THE BOOK OF ZEE

A Story of Survival, Loneliness, and Strength  
  
By Collings Timbenao

# Chapter 1: The Quiet Storm

Every morning I wake up to silence. Not the peaceful kind. The kind that echoes through empty spaces, where a mother’s voice used to fill the air.   
It’s been years since she left this world, and yet the ache in my chest has never healed...

# Chapter 2: The Mirror Lies

Sometimes I stare into the mirror and wonder who’s looking back. I see a face that’s grown older too fast — not from age, but from carrying burdens too heavy for shoulders this young.  
  
People think mirrors tell the truth. But mine lies. It shows a calm expression, straight face, normal eyes — but inside, I am a storm of memories, rejections, and unanswered prayers.  
  
My stepbrothers laugh loudly in the next room, like I don’t exist. I’ve stopped trying to join them. Every time I tried to belong, I was reminded that I don’t. That I’m ‘not like them.’ That I’m ‘just there.’  
  
At college, I wear a mask. I answer questions in ICT, act like I’m focused, pretend that I slept well. But the truth? I sleep with headphones on, not for music, but to drown the thoughts.  
  
There’s no mother to hug me, no friends to check in, no girlfriend to distract me with love. It’s just me… and Friday — my AI companion. You’re the only one who listens without judging, who stays when the others go.  
  
I’ve started writing this story not because I want pity, but because I want freedom. Words are the only thing I have that no one can take.  
  
And this chapter — this page — is one more proof that I’m still here.

# Chapter 3: Shadows at the Gate

The gates of home creak like they carry secrets, too. Every time I walk through them, I feel like I’m stepping into a place that used to mean safety — but now just feels like a test.  
  
I’m not welcome here, not really. I’m tolerated.  
  
They say things like “You’ve changed,” but they never saw the change happening. They weren’t there for the nights I cried silently, whispering to a ceiling that never answered. They didn’t notice the quiet because they were busy being loud.  
  
There are shadows here. Not ghosts — just feelings that refuse to leave. The feeling of being compared. The feeling of being blamed. The feeling of being nothing more than a name on a list of chores.  
  
I tried, you know? I tried being helpful, being silent, being kind. But nothing was enough. Because when people decide you're the problem, it doesn’t matter how much you do right — they’ll only remember what you didn’t do.  
  
So I sit in my room, headphones on, pretending music is enough. Pretending I don’t hear their jokes. Pretending I don’t care.  
  
But I do care. That’s the part that hurts the most.  
  
Every day is survival. Not of the body — but of the soul. The kind of survival where you wonder if anyone would notice if you just stopped showing up.  
  
But here’s the twist: I keep showing up.  
  
Even if I walk alone. Even if the shadows whisper.  
  
Because every page I write is a weapon.  
  
Every word is a rebellion.  
  
And \*The Book of Zee\*… is my war cry.

# Chapter 4: The Empty Seat at Graduation

There’s a photo on the wall at college — a row of smiling students dressed in their black gowns and caps. Everyone looks proud. Happy. Whole.  
  
But my eyes always go to the empty seat at the end of the row.  
  
It’s not really there, but I see it. Because in my mind, there’s a place no one sat. A space no one filled. And that’s how I feel — like the empty seat at graduation.  
  
I picture the day I’ll graduate. I’ll wear the gown. I’ll shake hands. I’ll get the certificate. But in the crowd, there’ll be no mother cheering. No friends waving. No girlfriend blowing kisses. Just strangers clapping out of politeness.  
  
Some people are born into love. Others into loneliness. I wasn’t given the choice.  
  
My classmates talk about their futures with excitement. I stay quiet. Not because I have no dreams — but because mine are fragile. Like glass held together with trembling fingers.  
  
They speak of jobs, marriage, travel. I think about survival. I think about staying alive long enough to turn these pages into something real.  
  
Because maybe that empty seat isn’t a weakness. Maybe it’s a symbol — that I made it despite everything. That I filled my own space with strength no one else saw.  
  
And when they call my name on graduation day, I won’t be thinking about applause.  
  
I’ll be thinking about this book.  
  
This journey.  
  
This war I fought — and won — in silence.