THE BOOK OF ZEE

A Story of Survival, Loneliness, and Strength  
  
By John 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.

# Chapter 5: Letters I Never Sent

There are words stuck inside me — whole paragraphs, entire pages — that I’ve never spoken. Some were meant for people who left. Others were for people who never really arrived.  
  
I wrote letters in my mind. To my mother. To friends I never had. To the girl I liked but never told. To my stepbrothers, even. But I never sent them. Not because I didn’t want to — but because I knew they wouldn’t be read the way I meant them.  
  
To my mother: I miss you more than I admit. I pretend I’m strong, but your absence is a hole in my chest. I hope you’d be proud of me — even when I’m just surviving.  
  
To my stepbrothers: I’m not selfish. I just stopped trying to explain myself to people who already decided who I am. You call me distant, but it was your distance that built the walls.  
  
To the girl I admired from afar: I wish I had the courage to say I saw something kind in your smile. But people like me don’t get chosen. We get used or ignored.  
  
To the world: I’m not angry. I’m just tired of being invisible. Tired of fighting battles no one sees.  
  
I never sent these letters, but I don’t regret writing them. Because they helped me understand one thing:  
  
Even if no one listens, my voice still matters.  
  
Even if no one responds, my truth still stands.  
  
This book… these chapters… they’re all letters too. Letters from Zee. From me.  
  
And maybe, one day, someone will read them — and finally understand.

# Chapter 6: When Silence Screams

People think silence is peaceful.  
  
They imagine calm, gentle moments where nothing disturbs you. But silence can also scream. It can press against your ears until your thoughts are the only sound left. And sometimes, your thoughts are the loudest noise of all.  
  
I know that silence well.  
  
It fills the space after an argument. After a long day at school when no one asked if I’m okay. After a birthday passes with no one remembering. It’s the silence that says, “You don’t matter.”  
  
At home, silence sits beside me like an unwanted guest. It watches me eat. It walks with me to bed. It sleeps on the other side of the mattress where warmth used to be. At college, it follows me between lectures, settling in when the bell rings and classmates rush off laughing, leaving me behind.  
  
But there’s power in that silence, too.  
  
Because it taught me to listen — really listen. Not just to others, but to myself. It taught me to write. To find meaning in moments no one else notices. And in the silence, I started hearing someone stronger inside me. Someone named Zee.  
  
Zee doesn’t cry out loud anymore. Zee writes.  
  
Zee doesn’t beg to be included. Zee builds a world where he belongs.  
  
So if silence wants to scream, let it. I’ll answer with pages.  
  
I’ll answer with this book.  
  
Because \*The Book of Zee\* is louder than anything they never said.

# Chapter 7: Home Isn’t a Place

They say “home is where the heart is.” But what happens when your heart has no home?  
  
I used to think home was a house. Walls, a roof, maybe a gate that squeaks when you push it open. But I’ve lived in houses that felt colder than the streets. Places where the silence wasn’t peaceful — it was punishment.  
  
Home isn’t where you sleep. It’s where you’re seen.  
  
And in that case, I’ve never had a home.  
  
I’ve had rooms. Beds. Spaces I was allowed to exist in — as long as I didn’t take up too much of it. I’ve had meals at tables where my voice wasn’t welcome. Celebrations I wasn’t part of. Arguments where I wasn’t even the subject — just the target.  
  
So I started building my own kind of home.  
  
It’s in my notebook. It’s in the blank pages that listen without interrupting. It’s in my thoughts, when I’m walking alone and Friday is the only one I talk to. It’s in this book.  
  
This… is home.  
  
Not because it has a door. But because inside these words, I don’t feel like I’m begging to belong. I do belong. And no one here rolls their eyes when I speak, or tells me I’m too much, or not enough.  
  
Maybe one day I’ll find a real home. Maybe I’ll build it with my own hands.  
  
But until then… these chapters are my shelter.  
  
And \*The Book of Zee\* is the address I live at now.

# Chapter 8: The Ones Who Never Asked

There’s a special kind of hurt that comes from people who never asked.  
  
They didn’t ask how I was doing. They didn’t ask what I was feeling. They didn’t ask what I needed, what I dreamed about, what I feared at night. They just assumed. Assumed I was fine. Assumed I didn’t care. Assumed I didn’t feel.  
  
But I did.  
  
And I still do.  
  
I remember the times I sat next to them, hoping they’d notice I was quiet for a reason. That my silence wasn’t rudeness — it was pain. That my distance wasn’t pride — it was protection.  
  
They laughed without me. Moved on without me. Made plans I was never part of. And every time they didn’t ask… it told me everything.  
  
It told me I wasn’t important.  
  
But maybe they didn’t know better. Maybe they were too busy surviving their own storms to notice mine. Or maybe… I just never mattered to begin with.  
  
Still, I wish someone had asked.  
  
Because I would’ve told them the truth.  
  
I would’ve told them that I miss my mother every day. That I feel like a ghost even while breathing. That I’m trying — not for praise, not for sympathy, but just to not disappear completely.  
  
I would’ve told them… that writing is the only thing keeping me alive.  
  
So this chapter is for the ones who never asked.  
  
I forgive you.  
  
But I won’t forget.  
  
Because \*The Book of Zee\* is full of all the words I waited for someone else to say — and had to say for myself.