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**I have taken many mercies for granted**

By ASUNTA WAGURA

It’s Friday. Tomorrow I’ll receive an award from the Voice of Hope organisation. As we rehearse, I look at my fellow awardees and wonder what they were nominated for.

My train of thought is interrupted by a melody. In the four days I’ve been here, I’ve learnt that the melody goes off after every hour. When this happens, everyone must observe a moment of silence.

Meaning you press the “pause button” on what you’re doing (or thinking) and simply reflect on your inner self. I think it’s called meditation.

As the place sinks into a deep silence, I don’t reflect on myself. I’m thinking about what everyone else thinking. Are their thoughts wandering too?

The minute is over and the melody is gone. Well, at times it’s spiritually beneficial to reflect on the self.

It’s raining heavily. We’ve been told that people can take silent walks to meditate. I’m very cautious of the weather, especially when it comes to exposing myself to the rain.

These are some of the unwritten rules for people living with HIV. Never expose yourself to rain, cold or dust. Never ever. You may survive, but you don’t want to deal with the consequences of disobeying HIV’s unwritten rules.

There’s another reason why I’ve never taken walks in the compound since I arrived. The person who received us said it was safe to walk around, although one may occasionally encounter a bear.

“If you encounter a bear, don’t panic. Go on your way calmly and don’t show your fear. Bears are friendly animals and unless provoked, they don’t attack humans.”

The last thing I want to deal with is a bear. Its docility is not for Asunta to prove.

Saturday evening. We’re all set for the awards. I’m the first on the podium. My, I’m being feted in the world’s numero uno city: New York.

I feel humbled. There are two people I wish could have been here to witness this. One is my father. I know he would have stood with me after I tested HIV-positive. I know. And he would have been proud of me today.

The other person is the principal who disclosed my HIV status in the most inhuman way ever. I wish she was here to witness how God rewrote her tragic script.

I start my presentation by showing a person being given home-based care. He can barely walk without the assistance of a community volunteer worker. There’s progress.

The person is now mentoring others in a group therapy. Besides, he is rearing dairy goats that provide his family with milk.

The other awardees share their stories. Stories of pain. One from Afghanistan has been struggling to make the situation of the common man known, as stronger nations struggle.

He has been arrested and kidnapped to stop him from telling the world the story of war in Afghanistan.

He shows where he works in cafes without water, electricity or basic necessities. He walks for miles in the scorching sun to have his stories published. And he has to do it pretty quickly because if his foes get him, all his work will be destroyed.

It is eye-opening that some people live in fear and the devastation of war, whereas in Kenya I take so much for granted. I can hear quiet sobs as I restrain my tears, seeing pictures of massacred children and women. I make a mental note: this is a lesson to take home, especially now that we’re going into a General Election.

Next is a lady from Chile. She shares how she uses her skills to bring justice to the society. In her investigative journalism, she seeks employment in government offices where she exposes corruption.

She does the same in hospitals where the medical staff have no regard for human life and in the police force where bribery is rampant. She resigned several times because she said she only witnessed pain and no justice.

Later, she reconsidered this decision and went back, saying, “The little I can do is let the world know there’s injustice in the world.”

I return home the following day reasoning that my situation isn’t as bad as those of the other awardees. I’m grateful that God has placed me in a far better place to serve humanity.