

Becoming Me: The Journey of Dante Kadagi

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Dedication

To my parents, whose love, discipline, and sacrifices shaped the foundation of who I am.

And to every silent child who ever felt unseen: may you find your voice and use it boldly.

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Preface

I am Kadagi Asiko Dante, a young woman still navigating the winding journey of life, yet with enough experiences, lessons, and reflections to begin telling my story.

At the time of writing this autobiography, I am a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science student at Dedan Kimathi University of Technology, nestled deep in the heart of Nyeri County — a place that beautifully blends urban development with natural serenity.

This autobiography is more than just a school project. It is a personal endeavor a moment of pause and reflection. Through these pages, I aim to capture the milestones, memories, struggles, and victories that have shaped me into the person I am becoming. I hope my story resonates with someone out there, whether you're on a similar path or just curious to know how a young girl from Kenya is chasing her dreams in the world of technology.

Chapter 1: The Beginning

I was born on December 13th, 2003, in Eldoret County to the late Emmanuel Kadagi and Naomi Kadagi. I am the middle child in a family of three, sandwiched between my elder sister, Deirdre Kadagi, and my younger brother, Antony Kutswa. Growing up as the middle child came with its own unique dynamics. Before Antony was born, all eyes were on me. I was the baby of the family, basking in all the attention, loved and nurtured by both my parents and my sister. But with my brother's arrival, I had to learn how to share the spotlight a lesson that taught me humility, patience, and balance from an early age.

My childhood personality was best described as shy. I was the quiet observer, often hiding behind my mother's dress in unfamiliar settings or clinging to the corners of the room during family gatherings. But being shy did not mean I lacked depth or curiosity. I was deeply imaginative, always building entire worlds in my mind. Whether it was pretending to fly as a pilot or reenacting school scenes with my dolls, I found joy in silence and introspection.

Religion was deeply woven into the fabric of our family. Sundays were sacred — not up for negotiation. My earliest memories are colored by the melodic hymns in church and the pages of my colorful children's Bible. I can still picture myself flipping through its worn pages, trying to memorize verses and stories. My parents made sure faith wasn't just a Sunday affair; it was a lifestyle. We prayed before meals, before bed, and when things got tough. My mother was especially strict about religious values, making sure we understood the significance of faith, obedience, and respect.

Our home was in a quiet, gated estate in Eldoret, a place where the kids all wore similar school uniforms, and everyone's dad seemed to drive the same type of car. Life felt safe and almost idyllic. We had just the right blend of comfort and discipline. My mother ruled with an iron hand — the kind of woman whose eyes alone could silence a room. Her strength was unwavering, and she instilled in us the power of order, discipline, and excellence.

On the other hand, my father was the calm in our storm. He was gentle, kind, and always made time for his children. He was the one who'd dance with us in the living room on a random Tuesday, or show up on visiting days at school without fail, always with a newspaper in hand and his warm smile.

Those school visiting days remain some of my most cherished memories. He would walk through the school gate like a man on a mission, clutching the day's newspaper and a bag of goodies. He never missed a single one, no matter the circumstances. It was in those simple yet powerful acts that I learned the true meaning of presence of being there for the people you love.

Another defining part of my upbringing was how shielded we were. Our parents built what I now refer to as a "tight moral fence" around us. We were protected from the chaos of the outside world. I did not even use public transport until I was sixteen years old. The first time I boarded a matatu, it felt like stepping into a different universe. I had always known transport to be a private affair — family road trips or city travel, never the shoulder-to-shoulder shared rides with strangers. That experience, as small as it may seem, was jarring and humbling. It made me realize how much I had to learn about the world beyond my comfort zone.

Despite our structured upbringing, my siblings and I had a vibrant relationship. Of course, we fought usually over remote controls, snacks, or whose turn it was to wash dishes. But beneath the fights was a strong bond, an unspoken loyalty to each other that has only grown stronger with time. I particularly remember us playing indoor games, reenacting scenes from our favorite shows, and creating secret codes to pass messages during boring family events. Now, as adults, we talk often, support each other's dreams, and remain each other's biggest cheerleaders.

Before I was introduced to programming languages and data structures, I aspired to be a pilot. Yes, a real, flying-in-the-clouds kind of pilot. Looking back, it's hilarious considering how grounded my current career is in front of computer screens and logic gates. But that dream reflected the vastness of my imagination, the desire to soar high, both literally and metaphorically.

Suppose there's one thing I miss most about my early life. In that case, it's the peace and structure of that neighborhood the security of knowing everyone, the familiarity of our routines, and the tight circle of childhood friends with whom I shared endless laughter and innocent mischief. We would ride our bikes in circles, create make-believe cooking shows, and race to finish our homework so we could squeeze in just a little more playtime before dusk. It was a life wrapped in simplicity and joy, the kind of childhood that now feels like a dream.

Then, everything changed.

When I was around twenty, my father passed away. His absence left a deep hole in our family. I suddenly found myself stepping up, being the emotional and organizational pillar for my mother and siblings. Grief did not give me the luxury of waiting; I had to mature fast. I became more responsible, more grounded, and more intentional with my decisions. That period in my life shaped me in ways I cannot fully explain. It taught me resilience, the sacredness of family, and the importance of continuing the legacy of those who came before us.

This is the story of my early years a quiet girl from Eldoret, shaped by faith, discipline, and love. A girl who once wanted to fly airplanes, now building digital worlds with code. A daughter, a sister, a dreamer, and above all, a believer in growth, one chapter at a time.

Chapter 2: Primary and Secondary School Years – From Obedience to Excellence

My formal education began at Queen of Angels Academy in Eldoret, a small but profoundly influential Catholic institution known as much for its rigid discipline as for its academic prowess. Queen of Angels was not just a school — it was a world governed by rules and rituals. Every Monday, we lined up in perfect rows, our heads freshly shaven, our uniforms ironed to crisp perfection, and our shoes polished until they reflected the morning sun. Boys and girls alike bore the same fate shaved heads and stern faces as if our hair were the root of all mischief.

To a sensitive child like me, the environment was often overwhelming. The caning, the unspoken fear of being singled out for minor mistakes, the hyper-focus on obedience — all of it weighed heavily. I hated being caned. I still believe that some of the harshness was unnecessary, even if my parents, loyal children of the "boomer" era, considered it an essential rite of passage. Many of my peers eventually transferred schools, often citing the strict discipline as a breaking point. But I stayed. I was not given the option to leave — and somewhere along the line, I stopped wanting to. That environment, though unforgiving at times, made me who I am.

I became a star pupil not because I craved attention, but because I found safety in structure and focus. I loved learning. I craved the thrill of getting a correct answer, the rhythm of handwriting neatly across the page, the quiet satisfaction of understanding something before others did. I was “the teacher’s pet,” though I never wore the label like a badge. My teachers knew me as the quiet girl who always raised her hand, who always submitted assignments early, and who rarely, if ever made trouble. My academic performance reflected that. Year after year, I ranked first in my class.

When the KCPE exams came, I gave them everything I had. I remember the day I received my results, 436 out of 500. I had not just topped my class, or school, I was also among the top performers in the entire county.

That moment changed my life. Suddenly, I wasn't just the quiet girl who aced tests; I was a local hero. Teachers, relatives, neighbors, even strangers wanted to meet me, shake my hand, congratulate my parents. I was invited to the State House, where I met First Lady Margaret Kenyatta in person. She signed my autograph book — a moment I've immortalized in both memory and ink.

From that moment, I knew I couldn't settle for less. I chose the best because I wanted to be among the best. That's how I found myself joining Alliance Girls' High School, one of the most prestigious girls' schools in Kenya. For years, I had been a big fish in a small pond, confident, comfortable, recognized. Alliance quickly shattered that illusion. I stepped into a community where everyone was brilliant. I sat beside the daughters of ministers and CEOs, girls whose parents had mapped out their futures before they hit puberty. It was intimidating. The air smelled of ambition and pressure. The competition was real.

At first, it was a cultural and academic shock. No more top-of-the-class guarantees. I was often ranked somewhere in the top 20, sometimes 50, occasionally even 100. That dip was painful. It bruised my ego. But in retrospect, it was one of the best things that could have happened to me. It taught me to redefine success, not as beating others, but as beating my past self. I learned to appreciate collaboration over comparison. I learned that being excellent was not about titles or ranks, but about effort and growth.

My love for academics remained unshaken. In primary school, every subject felt like a puzzle I was excited to solve. I loved them all: Math, English, Science, Social Studies, Kiswahili they felt accessible, manageable, and even fun. But in high school, my heart settled into a rhythm with certain subjects. Mathematics became my anchor numbers calmed me. Chemistry fascinated me with its strange symbols and reactions, and Geography took me places my feet had never been. But it was Computer Studies that first whispered to me about a future I had never considered one filled with code, logic, systems, and possibilities.

Even outside the classroom, I explored my growing interest in tech. I joined the **Robotics Club**, where we learned how to build simple robots and automated systems. It was challenging and often frustrating, but it lit something inside me — a quiet fire that would only grow in the years to come. I didn't seek leadership roles at that time. I was still quite reserved, still cautious about standing in front of others. My **primary school teacher, Mr. Simba**, used to call me “the most conserved child” — not just reserved, but perfectly preserved in my little bubble of thoughtfulness and privacy.

But even if I wasn't loud, I was observant. I soaked up every conversation, every challenge, every success. The **friendships I formed in high school** shaped me more than I can explain. Some friends inspired me with their confidence, others with their work ethic. Some taught me hard lessons about trust and disappointment. But each of them added to the mosaic of who I was becoming. I learned how to balance loyalty with boundaries, ambition with humility, and dreams with reality.

Most importantly, **high school gave me exposure**. It cracked open the small, predictable world I had known and showed me just how wide the universe could be. It introduced me to people with entirely different lives — girls who had traveled abroad, who had access to high-end gadgets and tutors, who already spoke fluent French and coded in Python before sitting their KCSEs. At first, I felt behind. But then I reminded myself: I didn't come from the most privileged background, but I came prepared to work.

That mindset stayed with me as I graduated from Alliance, a girl no longer content with just being the best in her school, but determined to compete on the global stage.

Chapter 3: University Life — Awakening the Engineer Within

In 2021, I joined Dedan Kimathi University of Technology (DeKUT), pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science. When I received my admission letter, I felt a curious blend of pride and apprehension. This was the moment I had prepared for all through high school, but now, it was real. A new beginning. A blank page. The campus was nestled against the scenic backdrop of Mt. Kenya, a place where the air smelled of pine and promise. It felt like stepping into a future I had long dreamed about, though not entirely understood.

The transition from high school to university was not as seamless as I had imagined. The rigid structure of high school was replaced by a strange kind of academic freedom that was both thrilling and terrifying. No one was watching my every move. No one was keeping tabs on my attendance. Lecturers introduced topics and left us to swim or drown in them. For someone used to clear rules and expectations, this required a psychological reboot. I had to relearn how to learn.

In those early months, I discovered that Computer Science was not just about using computers—it was about building the systems behind them. It was about theory, mathematics, logic, and most importantly, problem solving. I loved it. I struggled with it. I kept going.

Some units felt like riddles wrapped in frustration from Discrete Mathematics to Automata Theory while others, like Programming in C and Java, quickly became my allies. My first programs were simple: calculating factorials, printing Pascal's triangles, and making a basic login system. But the feeling of writing code that actually worked was electric. It was like solving a puzzle, but with the power to build something real.

In the midst of lectures, practicals, and endless PDFs, I slowly found my tribe. Fellow students who, like me, had once been the "smart kid" in their high school but were now figuring things out afresh. We bonded over debugging marathons, shared notes, and group study sessions. We

laughed at how we thought we were geniuses until Data Structures and Algorithms humbled us all.

Despite the often-intense academic workload, I made time to explore beyond the classroom. I joined the Google Developer Student Club (GDSC), where I was exposed to real-world technologies, hackathons, and collaborations. It was there that I truly began to fall in love with front-end development. I had always been a visual thinker. The joy of designing interfaces that were clean, functional, and beautiful spoke to both my technical side and my artistic side.

I started building simple websites personal portfolios, landing pages, and blogs using HTML, CSS, and JavaScript. At first, it was trial and error, relying heavily on YouTube tutorials and Stack Overflow. But soon, I was writing my own code confidently, understanding the logic behind responsive design and interactive elements. I became the go-to person in my class for anything involving UI/UX.

It was during my second year that I experienced a shift, not academic, but philosophical. I started thinking more deeply about what kind of developer I wanted to be. Not just someone who could code, but someone who could create impact. I didn't just want to be another Computer Science graduate; I wanted to build tools that solved real problems, especially in Africa, where so much potential is held back by infrastructure gaps and overlooked communities.

This internal pivot led me to take on side projects from creating simple AgriTech interfaces to collaborating on student-built systems for event registration, hostel booking, and more. These weren't major tech breakthroughs, but they were mine, built from scratch, bug by bug, line by line. They gave me confidence. They gave me proof that I could build.

I also started volunteering as a tech tutor, helping younger students and peers grasp concepts they were struggling with. It wasn't about being the smartest person in the room it was about using my knowledge to uplift others, just as I had been uplifted when I first stepped into that world.

By my third year, I was eager to dive deeper into mobile development. I had toyed with Android Studio and native Java development before, but it always felt clunky. Then, I discovered Flutter, Google's UI toolkit that allowed me to build beautiful, natively compiled applications for mobile, web, and desktop all from a single codebase.

This was a game-changer. Flutter rekindled the dream I had shelved long ago — to build something that small businesses could use, especially in Kenya. I envisioned apps that local vendors, tailors, and artisans could use to manage orders, showcase their work, or even accept payments. The possibilities were endless, and Flutter gave me the tools to chase them.

I committed to a 100 Days of Flutter challenge, where I built something, no matter how small, every single day. Some days it was a new layout, other days a working authentication page, or local database integration. Through this, I learned not just technical skills but consistency, discipline, and the beauty of community. People online supported my work, gave feedback, shared resources, and I realized how interconnected the developer world is.

University life also made me realistic. Passion was great, but I needed to start building a portfolio that would make me employable. I began applying for internships and joining collaborative student projects. During one such internship at The Cube Innovation Hub, I taught beginner-level web development to over 15 trainees. It was surreal. Just two years earlier, I had been the one learning HTML tags for the first time. Now, I was introducing others to it.

At the same time, I co-built an AgriTech platform connecting farmers to buyers. It was a basic web app, but it worked. It solved a real problem. And that gave me more satisfaction than any grade or certificate.

Chapter 4: The Challenges That Shaped Me

For every triumph in my life — every smooth deployment, every “A” on my transcript, every moment of clarity in the world of code — there were equal, and sometimes greater, moments of struggle. If university life gave me the wings, challenges gave me the grit. And as much as I may have resisted them at the time, these trials ultimately refined my character, sharpened my discipline, and deepened my empathy.

One of the earliest hurdles I encountered in university was the overwhelming academic pressure. It wasn’t just the volume of work; it was the weight of expectations, both internal and external. I was no longer just a high school achiever; I was now competing with some of the brightest minds from all over the country. There were moments when I genuinely questioned my capability. Imposter syndrome crept in quietly, whispering things like, *“Maybe you’re not cut out for this,”* whenever I failed a test or lagged in understanding a concept like recursion or Turing machines.

There were semesters where 6-hour classes back-to-back left me mentally exhausted. Balancing theory-heavy units like Computability, Operating Systems, and Complexity Theory with programming labs often felt like trying to juggle swords on a unicycle. I had to learn to be strategic when to push, when to pause, and most importantly, when to ask for help.

Sleep became a luxury at times. I remember a week during midterms when I was running on instant noodles, cold showers, and adrenaline. But I also remember how good it felt to see improvement. Every low grade that turned into a pass, every bug fixed after hours of staring at code, was a quiet victory.

University also exposed me to the harsh reality that dreams need funding, and sometimes, the funding isn’t there. There were times I couldn’t afford certain textbooks or hardware upgrades. Access to reliable Wi-Fi, good laptops, or subscriptions to essential development tools wasn’t always guaranteed. I had to become resourceful — downloading PDFs, using open-source tools, and making the most of the university labs.

There were months I stretched my allowance far beyond its limits, calculating whether I could afford printing materials for a project or transport to attend a tech meet-up in another town. These limitations frustrated me, but also made me innovative. I learned that resourcefulness was as important a skill as coding itself.

One of the most silent, personal challenges I faced was burnout. During my second year, I hit a wall. I had taken on too much, juggling class projects, volunteer work, freelance gigs, and a heavy course load. At first, I mistook my tiredness for laziness, but I later realized I was simply mentally drained. I had stopped enjoying what I once loved. Code became a chore. Everything felt urgent, yet nothing felt important.

That period forced me to confront an uncomfortable truth: I am not a machine. I needed to rest. I needed to reconnect with myself beyond my productivity. I began to carve out moments for silence, journaling, evening walks, listening to music that soothed my soul, and sometimes, just talking with a friend no screens, no deadlines. Slowly, I found my rhythm again.

Mental health in tech is often overlooked, especially in fast-paced academic settings. I realized I couldn't pour from an empty cup, and that looking after my mental well-being wasn't selfish, it was strategic. It allowed me to return to my work with renewed clarity and purpose.

University group projects were their brand of challenge. As someone who liked things done thoroughly and on time, it was difficult to work with people who didn't share the same urgency. There were group mates who disappeared after the first meeting, or worse, showed up only to present slides they didn't help create.

But through this, I learned people skills. I learned how to lead with empathy, set boundaries, and sometimes, carry the weight with grace when it meant preserving the project. Not every battle had to be fought. Not every group needed a hero. Sometimes, being strategic and silently effective was better than making noise. These experiences prepared me for real-world

collaboration where personalities, priorities, and processes don't always align.

Being in tech as a young African student also came with identity friction. There were spaces I entered where I felt invisible, where ideas were dismissed until echoed by someone more senior or louder. I often found myself in male-dominated discussions where I had to work twice as hard to be heard, especially during class presentations or tech community meetups. But rather than shrink, I chose to shine with my work. I let my code speak for me. I let my UI designs turn heads. I became known not for how much I said, but how much I did.

Slowly, I began to build a reputation not of loud brilliance, but consistent excellence. I learned that identity is not something to be defended, it's something to be lived, unapologetically.

These challenges were not anomalies; they were necessary teachers. They taught me resilience, humility, patience, and emotional intelligence. They grounded me. They helped me see that every setback was simply the next chapter in a bigger story. A story I was still writing.

Each challenge, from academic exhaustion to sleepless nights before deadlines, didn't just shape my journey; it shaped me. And though I wouldn't wish to relive every hardship, I also wouldn't erase them. They made me more than a Computer Science student. They made me a builder, a listener, a leader, and most importantly, a human with both scars

Chapter 5: Personal Growth and Self-Discovery

If my academic and technical journey was the outer shell of my university experience, then this chapter marks the inner voyage the soft, quiet revolution that took place within. It's one thing to learn programming languages, design patterns, and system architecture; it's another to learn to know your limits, your voice, your fears, and your passions. The university gave me that too. It gave me mirrors and windows mirrors to look inward and windows to see beyond.

As much as I loved writing code, I knew early on that I wasn't **just a developer**. I was a storyteller, a visual thinker, someone deeply moved by clean UI and smooth user experience. I began to see software not just as logic and loops but as a **medium of human expression**. Every interface I designed wasn't just a wireframe; it was a conversation between the product and the user.

That realization changed how I approached every project. I stopped focusing only on what *worked* and started focusing on how it *felt*. I wanted users to feel something — to feel understood, empowered, or even delighted. That emotional aspect of tech became a core part of my identity. I realized I was not here just to build systems. I was here to gain experience. I was here to **care**.

Another major area of self-discovery was **leadership**. I didn't start out seeing myself as a leader. I was quiet, focused, and more comfortable behind my screen than in front of a crowd. But somehow, opportunities kept finding me — whether it was leading a group project, mentoring a junior student struggling with HTML, or giving a talk at a tech club session. Each time, I hesitated. And each time, I said “yes” anyway.

Leadership, I learned, wasn't about perfection or charisma, it was about **responsibility and empathy**. It was about showing up, even when you were tired. It was about giving credit, absorbing criticism, and asking the right questions more often than giving the right answers.

These experiences taught me that I had influence. And more importantly, that I could use that influence to elevate others, to be the kind of tech leader I had once needed myself.

Part of growing up was realizing that **“no” is a complete sentence**. I used to say yes to everything every request for help, every club event, every side project. I was afraid of missing out. Afraid of disappointing people. But I began to learn that every “yes” was also a “no” to something else — often my rest, my peace, or my own goals.

Learning to say “no” taught me boundaries. It taught me that I am not a machine, and I don’t owe my energy to everything that demands it. And far from making me less helpful, it made me more focused. It made my “yes” more sincere and sustainable.

Somewhere along the line, probably in my third year I began to truly **own my voice**. I stopped mimicking what I thought developers were supposed to be like. I stopped toning myself down in professional spaces. I embraced the fact that I could be both deeply technical and deeply creative. I could talk about algorithms and also speak passionately about African women in tech, cultural design principles, and ethical computing.

This confidence in my identity didn’t come overnight. It came from pushing through rejection emails, failed interviews, and awkward moments in team discussions. But each time I chose to show up authentically, I got better. I learned that **my perspective mattered**, and that authenticity would take me further than any act ever could.

Perhaps the greatest discovery of all was the **clarity of purpose**. Through all the assignments, hackathons, late-night debugging sessions, and design critiques, I started to see the bigger picture. I wanted to build technology that serves real people, especially those often overlooked in mainstream systems. I wanted to build tools for small businesses, community-centered apps, and platforms that empower women, learners, farmers, and local vendors. I wanted my work to mean something beyond KPIs and screens.

This purpose gave my hustle a soul. It reminded me that I wasn't just learning for grades. I was learning for my people, for the continent, for the communities that raised me, and the young girls who'd one day see tech as a home because someone like me made space.

Chapter 6: Mentorship, Community, and Giving Back

They say we rise by lifting others. For me, that wasn't just a quote on an Instagram post, it became a principle I chose to live by.

University exposed me to more than just books and code; it exposed me to people. Talented, struggling, brilliant, frustrated, motivated people, some of them younger than me, just getting started and unsure of their path. I saw myself in them, the version of me who once sat in a programming class and questioned if she belonged, or stared blankly at a screen wondering how everyone else “got it” so fast. And so, I made a choice: to be the person I had once needed.

It began with small things. Helping a classmate understand CSS positioning. Breaking down JavaScript functions for a junior during lab hours. Staying after class to assist someone who was too shy to ask questions during lectures. I didn't call it mentoring at the time — it was just me being me. But then people started coming to me deliberately for help. And not just for code, for advice on career paths, internships, imposter syndrome, even personal decisions. That's when I realized this was bigger than tutoring. It was mentorship.

I became intentional about it. I started attending and eventually speaking at tech community meetups. I took part in women-in-tech events. I gave mini-tutorials online. I even helped organize beginner-friendly coding sessions and advocated for more inclusive and accessible learning experiences. I wanted to make tech less intimidating and more human.

The more I gave to the community, the more I gained from it. I found peers and seniors who cheered me on, corrected me with love, and opened doors I didn't even know existed. I began to see that I wasn't walking this path alone. I was part of a network, a tribe of people building not just systems, but futures.

It was in these spaces that I met developers who introduced me to tools like Flutter, platforms like GitHub, and opportunities like contributing to

open source. These spaces challenged me to level up, not just technically but socially, learning how to collaborate, give feedback, handle disagreements, and still walk away with respect and clarity.

I came to believe that real growth is incomplete if it isn't shared. That's why even as I pursued my goals, I carved out time to give back. Whether it was helping younger girls learn how to code, speaking at a university event, or just showing someone how to deploy their first website, I did it with all my heart.

One of my proudest moments was when a first-year student once told me, "I thought tech wasn't for me until I saw someone like you do it so naturally." That one sentence reminded me why I do this, why I answer DMs, why I share resources, why I show up. Representation matters, and sometimes simply existing out loud is a form of mentorship.

Community also shaped the kind of software I wanted to build. I began to ask: Who is my work for? Whose life will this line of code improve? I leaned into problem-solving for communities close to home for small business owners, for farmers, for women entrepreneurs, for students just like me.

I stopped dreaming of Silicon Valley and started dreaming of Nyeri Valley. Of tech hubs in Eldoret. Of remote-first African teams building world-class solutions rooted in culture and context. I want to build for Africa, with Africa. And I want others to know that's not second-best it's necessary, it's powerful, and it's possible.

Chapter 7: Challenges and Resilience

Behind every smile, there's a story. And behind mine, a quiet storm that shaped me more than any class, project, or award ever could.

University life wasn't just lecture halls and deadlines it was real life happening all at once. And no exam or syllabus could have prepared me for the weight I was about to carry.

I was around twenty when I lost my father, my quiet strength, my constant, the man who never missed a school visiting day and always walked in holding a newspaper like it was part of his uniform. He danced with us in the living room. He taught me about investments and responsibility long before I understood the stock market. He was present, even when life demanded his absence.

Losing him wasn't just painful, it was transformational. Grief has a way of rewriting you. You don't go back to the person you were before. You adapt. You mature overnight. You become someone you didn't plan to be because you have to be.

Suddenly, I was no longer just a daughter. I was a second parent. A pillar. The one who had to show up strong when all I wanted to do was crumble. It wasn't fair. But life rarely is.

Soon after, I also lost my mother, a woman of iron and grace. Strict, yes but the kind of strict that carved discipline into your DNA. Her voice still echoes in my mind when I organize my space, when I correct my posture, when I remind myself to never settle for "average." She ran our home with a steady hand and fierce love. Losing her felt like losing the roof above my head, even if I was standing indoors.

I was still in university when both losses happened. And yet, school didn't stop. Life didn't pause. The world doesn't slow down to let you grieve it just keeps spinning. So I spun with it. Quietly. Bravely. Fully aware that I now walked through life with invisible scars.

There were days I woke up and forgot for a few seconds that they were gone. Then reality would hit like a wave, cold and sudden. But even through the tears, I had to attend classes. Submit assignments. Hold leadership roles. Be someone people look up to. It was one of the loneliest, hardest seasons of my life.

Yet something unexpected happened, I didn't collapse under the pressure. I hardened. I matured. I made bold decisions. I spoke up more. I found comfort in code, in community, in creation. I didn't just survive, I evolved.

There's a kind of strength you earn when the people who raised you are no longer around to catch you. I found that strength. It was quiet, not loud. Gentle, not aggressive. But it was there. It still is.

Losing both parents came with emotional pain and financial strain. I had to learn to stretch resources, plan carefully, and say no even when everything inside me wanted to say yes. Budgeting wasn't a lesson from a finance class; it was a lived necessity.

I started looking for freelance work. Took gigs that aligned with my skills. Taught myself how to market what I could offer. Learned about taxes, contracts, and setting boundaries with clients. I was barely an adult, but I was managing like one who had no choice.

It's easy to pretend you're okay when people see you as strong. But grief lingers in the quiet moments. In the gaps. In the silences between tasks.

I had to learn to grieve out loud. I sought support where I could find it, friends, mentors, and eventually journaling. I found peace in writing. Sometimes I would code for hours, not because of the task, but because of the **stillness** it gave me. The way syntax errors made more sense than human emotions.

And slowly, I realized something: I wasn't just rebuilding myself I was healing. Day by day. Bit by bit.

Chapter 8: Purpose and the Future

The pain of loss, the pressure of responsibility, and the quiet victories of growth have shaped not just my past but my vision of the future. Every challenge I've faced has stripped away pretense and pushed me closer to my purpose.

I am no longer the girl who once dreamed of becoming a pilot because it sounded fascinating or admirable. I am the woman who has discovered her true trajectory — one grounded in innovation, empathy, and impact. My purpose is no longer just about a personal dream; it's about creating solutions, communities, and opportunities, especially for those who need them most.

As a computer science student, I've seen both the cold precision and the beautiful creativity of code. But I've also realized that technology, on its own, is empty. What gives it power is how it's used. And for me, that means building systems that improve lives — not just apps and websites, but tools that empower small-scale business owners, support underserved communities, and help young girls believe they can become developers, engineers, and leaders.

I dream of founding a tech company that is inclusive, Afrocentric, and solution-driven. I want to build digital platforms for small businesses, enhance access to information, and use my voice to advocate for digital literacy in rural communities. The tech space is full of possibilities, and I want to make it more human.

My losses have taught me that life is fragile and short. That's why I don't want my journey to end with me. I want to mentor others. I want to be the reason a younger girl from my neighborhood picks up a laptop and learns to code. I want to sit at tech panels and speak about ethics, accessibility, and African innovation. I want to write books, speak at conferences, and use my story to inspire others — not because I am extraordinary, but because I chose not to give up.

I see myself building bridges between problems and solutions, between tradition and innovation, between silence and voice.

While my professional dreams soar, my personal vision remains grounded. I hope to create a home not just a physical one, but an emotional one full of warmth, wisdom, and gentle discipline, just like the home I was raised in.

I want to continue honoring my parents' legacy: My mother's discipline and order, and my father's gentleness and wisdom. I want to raise children who understand both excellence and empathy. I want to live in a world where African girls in tech don't have to explain themselves; they simply lead.

Purpose is not a final destination. It is a journey shaped by reflection, refinement, and service. I am still becoming. And that's okay. I no longer rush the process. I now understand that each season has its lessons. Each challenge has its gift.

As I close this chapter of my life and prepare for the next, I carry with me a quiet certainty: That everything I've been through was for something. That my story, with all its highs and lows, is not just valid, but valuable. That I was not just meant to exist, but to build, uplift, and lead.

Epilogue: A Life in Motion

As I write the final words of this autobiography, I find myself pausing not in sadness, but in gratitude. Gratitude for the winding paths, the whispered prayers, the moments that broke me, and those that built me. I am not the same girl who once clung shyly to the edges of the room. I am no longer unsure of my voice or my place in the world.

This journey, my story, has been a collage of grace, grief, growth, and grit.

There are days I still feel lost, unsure, and overwhelmed. But I now understand that these emotions are part of the rhythm of becoming. Life doesn't come with a clear roadmap, and maybe that's the point. Maybe we are meant to stumble, to restart, to feel deeply, and to rise over and over again.

Writing this autobiography has helped me connect the threads of my life from the safe, gated estates of my childhood to the lonely moments of responsibility in the wake of my parents' passing. From the girl who dreamed of flying planes to the woman learning to build digital wings for others. It has made me realize that even in the silences, the detours, and the delays, there was always purpose.

I am Kadagi Asiko Dante, a young woman still learning, still questioning, still dreaming. But more importantly, I am someone who no longer fears her own story. I wear my scars with pride. I carry my lessons with humility. I walk into tomorrow not with certainty, but with courage.

This autobiography isn't the end. It's a pause, a soft breath before the next chapter begins.

And wherever the road leads, may I walk it with grace, vision, and the unwavering belief that my life in all its complexity was always meant to matter.

– DANTE

