing there, staring at those grades, and thinking about the people who had shaped my life, the ones who had taught me about strength, love, and resilience. People like Madam Ernestina, who had shown me that literature wasn't just about reading words on a page; it was about the power of stories to shape who we are. I could still see myself hopelessly lost in her ever calm Monday morning exhortations. All felt blur just my mind replaying memories. People like Magret, whose presence had grounded me when my mind was adrift. I remember a lifting scene where she walked in on my bible study session and she just admired and it meant a lot to me as I had admired her for long growing up. And then there was my sister, Esi, whose quiet strength and understanding had always cut through my toughest defenses.

They all had one thing in common, they believed in me even when I didn't believe in myself. It was time to start believing again.

With that thought in mind, I made a promise to myself: I would face this failure head-on. I wasn't going to let it define me. I would retake those exams, and I would keep moving forward. The real test wasn't in the grades, it was in what I did next.

And so, the journey began.

CHAPTER 2

Foundations of Resilience

If failure is a teacher, then my life has been a classroom. As I sat with the weight of my recent results, I couldn't help but think back to the people and moments that had quietly molded me. The ones who had planted resilience in me without me even realizing it.

At the center of it all was Madam Ernestina. She turned my life around completely. She made sure I became better in all aspects of it especially my academics. Her office had been my sanctuary, cluttered with books and papers, yet alive with purpose. I spent countless afternoons there, listening to her unravel the world's complexities with nothing but her words. She had this way of making you feel seen, of convincing you that your story mattered even when you doubted it yourself. It felt as if she saw through my soul, Oh! The very core of me.

One particular visit stood out among the rest. I had gone to her office, weighed down by the usual teenage uncertainties. She placed her book aside with a deliberate calmness, the soft thud echoing in the quiet room. Adjusting her glasses, she studied me as though she could see the doubts tangled in my chest.

“Do you understand your call?” Her voice was steady, measured, yet carried a warmth that made the question sink deeper than I expected.

I blinked, caught between awe and confusion. “My call?” I whispered, the words foreign on my tongue.

“Yes.” She nodded slightly, leaning back in her chair. “Everyone has a call. It’s not always loud or obvious. Sometimes, it whispers. But it’s there, the thing you’re meant to do, the thing that pulls you forward, even when the path feels impossible.”

I looked down at my hands, twisting my fingers together. The weight of her words pressed into me, a gentle insistence I wasn’t ready to accept.

“Even if you stumble?” I asked, voice barely above a breath.

Her gaze softened. “Especially if you stumble. Your call doesn’t disappear because of fear, mistakes, or detours. It’s waiting... patient, persistent. It waits for you to pick it up and decide, even if slowly, that you’re ready to follow it.”

A silence filled the room, heavy yet comforting. Outside, the faint hum of the campus carried on, students walking by, doors creaking, footsteps fading and returning. In that pause, I felt the stirrings of something I hadn’t named before, a flicker of purpose buried under uncertainty.

She reached for her book again, but her eyes lingered on me for a moment longer. “Don’t rush yourself. Listen. Pay attention. And when you’re ready...” She trailed off, letting the words hang like a promise.

I nodded, though I wasn’t sure I fully understood. Something, though, a quiet insistence in my chest, told me I’d come back to this moment again.

It wasn't until months later, during a rare visit to her home, that those words truly sank in. I had visited to talk one last time as a student and her admired headmistress, I needed more than her office could offer. Sitting with her, she spoke again about the idea of a call. This time, she explained it differently. "Your call is like a thread," she said. "It might get tangled or frayed, but if you hold on, it'll always lead you back to where you're supposed to be."

I carried those words with me, even when I didn't fully understand them.

And then there was my sister, Esi, her approach was different, sharp and unyielding but always rooted in love. When I wanted to retreat into my failures, she was the one to pull me back. "You don't get to quit," she told me once, after sensing I was ready to give up. "Not when there's still fight in you." She never sugarcoated things, and maybe that's why her words always landed exactly where they needed to.

Magret's belief in me was steadfast, unshaken even when I faltered. Magret's quiet wisdom reminded me that strength didn't always have to roar, it could whisper and still move mountains.

These women, each in their own way, had poured their strength into me. They'd prepared me for moments like this, even when I wasn't aware of it. As I reflected on their influence, I realized something: they hadn't just taught me resilience; they'd shown me what it meant to live it.

And maybe, just maybe, this failure wasn't the end of the road. Maybe it was a chance to pause, to look back at the threads I'd been handed, and to begin weaving something new.

CHAPTER 3

The Emotional Peak and the Balance

There was a heaviness in me that words couldn't quite hold. It wasn't just the pressure of exams or the fear of failing again, it was a quiet, growing exhaustion. My mind was constantly racing, yet my body felt drained. Sleep didn't refresh me. Meals didn't satisfy. I was present, but barely. My thoughts were loud and tangled, and my body began to show the signs of a soul overwhelmed.

I was tired, not just from books and expectations, but from carrying the silence of my own struggle. I didn't know how to say "I'm not okay." I didn't even know what to ask for. All I knew was that I didn't feel like myself anymore. And the more I tried to push through it alone, the more lost I became in the noise of my own mind.

That's when Naa stepped in.

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She didn't force her way in, didn't try to fix me or offer cliché encouragement. She just showed up, with presence, patience, and quiet strength. Somehow, she saw me, even when I felt invisible. She asked questions that didn't pry, listened without judgment, and stood beside me without demanding anything in return.

What I felt for Naa was not anything dramatic. It was deep gratitude and profound respect for a sister-friend whose presence helped me come back to myself. In her, I saw what it meant to be strong without shouting, kind without conditions, and real without needing to explain.

She helped me slow down. She reminded me that rest was not weakness, and that healing begins with honesty. Her influence in my life wasn't

loud, but it was steady, like a hand on your shoulder when the world feels too big.

With Naa's presence came a shift in how I saw myself. I realized I didn't have to pretend I was okay to prove my strength. I didn't need to hide the fact that I was struggling. Her calmness gave me permission to breathe, and in those breaths, I found fragments of myself again.

Slowly, I began to take care of my health, not out of pressure, but because I wanted to feel whole again. I allowed myself moments of quiet. I returned to the basics: eating, sleeping, walking, and praying. I let go of the idea that I had to figure it all out immediately.

Naa didn't walk into my story to rescue me. She walked in to remind me of who I am, and who I'm becoming. She anchored me with her simplicity, grounded me with her care, and helped me see that healing isn't about rushing ahead; it's about learning how to stand still without falling apart.

This chapter of my life was never about someone else becoming the center of my world. It was about rediscovering my own center, with help from someone who believed in me when I had forgotten how to.

And as I prepared for the exams ahead, I carried with me not just a pen or a plan, but the quiet strength I had regained. I was not alone. I had found balance, not in perfection, but in presence.

And sometimes, that's more than enough.

CHAPTER 4

Building the Future

The decision to retake the exams wasn't the end of the struggle; it was just the beginning. Each day became a test of my endurance, a slow and steady march toward a future I was still trying to define. The dream of nursing still lingered, but so did the possibility of the military, a path I hadn't fully considered until the weight of failure pushed me to explore every option. Somewhere in the chaos, I realized this wasn't just about choosing a career; it was about choosing who I wanted to become.

The days began early, the nights stretched long. My study sessions were filled with quiet battles, and with silent victories, fighting against the voice in my head that told me I wasn't good enough, that failure was inevitable. It wasn't just the content of the books that challenged me; it was the discipline, the focus, the need to prove to myself that I could still rise. Each formula memorized and every scientific concept grasped felt like a small victory, a reminder that I was more than my mistakes. Every smile, every laughter, every handshake, every hug, even the good mornings felt worth it.

But progress wasn't linear. There were days when doubt crept in, threatening to unravel everything I had built. On those days, I thought of the people who had always believed in me. Madam Ernestina's voice echoed in my mind, her words like scripture: "Understand your call, and the world will follow." She had always encouraged me to see beyond the surface, to connect with the deeper meaning of everything I pursued and believe everything will work out for my good. Her lessons were more than academic, they were about finding purpose, finding your footing and working towards your goal, even in the midst of uncertainty.

I thought of Magret too, the thought of her brought to life what it would feel like to meet her again but this time with a simple message; "I made it Ma!" and finally let her know how she has impacted my life even from afar. She reminded me that admiration could be a source of strength, that it was possible to honor someone's influence without losing yourself in the process. And then there was my sister, Esi, whose relentless belief in me never faltered. Her voice cut through the doubt like a blade, sharp and unyielding: "You've survived worse. Keep going."

In between study sessions, I explored what the future might hold. Nursing felt familiar, a dream I had carried for so long that it had become part of my identity. But the military offered something different, a chance to challenge myself in ways I had never considered. It wasn't just about the uniform, it was about service too.

CHAPTER 5

The First Step Forward

The day of the exams arrived sooner than I expected, a moment I had been preparing for both mentally and physically. It was strange how something that once felt so distant, so uncertain, could suddenly be right

in front of me. The weight of those papers in my hands didn't feel like a test of knowledge, but a test of my resilience. Could I withstand the pressure? Could I truly rise from the failure I had experienced?

Well time will tell...

As I walked into the examination hall, I felt chill down my spine. It wasn't just about the subjects anymore, it was about everything that had led to this point. The countless hours spent studying, the doubts I had overcome, the decisions I had wrestled with, and the people who had been there, sometimes without saying a word, but always making their presence felt. Each person who had believed in me, even when I hadn't believed in myself, was in that room with me.

I sat at my desk, the questions staring back at me, but I didn't panic. I felt an odd sense of calm, a clarity that I hadn't expected. The doubts that had once plagued me, the fear of failure, all seemed distant. I took a deep breath and began writing, one answer at a time. It was as if the struggle, the emotional peak, and the balance I had fought to find over the past months were finally coming together in this moment. I was no longer just writing answers, I was writing my future.

But no matter how well I did or didn't do on that exam, I knew something important. The test wasn't really in the answers I wrote down. It was in the journey I had taken to get to this point. The real test had always been about who I became along the way.

When I left the exam hall, I didn't feel the immediate sense of relief I thought I would. Instead, I felt a quiet certainty that everything I had done, every struggle, every step forward, had led me to this moment. And this moment was just the beginning.

In the days that followed, I couldn't help but reflect on how far I had come. The person who had walked into that examination hall was not the same person who had walked into the classroom months before. I had faced my doubts and my fears. I had learned how to balance the weight

of the world on my shoulders, and in doing so, I had learned to trust myself.

The results were still unknown, but in that uncertainty, I found peace. I had given everything I could, and that was enough. The future, whether it led me to nursing, the military, or something else entirely, would unfold as it was meant to. What mattered was that I had learned to trust the process, to trust that even when I stumbled, even when I failed, I would rise again.

The 12th Fail was not a symbol of defeat, but a symbol of growth. I had failed, but I had learned, and that was the true victory. The first step forward was not about the destination, it was about embracing the journey. And now, with every step I took, I knew that no matter where life led me, I was ready.

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AFTERMATH

You've read pieces of my story, but you may still be wondering who I am.

Let me introduce myself properly.

My name is Akosua Nyarko.

In Akan tradition, Akosua is the name given to girls born on a Sunday, girls believed to carry calmness, intuition, and a quiet kind of strength.

Nyarko means God's gift... a name that has always felt heavier than it sounds.

A gift, yet my failures often made me feel like the opposite.

I'm nineteen years old, born and raised in Takoradi, Ghana, in a family of five that breathes discipline, hard work, and expectation.

My father, Kofi Frimpong Nyarko, a retired military officer, carries his principles like armor. My mother, Adjoa Tawiah Nyarko, a humble trader with a soft heart and firm beliefs, anchors our home with a gentleness that never excuses lack of effort.

I am calm, introspective, and thoughtful, one of those people who can sit in a crowded room yet live entirely in a different universe of books, ideas, and private dreams.

People often mistook my calmness for weakness.

But I was never weak, I was both calm and confident, steady in ways many people never took the time to understand.

Still, beneath those traits I carried so naturally, there lived a fear I rarely admit:

The fear that I am not enough.

For years, math and science were my battlegrounds. I studied, prayed, revised, and tried again, yet the results arrived as a blow I didn't know how to defend. A D7 in math. An E8 in science. Scores that sat on my chest like stones, pressing down on any belief I had in myself.

I had dreamed of becoming a nurse, of helping people, of meaning something, but those grades built a wall I couldn't climb. And standing

on the other side of that wall was another pressure: my father's desire for me to join the military, to follow the path he walked with pride.

I found myself torn between the life I wanted and the life others expected me to live.

But this is not just a story about failure.

This is the aftermath, the part where clarity begins to form after all the dust settles.

Ride with me, because a Presence that sailed with me all along, God, brought six remarkable women, and one unexpected love interest, to shape what came after my twelfth failure.

They did not arrive perfectly or gently, but they arrived precisely when I needed them, teaching me how to rise, rebuild, and redefine the meaning of calling.

This... is where everything began to change.

CHAPTER 11

When I Finally Took My Life Back

After the exam, the world didn't fall apart dramatically, it just grew quiet in a way that scared me.

Nothing was loud, nothing was chaotic, but every step I took felt like walking through fog.

People kept saying, "You'll be fine," and I nodded because it was easier than explaining the kind of emptiness you feel when your life has no shape but it's believed to be picking its own shape.

I wasn't fine.

I wasn't even close. I was only trying

Most days, I moved like someone trying not to disturb her own ruin.

I wasn't brave enough to talk about it, not even to myself — so I folded everything neatly into silence.

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I was vague, completely vague with everyone. And yes, I was vague with Ri too.

Not because I didn't trust her, but because I hadn't learned how to trust myself with the truth yet.

Sheridan was steady, though, the kind of steady that doesn't ask for more than you can give.

She never demanded my details.

She never asked why I disappeared for hours.

She simply met me where I was, not where she wished I'd be.

But the night everything shifted...

It was 2 a.m.

Scene [flashback]

The room was dark except for the dimmed glow from my cell phone slipping through my sheets.

My phone, screen lit, cold in my hands.

I had been crying, not the loud kind, but the quiet, breathless crying where your chest gets tight and you feel like your soul is trying to leave your body.

I turned on my phone just to distract myself, scrolling blindly through messages I didn't care about.

Nothing helped.

I felt heavy, hollow, and uneasy.

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And then my fingers typed her name almost on their own.

“Ri... I can’t sleep”

I didn't expect a response.

Normal people slept at 2 a.m.

Reasonable people had boundaries.

Strong people weren't falling apart on random weekday nights.

But my phone lit up almost instantly, piercing the darkness.

“What’s wrong?”

Something in me cracked at those words, not in a painful way, but like a window opening in a suffocating room.

I typed slowly, hesitating between every sentence, revealing nothing and everything at the same time.

“I don’t know. I just... feel lost.”

A pause.

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Not long, but long enough for me to feel silly for texting her at that hour.

Then:

“Okay. Breathe. I’m with you.”

I stared at those words for a long time.

Not because they were dramatic.

But because they were steady.

And I needed steady.

We chatted for a few minutes, my messages short, vague, broken.

Hers warm, patient, undemanding.

And then she said the words that changed the architecture of my night and my life:

“Talk to the Holy Spirit.”

“Let Him sit with you in this.”

It wasn’t advice.

It wasn’t a sermon.

It was an invitation.

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Something shifted inside me slowly, like curtains being drawn open at dawn.

I didn’t know if I could pray.

I didn’t even know what to say.

But I closed my eyes anyway.

I remember whispering,

“Holy Spirit... I don’t know what to do.”

And for the first time in a long time, I didn’t feel alone in my own silence.

I didn't receive instant answers.

My situation didn't magically change.

But something softened.

Something steadied.

It was the first time I realized peace isn't loud.

Peace is presence.

When I opened my eyes, RI was still there, still replying, still holding the space without forcing anything out of me.

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That night altered the trajectory of my life.

And I've prayed ever since, especially at my worst.

Not out of habit.

Not out of fear.

But because someone pointed me back to the One who understood me completely.

Leadership began there.

Not in a classroom.

Not in success.

But in a 2 a.m. whisper when the world felt too heavy.

I started taking my life back in small, quiet ways, choosing intention over numbness, choosing truth over performance, choosing to show up even when I didn't feel enough.

I began leading myself.

Then I began leading others, gently, honestly, imperfectly.

With my juniors, I gave direction from a place of understanding.

With friends, I created space for conversations that mattered.

With those I admired, I let myself admire without shrinking.

With myself... I finally became honest.

And in all of it, RI's influence lingered, not as a savior, but as a reminder.

A reminder that leadership isn't about being perfect.

It's about being responsible with your own life.

It's about rising slowly but deliberately.

It's about holding others with the same compassion that saved you at 2 a.m.

I'm still learning.

Still growing.

Still becoming.

But one thing is clear:

The night I texted RI at 2 a.m. was the night the leader in me woke up.

CHAPTER 12

THE YEAR I REFUSED TO BREAK

The hardest part of rewriting my papers wasn't the studying.

It was walking into the exam hall again, it felt as if it was the worst experience anyone can ever go through. Same chairs, same memories that once made me laugh now mocked me. But this time, I wasn't the trembling girl who stared at her scripts in shame. I wrote with a steadiness that surprised even me. Every line I wrote felt like stitching myself back together.

Months later, when the results were finally released, I didn't rush.

I stared at my index number on the screen, breathing slowly, I calmly turned to watch as if my whole life depended on it,

Then I saw them.

The passes. All of them. Clean. Solid. Deserved.

No scream left my mouth.

No jump.

No tears rolling down my cheeks.

Just a quiet, heavy joy that sat in my chest like warm water, steady, deep, overwhelming in a gentle way. The kind of happiness that makes your breath slow down, not speed up. The kind that feels like finally exhaling after holding air for too long.

I sat on the edge of my bed and pressed my palm to my heart.

“I did it,” I whispered, not to the world... but to myself.

To the girl who thought she wouldn’t make it.

That evening, I walked to my parents.
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No speeches rehearsed. No fear. Just truth.

“I know what I want to do,” I said.

For the first time, they listened without interrupting.

And I told them about Computer Science, and that I wished to major in Cyber security.

I told them why, because I wanted to challenge myself, because I wanted to build something bigger than my fears, because the failure that once almost destroyed me had sharpened me in ways I didn’t expect.

They nodded. They did not hesitate as it was so obvious that I yearned for a career that required much but will also keep me extremely reserved in my world.

My mother smiled softly, the kind that says I see you now.

My father didn't hide his pride; he didn't even try.

And together, we began the application.

Weeks later, the admission came.

A simple email.

A simple line: YOU HAVE BEEN OFFERED ADMISSION.
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Again, I did not scream.

I just placed my hand over my mouth and leaned back slowly, feeling the same warm heaviness rise through me. That fullness you can't cry about, can't laugh about... you just feel it.

CHAPTER 13

THE YEAR THAT STOOD STILL

Before this joy, there was the silence.

The year I sat at home while all my mates left for school.

I remember the day they packed their things, their laughter reaching corners of the compound that my hope couldn't reach. I remember pretending I wasn't watching them, pretending it didn't sting. Saw them post departure photos, arrival, first lecture, campuses, oh my heart burned! I stayed behind.

That year nearly broke me. It literally took the grace of God for me to survive.

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At night, I would visit every failure in my head like a painful museum.

The questions I couldn't answer.

The shame and guilt I buried in me.

The feeling that life had moved forward without me.

But that painful year was the year something else was quietly forming in me, discipline, patience, clarity, a sense of self I didn't know I needed. I studied not because I was competing with anyone, but because I was tired of seeing myself small, I knew I was bigger than that.

That was also the year I found writing, my safe heaven.

It started with late-night thoughts, then paragraphs, until the page became a place where I could breathe without fear. Writing softened me, steadied me, and taught me to understand myself. It made loneliness feel less like punishment and more like preparation.

And then came photography my long hidden passion.

My phone became my companion, sunsets, shadows, random objects, accidental art. Photography taught me how to see beauty in places where I never looked before, including myself. The lens helped me find angles of life that made everything feel possible again.

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CHAPTER 14

UNIVERSITY: THE GIRL WHO BLOSSOMED

When school started, I walked in nervous but not scared.

The girl who once failed mathematics now loved solving problems. The same D7 girl started topping her class, not because she suddenly became a genius, but because she had learned to trust God and lean best on what Christ had to offer.

I found friends who understood discipline, who checked on me, who kept me accountable with kindness rather than pressure. People who looked at me and saw potential rather than a past.

Leadership found me, not loudly, not forcefully.

It grew in small ways:

In how I organized my life,

In how I helped others,

In how I took responsibility for myself.

Sheridan inspired a part of that awakening, but she wasn't the whole story.

The competence, the discipline, the courage... that was me.

She only sparked what I eventually learned to carry on my own.

EPILOGUE

When I look back now, I see a girl who thought she had lost everything, unaware that life was quietly rebuilding her from the inside out.

I see a girl who sat out a year but rose higher than she ever could have if she had moved with the crowd.

I see a girl who failed... but refused to stay fallen.

And that is leadership.

That is growth.

That is becoming.

If someone had told me years ago that I would walk into university with my shoulders relaxed, my head steady, and my heart calm, I would have laughed. The kind of laugh that hides fear.

But there I was, orientation week, the sun gently warming the courtyard, the chatter of new students mixing with the smell of fresh notebooks and hope.

I didn't feel behind anymore.

I didn't feel less-than.

And if anyone knew me any better they'd have recognized the growth, now my aura was different.

I felt... ready.

The confidence didn't arrive as a loud voice; it arrived in pieces, small, quiet, certain.

Like the first time I solved a programming problem on my own.
The first time I walked into a math tutorial and didn't shrink.
The first time I raised my hand during a lecture not because I wanted to impress anyone, but because I actually knew the answer.

People noticed. People saw.
They didn't know the story, but they saw the steadiness.
Some called it bravery; some called it maturity.
Only I knew it was survival turned into strength

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CHAPTER 15

FRIENDSHIPS THAT HELD ME TOGETHER

I met people who felt like sunlight, warm, gentle, and consistent.
Not the kind of friends who asked for perfection, but the kind who celebrated progress.

They held me accountable in ways that didn't choke me.
“Have you submitted the assignment?”
“Let's study together.”
“You're doing well. Don't stop.”

They pushed me without force.

Encouraged me without pressure.

And they brought a softness into my life that made everything feel less heavy.

With them, I didn't need to pretend.

The version of me who once hid her scripts now helped others understand theirs.

Slowly, quietly, I became someone people trusted.

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CHAPTER 16

LEADERSHIP THAT GREW IN SECRET

Leadership didn't come to me as a position, it came to me as responsibility.

In the way I organized study groups.

In the way juniors walked to me for help.

In the way my mates trusted my direction, even when I didn't announce myself as a leader.

Sheridan's influence wasn't loud anymore.

It wasn't the backbone of my story.

It had become a memory, something that once nudged me forward but no longer carried me.

Now, I carried myself.

I was becoming the kind of woman who could inspire, not because she was perfect, but because she kept going.

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CHAPTER 18

THE CAMERA THAT TAUGHT ME TO SEE

Photography grew with me on campus.

Both became places for discovery.

Through the lens, I learned how to focus, literally and figuratively.

I found angles in people's faces, colors in ugly buildings, stories in ordinary moments.

My photos became little journals:
“How I felt today.”
“What I saw when I didn’t know what to say.”
“The beauty I didn’t recognize before.”
“How God was experienced by people at church.”

Some people said I captured emotions.

Others said I captured truth.

But I knew what I was really capturing, myself, piece by piece, in every frame.

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CHAPTER 17

THE GIRL WHO CAME HOME

Each time I went home on vacation, I carried a different version of myself.

Less fear.

More clarity.

More grounding.

I remember one evening sitting with my parents on the porch, watching the sky fade slowly from blue to orange. My mother looked at me the way someone examines a flower that bloomed quietly in a corner.

“You’re different,” she said.

“I’m becoming maa, I have found my all my struggles leading me to Christ” I answered.

And it was true.

I had not arrived, but I was no longer lost.

I was still searching, but this time with a goal.

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CHAPTER 18

FLASHBACK

THE WOUND THAT STARTED IT ALL

Sometimes, the memory of that lonely year returned, softly now, not painfully.

The silence.

The feeling of being left behind.

The ache of watching buses drive away without me.

But instead of shame, I now felt gratitude.

Without that year, I wouldn't have learned discipline.

I wouldn't have discovered writing.

Or found photography.

Or awakened leadership.

Or known the sweetness of a second chance earned through sweat.

The wound became the foundation.

The delay became the blessing.

The pain became the path.

HERMENIA

CHAPTER 19

A LIFE THAT MADE SENSE AT LAST

I didn't become perfect; I became present.

I didn't become the brightest; I became determined.

I didn't become the loudest; I became sure.

And the girl who once whispered "I did it" now whispered something else on nights when she lay in bed, staring at the ceiling:

"I am still doing it."

Not for applause. Not for validation. Not even to prove anyone wrong.

But because I owed this version of myself the life she once thought she could never have.

HERMENIA

CHAPTER 20

THE GRACE & PRISCILLA

I didn't know that failure had a sound until I heard the way it echoed inside me. A quiet, embarrassing crack. The kind you don't want anyone to notice. The kind you pretend isn't there.

For a while, I carried it alone, my disappointment, my shame, my fear and I was so sure that maybe God had finally run out of patience with me. I walked around like someone living on borrowed breath, smiling because it was easier than explaining why every night felt like drowning.

One Important detail on my failure turmoil was that it happened during Christmas and so remembering it during this Christmas It brought me back to these amazing women.

And then.... Sister Grace.

I don't know what shifted inside me the day I finally opened up to her but I remember wanting to build honesty with my sister friend. Maybe it was the gentleness in the way she said my name. Maybe it was the way she looked at me like she could see all the parts I was trying to hide and wasn't afraid of any of them. Or maybe I was just tired, tired of holding the ache, tired of pretending I was fine.

I told her everything.

The failure. The fear. The decisions I made in panic.

The way I had almost given up on myself.

I kept waiting for judgment. For advice coated in pressure. For that look people give you when they think you've ruined your life.

Oh I waited! I waited for the “you could have done better message”

But Sister Grace didn't give me any of that.

She listened. Just listened.

And in that silence, I broke. Not loudly... but in the small, trembling way a person breaks when they finally feel safe.

HERMENIA

She didn't rush to fix me.

She just held space for me to breathe again.

That night, Grace prayed for me and I was so sure she did, not to erase the failure, but to remind me that purpose doesn't die because of a bad season. I cried in a way I hadn't cried in months. The kind of crying that feels like release, not humiliation. And it made happy as I had just been accountable to someone I cherished dearly as a young adult.

And then there was Sister Priscilla.

If Grace was calm waters, Priscilla was light, very sweet, warm, honest, and steady. She had this way of checking on me without making it feel like surveillance. She and Grace became a shelter I didn't even know I needed.

When I started falling under wrong influences, when my heart drifted where it shouldn't have, when my emotions got loud and messy, when I started confusing attention with affection, they didn't abandon me. They didn't shame me. They didn't make me feel unworthy.

They loved me through it. That was love being loud and love being quiet!

They spoke to me like my soul mattered.

They prayed for me like my life depended on it.

They reminded me who I was when I couldn't recognize myself.

For many times, the two sisters spoke to me about purpose, love, decisions, and the future. I remember their voices layered over each other, Grace with her calm yet fierce truth, Priscilla with her fierce tenderness. I remember their words every time, and holding mine and theirs during prayer. I remember the way their words pulled me back every time I drifted too far.

And somehow, their influence reached even the things I never spoke out loud, my love interests, my choices, and the people I allowed near my heart. They didn't dictate anything... but their standards became my compass.

Through their friendship, I began to unlearn the loneliness I had normalized.

I began to trust softness again. I began to believe God hadn't forgotten me.

Sister Grace and Sister Priscilla made me love my own sisters more.

They made me see sisterhood as something holy, not loud, not dramatic, but steady, patient, and healing. They taught me that intimacy between women is not competition or fear. It is ministry.

Their friendship was the real aftermath of my failure, proof that God can use broken stories to build safe rooms around you.

HERMENIA

I didn't just experience comfort with them. I experienced transformation.

And sometimes, when I think about those night, our prayer sessions, shared prayer links, shared testimonies, my tears, our laughter, the way they surrounded me like a covering, I realize something:

My failure didn't destroy me. It delivered me into the hands of the right people.

And that, to me, is the most beautiful kind of redemption.

Grace visited Takoradi and we met.

And that single moment became a memory etched into my spirit.

My very request was that she prays for me for she leaves and she did.

After church, when everything had settled and we were both drifting home, I gathered courage and asked her quietly,

“Please... pray for me.”

We stepped aside, just the two of us.

The wind was soft. The sun was low.

And for a moment, Takoradi felt like the safest place on earth.

HERMENIA

Grace didn't hesitate. She didn't rush.

She just pulled me into a hug, the kind of hug that feels like God's own arms, and began to pray.

Her words were gentle at first. Then firm. Then full of something holy.

And then she said the sentence that pierced straight through me:

“I know this young woman is destined for greatness.”

My knees went weak. My chest tightened.

I felt that, fully, openly, uncontrollably and right there in her arms.

My tears soaked her shoulder.

My voice disappeared and I rather sobbed louder.

But she didn't stop praying.

She didn't loosen her hold.

She didn't pause for a second.

She kept speaking blessings over me, calling out my future as if she had seen it with her own eyes.

She kept speaking strength into me, purpose into me, and identity into me.

She kept praying until the brokenness inside me felt seen, and held.

HERMENIA

And in that moment, something shifted.

I realized that sometimes...

Love is Christ.

Sometimes love is accountability.

Sometimes love is kindness that refuses to let you down.

That day, Grace wasn't just my friend.

She was my reminder that God still remembered my name.

And as Priscilla later told me over the phone, "Sisterhood is healing in human form."

And she was right.

DEDICATION

Miss. Grace Abena Bruwa Edutuah – Appiah.

My only best friend, you are beautifully aggressive in the best way.
You are caring, so sweet and very kind to your core.

Mrs. Priscilla Akosua Sam-Ansong.

You are my big sis by choice and you make sure I never feel otherwise.
You are Kind, humble and so down-to-earth.

If you ever read this chapter, I hope you feel the softness, the gratitude, and the love stitched into every line. Distance never dimmed your impact. You held me from cities away. You covered me when I didn't know how to cover myself. You loved me with the gentleness of women who understand purpose.

You didn't just stand with me.

You built me, you believed for me and you prayed me into becoming.
Thank you for being the aftermath God sent to heal me.

CHAPTER 21

MY FRIENEMY

I've met many people in my life, but none have bruised me, built me, confused me, and shaped me the way Shika Eshun did. This chapter of my life is called My Frienemy because there is no other word that fits her. She wasn't my enemy. She wasn't my friend. She was something in between, sharp enough to wound me, soft enough to save me.

The Shika I knew was unforgettable. The type of girl who didn't walk, she arrived. Effortlessly hot, intelligent without trying, thrilling to watch, impossible to pin down. She laughed loudly, spoke quickly, moved like life was waiting for her to catch it. People admired her without knowing why. I admired her even when I tried not to.

She liked me... I think. But Shika had a way of liking you that felt like a test. She challenged me, provoked me, and pushed me so hard that sometimes I wondered if she wanted me to break. And then she would say things that stitched me back together again.

My favorite thing she ever told me were the words I didn't know I needed:

“You’re Fiona... what haven’t you been through? You get through. Just take it easy on yourself.”

Shika always said it casually, like she didn't know those words held me up on days I was collapsing inside.

Who Shika Was to Me

Shika was duality. Two people in one body. The outside version was vibrant, sarcastic, and untouchable. The inner version, only glimpsed in rare slips, was soft, observant, wounded in places she refused to show.

She noticed everything about me: the way my voice dipped when I was scared, the way I touched my wrist when I was overwhelmed, the way I pretended not to care when I was hurting. Shika read me too well, and it terrified me.

She was hyperactive, thrilling, and unpredictable. And I was the calm one. The soft one. The patient one. Sometimes she got irritated with my softness, like it reminded her of something she had lost long ago.

But she made me stronger. Even when she didn't mean to.

Her Story As I Saw It

Shika came from a well-structured, beautiful home, but you could feel the ghost of her mother in everything she did. Losing her mother so young taught her the kind of independence people admire too early. She was mature, responsible, and intelligent. An ideal daughter on the outside. A guarded child on the inside.

You'd never guess she grew up without a mother. She didn't let the world see softness. She hid it like an old scar.

We met in Senior High School, and she gave me a very hard time. I think she hated how gentle I was. Or maybe she wanted to see how far I could bend before I broke.

Funny enough, she was the one who built the backbone I walk with today.

Why She Was My Frienemy

Shika wanted me to win but she wanted to win too.

She protected me but only when I couldn't see her doing it.

She exposed my weaknesses but not to destroy me; to force me to face them.

I couldn't predict her. Ever.

She was my critic, my mirror, my chaos, my comfort all in one person.

The Competition That Broke Us (Flashback)

People think friendships begin with soft laughter and shared secrets. Ours began at a national academic competition.

Different universities. Same goal.

Shika represented my dream university. I represented the school that accepted me because of my hard work.

We started as rivals. Fierce ones. She argued like she was born for battles. I fought quietly, steadily. Somewhere in the late-night studying, intense debates, shared notes, and accidental confessions, we became something like friends.

There was a fight, one of the biggest arguments we ever had. A fight that didn't start with shouting, but with silence so sharp it bruised.

It happened the night before the final round of the competition. We were in the study hall, just the two of us. Papers everywhere, our notes mixed, tension thick enough to cut. Shika was pacing. I was pretending to stay calm, but my hands were shaking.

She slammed her pen down. "Ako, do you even want this?"

I blinked. "Why would you ask me that?"

"Because you're too calm!" Her voice cracked like something inside her was breaking. "Too calm for someone who's about to face the hardest round! Too calm for someone who claims to care about winning!"

I tried to explain, "Calm doesn't mean I don't care."

But she stepped close, too close, and said, “No! You stay composed until you suffocate yourself. Until you shrink. Until people walk over you. Why don’t you ever fight back, Ako? Why don’t you ever let yourself explode?”

I could feel a different woman in the hall. Her eyes were glowing with frustration and fear. And something inside me, the part she kept poking and bruising, finally snapped.

“For someone who claims not to care,” I said quietly, “you care too much.”

She froze. Or maybe she doesn’t, who cares anyway?

I continued, voice trembling but steady, “You pretend you’re invincible, but you’re not. You pretend you’re fine, but you’re lonely. You pretend nothing gets to you, but everything does. You fight me because you think that’s the only way to keep people close.”

Hurt flickered in her eyes before she blinked it away.

“Let’s not pretend you’ve figured me out” she yelled.

“If you didn’t want to be understood,” I said, “you wouldn’t let me this close.”

The room went still. Everything was all silent for us.

She looked up at me, and for the first time ever, her eyes softened.

“You don’t know what it’s like to lose something that mattered,” she murmured, voice tight.

And I whispered back, “You don’t know what it’s like to keep losing yourself just to survive.”

We stood there, eyes wet, the whole room silent.

She looked at me with something like respect. Maybe love. Maybe fear.

But then I won.

I beat her fairly, for the first time. And I saw the crack in her confidence.
Out of fear, fear of losing me, fear of losing herself, she exposed one of my weaknesses to the opposing team.

It hurt. Deeply. More than anything else.

And then she disappeared. No messages.
No calls.
No explanation.

My Rise without Her

I performed anyway.
I kept going anyway.
I won anyway.

But I carried her words with me: “You are Fiona... what haven’t you been through?”

And when I finally emerged the champion, I dedicated my victory to her.
I wrote to her, not out of pride, but because the girl who wounded me also built me.

Shika,

I won.

And I wish you had been there to see it, not because I wanted to prove anything, but because so much of who I became was shaped beside you and sometimes against you.

I've been thinking a lot about us, about the hurt, the tension, the strange bond we never understood. And somewhere in all of it, I realized something:

God uses brokenness to build people.

I didn't see it then, but I see it now.

The cracks you left in me became places God filled with strength.

The silence you disappeared into became the space He used to teach me endurance.

The wound from your betrayal became the doorway to my growth.

HERMENIA

You were both a storm and a tool.

A lesson and a blessing.

And somehow, God used every sharp part of our story to carve something stronger in me.

I don't hold anything against you, Shika.

You taught me resilience in a language only you could speak.

You pushed me into the version of myself I didn't know I was allowed to become.

So this victory, I'm giving it back to the One who built me through it... and to the girl who unknowingly helped Him shape me.

If you ever return, you'll find me softer, lighter, and stronger.

Not because I escaped the brokenness —
But because God used it beautifully.

Ako.....

HERMENIA

That letter became the beginning of a new chapter for me yet again, one of slow healing, honest friendship, and steady growth.

The chapter of my Frienemy.

CHAPTER 22

ME.....

The morning broke in muted colors as usual, dust, smoke, and the low hum of a settlement that had forgotten what peace used to sound like.

Ten years since the Frienemy days. Ten years since Shika told me, “You are Fiona... what haven’t you been through?”

And yet, somehow, here I was, boots in the red sand, badge on my chest, and heart on my sleeve.

I had just finished patching up a report when my satellite tablet buzzed.

One unread email.

Subject: We love your book.

For a moment, the world around me, sirens, murmured prayers, distant gunfire went silent. My throat tightened. It’s almost out... after all these years.

HERMENIA

“Lieutenant Nyarko,” Lieutenant Rolake’s voice floated behind me.

Her Nigerien accent always sounded like home in foreign lands.

“The children are waiting... before Lieutenant Rashida starts shouting.”

I laughed under my breath, pulled myself together, and slipped the tablet into my vest.

We walked toward the tent together, dust rising behind our boots. The moment I lifted the flap and saw the children, bandaged, hopeful, and afraid, brave all at once, something inside me cracked open and I missed my nieces terribly!

A shy little girl tugged at my sleeve, her small fingers brushing against the dust on my uniform. Her voice trembled softly:

“Yaan tahay, Aunty Askari?”

(Who are you, Auntie Soldier?)

Before I could gather my breath, a little boy stepped forward, older, brave in the way children learn to be when the world forces them. His accent carried the warmth of Southern Africa. He tilted his head, studying me with bold curiosity.

“Unabantwana bakho, u-Anti?”

(Do you have children of your own, Auntie?)
HERMENIA

Two questions. Two languages.

Two worlds meeting in one moment.

Their voices, Somali dust and Zulu melody, melted my heart.

And suddenly, the past began pulling me under.

That morning didn't feel like anything I've experienced till now.

It felt beautiful.

My white suit well ironed and shiny, and the car speakers buzzed slightly as Mom played her old Pentecostal gospel playlist, the same one she loved dearly.

Mom kept looking at me. Her eyes were already wet yet so full of life. I saw Papa's proud smile as well.

"Ako... today is your day," she whispered, as if saying it too loudly would break the miracle.

I remember staring out the window, watching Takoradi blur past, shops, rotor drivers arguing, schoolchildren running and thinking,

How did a 12th failure end up here?

How did I survive myself?

Grace and Priscilla, who had come from Accra a day before squeezed themselves into the backseats with me, refusing to sit in front, "today we're your sisters too, not big girls," they said. My nieces joined too while Esi and Ama my older siblings joined mom and dad in the other car. I kept touching my arm as if to make sure I was real.

When we reached the campus gates, my eyes welled up .The whole family hugged me and Esi helped me wear my robe.

Students in gowns rushed everywhere.

Lecturers in their regalia.

Cameras everywhere.

Proud families shouted names.

But nothing moved me like seeing my own family:

My sisters standing tall, their proud smiles, my adorable nieces clinging to their skirts, shouting, “Auntie Ako! Auntie Ako!

The walk from the car to the auditorium felt like it was all pre planned, every step heavy with gratitude, fear, love, and something close to destiny.

When my name was called, Miss Akosua Nyarko,

“Overall Best Student of the Entire University...”

The room rose before I did.

Mom’s hand flew to her mouth.

HERMENIA

Grace smiled. I looked at Priscilla grabbed her hand and whispered,

“God has done it, I fulfilled my promise, and you are at my graduation”

My sisters held each other and all I felt was Love.

My nieces admired.

My heart...

My poor heart didn’t know whether to stop or keep sprinting.

I climbed the stage with trembling hands.

I could feel every eye look up at me, tears warming my lashes.

And when I reached the podium, the hall became quiet.

I unfolded my speech.

But the paper blurred instantly.

“I...”

My voice cracked.

They waited.

“I stand here today... not as someone who had it all together.

Not as someone who always passed.

But as someone who failed, twelve disappointments. Twelve reasons to quit.

“But I still look hot”, I said.

The hall erupted in laughter.

And then I continued:

“I am standing here today because God never wastes broken pieces.”

The audience went silent, a holy silence.

“I am standing here because people believed in me.

Because life pushed me. Because grace found me. And because failure...

Taught me how to fight.”

Tears blurred my vision. Even my rector wiped his eyes.

So if ever you’re in doubt remember a D7 in maths and E8 in Science topped your entire university and keep fighting!

When I stepped down from the podium, Mom couldn’t hold back her tears, I grabbed onto her so tightly I could barely breathe.

Ama the oldest and Esi wrapped around us. I offered my hand for Grace and Priscilla to join. My nieces hugged my legs like they were trying to keep me on earth.

HERMENIA

It felt like heaven had opened a small window, just for me.

That day lit a fire in me.

A calling. A promise.

CHAPTER 23

And in the tent, back in the present, with two war-zone children staring up at me,

It all came crashing back.

The girl I was. The woman I had become. The officer I was now. The one soon to be promoted. The 12th failure who now stood between children and their fear.

A tear rolled down my cheek as I whispered to them,

“I will tell you who I am.”

Their eyes were still on me,

The Somalian girl with dust on her cheeks, the Zulu boy with a bandaged arm and a brave smile.

Two tiny souls whose worlds had been torn open far too early.

Two children asking me,

Who are you?

Do you have children of your own?

HERMENIA

I inhaled deeply, tasting the dry air of Somalia,

The scent of smoke, antiseptic, and hope.

Then I knelt down to their level. My heart touched.

“I’ll tell you who I am,” I said softly.

Their eyes widened, waiting.

“I am... a girl who failed 12th grade”

I smiled faintly.

The Zulu boy blinked, surprised.

The Somali girl looked up at me.

“But I learned something,” I continued.

“Failure isn’t the end. It’s a teacher.”

A breeze swept into the tent.

“I am a girl who cried more nights than I can count,” I whispered.

“A girl who wanted to give up. A girl who didn’t think she was smart enough...

Or strong enough.”

HERMENIA

They leaned closer, hanging on every word.

“But God has a way of taking broken things...

And building something strong from them.”

The Somali girl touched my hand gently.

“Today,” I said, looking into both their faces,

“I am a Lieutenant in the military. A child psychologist. A cyber security specialist.

And I am in law school.”

The Zulu boy blinked again.

“You study all of that?” he asked in English, his accent rich and warm.

I laughed. “Yes.”

“And do you have children?” he asked again, softer now.

I reached out and brushed a tear from his cheek.

“I don’t have my own,” I said,

“But I have all of you.” HERMENIA

His face softened.

The Somali girl looked me in the eye.

“Ina ku jeclahay,” she murmured,

A shy, emotional whisper.

I love you.

I beamed.

“I love you too,” I whispered back.

Behind me, I sensed movement,
Lt. Rolake standing with her arms folded, smiling softly,
And Lt. Rashida wiping her eyes even though she’d deny it later.

“You want to know who I am.” I said to the two children
And to myself.

“I am the 12th failure...
Who refused to stay a failure?”

HERMENIA

Their little hands reached out toward my uniform,
And instinctively, I hugged them both.

For a moment, the world stilled. No gunfire, no chaos, no fear,
Just three hearts beating in a borrowed moment of peace.

Then Lt. Rolake stepped forward and said gently,
“Lt Ako... the others are waiting.”

I stood slowly, brushing sand from my knees.

Before I left the tent, the Zulu boy tugged at me once more.

“Will you come back?” he whispered.

I placed a hand over my badge.

“As long as I breathe...” I said,

“I will always come back for all of you.”

I straightened my uniform.

The Somali girl and Zulu boy stepped back, eyes wide, uncertain.

HERMENIA

Then something extraordinary happened.

One by one, the children, all of them, bandages and dirt and hope raised their small hands in a crisp, awkward salute.

“Lieutenant Ako!” the youngest shouted.

“Salute!” echoed another.

Their voices collided into an admirable innocence and resilience, and my chest tightened.

Behind me, Lt. Rolake and Lt. Rashida mirrored their salute.

Lt. Rolake, her sharp eyes soft with pride.

Lt. Rashida, the lawyer, grinning despite her tears.

Ten years of training, missions, battles, and chaos had led to this:

A tent full of children, my two closest friends, and a heart full of purpose.

I swallowed hard and smiled, my throat thick.

“Attention dismissed,” I whispered, though it barely sounded human over the emotion welling inside me.

Then, my satellite tablet buzzed again, sharp and insistent.

I fished it from my vest, unsure if I wanted to see it.

The screen lit up:

HERMENIA

Subject: Your book is published, official reading and launch in Accra, one month from today.

I blinked.

Lt. Rolake leaned over, squinting at the tiny text.

“Is that...?” she whispered.

“Yes,” I said, voice shaking with a mixture of disbelief and joy.

“I wrote this book years ago... and now it’s finally out there.”

Lt. Rashida reached over, squeezing my shoulder.

“This is huge, Ako,” she said.

“It’s your story. The world will finally read it.”

The children, sensing the excitement but not the full weight of the news, clustered around me.

I knelt down again, brushing a stray lock of hair from the Somali girl’s forehead.

“You see,” I said softly, “this is not just my journey.

It’s ours, everyone who has struggled, who has survived, who has kept hope alive.”

The Zulu boy’s small hand found mine.

“Are you really going to go?” he asked.
HERMENIA

I smiled, eyes glistening.

“Yes. And when I do, I will carry all of you with me.”

The tent was quiet for a heartbeat.

Then Lt. Rolake clapped her hands lightly, and the children followed, laughter and chatter spilling into the warm Somali air.

One month from today, I would stand in Accra, reading my story to the world.

But in that moment, surrounded by these children, my two friends, and the weight of every step I had ever taken...

I felt like the richest woman alive.

And I knew: this was only the beginning.

CHAPTER 24

LOVE, LEGACY, AND THE LAUNCH

He is called Aaron William Kwame Gyasi, though I never think of him as just a name.

HERMENIA

British-Ghanaian, tall, deliberate in everything he does. His eyes very warm, a quiet and understanding human being, sees the world beautifully, and somehow always see me.

We met four years ago while I was buried in my second degree. I was fumbling with books and deadlines, trying to survive, when he appeared like a pause in the noise. He was patient, steady, and unshakable. We started talking, and within months, I realized he is the man I didn't know I had been waiting for all my life. I felt my head when I met him and I knew God himself approved of this love.

Two years together, and every day he proves what it means to love without reservation. His love is the foundation upon which I have built

my devotion to the children I serve, the uniform I wear, and the mission I live. He is my anchor and my wings.

Gyasi is a man who builds. Not just houses or offices, but hearts, communities, futures. He protects. He plans. He loves fiercely, yet with a kindness so constant it humbles me. Photographer, Data Analyst, Publisher, owner of a tennis club, all of that is impressive, yes, but it's the man beneath it who matters. The one who waits for me when I return from missions, who celebrates my victories quietly, who lifts me when the world feels like its falling.

And now, he is planning my book launch.

He called it the final celebration. Accra. A month from today. But this is more than just a reading, it's a story of my endurance, of every tear, every failure, and every little hand I've held along the way.

"I want every character in your book there," he said, voice low and certain over the phone. "Every child who inspired you, every figure you've written from your heart, I'll bring them. We'll give them a day of joy, a personal signing, and a memory."

He's meticulous. The guest list, the order of speeches, the layout for children's seating, the press, and every detail passes through his mind.

And then, the legacy part, the part that made me cry on the call.

He planned for us, together, to visit 2,025 villages, towns, and communities. Two thousand and twenty-five boreholes, wells, and pipe systems, gifts of water, a reminder of survival, resilience, and hope. One for every village, a symbol of every struggle I endured, every tear I shed, and every victory I earned.

“That water,” he whispered during a long call that stretched into the night, “it’s your story flowing outward. Every child who drinks it will know, even in silence that someone endured and built for them. Just like you.”

I picture him now, standing with maps, checklists, notebooks, tennis club spreadsheets open, phone in hand, his brow furrowed not with stress but with purpose. Every day he works, he builds this event like a cathedral and I am its humble center.

HERMENIA

I love the way he looks at me. Not the version in uniform. Not the author version. Not the Lieutenant or the psychologist. Me. Just me.

And I chose him because he sees all of me. The failures. The scars. The strengths. The small, trembling girl who cried over D7s and E8s and the one who climbed every mountain afterward.

He’s more than a lover. He is a partner of fate, a co-builder of legacies, a reminder that love itself can be Christ and a safe place.

Accra will not just celebrate my book.

It will celebrate every child I've reached, every failure that became fuel, every friend, every mentor, every quiet tear I thought no one saw.

And it will celebrate us, Gyasi and I, the love that shaped me, the foundation beneath all my work, the reason I stand strong even when the world bends.

Two thousand twenty-five wells. Two thousand twenty-five villages. Two thousand twenty-five reminders that hope flows, even in dry places.

And I will stand there in Accra, surrounded by the world, surrounded by my characters, my family, my children, my friends, my heart... and Gyasi will be beside me, smiling that quiet, knowing smile, and I will finally see everything I've ever endured reflected back in love, purpose, and water.

HERMENIA

CHAPTER 25

THE LAUNCH

The air in Accra was humid and alive, buzzing with anticipation.

I stepped off the car, neatly pressed, hair tucked back, and my heart thumping in rhythm with the city. I was home!

Gyasi, was already there. Of course he was. He always was.

Tall, calm, purposeful, the same quiet storm that had stolen my heart four years ago. His eyes found mine across the crowd, and I felt the same way I had the first time he smiled at me in the library: seen, safe, loved.

“Ready?” he asked, voice low but certain, slipping my hand into his.

“As ready as I’ll ever be,” I replied.

He guided me into the hall. Children from all over, my characters come to life, and the real ones who had inspired them, were gathered. Their excitement was evident, a soft laughter, whispers, and shuffles.

HERMENIA

The first moment my eyes fell on them, my breath caught.

The Somali girl from the tent. The Zulu boy. Children I had hugged, held, counseled, and prayed for, all smiling back at me.

Gyasi nudged me gently.

“They’ve been waiting for you,” he whispered.

And they had.

I knelt, letting the world fall away. They surged forward, hands outstretched, eager for stories, signatures, and attention. I laughed softly, tears pricking the corners of my eyes.

One by one, I signed the books, my story, my failures, my triumphs, for each child.

Some were shy. Some were bold. Some whispered their names in languages I had come to cherish: Somali, Zulu, Twi, Ewe, and Ga.

Gyasi, orchestrated every detail behind the scenes:

- Personal signs for each child with their name
- Gift packs filled with school supplies
- Interactive storytelling stations
- Mini-exhibits of my uniform, my first books, and photos from missions

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I realized he had thought of everything. Of course he had. Gyasi never left a stone unturned when it came to love, purpose, and legacy.

Then came the moment that made my chest ache with pride and humility: the announcement.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he said into the microphone, calm, deliberate, commanding yet tender, “today is not just about a book.

It is about resilience.

It is about the power of one life to inspire many.

It is about Ako, our Lieutenant, our psychologist, our author, whose journey has brought hope to thousands.”

The crowd erupted, children cheering, cameras flashing.

And then he said it:

“Together, we will be building 2,025 wells, boreholes, and pipe systems across villages and towns. One for every challenge Ako overcame. One for every child she has reached. One for every person who has believed that hope can survive even in the harshest places.”

I blinked. Tears ran freely now.

Gyasi had turned my story into living, flowing water, literally and symbolically.

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He stepped beside me, hand in mine, and whispered,

“This is your world, Ako. You built it. We’re just helping it breathe.”

The children raised their hands in salute, smaller versions of the moment in Somalia, voices carrying the weight of courage and hope.

Lt. Rolake and Lt. Rashida flanked me, mirroring the salute with pride shining in their eyes.

And I realized something profound:

Every failure. Every tear. Every late night of studying, every mission in dust and blood, all of it led here.

To love. To life. To legacy.

Gyasi leaned down, lips brushing my ear.

“Ready for the next chapter?”

I smiled,

“The best chapter,” I said.

“And it starts with you.”

In that hall, surrounded by children, friends, and the man who had built love like a fortress around me, I understood what endurance really meant.

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It wasn't just surviving. It wasn't just fighting.

It was building. Protecting. Loving. Leaving something behind that would flow, long after we were gone.

And today, we had just begun.

CHAPTER 26

HUGS OF A LIFETIME

The crowd had quieted, the cheering fading into a hum, but my heart was still racing.

I glanced around. Every face I had written, every soul I had touched, fictional or real, was here.

I began moving through them, one by one.

First, Grace and Priscilla. My lifelong sisters in heart. Their arms wrapped around me, warm and grounding. I felt their laughter shake through my bones, the comfort of years of friendship, of shared secrets and struggles.

Then, my two sisters, each holding me differently, one firm, proud, the other softer, smiling through tears. My niece's now beautiful girls watching on, beaming as if they could hold onto the story itself if they held me tight enough.

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Next, Lt. Rolake and Lt. Rashida, my partners-in-life, in uniform, in chaos, in every mission.

Rolake's hug was steady, reminding me of every battlefield we survived.

Rashida's was tight, almost protective, carrying the weight of every laugh, every late-night study session, every mission completed side by side.

I moved through the characters from my books; every minor character, every mentor, every friend, every child who had appeared in my stories, all of them hugging me briefly, intimately, like puzzle pieces finally coming together.

Each hug was a story, a lifetime compressed into a second.

Each embrace said, we survived. We mattered. You mattered.

By the time I reached the children who had inspired my journey, the Somali girl and Zulu boy, I knelt again, arms open wide.

They ran into me, small bodies pressing close, and I whispered over and over:

“I love you all”

Gyasi stood a step back, watching, pride radiating off him in waves. His hand found mine after I straightened, a quiet anchor amidst the storm of emotion.

And then I realized, every hug, every smile, every touch in this hall was a bridge.

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Between my failures and my triumphs. Between my past and my present. Between the girl who almost gave up and the woman standing here, fully alive, fully loved, fully ready for the next chapter.

The crowd, the characters, the children, all of them were a part of me, and I a part of them.

And for the first time in years, I felt truly whole.

CHAPTER 27

PRIVATE JOYS AND PROMISES

The sun had barely risen when Gyasi and I arrived at the family home. It was quiet, only the soft hum of morning, birds, and distant city sounds in Takoradi.

This was our private time. No cameras, no press, no crowds, just us. My uniform and medals hung neatly in my closet; my books rested on the shelves. Everything I had fought for, built, and survived was here, in this room.

Gyasi held my hand, tracing gentle patterns over my knuckles.

“Are you ready?” he asked, voice low.
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I smiled. “I’ve been ready my whole life, I just didn’t know it yet.”

He pulled me close, and in that quiet living room, surrounded by family photographs and memories, he knelt.

“Ako,” he whispered, “you’ve built lives, you’ve saved children, you’ve inspired the world, and you’ve conquered yourself.

Will you marry me?”

Tears blurred my vision. I had pictured this moment a thousand times, not in grand halls, not in foreign lands, but here, where love felt sacred and protected.

“Yes,” I whispered, voice trembling, “a thousand times yes.”

He slipped the ring onto my finger. Small, simple, but perfect, a symbol of endurance, love, and partnership.

We hugged. Long, quiet, weighty hugs that carried years of story, of struggle, of hope.

Our families gathered, embracing us both, blessing us softly, quietly, intimately.

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The wedding was spread across two countries, two cities, and a journey of love, legacy, and celebration.

In Accra, we honored tradition.

A Ghanaian traditional wedding, vibrant with kente cloth, drumming, singing, and dancing. Families of both sides intertwined, blessings flowing like rivers.

Courts were signed, vows exchanged, legal, spiritual, and emotional promises etched into eternity with flowers, prayers, and the energy of generations who had watched me rise from failure to triumph.

London was calm, soft, a gentle contrast to the vibrant chaos of Takoradi. I stepped into the room, my hand in Gyasi's, and felt my chest swell with warmth.

Friends, colleagues, and loved ones from near and far were gathered, their faces familiar, their smiles welcoming.

This was his world meeting mine, a delicate intertwining of lives, of paths that had run parallel for years, now merging completely.

I looked at Gyasi.

Tall, composed, eyes bright with affection. That quiet, steady presence that had anchored me through every storm, every mission, every challenge.

I swallowed hard, because this man, this love, had built me up in ways I hadn't even realized I needed.

Today is the day.

I twirled in front of the mirror, the dress.

“Yayyy! I’m getting married!” I whispered, then laughed aloud, clapping my hands like a little girl who had been dreaming of this moment her whole life.

Peeked in from the doorway, holding two cups of tea, eyes smiling like he already knew every thought racing through my head.

“You look... breathtaking,” he said softly, voice warm, steady. “But I knew that already.”

I shook my head, spinning once more.

“Breathtaking? I’m marrying you, Gyasi. Can you believe it?”

He laughed, coming closer. “Believe it, I do. And you? You ready for the adventure after the vows?”

I threw my arms around his neck, hugging him tight. “I’m ready for everything with you.”

The house buzzed with soft excitement, my sisters fussing over my hair, Grace and Priscilla adjusting final touches on my dress, my nieces admiring.

Even in the chaos, in the laughter, in the soft hum of everyone preparing, I felt a strange, perfect calm.

The same calm I felt in war zones, in the quiet of my office after helping a child, in moments when I had thought I couldn’t go on, except now, it was pure joy, anticipation, and love.

Gyasi’s hand found mine again, thumb brushing over my knuckles.

“Are you ready to say ‘I do’?” he whispered.

I took a deep breath, eyes shining.

“Yes. Yes! Yes!” I laughed, spinning once more. “I’m marrying the man of my dreams today, and I can’t wait for every second.”

He kissed my forehead gently.

“And I can’t wait to spend forever proving to you that I’m worthy of it.”

The moment was perfect. The air t excitement, love, and laughter.

I twirled one last time in my gown, whispering to myself:

Yayyy!!... I’m getting married. Finally. My love, my family, my life, everything I’ve fought for, it all comes here.

And with that, I stepped forward, heart pounding, hand in Aaron’s, ready to walk into the next chapter of our story.

Chapter 26

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Legacy and Reflection

After the ceremonies, after the celebrations, after the hugs and tears, I sat quietly, pen in hand.

I wrote my soul on paper, a gift to the world and a reminder to myself:

“From broken steps to steady strides,

From tears at night to morning pride.
I walked through storms, through fire, through fear,
And found the strength to persevere.

Each hand I held, each life I touched,
Was a story of love, endurance, and much?
Now love has found me, solid and true,
A life, a family, a dream come through.

Let the water flow, let hope remain,
Through every village, through every pain.
From the 12th failure to this day,
I survived. I thrived. I found my way.

Now hearts I've built will carry on,
Through every dusk and every dawn.
A legacy of love, of light, of grace,
Forever flowing, leaving its trace.

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me". Philippians 4:13
I stood at the balcony of our home, London skyline behind me, Takoradi
in my heart, children's laughter in my memory, Aaron's hand in mine.

Everything I had survived, failures, tears, war zones, heartbreak, exhaustion, had led to this moment.

And in the quiet of my soul, I whispered the words that would close my story, yet open the rest of my life:

“I survived. And I married the man of my dreams.”

DREAMS DO COME TRUE!!!

The sun set gently.

And for the first time in years, I knew, truly knew that I was home.

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