

Her daughter is finishing her last year at primary school this year. The time has past so fast that I barely remember what it was like not to have her living in my house. She looks more like her mother every day. I miss my friend so much, because each day when I look into her daughter's eyes, I see her mother staring back at me once again. It's as though she never left. I used to imagine that she would come walking through our front gate to say hello like she used to do before she became sick.

Kigali, November 2007

The wind blew gently with broken bits of radio feedback.

"African women, in particular, face extraordinary challenges."

A tattered curtain rippled in the breeze.

"Key among these are the lack of access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunity."

A haze. A mystery hovered gently over the trees. An insect hummed. Flaps of wings followed by chirps of morning filled the air and dew rested on the grass by the doorway. Grace watched as the sun rose to expose her to a new day in a life of dying.

Ah, my head, how it aches! The hills look small this morning. Everything seems distant to me. I see the same workers headed out for the day; I hear Wella's baby crying next door. Oh--I must sit down again, my legs are so weak. She's sleeping. I won't wake her--no, of course not. She needs sleep. I only wish she would wake soon so I won't have to be alone this morning. My body doesn't want to move. I have no desire to eat anything. Food is so scarce in

this home. It'll be better for Patience if I don't waste the food on myself.

What's that, you say, Lord? Yes, You'll provide. You'll provide for my dearest love. You've given her rest, and You'll also feed her. I just pray that her mind be strong—that she have a desire for life even as mine is breaking. Oh, Father, if I could ask anything of You—and I know You are able—please, feed my child, but even more so, keep her hope alive! Let her live not only a long life, but a happy life, a life lived for You and in Your arms! Oh, Father, please grant us this—.

Tears tumbled out of her once dry eyes. Grace had not cried for over a year. Her failing health had hardened her emotions until that day.

What's so different about this day?

Children were waking up all around the small plot of tin, wood and mud that Grace constructed for her family with her husband, John. John was a strong man—not only in body but in mind, too. His voice had the vitality and fullness of a soldier but the tenderness of a father. Even when he was angry, John could reason through difficult circumstances.

I wish John was still with me—NO, no, I won't talk like this, Lord! John is with You—he is happier and healthier than he ever was in his life! But still, can't I miss the man whose face I see every day in my daughter's? Oh! Why do I feel this pain today? What have I done wrong that has made me so hopeless? I'm sorry, Lord, I'm sorry for my lack of faith! Please, please, know that I'm thankful! Know that I love Patience and see how You've granted me a piece of Your perfection on this earth—to live with me! Father, don't let her be sick like me—.

A silence set in. A silence that could teach. Suffering creates wounds and the silence

dresses them. This was the suffering in the silence—the suffering of uncertainty. And in the uncertainty, the anticipation of what could be. There’s nothing more unbearable, nothing that will tear a heart more than the trial of waiting. Patience had been healthy. She had shown no signs of the illness. Grace recalled feeling the change in her own body three years earlier.

It started with—what was it? I have had so many calamities I don't even know which was first! Oh yes, it was the strange fever and bumps that so oddly came over me during the rainy season of that year. Then there was the definite sign—the proof that something was truly wrong in my body—. Oh, Patience was so much younger, then. I was so afraid that I would get her sick, too—how foolish I was to think it was only a germ! Ay! I could laugh out how little I really understood then! When it got really bad a few months later, my sister thought it was a curse! I don't know why she decided it was my neighbor's wife! Tsk. Babra would never put a curse on me. I would feel guiltier except that it was wishful thinking to believe that we could put down a curse so I would be healed. My sister, though, she didn't care much for Babra then. We tried to pray the curse away and when that didn't work, we brought the whole family to confront Babra—how ashamed I am. The healers visited me once. And for that, Lord, I'm sorry. I should have known that by then it was only You I could depend on. The healers tried to give me a remedy that would cure the blisters, but I gave up before I tried. No, medicine won't work for me anymore.

The sun is up! Oh, Patience, wake up, please? Child, you have slept for so long! I'm ready to hold you in my arms and tell you how beautiful you are—.

The pallet was light blue. Grace's sewing had been improving over the years, and by the time she had gathered the materials for a sleeping pallet for Patience, she put it together with care. A few strings were coming loose at one end but after two years of use, it was still comfortable

and sturdy for Patience. Patience, who had been born six years earlier, slept with her mother until she was four years old. They only had one mosquito net. Grace still slept on the pallet which she had shared with John. Patience slept silently between them for two years, and then there was only Grace and Patience to keep each other warm at night. Although it was difficult to sleep alone, Grace eventually decided to make Patience a pallet of her own. Grace didn't want to take any chances. She wanted her daughter to stay healthy. Slim was so sneaky—there was no way of telling if Patience was at risk.

Patience had short hair. In fact, Patience had never had much hair. Grace was thankful that Patience didn't mind. It was so much easier to keep her clean when her hair was short. Grace decided that if Patience wanted braids when she turned 13, then Grace would find a way to help her get braids.

But only by age 13. No sooner. If I ever have to pay for Patience's schooling, then there will be no money for anything else.

The sunshine by this time had seeped into the small room and fell on Patience's tiny eyelids. The child rolled over slightly to hide from the brightness. With a breathy sigh, Patience rolled to her other side in her pink sweatshirt with the green cuffs. Grace watched and wondered what she would prepare for Patience to eat.

The plantains are ripe, she thought. And the small slices of bread that the Pastor delivered the week before were being saved for a special day, but Grace decided that she and Patience would enjoy it that day.

Today is a day to rejoice. I'll rejoice because the Lord is with me and Patience will wake up soon to see this beautiful day.

* * *

A woman in a red pant suit walked up the hill to Grace's home carrying a basket and a heart heavy with concern. She wondered silently to herself as she avoided large cracks in the road and nodded greetings to passersby.

"I hope Grace is doing better today. She's looked so tired lately. She hasn't been to church in—what is it—two months or so? Joseph mentioned that she has been doing some sewing for other church members, but there isn't much money to be made there. How I wish I could help her. She won't open up and tell me exactly what's wrong...although I've heard rumors...but rumors mean nothing until I hear it from her mouth. It's not too early—she and Patience should be awake by now."

"Amikuru! Grace, you're up! Hello, dear."

"Nemeza, Rose, and come inside, please."

Grace moved shakily to the doorway. Her bony legs were concealed by her long skirt. She didn't want to worry anybody.

Lord, thank you for bringing Rose to see me today.

Rose, with a smile bright like the sun, held a thermos in her right hand. Grace smiled humbly.

"What's this, Rose?"

"It's extra. God put you and Patience in my heart today and I thought some hot porridge would be good for you."

Oh, my Lord. You thought of me and Patience, again?

“But, Rose, what about your children?”

Grace asked, knowing that Rose would never neglect feeding her children.

“Oh, Grace, you must know by now that I think of you every day. How has this morning been to you?”

Grace skipped over words. As she told Rose that she had been feeling better, she felt her spirit resist her attempt at a lie.

But I can't tell Rose too much—I must not. God has given me another day. I need not say too much—.

“Grace, I watch your face each day and see sadness in your eyes. Tell me, how can I help you?”

Lord, should I tell her?

“Well, Rose, I—.”

“Ah, Patience, Amikuru!” Rose exclaimed. She nodded lightly towards Grace.

“Nemeza.” The little voice sang hope into the day. Patience stood barely three and a half feet tall but was the biggest person in Grace's life. The white of her eyes were startling, and in her brown pupils one could almost see flecks of gold. Her small rounded nose was perfect, and her eyes stared down the tip of it when she was shy or in trouble; but this was rare. Patience was her name; and as the first born and now only child, she lived her name out with her hands clasped behind her back and two eyes blinking back at everyone. In a world of dying and desperation where mothers could kill their babies in clinics or watch them die in their arms, Patience was the mark of God. She was healthy.

Grace watched in amazement as her small daughter swung her arms two and fro with a

smile that revealed two missing teeth at the bottom of her mouth. Patience was not one to talk up the morning. She listened intently to every sound. If a bird flapped its wings or a football hit the ground nearby, Patience would respond with a tilt of her head and a skip in her step. The joys of life abounded within her spirit. Grace watched in amazement.

“Ah, Patience, are you ready for school today?” Rose asked with a grin.

With a nod and her tongue sticking out, Patience's eyes crinkled into an expression of childlike exuberance. When Patience was excited, she resorted to silliness in order not to seem too grown up.

“Patience, you should say your ABC's for Rose,” Grace said with a laugh.

With one finger to her lips and two eyes to the sky, the song began: “Aye, Bee, Ceee, Deeeeee, Efff...oh no no...Eeeee, Efff, Geee, Aaach, Aiiiiiiee, Jaaaaeee, Kaaaee, Elllle, Immm, Innn, Oooh, Peee...” Patience jumped up and down in a fit of laughter. Grace watched in amazement and happiness at her daughter's love for life and learning.

“Go on, go on, Patience, you haven't finished.”

“Queeeeee, Arrrr, Esssss, Teeee, Yooooo, Veee, Doubleh yooo, Ex, Whyyy, Zeeee!”

“Patience you're so smart!” Rose grinned with satisfaction. She peered at Grace's watery eyes and forced smile. “Grace, I can walk Patience to school this morning, if you need rest.”

She won't stop trying. Lord if I tell her, I'll regret it.

“That's fine, Rose. I need to sew for a neighbor, and I'd like that.”

* * *

Case #: 56879992-PK

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Reyes,

Thank you for giving to Global Kingdom Child Sponsorship Fund. Your monthly contributions will change the life of your sponsored child. Children enrolled in the program will receive the essential building blocks for a productive and healthy life. Global Kingdom incorporates faith-based learning as well as nutritional eating in the program. With your

monthly contribution, your sponsored child will receive opportunities that he/she deserves and could not have without you. Please share your story with other families so that more children can be saved from a life of poverty.

Name: Patience Kapyate

Birthday: June 12, 2001

Country: Rwanda, Africa

Project: Kingdom School, Kigali

Patience lives with her mother in Kigali. She is an only child. Her father died in 2005. Her favorite subject in school is English, and her performance is above average. Jump rope and singing are two of Patience's favorite activities. Patience regularly attends church and Bible class at Kingdom School.

Please keep Patience in your prayers. She needs your love and support to grow and develop.

* * *

Grace sat on the floor staring at the wall. She felt faint and her eyes squeezed away tears. Her sewing needle moved back and forth in forced motions through the bright yellow cloth. Her stitches were crooked, but her yellowed eyes were too blurred to see. She was too numbed by the pain to notice that she had pricked herself. Earlier she had measured each spoonful of porridge that entered Patience's mouth but hadn't eaten any of it herself.

"Agh!"

Spots of blood. I cut my finger—oh, I can't focus my mind, and my head is hurting too

much. I need to eat, but if I eat, will Patience have any food when she comes home? I must keep her healthy—.

Oh Lord! I have not thought of that. No, I don't want her to be an orphan! What will she do? Where will she live? Who will care for her? Yes, yes, I must eat. I must keep myself alive as long as I can. If I can stay alive, just long enough for her to finish school, she'll be free to do as she wishes! But what if her sponsors lose their jobs? Tsk. I can't predict the future, but I'll die trying, won't I? Yes, I'll eat.

The blue thermos remained on the table where Rose left it. Grace could see it and felt herself moving towards it, only to realize that she had not yet stood up. Her legs were folded beneath her and wouldn't move quickly enough for her body to stand. Her feet grabbed for the floor, her knees began to straighten. She used her left arm to support her shaking body. Her left arm buckled. Grace's back hit the dirt floor.

Ooooooh, Lord! Lord, help me!

Grace wept aloud.

Lord have you forgotten me? I can't move! My body is no longer worth anything! I'm useless! I can't even walk my daughter to school!

Grace's weeping became loud and uncontrollable. Her body moved helplessly from one side to the other, like a fishing boat on untamed water. The net was in the water, yet it only swayed with the current, not catching anything. The fish that did swim into the net found the tear that was just large enough to get out of. The thing that attacked Grace was smart enough to know where her weakness was and swift enough to penetrate it quickly. She was defeated.

The air grew quiet. Grace lay like a limp fish on the dirt floor of her shack. Her eyes were closed. The needle and cloth lay somewhere across the room where she threw them. Her heartbeat was rapid but slowing. Her chest moved irregularly as she gained back her normal breathing. Her eyes opened to a bright light shining on her face. The curtain was opened by the wind so the sunlight filled the small room. Again, Grace attempted to stand. Her tired body proved to be too much. She shifted her weight onto her stomach, and picked herself up with her knees and hands to the floor. She shuffled to the small table, and with one desperate heave, picked her body up enough to stand on her knees. The thermos was in reach. Grace reached agonizingly with two hands, unscrewed the lid with shaky fingers, and proceeded to drink the porridge. It was still warm, and went down the throat with ease. She had forgotten everything else long enough to answer her body's cry for food.

After three gulps of porridge, Grace attempted to stand again. Somehow, the knowledge of the food in her empty stomach renewed her strength. It wasn't the porridge that helped her stand; it was her will. She answered the taunts of the enemy inside her with a loud shout of resistance and rebellion. Grace was never a bold or stubborn person. In fact, John would always comment on her meekness. He would say, "My meek and lovely, Grace, what troubles you so?" in response to Grace's looks of doubt at his honesty. She was never one to say no to the requests of those she loved nor was she one to defy her husband, even if he was being unfair. That was before she met the enemy within her. It wasn't just an enemy of the body—it was an enemy of the mind, emotions, and more profoundly, an enemy of one's sanity. Grace's will had become her only chance for survival.

Patience was also born with the same meek nature. Patience didn't ask others for much. Even at a young age, Patience's main loves were learning and her mother. She laughed at other's

jokes and liked to hear what older people had to say. Her quiet, yet happy nature distanced her from her father's more solemn ways.

Grace breathed heavily. She noticed that she was breathing rapidly. As if it moved up her body from her feet, a loud and painful cough erupted from her throat, followed by a rumbling in her chest.

It's a cold. I've caught everything this year from those blisters—which have still not disappeared—to the stomach pains and now this. It won't end, it seems. At least Patience is well.

* * *

“I'm home!”

Grace had nearly finished the green, blue, and red table cloth when Patience came running in. Grace still felt weak, but she extended her arms to Patience anyway.

“My, Patience. What did you learn at school today?”

Patience's uncontained smile said that she had learned something exciting. She looked as though she would burst into giggles at any moment.

As if she told a secret, Patience said, “I can write my ABC's.”

Grace's throat felt suddenly constricted by happiness. She felt tears welling in her eyes. Patience waited for a response, but she had a talent for seeing into her mother's soul. She understood. She wanted show her mother what the ABC's looked like.

As Patience pulled a crinkled sheet out of her dress pocket, Grace stared in anticipation as

Patience's tiny hands unwrapped the most beautiful sight Grace had ever seen. It was what she had always dreamed of. The paper was grayish white with wide, blue lines. On it were symbols that Grace was only somewhat familiar with. It had been too long for her to remember what they meant.

Patience wanted to teach her mother. With one skinny finger, she pointed to the first symbol. "This is Aaaeee."

A. My child can write the letter A.

"This is Beeee."

She can write the letter B.

"This is Ceeeeee, this is Deeee, this is Effff..."

Her tears fell freely.

If my child can write her alphabet, then she'll be able to get a job. She'll be able to write a letter in English. She'll be able to read in English. There are no limits. She'll be able to do so much. I'm so proud. Thank You, my God, my Savior who has listened to my prayers. You've blessed Patience. You've blessed me.

Patience looked down her nose at the sheet of paper. She handed it to Grace. Grace's hand caressed the graphite stains. She held it up proudly and reviewed the letters intently.

"You must take this and study it, Patience, my love. Memorize it. Write it on the table so you can see it each morning. You must promise me, my child, that you won't forget what you've learned."

Grace gently folded the crinkled paper and handed it carefully to Patience. Patience mimicked Grace's caution and slipped it back into her dress pocket. "I promise, Mama."

Patience moved into her mother's arms. Grace held her tightly against her chest. Tears ran down the front of her blue shirt and onto the waist of her blue and red wrap-skirt. Her head was wrapped in a yellow cloth. Her tired and wet eyes were closed in a sense of contentment. She pressed her beautiful, dark lips atop of Patience's head and kissed her gently.

“Patience, I'm very pleased.”

* * *

November 2004

“Good morning, Grace. It's late.”

John wore his best shirt and pants as he peered down at her.

“You're up so early,” Grace said with a tired smile.

“It's time for church. I have to speak with Pastor Joseph today. Get up or I'll be late.”

Patience remained silently beside Grace. As if they were one person, Patience and Grace both rolled to one side. Grace began to laugh and pat her daughter's back.

“Patience, you must wake up now and go to church. Don't you want to sing the songs again?”

Patience began to sit up and rub her eyes. “Yes,” she said with a sigh. Patience loved singing at church. It was her favorite activity. Unlike many of the other kids, she loved the slower worship songs. She didn't have to be at church to sing them—she sang all the time. The night before, she wouldn't stop singing. Grace finally had to threaten that if she didn't sleep, she would be forbidden to play with the neighbors for the next day. Patience loved her friends next

door. So she became quiet.

John paced across the room. “Grace, you know I have to work later today—eh, did I tell you?”

“You're driving the trucks today? Why? I thought you would be home for today.”

“No. There's a load for me to pick up. No one else was going to do it, and it came late so they asked me. We're going to make more money if I work on Sundays, too, you know?”

“Well, praise God for the work,” Grace replied. John and Grace had been fortunate. Grace could work in the city cooking and cleaning while John drove trucks. John was strong. He could lift things that other men couldn't because so many of them were getting sick. Because of their incomes, they could even have a mosquito net. So many families had to get them for free but John and Grace bought their own. When in the city, Grace made visits to the market for vegetables and could even buy Nutella and bread for special occasions. As a family, they could even give money to their church! Grace was pleased with their condition and was even expecting a second child. She couldn't wait.

John was handsome. As Grace helped Patience dress, she glanced over at John occasionally with complete love and appreciation. John worked nearly every day and was gone for long hours, so when he was home, Grace treasured each minute. Lately, though, she had been extremely fatigued, even more than her first pregnancy. Patience wasn't an easy child to bear. Grace was in labor for a day and a night and into the next day. That's why she was named Patience. She didn't expect the second child to be any easier, especially since she had been so ill. There were weeks when she could not go into the city because she felt as if she would faint. Grace prayed that her child would be safe.

* * *

I must make it to the city today. I must.

Patience trailed behind Grace singing and picking flowers from the side of the dirt road. “*Yezu nim wangu wazima wa mi le le-eh*,” Patience’s little voice quietly sang. “*Wa mi le le-eh, WAZIMA, wa mi le le-eh—*.” Her voice trailed off as she beheld her favorite flower. As Grace shuffled ahead, the tall, faint purple blossom danced delicately in the breeze, beckoning Patience.

Why has Patience stopped singing? “Patience?”

“I pick’d dis for you.”

“Child, we must go quickly; I have to clean two houses today.” Grace couldn’t resist her daughter’s thoughtfulness. “Thank you.”

Patience wore the same pink dress that she had worn for three days. It was her favorite. Grace didn’t mind, since all Patience would do was walk to and from the city with her. So long as it didn’t rain, and she didn’t play in the mud, there was no problem. Patience resumed her singing.

Kigali is a city on hills. When one neared the city, it felt as though the ground itself was moving. A traveler would tire from walking up hill after hill. The days of Grace’s pregnancies were always the worst. The walk first became agonizing two months before Patience was born. Her round belly bobbed up and down when she walked too fast, so she slowed her pace and was forced to leave the house even earlier than usual. On a regular day, the walk to the city could take thirty minutes. On a day during a pregnancy, the walk would take almost an hour. By the time she reached the city she would feel so nauseated that she would have to sit on the sidewalk with her legs stretched out and her head hanging over her stomach. It was no different with the second pregnancy, except she was still four months away from giving birth. The agony had

started earlier this time.

What truly worried Grace was her low weight gain. Now that Patience was three years old, she could eat so much. Grace had not broken the habit of feeding Patience before herself. John would always get angry. He would say, "Grace, you're starving my son! You need to eat or else you will get sick and he will die."

John was so sure that Grace carried a son. Grace hoped for a son as well but she didn't know what to expect. John insisted that if they had a son, his name would be Robert. Grace didn't like the name much, but John was so adamant that he name their son, what could she do? Grace liked how they had named Patience. It suited her so well and was reminiscent of her birth. She hoped the other child would be named in a similar manner, but John wanted to pick out the name regardless of how the labor was.

Grace had a premonition that something was wrong with her but she didn't know what. A few months before she discovered she was pregnant again, John got sick. He broke out in strange rashes and had a fever that lasted for about three days. Then he was fine. Grace was concerned that Patience would get sick too, so she wouldn't let Patience sleep in between them. She had Patience sleep on the outside next to her. John said it was nothing. He was back to working long hours and he never spoke of it again.

Grace worried every day that she wasn't well enough to deliver a healthy baby. She had been so fatigued that even walking a few steps around the small room where they slept would cause her to lose her breath. One morning she woke up with a pounding headache. After three tiring attempts, she stood up to prepare breakfast. She didn't know why her head hurt so terribly.

It wasn't until she realized Patience had been trying to talk to her that she couldn't hear very well. The only sound she could hear clearly was a ringing sound from inside her head. It was as though a bell was being shaken without stop. She didn't want to open her eyes because the sunlight made the ringing worse. Patience sat with a finger in her mouth, watching Grace. Grace's hands gripped the table tightly and her eyelids wrinkled in pain. Her arms were shaking. John had already left for work so Patience was the only witness to the episode. Grace sat down, holding her head. Patience stepped over to her mother. "Ma? Ma?"

Five minutes passed. Grace opened her eyes. The ringing had not completely stopped, but it seemed farther away. Her breathing was rapid but her eyes were coming back into focus. She looked at Patience.

I can't show my fear. I must act normal. What's wrong—what's happening to me? Oh, Father, please, take care of my child. Please, don't allow me to lose my son.

Grace prayed silently while Patience played with a rubber ball on the floor. Toys had been given to the children at church two days earlier. A group of missionaries from the United States brought gifts for the children and worshipped at the church where Grace and John were members. It was rare to have visitors from another country, whose were odd, but kind. One of the men wore a brown suit and delivered a sermon. He quoted men that Grace and John had never heard of—they were likely European Bible teachers. It was a long message. Patience fidgeted and at one point fell asleep. After the service, the guests passed out gifts to children. Patience was happy to have a new rubber ball. It was a treasure to her, although it was not her only toy. She had a jump rope, too.

Patience allowed her mother time to recover. Many mornings Grace would behave this way, and Patience learned to adapt. John was rarely present when Grace would become sick. He would usually see her at night, but over the past two weeks, there were nights he would not even come home. When he drove the truck, he would sometimes go to other cities and stay overnight. Grace missed her husband but she understood. She used to worry for him so much until she remembered that this was his job and without it they would have nothing. Still, she needed him.

The walk to the first house was short once they reached Kigali. The route was easy to remember: one block past the market, up the hill on the right. The house couldn't be missed. It was the largest on the hill. It was white with a red roof top. There were two balconies and a beautiful garden with multiple paths to walk across. There was even a gazebo. Grace was thankful that the family hired her. They could've hired so many other women, but they chose her. They also didn't mind when she would bring Patience. Patience usually played in the garden while Grace worked inside. When Patience was still a baby, Grace swaddled her on her back. Patience slept most of the time and didn't interfere with her work. However, as Patience grew older, Grace realized she couldn't let Patience follow her as she worked. It became risky. When Patience became difficult to watch while working, Grace asked Babra to keep Patience while she was away. Babra and Grace were friends, and Babra had three children for Patience to play with. During that time it was so much easier to do her work.

When Grace became pregnant with her second child, Patience wanted to walk with her to work again. She didn't want to play with Babra's children anymore. Grace didn't say no, and Patience walked with her again to work and was more able to play on her own outside without

getting into trouble. Grace worried at first and checked on Patience every ten minutes, but this slowed her work down and proved to be unnecessary. When Grace was five months pregnant and extremely fatigued, she was thankful that Patience was with her. It gave her motivation to keep working and stay on her feet.

She had episodes almost every day. If she would eat a piece of bread in the morning, the dizziness wouldn't be as bad later in the day, but some days, there was only enough food on the table for Patience. John was not bringing home as much money as he used to. Grace could only go shopping for an occasional need. John said that his bosses were late in paying him, but Grace questioned whether that was true.

“John, you say you don't want your son to starve. If that's true, then you need to bring home money for food. There has been no food in the house even to feed Patience two meals a day—.”

“Grace, you won't speak to me this way. You think I want to kill my son? I tell you the truth! I'll talk to my bosses tomorrow, but I don't know what they'll say to me.”

“John,” Grace said cautiously, “I've only had bread for the last three days.”

“Well, that's not MY problem. You give the girl all your food.”

“She's your daughter. I feed her because I know that she'll survive. This baby in my stomach—I'm afraid—.”

“Afraid of what? What are you afraid of?”

Grace held her tongue.

John's angry. I don't blame him—.

“I'll ask Ms. Flora for my wages early. Then I'll buy food. I'll eat, John, I promise.”

Grace knew she had no choice.

“Grace, my meek wife,” John caressed Grace's cheek with his finger tips. “I just want our son to be born healthy. I know you'll do the right thing for him.”

“John, I—never mind.”

How can I tell him that I can't even walk to Kigali without nearly passing out? He won't provide food for his family! What kind of father is he who refuses to demand a payment so he can feed his children? Father, I know I'm responsible if my son dies in my womb. I didn't think enough about my health. If I'm unhealthy, then he is unhealthy. I can't believe that I may lose him—.

* * *

The next morning, Patience slept softly. Grace didn't want to take her to the city since she had no food to give her and didn't want her to walk on an empty stomach. The pastor's wife, Rose, had noticed Grace's ill appearance that Sunday at church. Rose was worried and said she would stop by and visit.

I must leave for the city or I'll never leave the house. I ache today. My head is pounding. How could I have been so careless not to feed myself? I know that what I eat goes into my baby and what I do to myself, I do to my baby. I was just so afraid of seeing Patience lose weight. I'm used to choosing between myself and my husband and daughter. In the past, they've always been first, but now I know that I've been foolish. My son could die.

Grace fought back the tears. She bit her lower lip, and looked sadly to the floor. She

noticed something under the table. It was a bill. One hundred francs!

John must have dropped it before he left this morning—but he said he had no money!

Tsk. Well, I'll go and find food now, before I work! I'll be well now. I'll change my habits and feed myself better, I promise, God! I promise!

“My son, Robert, I'll feed you soon—just wait and you'll see. You'll feel better, I promise!”

Grace patted her round belly with her palms. She hummed softly. Patience began to stir.

“You'll go to play with Babra's children today,” Grace said as soon as she saw Patience open her eyes. With a look of bewilderment, Patience sat up and rubbed her eyes. “Ma, go wit you?”

“No. You'll play with Louis and Sabine. I must go now, so get up.”

Patience shrugged and stood up. Without another word, she walked over to Grace and put her arms around her leg. Patience looked up at her mother, with wide, wet eyes. Grace peered over her stomach at her daughter's pleading face. Grace pinched Patience's nose and smiled. “You'll play with them, and in a little while, I'll be back and we'll eat good food.”

The sun seemed so low. It beat on Grace's body and abused her in her own fatigue. She was so close to the market. A few more yards and she would arrive. She thought about all the different foods she could buy with one hundred francs. The truth was, she couldn't buy much. Perhaps a piece of fruit, and that was all. Still, it was better than eating nothing. Grace hadn't even thought about food since John first arrived home empty-handed. That was a week ago. She didn't want to torment herself with thoughts of food that she couldn't have. On the way to the market that day, however, she longed for the fruit with the red skin and yellow meat. She

couldn't remember what it was called. She desired it for herself but ever more for the child within her. She had to walk just a few more yards—.

The sounds of the market were the same as every morning. Chattering people, children with bare feet running about, honking car horns coming from all sides. Nothing had changed since the week before when Grace last saw it. She hoped to find something quick.

The street was lined with women holding baskets of fruit. One woman had plantains. Another had heads of lettuce and cabbage. Still another had what appeared to be yams or carrots, but Grace couldn't tell the difference anymore. All she wanted was the red, juicy fruit that she remembered from weeks ago. She had bought two of them, not knowing what they were. She tried one and didn't immediately like it because it had been cut too early, but as she thought about that fruit, it would be more delicious than anything she had eaten in a week. Grace searched, but couldn't see the red fruit. The lady squatting with plantains beckoned her over.

“I see you and your child are hungry. I'll give you two plantains for 150 francs.”

“That's too much. I'll give you 100 francs.”

“115.”

“100 is all I have.”

“Ok.”

Grace took the plantains and immediately peeled the first one. The taste was so sweet; it was the most wonderful feeling Grace had experienced over the course of the last dreadful week. The plantain was small, so it was gone quickly. As she peeled the second plantain, she thanked God repeatedly.

My baby will be well, now. He'll be well. Thank You, Father, thank You for giving me

the money for this food. Thank You for not forgetting us in our hunger...thank You, oh thank You!

As Grace turned to go up the street to the house, she felt better. She hadn't felt this strong for over a week. John expected her to feed herself when he was not home, but he failed to remember that Grace only received payment once a month for her cleaning jobs. When she was paid, she went immediately to the market to buy food for the next few days. John made more money driving trucks so when he brought the money home, Grace could buy more food. However, for over a week, Grace had no money from John to buy food. They didn't discuss his expenses. She wondered all the time where his money went, but according to him, his bosses had not paid any of the truckers. Yet, he didn't complain of being hungry, nor did he appear to be going hungry. Grace didn't understand.

Of course, John is strong and doesn't complain much. He probably only eats once a day, like he always did before. He isn't a big eater, anyway. I hope I'll see him tonight so I can tell him that the baby and I both ate well today.

Grace planned to speak with Ms. Flora, who was married to a business man. They owned a hotel in the city, and their children were away at a private school. Ms. Flora was reserved, but smiled at Grace when she entered the room. She always told Grace when she had done a good job cleaning. Often, Ms. Flora wasn't home, but the gatekeeper, Jacque, would let Grace in each week. Grace hoped she would be home to ask her for payment. She didn't know how to make such a request, but Grace hoped that Ms. Flora's kind nature would prove true once she understood what Grace was facing as a mother and wife.

Grace waited patiently outside the gate. Men walked by with satchels over their shoulders, and children ran by kicking a football. Grace leaned against the wall. She was thirsty. She heard the gate unlock. The large gate creaked open and Grace peered around the corner as Jacques pushed it open. Jacques wore striped pants and a sleeveless blue shirt. His cap was red and had a strange symbol on it. He spoke with a rich, French accent. Grace greeted him in Kinyarwanda and he nodded his head as she walked by.

If she's here, she'll be in the garden—.

Ms. Flora's bright pink shirt stood out from the blue and white blossoms that surrounded her. She wore her large straw hat and tan shorts as she scraped dirt out from under her nails and stood to greet Grace. Grace walked slowly over to her, suddenly petrified of what she was about to do.

How do I ask my employer such a thing? She paid me two weeks ago, and this is a request that I must not make of her. But do I have a choice? John thinks I'll do this because I told him I—.

“Amikuru, Grace. I have a party tonight so I need the kitchen to be spotless and the living room swept. I would also like to have my laundry washed, if you don't mind, because my laundress is not here today.”

Grace had no words. She thought of what to say, but could think of nothing. All she could do was nod and rub her stomach gently with slow caresses. She looked at Ms. Flora and smiled meekly. The lump in her throat constricted her words, but she had to try.

“Ms. Flora, you're so kind to me. I'll do all that you ask of me today, but I must ask a question—.”

“Yes, Grace? Is everything all right?”

“Yes. It will be if I'm able to buy food at the market today. My family is hungry and my husband hasn't been paid from his job. I know I shouldn't ask this of you, but I need money for food. My baby hasn't been getting enough food and I feel sick every day. If it's not too much trouble, Ms. Flora, would it be possible to be paid today for next month's work?”

Ms. Flora bit her lower lip. She looked as though she would speak, but she remained silent for a moment. She stared into Grace's face and studied her eyes. “So you haven't been eating, Grace?”

“Only a few pieces of bread. I have a daughter, and she must be fed first. I've only eaten what she doesn't finish.”

“Grace, I'm your employer. But right now, I'll be a friend and tell you that if I give you your payment today, then there are certain things that you must buy for yourself. If you want your baby to be healthy, you must eat more than bread. You promise?”

Grace felt tears coming. She didn't care. “Yes, Ms. Flora. I'll listen.”

“Are you eating vegetables?”

“Not every week. We eat bread and fruit.”

“Buy vegetables. Fruit is good, but be sure to have green vegetables too. They have nourishment your baby must have. What about milk?”

“I don't drink milk. We have nowhere to keep it.”

Ms. Flora studied Grace's face. She had never looked so closely at Grace before. She noticed that Grace's eyes had dark rings around them. She also noticed that her skin seemed thin and discolored in certain areas. Then she saw Grace's hands.

“Grace, your hands are so thin. Are you well?”

“Oh, yes, yes, Ms. Flora,” Grace pretended.

“Grace, this is what I think we'll do today. I have a friend who is a doctor. I want him to examine you. You look too unhealthy to be walking to the city three days a week. If I call him now, will you agree to see him?”

Grace was uncertain what to say.

Is this an act of kindness, or is she afraid I'll make her sick? Will she fire me if I'm unwell? What will the doctors do? I don't think this is the best idea—.

“Ms. Flora, I'm well. I'll do my work.”

“Grace, I'm calling Dr. Johnson. You aren't well. Don't worry, he won't charge you. He does this work for free for your people.”

Grace was petrified. Part of her comfort was her ignorance. She didn't want to know what was wrong with her—but she wanted to know if her son was well. She didn't know whether she ought to insist on getting her work done or if it would be better for her simply to leave. If it was a test to make sure her baby was healthy, then that would be fine. But, Ms. Flora wanted to have Grace's health tested. Why?

Father, is this your provision? Why should Ms. Flora want to know if I'm well or not? I'm so afraid, I can't lose my job! She'll take my job away if I'm sick—I know it! Oh, Lord, please, You must take care of my family! I don't think John will bring home any money this week—and I must get paid! But if I'm sick and can't work next month, Ms. Flora won't pay me! Father—oh, Father, please, I'm begging you—.

Ms. Flora gently gripped Grace's arm and led her to the porch. “Are you thirsty? I'll bring

you some juice. I'm calling Dr. Johnson.” Ms. Flora disappeared into the house. All the while, Jacques pulled weeds along the fence. The motion of his arm pulling and tossing the green plants aside soothed Grace's tired eyes. She leaned her head against the pillar on the porch and watched the clouds float by slowly. Grace didn't realize how tired the walk to Kigali had made her. It had been so long since Grace was given a break to sit in the shade and wait for a drink. To be served—rather than serve another—was a feeling she hadn't known for years. She almost felt guilty about it, but resolved that it was for the best.

I wouldn't have done this to myself, Father. Had I the means, I would've taken better care of my body. I must admit to myself that I'm not well. I'm sick and I'm afraid. I know I'm not healthy enough to do this job anymore. I may not even be healthy enough to go through labor. Maybe the doctor will tell me that I'm fine. Maybe he'll even offer to help me when I'm in labor? Rose offered to tend to me during the labor, but a doctor would give me more assurance.

Ms. Flora's footsteps behind Grace startled her, causing her shoulders to jump slightly. Ms. Flora took a seat beside Grace. She handed Grace a glass of yellow-colored liquid. “I hope you like mango,” Ms. Flora said lightly.

Ms. Flora was a beautiful woman. She had dark, curly hair and large, green eyes. Her cheeks always appeared to have a slight flush to them and her nose was long but delicate. Her hands were small and dainty, but almost always dirty due to her love for the garden. Her small frame made it seem as though she herself didn't eat much, but Grace knew that her employer ate at least three times a day, like all rich people did.

Grace studied the glass. It was clean and sparkled in the sunlight. There were blue and green designs on the sides which appeared to be painted flowers. Grace liked the glass but was so

afraid she might break it. As she carefully tilted her head to sip the juice, she gripped the glass with both hands. The crisp, sweet taste on her tongue made Grace's entire body shiver in glad relief. Within seconds, the juice was gone. Ms. Flora picked at the dark green weeds growing between the cracks in the marble steps of her porch. In her silence, she appeared to be contemplating the situation. The sun beamed down upon their feet, which were not safely hidden in the shade of the porch. Ms. Flora broke the silence.

“Grace, are you able to walk to my house every week? I mean, do you feel well enough to do so?”

Grace wondered about the same thing.

If I say no, I'll lose my job. If I say yes, I'll lose my baby. But without a job, Patience will suffer more. Lord, I'm afraid, and I don't know how to answer her. Ok, yes, I'll answer her honestly—.

“Ms. Flora, it's very difficult for me to walk this far. I feel as if I'll faint when I do.” Ms. Flora nodded thoughtfully. It was as though she had always known. “Grace, when Dr. Johnson sees you soon, you must tell him the truth about how you feel. I know other women in your situation who have lost their babies because their bodies were simply too tired to carry the baby to term. I don't want to see that happen to you, and you must take care of your body. Maybe you can come back to work for me after you have your child, that is, if you aren't well enough to do this job for now.”

Grace winced at the words she dreaded hearing the most. It was inevitable, it seemed. Each moment of waiting was agonizing. Grace awaited the doctor's arrival with great dread. She continued staring into the beautiful glass that sparkled in the sun. Grace unwrapped her hair to

wipe the sweat off her forehead. She could feel her nerves. In the distance she could hear children laughing and cars honking. She envisioned Patience playing with Babra's children. Grace wondered when she would go home, and if she would have food to take with her.

Jacques still worked up against the fence, uprooting weeds and wiping the sweat off his brow with his shirt. In an instant, Jacques had gone to the gate. Grace tensed. Ms. Flora stood up, wiping the back of her shorts with her clean hands. She motioned to Grace.

“He's here, Grace. Don't worry, he's very nice. You have nothing to worry about.”

* * *

That was years ago. I wish I could see Ms. Flora once again. She was truly kind to me—more kind than anyone else ever was. My other employers were so cold compared to her. They paid me less than she did, too. Ay, how lovely that house was. If only I was still well enough to travel to the city.

Yes, Father, I know. I could've died any of those hundreds of times that I traveled to the city. Even when I was pregnant, and so sick—I was always able to finish my work. You, Father, protected me. You kept me through both pregnancies to be a mother to Patience. Now I only wish that she won't know the pain I've known.

A football hit the wall of Grace's shack. Outside the small building there was a large trough filled with water. Every so often, a man named Eliazar would bring a jug of water to empty into the trough for Grace and Patience. Eliazar was a member of their church, and

although he wasn't wealthy like Ms. Flora, he cared deeply for Grace. They had been born a week apart. Their parents attended the same church. The two of them even went to school together, until Grace left school to help her parents. For five years, Grace helped to plant and grow crops on government land. It was sometimes unproductive and especially frustrating that she couldn't finish school. She missed learning with the other children. It wasn't until she was twelve that she was able to return to school. Many schools and churches in the area that were shut down during the fighting were being rebuilt within a couple of years. Missionaries were coming from all over the world to Kigali to help. A mission school had been built just over a mile away from where Grace lived with her family. Grace begged her father to let her attend the mission school, and when he relented she ran all the way there the first day without stopping. She arrived to find that all classes were full. She had to put her name on a waiting list.

Grace thought for sure she had missed her chance until a man named Mr. Morris walked across the school yard to where Grace sat waiting with her hands clasped in her lap. He was a hairy man. He always wore a green hat with a brim all the way around and dark glasses. Grace watched as he walked over to where she sat.

Mr. Morris waved. Grace waved back. "Good morning, what's your name?"

"Mpunji Grace."

"Ah, Grace, how old are you?"

"Twelve."

"And have you ever attended school before?"

Grace nodded. Mr. Morris stroked his beard and appeared to be putting together a plan in his head. "I'll tell you what. You can sit in on a class which my daughter teaches. It's crowded, but I want you at least to see what your level is, and then we can go from there."

* * *

How I wish I could've finished school there with Mr. Morris' daughter. I couldn't have known that my parents would get so sick that year. Young girls don't have choices. They don't get to say no. Their educations aren't as important as their brothers'. My brother didn't even do anything with his schooling but join the army and got shot! I'll always insist that Patience go to college—.

“Grace?”

Grace peered through her window to see Rose coming down the path. “Ah, Rose, welcome.”

“Grace, it's such a perfect day. You must come outside!”

“No, I'm fine. Why don't you come in?”

“Grace, come out here. You haven't been out for days, I know it.”

She's so persistent. She knows something is wrong. She wants me to say it—.

“Ok, I'm coming.”

Grace closed the tattered curtain and straightened her skirt. She wrapped a bright green cloth around her head and proceeded slowly outside the dark room. Outside, the sun embraced her, and she felt slightly dizzy but surprisingly refreshed.

“Ah, Grace, have you been well today?”

“Yes, I'm well. Thank you.”

Rose looked into Grace's face. She thought to herself, “Grace, if there's

something you need to tell me, I'm ready to hear it. I know you're sick."

"Why are you so secretive? I've known you since before you were married, and I've never known you to be so mysterious. Ah, but that's OK. If you say you're well, then you're well. I just wanted to bring something by for you."

"Oh?"

"Yes. I had something left over and I wanted to share it with you."

Rose reached into her bag and pulled out a bottle. She handed it carefully to Grace. "It's lotion! Can you believe I found this in my house and haven't finished it yet? Ha! I thought you might want to use it."

"Rose, thank you."

Grace felt the desire to open up grow stronger within her.

Rose has been so dear to me, Father. Thank you. Is it time that I share the truth with her? Well, Patience will be home from school soon. I must not open this long conversation now, so soon before Patience arrives home. She won't understand. Yes, Lord, I know I'm making excuses. But it's no small excuse! My daughter doesn't need to know that I'm sick. She doesn't need to know that I have the dreaded illness living inside of me, killing me more every day. I don't want her to worry. That's not what's best for her.

"Grace, I am praying for you every day. But I have to know what I can do now to help you."

Grace stared at the ground for a moment, praying, contemplating, and struggling with her deep desire to free herself from secrecy. She feared that she would be put in a home for women dying from Slim. There were not many of these homes, and when a woman went to live in one, it was said that she wouldn't be seen for months at a time. Grace didn't want to be far from her

home, and she didn't want anyone to take Patience from her.

Rose is my pastor's wife. She has no intent to harm me or my daughter. She only cares enough to ask—but of course she might already know and simply wants to hear it from my own mouth. She is smart enough to figure this out. My sister didn't tell anyone outside the family—except Babra, but Babra doesn't talk to Rose. Yes, it's time.

“Rose, you have asked many times for the truth about my health. I'm sorry that I've not told you before today. But I must ask that we go inside my house before I share this with you.”

Rose nodded. The walk into the house was silent and somber. It was as though the darkness inside concealed the shame. Rose watched as Grace sank to the dirt floor, trembling lightly. Rose squatted near her, placing a hand on Grace's shoulder. In rapid whispers, Rose prayed over Grace. The trembling subsided.

“Rose, I knew I was sick before my son died.”

Rose nodded silently. She reached for Grace's hand. “How did you know?”

“I couldn't walk far without wanting to faint. I had dizzy spells and my head was always hurting. I sometimes couldn't even get out of bed. I wasn't always sick like that, though. I started noticing I was sick when I was pregnant with Robert. I felt very different than I did when I was pregnant with Patience. I was eating less because we didn't have much money, but even when we did have food, I still felt ill all the time. One day, when I was working for Ms. Flora, I fainted while scrubbing the bathtub. She didn't know that I fainted, because she was not home. No one was home, except the gatekeeper, but he was outside, and didn't know anything had happened. Patience was outside playing in the garden. I don't know how long I was gone but I woke up with a pounding head. I still don't know what happened to me that day. Every morning after that, I would struggle just to walk a few steps to prepare breakfast.”

“When John began lying to me about his money, I was desperate. I asked Ms. Flora for an advance of the next month's wages. She agreed, but wanted her doctor to look at me first. Rose—I—.”

Grace wept. She held her head in her hands, and with heaping sobs, her bony shoulders bounced up and down. Rose drew closer to her and Grace clung to her with her weak, skinny arms. The mourning over lost life and lost hope is lonely for one to do alone. Rose cried as Grace heaved sobs loudly within the darkness of the small room.

Between heavy gasps for air Grace continued: “Rose, Ms. Flora's doctor was kind to me. I was so afraid of what he would say about me and my son. He took me to his clinic and the nurse took my blood. He said I needed to return to the clinic to learn the results, but I was so scared to go that I didn't go until after Robert died. Before then, I just couldn't go back! It was only after I lost Robert that I could handle the truth about my health—.”

“I'm home!” Patience ran inside to find Rose and her mother on the floor of the room. Patience stared silently.

“Hi, Patience, my dear,” Rose said softly. She looked at Grace, who still wore the distress and fear on her face. Rose smiled and wrapped an arm around Patience in a hug. “You look so beautiful today; so much like your mother.”

Grace wiped her eyes with the bottom of her white T-shirt. Without warning, her breathing became forced and rapid. She tried desperately to catch her breath, but it was no use. After several pained attempts to conceal her illness, she hacked loudly into her hands. Rose held Patience to her as they both watched helplessly. Grace lay doubled over to the floor. Rose instinctively covered her mouth with one hand and Patience's mouth with the other.

“Grace, what do you need?” Rose asked after a few moments of nervous silence.

“I need you to promise that you’ll tell no one.”

“I promise.”

* * *

Clap, clap, clap-clap, clap, clap, clap-clap-clap....

Eight children dance in two lines while spectators watch in wonder.

There are five girls and three boys. Their classmates encircle them, clapping in rhythm.

Clap, clap, clap-clap...

The eight children dance perfectly in sync with one another. They lift their right legs, stomp, and wave their arms in front of them. They are one. They are in harmony.

Clap, clap-clap...

Each dancer steps out of line for a solo dance, as the others continue their steps to the constant rhythm.

As the line moves from side to side, a disturbance disrupts the back line. A man has jumped in the middle of their dance. He mirrors the steps of the boy in front of him, making him almost untraceable.

The spectators whisper to one another in curiosity.

Clap, clap, clap-clap...

As the intruder moves with the lines, he chooses his first partner. She continues moving with the line as he begins to dance menacingly around her. His movements disrupt her step. She is no longer able to move like the others. Soon she has disappeared and he has taken her place.

“What happened to *her*?” A young man in the crowd asks loudly.

The intruder dances in harmony with the seven remaining dancers. He then chooses his next partner. She resists his attempts at first, concentrating on the rhythm that fills the air around her to keep her step. He is right on her. He overwhelms her with his spasmodic movements.

A woman in the crowd yells, “Leave her alone!”

The girl disappears. The menace has now taken her place.

Clap, clap-clap....

When there are only four dancers remaining, the intruder does a solo dance. He bursts into a chant of diabolical lyrics and sudden bends of his body. As he lunges forwards towards the crowd, men, women, and children all jump backwards to stay far from him. He re-enters the line of children. When he removes two at one time, only a boy and a girl remain in the dance. They remain perfectly in sync. The intruder moves behind his female victim. He chants as he moves around her, and she disappears.

The intruder dances with his last victim. He mirrors the boy's movements perfectly until he begins to encircle the boy with flailing arms and frightening shouts. The boy disappears. The clapping stops. The spectators watch silently as the mysterious dancer finishes the steps before completely freezing. No one speaks until the dancer walks out of the circle to sit down.

“What's this about?”

“It's about AIDS.”

* * *

AIDS in Africa. No one imagined it would be this way. No one saw it coming. I have heard many call it the “American” disease. I have also heard people call it “Slim.” There is no name that fully captures it. It's a beautiful virus. It drinks all the strength from the body. It can also hide very well below the malnutrition and lesions that people see.

I love it when people blame it on sin. That is where we're the strongest. Devine retribution is our hiding place! That way people will not care as much—that is, when they believe that we're the arm of justice. People can call it truth and we're permitted to do our job.

It must seem like we choose people but that's not so. We go where they go. We touch who they touch. We make our rounds without choosing anyone; we're opportunistic. We thrive in times of ignorance.

* * *

“Hello David!”

“Ms. Flora, nice to see you!”

“How has your day been? Busy?”

“Oh, yes, like always. You called after I had just returned from another house visit! Now I understand what my med school professors meant about work in developing countries—.”

Grace watched and waited. She felt paralyzed. All she could think to do was pray.

My Father, Your will be done. Your will be done.

Ms. Flora led the young doctor to the porch. “Grace, this is my good friend, Dr. David Johnson. I called him because he likes making house calls and is very good at them. David, this is Grace, one of my housekeepers.”

“Hello, Grace. I see that you are expecting a child! May God bless you.”

Grace looked him over carefully. His hair was brown and grew past his ears. His large, green eyes were friendly and youthful. He smiled with every word he said. Grace never expected a doctor to look this way. She felt more comfortable.

“Grace, it’s my job to ask lots of questions, and I need you to answer me as best as you can. How do you feel right now?”

Grace looked at Dr. Johnson blankly. “I—I don’t know.”

“Do you think you might be sick?”

“Well—I, I’m worried for my baby.”

“Why?”

“I’ve been tired. I don’t want to eat very often. When I’m able to eat, it isn’t very much.”

Lord, please, don’t let him ask too many questions. I’m so afraid.

“So you’re fatigued, and aren't eating? Well, Grace, that needs to change if you are going to deliver a healthy baby. Is this your first child?”

“No. I have a daughter. She's healthy.”

Dr. Johnson opened his large, white bag and pulled a stethoscope out of it. Without a word he fastened it securely in his ears and placed the other end on Grace's chest.

“Breathe in deeply.”

Grace rattled a deep breath. Her heart was racing. The nervousness was almost unbearable. Dr. Johnson listened carefully. He tilted his head slightly, moving the stethoscope to different places on her chest and back. Grace continued breathing deeply.

“Grace, what else have you experienced since you've been sick? And how long have you been sick?”

Which question do I answer first? I don't really know how long I've been sick—and I don't know what's been wrong with me, except the episodes that I have during the week.

“Sometimes during the day my head hurts. I've even heard strange sounds—like high-pitched sounds going in my head. It's not every day that it's so bad but it happens a lot. I think I've been sick for a long time, but I don't know for sure.”

Grace was downcast. She had told the doctor too much. She knew it would only be a matter of time that he would start asking her to answer harder questions; and she was afraid that she would not know how to answer him.

“Have you taken any vitamin supplements?”

Grace blinked a couple of times, trying to figure out what he asked. She had never heard of supplements.

“I don't think so.”

“Come to the clinic and we'll give you vitamin supplements. They'll help your baby, even if you're sick.”

Grace smiled cautiously.

“Grace, tell me about your husband. What does he do?”

“He drives trucks. He's very busy.”

“Has he been sick?”

“Not recently. He was sick a few months ago but he's better now.”

“What was wrong with him?”

“He had a fever. He also had a rash. But he's better, now, and I didn't get sick because of him.”

“What has your pregnancy been like?”

“It's been very difficult.”

Dr. Johnson studied Grace's face closely.

What's he thinking? He can't be much older than me. How did he get to be a doctor at such a young age? I don't want to answer personal questions about my family—I wish he wouldn't ask. I suppose he's only doing what he must do to help me, but I don't want him to think I have something terrible and tell Ms. Flora. He's reaching in his bag. What does he want to do?

“Grace, it would be a good idea if you came to the clinic and let us take a blood sample. There are illnesses we can test you for that might explain why you have been sick. It doesn't take long, and it won't cost you anything right away. Plus, you can get free vitamin supplements. In

fact,” Dr. Johnson motioned to Ms. Flora. “Ms. Flora, would you mind bringing Grace a glass of water? I’m going to give her a vitamin.”

Ms. Flora nodded and walked quickly into the house with the glass cup Grace had been holding. Dr. Johnson reached deep in his bag and retrieved a small packet with English writing on it. “This is an iron sample. Go ahead and take it with the water she brings you, because it’s the only serving you’ll need for awhile.”

Grace clasped the small packet in her hand. “Thank you.”

“There are other vitamins and nutrients that your body needs. In fact, I’m heading straight to the clinic in a few minutes, and you can come with me. We can take a blood sample AND give you samples of all the pre-natal supplements your baby needs. Whatever you do, I’d strongly urge you to give us a blood sample.”

Grace pondered his words.

What would he find in my blood? Blood is blood—how will that help me? Lord, should I do this? I’ve never been tested for anything before—maybe he thinks something is wrong with me? Oh, I hope not—although he said this was a standard thing, so maybe he’s only doing it because he must do it and not because he thinks he should. I don’t want to, but I’m afraid to say no.

“Grace, you should get your blood tested for illness. If you haven’t been well there may be something wrong that the doctor can help you with. Please promise me that you’ll go to a clinic and get a test done before you have your baby—.”

Rose’s voice keeps coming to my head. I know she’s right. She’s so wise, too. Well, if

I'm to have my blood tested, I must travel to the clinic, and I don't have the energy for that. I'm not sure that I can go through so much effort. But what's the harm? I can let him take the blood but I don't have to know what it is that he finds. I just want him to tell me if my baby's well. Outside of that, I don't need to know anything.

“Ok, I will. But first, I want to know if my baby's well.”

“I can check for your baby's heartbeat if that'll reassure you.”

“Yes, yes, please. And I'll allow the clinic to take blood.”

Dr. Johnson moved the stethoscope to Grace's stomach. He had to squat down for some time, moving the stethoscope around to different places. Finally, he looked up at Grace and nodded.

“I can hear a heartbeat. I would strongly recommend that you visit a pre-natal doctor, though.”

Grace sat on the porch, watching the sky and listening to the sounds of the afternoon. Ms. Flora still worked in the garden, and Grace realized that the events of the day would likely prevent the house from being cleaned. Dr. Johnson fidgeted around through his white bag, and with a nod of his head, he said, “Grace, I'm about ready to go back. Come along, and I'll show you where the clinic is and introduce you to the nurse.”

Grace thought for a moment.

I must also find time to buy food—that is, if Ms. Flora is still willing to advance my payment for next month. I suppose I'll go after visiting the clinic—.

“Yes, I'll go with you.”

“Great! Come along, now, and we'll get this taken care of quickly.” Dr. Johnson put his

hand out to Grace, grabbed her hand and pulled her up. As she pulled herself up with the support of his arm, Grace remembered for an instant what it was like to have a man care for her. John was a good husband, but he was pre-occupied most of the time. And he was always gone. Dr. Johnson was a caring man, and he saw Grace as a woman in need rather than a woman to pity. Grace was amazed that he would take the time to advise her and walk her to his clinic.

Ms. Flora rose, wiping her hands on her shorts once again. “Grace, I have some money to give you for food. Consider it a gift from my family to yours. Wait just a minute, David.” Ms. Flora trotted up the porch and into her house. Within a minute she had returned. She held a small woven purse.

“Here’s 1500 francs, Grace. That should buy you food for the week.” Ms. Flora said with a quiet voice.

Grace bowed her head graciously, unsure of what to say or how to express gratitude. “Ms. Flora, I—this is too kind of you. I’ll never forget your generosity.”

Ms. Flora took Grace's right hand, placing the small purse in her open palm. As she held Grace's hand in hers, she looked up at Grace with wet eyes. “Grace—I never knew, and I’m—I’m so sorry for your suffering. All these months you’ve walked all the way to my house—and I didn’t really know—you always did such a good job with cleaning that I was sure you were fine.”

Ms. Flora stopped abruptly. She breathed deeply and smiled. “I wish you all the best. I hope that you get the answers you need today.”

Father, I needed your help and You gave me more than I could've hoped for. This man who entered the gate today—well, you know, I didn't really think he could do anything to help me. Even more, I never thought that Ms. Flora would give to me so freely. Now, I'm going to a

clinic. My baby may have a chance for a healthier life now! Thank You, thank You!

Grace and Dr. Johnson walked together across the yard as Jacques opened the gate for them to leave. Jacques nodded his head to each of them as they made their way back onto the dirt road that led them up the hill. Dr. Johnson whistled to himself. Grace shuffled along with him, taking heavy breaths and small steps. Dr. Johnson pointed to a building across the street.

“I was over there before I came to see you. I’ve been making house calls all day long. I’m glad that Ms. Flora called me to come see you, Grace. And what a coincidence that I was so close by.”

Grace thought about his words. “I believe God knew I was in need.”

Dr. Johnson nodded. “God must have known something—but, of course, there are plenty of people here in need, and just not enough of me to go around—ha.” Dr. Johnson chuckled lightly.

Grace was uncertain what to say in response. She could only feel gratitude.

“Grace, may I ask, how old are you?”

“I’m twenty-two.”

“Really? My, you ARE young! I’m only about twenty-seven myself—that is, I will be next month.”

Grace smiled shyly.

As they went over the hill, Dr. Johnson led the way down a side road to the left. Grace followed, relieved that they were going downhill for once.

Father, Dr. Johnson is an angel from heaven. He must be. Why has he taken time to tend to me when there are so many others if You, Yourself didn’t send him? What will this clinic

be like? I'm not sure what to expect, but I expect that other doctors will examine me and my blood? Lord, I'm very nervous about the nurse taking my blood—I know it'll hurt—what if I faint? I've had friends who have had blood taken, and I remember that one of them fainted awhile back—who was that? I don't remember. I just know that I can faint because I've been fainting so easily. I hope the nurse is kind like Dr. Johnson.

Dr. Johnson's phone rang three times during the ten minute walk. Each time, he spoke rapidly. His British accent would become more pronounced whenever he became frustrated. The people who called always seemed to want to know where he was and who he was with, because he would say something like, “I'm walking a patient to the clinic and I'm only a few minutes away. What? No, no, don't allow her to do that. She must be supervised—she's a volunteer but we ARE liable. I'll be there soon—just wait.”

Every phone call ended with a sigh. Once he even cursed. He seemed wrapped up in thoughts that he would not utter out loud. Grace was exhausted, but she walked along, feeling the strain in her back and the nausea in her stomach. She also felt concerned for Dr. Johnson. He seemed tense.

Even in his tension, every couple of seconds, Dr. Johnson would look back at Grace, who followed a few feet behind him. Each time, he would stare her directly in the eye and smile. “You doing all right, there, Grace?”

“I'm fine, thank you.”

At one point, Dr. Johnson slowed his pace and turned to Grace. “Do you need to rest?”

“Really? Oh, yes, if that's OK. Thank you.” Grace stopped, stretched her back and unwrapped her hair to wipe the sweat off her face.

Dr. Johnson dialed on his phone and in a frustrated tone asked, “Is the child still there waiting? Well—don't be so dim. Give the child whatever you have—okay, well if that's all, then that should be fine. His father had a temperature, but I allowed him to leave after giving him some medicine. The child should be released as soon as possible, we don't have the room—what? Well, let his mother take him! The father won't be back anytime soon, he works all day. I sent him back to work. I had to. Well, I'll be there soon.”

Dr. Johnson rubbed his eyes with both hands. “Grace, I'm afraid the clinic is very busy today. We'll work with you as soon as possible—but it may be a few hours. If that's a problem, I'm so sorry.”

Grace became worried.

Should I do this, Father? I don't want to leave Patience all day with no food in her stomach. Either I go to the clinic and wait for hours to be tested, or I go to the market and buy food for us. What shall I do? If I turn around now, I can go the market and buy bread, fruit, vegetables—and so many other wholesome things for my daughter. Yes, I know, Father. I'll go to the clinic.

“I'm ready to walk again, Dr. Johnson.”

“OK, please, come along.” Dr. Johnson extended his hand to her again. This time, he held her arm gently and walked beside her. Grace felt slightly uncomfortable, but she knew it was important that she have his support as she walked. As cars honked loudly down the street, Grace observed a small, green building tucked away in the mass of dilapidated storehouses. People waited in a line that stretched around the corner of the building. Grace felt nervous, and didn't look forward to the prospect of waiting in line.

There were many children running about, squealing and laughing. Then others stood with joyless expressions against the wall. One child was skin and bone in his mother's arms. Men stood doubled over, women squatted with their chins resting on their arms. Dr. Johnson stared blankly at the overwhelming line of waiting people. "Looks like I won't be making anymore house calls today." He looked over at Grace. "We're here. I'm afraid I won't be the one drawing your blood, today, but that's all right because my nurse is here to do that. Follow me, please." Grace impulsively gripped the doctor's arm as he led her through the crowded doorway. Grace hadn't really known what to expect. She had never seen the inside of a clinic before. When they first entered, it was as though the room would collapse on them at any moment. The walls wore familiar signs that Grace had seen around the city: the red ribbon for Slim, and another sign that Rose explained was for water sanitation. Grace recognized these signs, and it began to make sense. They were going to test her for Slim. She suddenly felt as though she wasn't really walking through the building—but that she was being pulled inside. She wanted so badly to turn around and run out—except that it was the pre-natal care she was interested in. Grace didn't really know if she could have Slim, but she preferred simply to not know.

If I just allow them to take my blood, then a doctor will examine me and the health of my baby. OK, I can do this!

A child sat on a small table while a woman in white placed a stick in her mouth. Grace walked by slowly, gazing at the young girl who knew so little about the heaviness of life. Her yellowed eyes looked much like the eyes of so many other children. She was simply another one; facing the truth, responding to the anecdotes of the doctors and the fears of mothers.

The clinic had a strange smell. It reminded her of the cleaner that she used in Ms. Flora's house, except stronger. Behind that scent, however, was a pungent saturation of illness in the air. No air freshener could hide it. Hundreds of sick people came to the clinic every day. There was

no way that it could ever be kept truly clean. This wasn't what Grace had pictured. As she followed Dr. Johnson, she peeked into every room, nook, and open space. She saw only three beds, and they were all full. Those who had seen the doctor before were either waiting to ask a question, or they had nowhere to go. They were lingering.

Dr. Johnson took Grace into a room near the back of the clinic. A woman in white sat at a table with another patient. She held a needle in her hand and the woman at the table winced. Grace became frightened. The nurse looked so serious—she almost scowled. Her blonde, curly hair was pulled back, although some fell in her face. Her wrinkled forehead was sweaty and her lips were pursed in her tense effort.

When the nurse had finished, the patient looked relieved but slightly stunned. As she tried to stand, the nurse grabbed her other arm quickly and shook her head.

“Wait a minute. You'll faint if you stand now.”

Dr. Johnson took his chance in the quiet moment. “Amelia, this is Grace. She's getting her first blood test today. She's pregnant, so be nice to her.”

Amelia rolled her eyes. “We've been flooded all day, and you've been gone! You should've seen it earlier—.”

Dr. Johnson waved his hand at her, as though to silence her. He let go of Grace's arm. “Amelia will take the blood sample and we'll test it. Please come back for the results.”

Grace nodded. “Thank you, so much.”

Dr. Johnson smiled. “I hope to see you again, Grace! I pray for God's blessings over you and your child.”

Grace watched him walk out. She became worried. She didn't want to be alone in this sad place. She watched as Amelia ordered the other patient to leave. She motioned indifferently for

Grace to sit. The other patient, a teenage girl, looked Grace in the eye in such a way that Grace became nervous. This was going to be her greatest fear.

“Sit down and it'll be fast,” Amelia stared up at Grace, as if only to tolerate her presence. Grace sat and sighed deeply. She tried to get comfortable as the nurse Amelia rubbed a wet cotton ball on Grace's arm.

“It'd help if you didn't look while I do it. This is the needle I'll be using. It's clean.” Amelia held up the needle for Grace to see. Grace shuddered.

“How far along are you?”

“I think four or five months,” Grace responded, feeling suddenly more relaxed at the thought of her baby.

“You don't look well for delivering a baby, Grace,” Amelia said matter-of-factly. “Are you planning on visiting the pre-natal doctor today?”

“Oh, yes, yes, nurse, as soon as I'm finished with this I'll see the doctor.”

Amelia blinked a few times before saying, “You *do* know that there is a line to wait in, right? I mean—you did see all the sick women and children outside, didn't you? You'll have to wait in line like them.”

Grace was confused. She felt it would be detrimental to wait in line for so long.

I must have misunderstood. I thought that since I was already in here, I could see a doctor as soon as my blood test is finished. That's why I came here, after all! Father, this is so discouraging. I'll be in line all day long—and the line is only going to be longer once I'm allowed to take my place and wait! Surely this isn't what You had planned, or is it?

Grace tried not to watch the needle penetrate her arm, but she was so distracted by her worry that she didn't care much about the pain. She watched as the needle slowly sucked blood out of her arm and into the tube. She felt slightly light-headed, and the pressure around where the

needle was inserted was painful but it wasn't as bad as she thought it would be. Amelia pulled the needle out of Grace's arm and immediately taped a cotton ball to the site. Grace remembered how the other girl had tried to stand, and how Amelia pulled her back down onto the chair, so Grace remained seated as Amelia scribbled on a pad of paper.

“Your full name?”

“Kapyate Grace.”

“Age?”

“Twenty-two.”

“What are we testing you for?”

“I—I don't know. Dr. Johnson wanted to test my blood, but I don't know what for.”

“Hm. OK.”

Amelia scribbled quickly. She looked at Grace and nodded. “You may go wait in line now.”

Grace bowed her head. “Thank you.”

The nurse pointed her to a back door down the hall. As she walked down the hall, she couldn't ignore the crying she heard coming from behind the wall on her right side. She slowed her pace to listen. It was a child. Grace placed her ear and hands against the wall and listened. The child was in great pain. Grace felt heaviness come over her spirit. She knew that she must keep walking, and do what was necessary to care for herself, but she couldn't bear the thought of the child's pain. Eventually, Grace removed herself from the wall, backed away, and walked on with a numbness she couldn't understand or explain.

Once outside, Grace immediately saw the end of the line at the side of the building. There must have been twenty people waiting to go in before her. She found herself leaning against the wall next to a man with his hat brim pulled over his eyes and nose. She watched the children play

in ignorant bliss as their family members stood motionless against the wall. Grace stood silently, embracing her stomach with her tired arms.

I wonder where John is right now. He would never guess that I'd be standing in this line at the clinic today! For all I know, he could go home tonight and wonder where I am. Babra will wonder where I am. Of course, they don't need to know that I've been at the clinic. Father, I'm very worried. Help to fight the worry that tries to lord itself over me. I only want my baby to be healthy, and if this is the way to insure that, then this is Your will and I'm thankful. But, I'm still so afraid.

In the midst of laughter and whimpers, Grace closed her eyes. She missed John.

“Amikuru.”

He was tall and handsome. He held a Bible in his right hand and wore a yellow button-up shirt with black pants. He was the most attractive man Grace had seen in her church. She knew that he was named John, but he was years older than she. Her sister had mentioned him before, but Grace never met him before this day. Grace smiled cheerfully.

“Nemeza.”

John smiled. “Are YOU Grace? I know your sister. Your brother is a friend of mine too, yet I've never met you. May God bless you so much.”

Grace felt a yearning in her heart that first day for this man named John. He was unlike any man she had known. The men she knew were either too flirtatious or strange for her to be interested. She could tell he was different.

Father, I'm ready. This man is special, I know, but is he going to want me?

A few months later, that question was answered. John and Grace announced to the

church their desire to marry, and the congregation supported them. Grace was only seventeen at the time. John was twenty-four. He hadn't been to the university, but he was successful in his job as a trucker. He was only able to attend church every other Sunday, so every other two weeks, they would worship together, happily. Things were so good then.

John was so much like a father to Grace. At first, he was dedicated to their church and fatherhood. While Grace loved him blindly, John started to change. It started with the increase in his work hours. He would be gone on longer business trips, and some weeks he would only be home for three of the seven nights. While he always brought money home, and could even make it to church every few weeks, Grace sensed a change in their intimacy. Even his relationship with Patience became less involved. When she found out she was pregnant a second time, John became loving again for a few weeks, only to become distant again afterward. Their relationship had changed, and Grace didn't know how to fix it.

That's why I stand here alone, waiting at this sad clinic with lines of sick people. John doesn't care like he used to. He can act like it at church, but people can tell. Rose can tell. Tsk. She can sense every pain and tension.

* * *

December 2005

“Grace, I think it's time you came to *my* church.”

“I like my church, Babra,” Grace remarked half-heartedly.

All I want is to be well. That's all I want. Life has been too hard for me—the labor was such a terrible experience—to know that my child was born half-dead made me want to die myself. I feel so far from You, Father. Where have you been?

“Graaaaaace, my pastor is very good. He’ll show you that God can answer your prayers! He’ll help you claim your faith once again! Why don't you give it a try? I know you've missed church for the past three months! Just come with me this Sunday, and you'll see.” Babra spoke with the candor of a divine messenger. Grace continued her sewing as though she was too focused to hear Babra, but her slow stitches gave her distracted mind away.

“Ok, Babra. Does this church have a place for Patience? And—do you think that John might like it?” Grace asked with a hope-filled heart.

“Well, my children go listen to a teacher and sing songs during the main service. I think Patience would be fine. And I think John would be comfortable at this church. It's a bit far from here, but you'll see that it's worth it. I'll come knocking at your door on Sunday and we'll go together.”

Grace smiled. *At last, she thought, something different—how refreshing this will be for us—we need to go to church, and it would be nice to start over somewhere. Hmm, Mary warned me about Babra's church, though. She says they speak heresy there. What would it matter? She's in Uganda now. She won't know.*

John had been gone on a three-day long trip that week, and Grace anticipated the conversation that would occur.

I'll just say to him, 'John, we need to visit this church. You'll like it. We'll be fine, if we just ask God for help--' Wait, no, no. I can't accuse him of not needing God—he wouldn't like that. I'll just ask him to go with me, because I want him to, and not because he needs it.

John came home tired and weak. He was losing so much weight. Grace worried about him, but didn't want to make a big deal out of it. She hoped he was just depressed—because that would be a good alternative compared to other possible factors. His trips were taking all his energy out of him. Every time he would return from a trip, even if it was only for half a day, he would lie down for the remainder of the night. Grace wondered if he had been eating. She didn't know how to offer help—especially since she was also sick. It seemed as though she became more frail each day. Her skin was particularly susceptible to rash and infections, and fortunately for her, neighbors like Babra and Wella's husband offered her simple remedies. They weren't always successful, but the rashes eventually went away on their own. Grace and John were having a difficult time.

Grace was now more thankful than ever that her sister, Mary, had taught her to sew. Eliazar always did her the favor of picking up her wares and taking them to the market. It was a wonderful way to help her family. John would sometimes be so ill that he couldn't leave their home. Grace experienced days like that as well, but since she worked at home, it was easier for her to handle. Sometimes, her blankets, table cloths, skirts and shawls would make enough money in one day to feed the family for three days! She thanked God for this, although she hadn't done so recently.

“John? Are you well?” Grace asked lovingly.

“I—I'm so thirsty. Grace—.”

Grace picked herself up slowly and went to the extinguished fire outside where she had been boiling water. She picked up an old bottle and filled it to the brim with the clean water that she had prepared for her husband and daughter. Patience was playing with Babra's children next door, and Grace could hear her squealing laughter as the children chased a home-made football

around the grassy knoll between the shanties. She smiled to herself as she carried the bottle to her famished husband.

His eyes were shut tightly and his teeth clenched together as if to silence his wails. Grace was having a better day than the day before. She had blacked out two times from the pain in her stomach. She caught a bug of some sort that caused her to throw up everything she ate—including water. It wasn't the first time. However, John seemed much worse this day than even Grace had been the day before. Grace caressed his burning forehead with her palm as she lifted the bottle to his mouth. He relented enough to part his mouth for a drink of water. Then, he simply lay across the floor as though unconscious.

Grace wanted to ask him about church, but it wasn't the proper time.

* * *

Rap, rap, rap...

"Grace? Oh, Graaaaaace! Wake up and come to church—you said you would!"

"I'm not sure, Babra; John is not well today."

Grace peered through the doorway at her young neighbor. Babra wore her church outfit. Grace still wore her night clothes. Her head hurt terribly, and the ringing in her ears had given her insomnia. John coughed agonizingly in the corner. He was wrapped in a blanket. His eyes were red with fatigue.

Babra motioned to John, "Grace, go to church so you can pray for him!"

"No, Babra! He's so sick, can't you see?"

Babra walked into the house and crouched closely to John. "John, God wants you to be healed. Come to church and make an offering and see what He does!"

Grace was baffled at this comment. Babra had taken on the voice of the divine messenger

once again. In this state, one could not tell her no. John trembled and coughed into the dirty blanket that he'd been sleeping under for days. He looked at Babra with an irritated scowl. He wasn't convinced.

“Now, John, don't you want to return to God? He'll make you whole again. Believe me, I've seen it!”

“Babra, please, go ahead. We're not able to join you this morning. We're so ill. Please go so you don't also turn up sick.”

Babra put her hands on her hips and sighed deeply. She remained inside their home, looking back and forth at Grace and John.

“Grace, come with me. If John doesn't come, then we can go pray for him. Bring some money to make an offering and you'll be amazed at what happens. I'm telling the truth. My pastor prayed at church last Sunday—he said, 'One of you in this room has a sick neighbor. If you look at the words of Jesus, remember He said, “Let the sick come to me and be healed.” If you're a follower of Jesus, you'll believe this. Give unto Him of yourselves and He'll pour back into you twice as much. Bring the ill into the house of the Lord and they'll partake in His healing powers!' Grace, don't you see, Pastor Solomon was talking about you and John! Come to church with me, please?”

Grace couldn't say no. John remained in the corner, collapsed, and unable to move. Grace hesitated to leave him, but her hopes were so high because of Babra's words. Patience was outside playing, but she loved church. Grace began to feel better about going.

*Father, You HAVE remembered us! Why else would You give Babra such a message?
How You love us! How I love You! I trust You, I trust You—.*

Babra and Grace walked out the door.

“How many of you are sick? Raise your hands.”

Everybody had closed their eyes, and Grace weakly raised her hand. She heard the pastor praying over each lifted hand, and she knew when he prayed for her because her heart leapt when he prayed for a “sick family member who wasn't able to attend.” Grace's heart was aching for intimacy with the mighty God.

After the prayer had concluded, the pastor gave a short message about endurance. He spoke about the life of Job. The pastor told the story in a way that Grace had never heard before. He said Job was afflicted and continued getting worse because he didn't believe in God's desire to see him prosper. It wasn't until he fell on his face before God that he was given back all that he had lost. The pastor said it was because he finally embraced the promise of God. Grace became anxious, as a lone pup who only knows to run faster once it realizes it's lost.

So is that what we've been missing all this time? We've given up on God's plan to make us well again? How do we accomplish this? Oh, pastor, please speak more!

“If you give of yourself—and embrace God's destiny for you by making an offering, He *will* heal you. He *will* provide your daily bread. He *will* promote you at your work. You see, God's will for your life is more than you could ever dream!”

The offering plate made its way through the audience. Members threw money in left and right. The plate was almost overflowing by the time it reached Grace. She couldn't lift it, so Babra held it for her as she placed all of the wages from the day before into the plate.

Lord, I'm ready now, to see You victorious in my life. I trust that my husband will be well now. Accept this money on behalf of John. And then, when You have healing powers to offer me, I'll be ready.

During worship, the entire room shook with dancing and singing. Grace sat in her seat,

weeping and clapping as Babra prayed over her with shouts towards the heavens. It was exuberant. It was electrifying.

It was all a lie.

God didn't heal John. John died five hours after Grace and Patience returned home from Babra's church.

Earlier that afternoon, Patience ran into the house ahead of Grace. Then, Grace heard Patience crying. Grace walked as fast as she could to get to her husband and daughter. When she entered the house, John was lying on his stomach in his own vomit. He hadn't eaten for days, so Grace knew it couldn't have been food he'd vomited. In one shriek from Grace's mouth, Wella came knocking on the door.

"Grace? What's wrong? Oh, my God."

Wella stood frozen as Grace held John's head in her lap. Patience sat by her father, rubbing her eyes and whimpering.

Wella moved cautiously into the room. John's breathing was forced and slow. His eyes stayed closed. He was awake, but the pain was so intense that he didn't respond to anything that happened around him. He was slinking into that state where no one would be able to reach him. Wella took the wrapping off of her head and placed it between John's head and Grace's lap. Grace looked at her in shocked gratitude. Wella placed her hands on Grace's shoulders.

"Who can help, Grace? I'll go find them," Wella said kindly.

Grace thought quickly. "Wella, in the city, there's a clinic—and there's a doctor there named Dr. Johnson—get him, for he can help! Please, hurry!"

"Where's this clinic, Grace? There are many."

"Past the marketplace. It's up the hill, in an alley of old shops. There's a sign across from

it for the international university—and it's a green building! Thank you, thank you so much!”

Wella left quickly. Grace knew it would be at least an hour before anyone would arrive.

Three hours later, Grace still held John's head in her hands. She caressed his cheek lovingly as she sang lullabies in Kinyarwandan. She knew it wouldn't be long. Patience lay parallel to her father, staring at his sweaty face. She understood. Grace still prayed for John to be healed. She still hoped for the best.

God, I believe what the pastor said today. He said You can and will heal if we embrace Your promise! Well, I embrace Your promise! Please, heal my husband, oh Father, please heal him. I can't bear to be without him—.

Grace's songs turned into wails. It'd been no use. She gave her money to a church she had never been to for the sake of her family, and it yielded no results. Her heart ached with disappointment and fear. As each moment passed painfully by, Grace watched her husband disappear more and more. His skin felt clammy and his sweat soaked her skirt. His cheeks felt like putty. He was expiring.

A rap at the door caused Grace's heart to race. “Who's there? Come in, come in!”

Babra walked in and abruptly stopped. She covered her mouth and sank to her knees. Grace peered at her with wet eyes and a stern face. Babra stared blankly at John's limp body. There was nothing she could do.

“Grace, what—what's happened? Didn't you—didn't you pray for your husband?” Immediately she knew she had said the wrong thing.

Grace looked back down at her husband. “I want time with my family. ALONE. Please leave,” Grace said with warning in her voice. Babra stood and backed out slowly. As she

watched her friend caress her dying husband's face, she placed her head in her hands and bolted through the doorway. Her crying could be heard even after she entered her own home. Grace was numb to it. She beckoned Patience over to her. She placed one arm around her daughter and kept one hand on her husband's hot head. Patience cuddled up to her and didn't become restless, even after a long time had passed.

The sounds of the evening reached Grace's ears. Crickets chirped and branches shook steadily in the breeze. It had been hours since she found her husband on the floor. Wella hadn't returned. Grace's hopes had dissolved. There was nothing she could do now. Patience had fallen asleep on their pallet. Grace had laid John's head carefully on the cloth Wella had given her and fanned him with an old newspaper. When the hour came, John passed with an exhalation that disrupted the calm.

Grace looked down at her dead husband, who, after all these months, had finally come to love her again. After Robert died, John wept bitterly every night for a week. Even through her own pain, Grace comforted her husband, who suffered from the loss of his long awaited son and bore the weight of his own guilt. Grace didn't know why John felt so guilty—in her mind, it was she who hadn't taken good enough care of herself. She didn't ask what he meant when he would pray each night for God's forgiveness. He took so much of the blame on himself, and Grace worried that he carried too much responsibility on his shoulders.

After about three weeks, John began to resemble the man that Grace married. He spoke tenderly to her and played with Patience when he was home. He even made an effort to buy food from the market when he was able. Grace sensed such a profound reversal in John's behavior that she thanked God every day for the way He had used the death of their child to change her husband's heart. Although John was closer to Grace, he was less enthusiastic about going to

church. Even though he prayed frequently, he would shy away from meeting with church members. Grace didn't understand, but she had her suspicions. She often wondered if John had been unfaithful in the past—but she didn't want to ask. She knew it could only make trouble, although it would explain his apparent shame.

He became ill very quickly after Robert's death. John seemed to catch every illness that went around. Although he could still drive the trucks, he seemed less energetic and more lethargic. Eventually, he could no longer play with Patience anymore. Patience didn't understand at first, but she too realized that her father needed rest when he came home.

Grace had dreaded this day for the past two months. His health had deteriorated so quickly. What frightened her most was that she was experiencing similar symptoms. Her appetite had never increased back to normal, even after she gave birth to Robert. She tried to eat, even when she wasn't hungry, but some days went by when she didn't even notice her empty stomach.

As Grace sat with the body of her husband, she stared somberly at her sleeping daughter. Patience was mostly healthy, except for some minor illnesses that came and went. Still, Grace feared that Patience might start exhibiting the same symptoms that she and John had endured. Grace's head ached more with the thought of something happening to her only daughter.

John was buried five days later. His family traveled to Kigali to witness the service. There were four hundred people in attendance. They sang worship songs and lifted their hands in prayer. Rose and Joseph offered to have a reception at their home for close friends and family. As Grace greeted every attendee, her head throbbed and her chest rattled. She was so afraid that she might have caught John's horrible cough. She hadn't told anyone what John's symptoms were. There was an illness that had such a stigma, and victims of it could be easily pointed out based on the sound of the cough. Grace wasn't sure if John had that illness, but she suspected it

to be so. His friends were nowhere to be found the days before he passed. They might've known something about him that others didn't know. That's what Grace feared the most.

The evening of the reception, Grace sat on a bench in Rose's garden. It was a cloudless night. The cool of the evening brought a fresh breeze that caressed her face playfully. She looked around the garden that surrounded her and was reminded of her daughter. Patience loved all flowers. She could've spent all day skipping around, picking every flower in sight.

If only I could've had one more day with John—sick or well. And what I would give to only have stayed with him in his hours of need. Father, is John with You, now? If he's to be far from me, then there's no other place better for him than by Your side.

Tears fell down Grace's cheeks. She cried silently in the garden, with the moon suspended high above her—the only witness. Grace heard the front door open. Light footsteps approached her, followed by the clap of high heels.

Patience hugged her mother's neck from behind. Grace smiled affectionately. Patience always knew how to bring a smile to her mother's face, no matter what the circumstances. The high heels came to a stop by Grace's side. It was Rose.

Without a word, Rose took a seat next to Grace, whose face was soaked in tears. Rose put her arm around Grace instinctively. Grace laid her head on her shoulder. Patience took to the flowers and hummed quietly to herself as the two women sat in the stillness of the night.

Grace couldn't restrain herself. "If only I'd been there with him. Did you know? I left John to go to a church led by a heretic? Ha! I thought John might get better if I prayed the right prayer, or gave the right amount of money. But, now I know that God's will isn't always what I want it to be."

Rose tilted her head thoughtfully. "Who said this was God's will, Grace?"

“Isn't it?”

Rose pulled a handkerchief out of her pocket and wiped Grace's face. With her free hand, she patted Grace's cheek as she faced her. “Grace, God didn't will for your husband to suffer and die like this. God didn't will for any of this to happen. It started with Adam and Eve. It's our curse—but we're promised deliverance—through our Savior, Jesus. John's with Him, now. That's no punishment, you know?”

Grace pondered her words for a moment. She nodded her head in silence, and brought it to rest on Rose's shoulder once again.

“Does God truly love me, Rose?”

“More than He loves Himself.”

* * *

February 2005, 2:30 P.M

Lord, I don't know if I can stand in this line any longer!

The clouds had moved in after the hot morning. Locusts chirped incessantly and buzzards flapped loudly by, but grew quieter as the wind grew stronger. Under the grey clouds, the city of Kigali seemed small and vulnerable. Up the street, pedestrians cleared the roads and street vendors gathered their wares for the day. The line to the clinic had moved gradually for three hours, yet, Grace still waited her turn behind eight people. Of the eight people, five of them were children. Two of them belonged to the same mother. She held the smaller of the two children on her hip while the other leaned against her leg. Both appeared to have similar symptoms: coughs and lethargy. The man next to Grace kept his hat pulled down over his eyes for the entire three hours of waiting in line. She watched him in curiosity and caution as he puckered his lips and

clenched his fists in response to the waves of pain that appeared to be moving through his body. At one point, he squatted on the ground with his back against the wall. Grace wondered what was wrong, but she didn't dare ask, nor did she move too close.

Grace watched as the wind blew dirt and leaves along the road in front of them. She watched the clouds in the sky as they grew ominous and dark. Every time the line started moving, Grace's heart leapt with gratitude; until the line stopped again and the endless standing forced her to lean herself against the wall and slink to the ground. At one point, she heard the ringing again, forcing her to close her eyes and cover her face. Once it subsided to a level she could handle, Grace looked towards the sky in desperation.

It looks as though it'll rain. I've been here so long that I simply can't believe that I'll ever see a doctor today. Tsk. I would've seen one by now if they had enough doctors. Maybe Dr. Johnson will see me. I hope so. Father, I know that there are so many others who are sicker than I am, but I'm here for my baby. Please, have mercy on him, if nothing else! It doesn't matter what's wrong with me.

The first drop of rain hit Grace's cheek; followed by another, and another. It didn't fall hard; but it did continuously, causing the mother ahead to cover the faces of both her sick children. Grace stared down at the ground as small puddles formed at her feet. She was surprised at how refreshing the soft rain felt on her body. The morning at Ms. Flora's house had been sweltering, and as much as she'd dreaded rain during her walk home, she thanked God for its soothing power as she stood in line. The only concern she had about the rain was that the street vendors wouldn't be out selling for long if the rain continued. A few of them stayed near shop windows where they could sit under a canopy or a roof; and she hoped to find one of those

when she left the clinic, although it wouldn't be likely.

The rain fell for the next twenty minutes. It never fell hard, but the wind blew it into Grace's face every so often. Grace's senses woke up as she stood holding her round stomach in the rain that was unforeseen and uninvited. Her clothes were quickly saturated in rain water and after the twenty minutes of steady precipitation, Grace felt strangely rejuvenated. The children ahead of her who had seemed so ill smiled as they took turns sticking their toes in the puddles of water. All eyes had been on the front of the line, but at that moment, people's eyes were looking all over, taking in the beauty of a recent shower that brightened the greens in the trees and darkened the reds of the dirt. As another patient stepped inside the clinic, the sun seemed to rip the clouds apart as it appeared once again in its mid-afternoon position. Grace hid her eyes from the sudden burst of sunlight in her face. Her mind seemed more able to concentrate now that the air was fresher.

On the walk home, I'll dry off anyway. For now, I'm just happy that it's almost my turn to go inside.

* * *

4:00 P.M

"What's your name?"

"Kapyate Grace."

"Yes, and how old are you?"

"I'm twenty-two."

"What's the reason for your visit today?"

"Dr. Johnson brought me here—I'm expecting a child."

An African man with a French accent scratched quickly with his pen on a small pad of

paper. He didn't look at Grace. He grabbed a form and made a few scribble marks on the front while Grace watched in confusion. The receptionist desk was too short for the tall man who used it. He grunted in French as he shuffled through papers and cursed when he knocked his pen on the ground.

After a few awkward moments, the man pointed to a room across the hall with his pen and nodded. "Go wait in there."

Grace walked as quickly as she could to the room he had directed her to. It was small. Grace hoped desperately for a place to sit, but the only available seat was a multi-colored child's seat. There was what appeared to be an operating table, but it was too high for Grace to sit on. So she stood with her hip leaning on the operating table, gripping the sides while staring vacantly at the various pictures and diagrams on the wall before her. Most of them were ads that she was used to seeing around the city. However, one of them was a beautiful picture depicting a baby in the womb of his mother. Grace stared in disbelief as she saw the outline of the protruding stomach and the illustrated baby resting comfortably inside. She moved towards the wall so she could place her hands on the picture. She traced the baby's body with her finger and smiled to herself.

So this is what it looks like on the inside? God—You are an artist, aren't you?

"Are you Grace?" A strange voice inquired from behind Grace.

Grace turned around and with a relieved smile, nodded her head.

"I'm Veronica. I'll be examining you today. Ah, I see you are at least in your second trimester! Congratulations."

The small woman with the long black hair and dark eyes looked up at Grace with a tired smile. Veronica fumbled with a clipboard in her hands and took out a small pencil from her

pocket. After scribbling something, she placed the small pencil behind her left ear.

“I spoke with Dr. Johnson, Grace, and he told me that you were having some health issues. You had blood drawn first, right?”

“Yes,” Grace answered. At that point, a piercing melody burst from Veronica's pocket. Without hesitation, Veronica reached her hand into her pocket and pulled out her phone.

“Hello? Oh, yes, I did. I'm in the next room—but I'm with somebody right now. Can you give me about five minutes or so?”

Grace waited patiently. She was so relieved to finally be seeing a doctor that she didn't mind the interruption. After a minute, Veronica hung up and looked at Grace with an unsure expression followed by a smile.

“Grace, this is what we call a pre-natal visit. But, I have multiple patients that I'm taking turns with, so our visit will have to be in spurts. I hope that's not a problem. I'm assisting Dr. Johnson with some of his more critical patients, and since I'm the only one available to do that, I'll be taking turns with each patient.”

Veronica put her stethoscope around her head and placed the other end on Grace's heart. She felt around the chest and the back, and also on the stomach. She then took Grace's wrist and held it firmly while watching the time on her watch. Grace was confused, but not bothered by Veronica's behavior.

“All right, Grace, how about sharing with me what your health has been like for the past few months?”

“I'm always so tired. My head always hurts. I can't walk very far without wanting to faint. I also haven't been eating very much and I'm not hungry very often.”

“Hmm. That concerns me, Grace. How long has it been this way?”

“Since I first became pregnant, I think.”

“Is this your first child?”

“No. I have a daughter.”

“How long ago did you give birth to her?”

“It was almost three years ago.”

“Did you have any of these same problems during that pregnancy?”

“No.”

Veronica bit her lower lip. She nodded and pulled the pencil out from behind her ear and took notes on the sheet of her clipboard.

“OK, Grace, I need to step out for a few minutes. I need you to change into the gown on the shelf right there so I can examine you more closely when I come back. Leave the gown open. I don't know how long I'll be but don't go anywhere.”

Without waiting for a reply, Veronica turned and walked out of the room, pulling the curtain over the doorway.

5:00 P.M

I'm sure it's so late now. Patience is wondering where I am—and I still haven't bought any food.

Grace gripped the edge of the operating table with both hands and bent over slightly, relieving her tired back. She had changed into the thin, worn, and old-smelling hospital gown and waited restlessly for Veronica to return. It seemed as though she'd waited so long.

People constantly shuffled past the doorway and sometimes Grace's gaze would meet the gaze of a stranger as they looked through the holes of the curtain. The room was so small that there was nowhere she could hide from on-lookers. There was constant chatter going on around the small room, and very often the sound of children's crying could be heard nearby. Grace

waited—aching and miserable.

Finally, Veronica opened the curtain and walked in, wiping her hands on her shirt. She sighed heavily as she looked over the clipboard and tapped her pencil against the edge of it.

Click, click, click. Grace watched Veronica with eagerness.

“OK, Grace, now that you've changed, I'm going to examine you. This won't hurt, and it won't take long, either. After I do that, I'll have to take your height and weight—because I wasn't able to bring the scale in here earlier, but I have someone bringing it over to me in a few minutes. Now, turn so I can examine you.”

Grace obediently turned to face Veronica. Veronica gently felt around Grace's stomach and along her sides.

I hope she knows what she's feeling for. Her hands are so cold.

Veronica pressed slightly on Grace's stomach and held her hand there for a few moments before examining Grace's breasts. “Ok, my biggest concern is that you have very little body fat, Grace. Your baby needs more nourishment. Now, Dr. Johnson commented that the baby's heartbeat sounded a little slow when he listened for it earlier, and that could be a sign of a condition. Does your baby move very much—does he kick or do you ever feel him move?”

“Sometimes.”

“Ok, well, pay attention to how often he moves so that if he starts moving less, you'll notice. You also need to eat a balanced diet; which means you need to eat vegetables—and it would be better if they were cooked just so you could avoid bacteria and parasites. I would also suggest fruits and well-cooked meats as often as you can.”

Grace nodded. “Thank you, I'll try.”

Veronica scribbled more on her sheet before looking at Grace seriously and saying, “Grace, your blood test will be ready in about five days. It's extremely important that you return

for the results. If there's something seriously wrong, we may be able to give you medication to prevent harm to your baby. So far from what I can tell, your problems can likely be solved with vitamins and adequate nutrition. However, those two things will not help if you're sick—because your baby could become sick too."

Grace became fearful.

Oh Lord—I hope that changing my diet will be enough to help Robert. I hope it's not too late! No—no, of course it's not too late. You've saved us just in time! I believe You can fix this, and I pray that You will provide the food that's necessary for my baby and myself. This doctor thinks it's my poor diet that has made us ill! I'm so relieved!

While Veronica looked over her charts, the curtain opened and the unfriendly receptionist placed a flat box on the ground at Veronica's feet.

"Thanks, Edmond. Here's the scale, Grace. Just come over here and stand on it really quickly."

Grace stepped carefully onto the shaky, plastic box and watched as a needle swung back and forth between hash marks and symbols.

"121 pounds....huh. Grace, this is just what I suspected. Your weight is a bit low for being in your second trimester."

"I'll start eating more food and then I'll be healthier, just like you said."

Veronica stared thoughtfully at Grace. "Yes, there's that possibility. Just start eating better immediately. Within two weeks, please come back for a second visit, and we'll measure your progress. Now, stand over here—."

Veronica led Grace to the wall and marked above Grace's head with her pencil on the wall. She picked up a ruler and measured from the floor to the mark on the wall, then scribbled on the

sheet of the clipboard. “Ok, you may get changed now. Before you leave, stop by the front desk and Edmond will give you some vitamins to take home.”

Grace was beaming. “Thank you, thank you, so much.”

As Grace changed back into her damp clothes, she looked back at the picture on the wall. She envisioned her baby boy inside her stomach, resting as peacefully as the baby in the drawing. Grace felt reassured and hoped for the best.

Thank you, Father, for bringing me here and showing me this picture. When I shop today, I'll be sure to buy as much as I can of what Robert and I need.

* * *

1:24 A.M, April 2005

“What? She's only in her seventh month!”

“Yes, yes, but she has been so sick and now she's in labor, please, come!”

Rose ran inside her house to gather towels, blankets, and a thermos of water as Wella waited by the front door, panting and fear-stricken.

Joseph called from the living room, “Rose, shall I bring the children and come with you?”

“John will need you. So it would be good for you to come. Now where did I put that bag —.”

Rose frantically shuffled through her closet, trying to find a bag containing first aid supplies. “God please, please, I must find this bag—please! Ah! Thank you!” Rose pulled the black bag out of the closet. She quickly unzipped it and threw two towels and a blanket in as well as matches and three candles.

Rose whispered to herself anxiously, trying to remember if there was anything else she

needed to bring with her for delivering a baby. Her nerves jumbled her thoughts. She opened the bag again and looked over the contents for a few seconds before closing it and running out of the room. She heard her children whining as Joseph instructed them to get out of bed.

“I'm going on ahead with Wella!” Rose called out to her husband. Rose grabbed her keys and while doing so dropped the thermos of water. As she knelt to pick up the thermos, Joseph came into the entry way and knelt down beside her.

He pulled her to himself and started to pray.

“Father give my wife the hands of a doctor and protect Grace and her baby from injury or sickness. You, God, are the mighty healer. Impart Your wisdom to my wife as she seeks to care for the needs of our sister Grace. Your will be done, Your will be done....”

As Joseph prayed, Rose felt a sense of rejuvenation before embracing her husband and running out the door to go with Wella. They both ran without stopping. Rose lost one of her shoes as she ran, but she didn't waver. Grace's life was in serious danger. She had been sick for months—Rose had seen it and questioned Grace periodically but not often enough. She regretted it. The walk to Grace's house was not long, but this night it seemed as if they would never reach the road by Grace's house. Rose seldom traveled alone at night, but this was a night when routine was forgotten. Kigali was still awake and people roamed the streets, even at one-thirty in the morning. Rose and Wella ran as fast as they could as street-walkers looked on in curiosity.

Finally, the two women reached Grace's home. There was an eerie presence in the air that caused Rose to cringe and pray for God's deliverance. Without announcing her entrance, Rose pushed through the curtain of the doorway. In the dim light, she could see John crouched on the floor in the corner of the room. Upon her entrance, he quickly jumped to his feet and ran to Rose. He was covered in sweat. Patience sat on the pallet, looking very tired and confused.

Grace lay in the corner with a blanket beneath her and her legs spread apart. She was still. Rose looked at John and nodded while placing a hand on his shoulder. “I’ll care for her. Wait outside and pray.”

John nodded and hesitantly called Patience to follow him as he walked through the doorway and out into the night. Patience followed silently. Rose walked cautiously over to her friend who breathed irregularly and appeared unconscious. Upon closer observation, it appeared that Grace’s water had broken in the middle of the small room, right by the pallet she and her family shared. John left one small candle burning on the table, and Rose proceeded to place lit candles around the room. Once her eyes adjusted to the faint light, she opened her bag and pulled out the towels and the first aid kit.

“Grace? Grace? Can you hear me? Grace?”

“Oooohhhh—Imana...”

“Imana Ishimwe, yes, yes, your baby’s going to be born tonight, Grace. I’m here. John and Patience are outside. Open your eyes if you can hear me.”

Grace’s eyes fluttered open and after looking once at Rose, her expression changed from one of incoherence to one of comfort. “Rose, Rose, thank you, thank you—,” Grace’s voice trailed off but her eyes remained on Rose, who placed a folded towel beneath Grace’s head.

“Grace, you remember how to give birth, right? You’ve done it before, so you’re experienced and can do it. Don’t forget that. It’ll hurt, but I’ll be with you.”

Grace nodded tiredly and laid her head back on the towel. The contractions were intense to begin with, and after thirty minutes occurred more frequently. As the contractions worsened, Grace moaned and groaned and her body jerked in excruciating pain. Sweat ran down her entire face and her knuckles and teeth clenched tightly. Rose encouraged her.

“Push, Grace! Don't stop pushing! You can do it! I'm here, I'm here—.”

Grace cried and yelled loudly. Rose became worried.

“Rose, Rose, I'm going to die.”

“Breathe slower, Grace! You need to breathe more slowly—bigger breaths, yes, that's better.”

As Rose coached Grace in her breathing, she noticed something out of the corner of her eye on the floor below Grace. Grace was bleeding profusely. Rose tried to keep her eyes on Grace's face but kept looking back at that puddle forming on the floor. She placed the towel on the floor below Grace. Blood soaked the towel and the bleeding didn't stop. Rose tried to remain calm by focusing on Grace's breathing and pushing.

“Keep on pushing, Grace. You're doing well.”

For four hours, the struggle worsened. Grace was losing coherence more with each contraction and even stopped responding to Rose's instructions altogether. Rose felt completely helpless. Sweat poured down her face as she braced herself for trying to regain Grace's coherence. She unscrewed the lid from the thermos full of water and sprinkled it on Grace's chest and forehead. She spoke loudly to Grace, hoping that Grace would respond.

“Grace! Your baby needs you to wake up! Wake up!”

Grace lay in stillness and didn't flinch at Rose's words. She had passed out.

Rose sat, staring at her friend in complete surrender. There was nothing she could do when Grace was unconscious. She feared the worst for Robert, because Grace wasn't able to respond to her body's desperate attempts to give birth. Rose wiped her face with her sleeve and stood up to go outside and talk to John. She turned and looked back once at Grace, who appeared to be breathing but hadn't moved an inch from the position she had held for the last five

minutes. Rose walked out the door.

John jumped immediately from where he'd been sitting on the ground. He ran to Rose asking, "How is she? Is my son well? Can I go in now?"

Rose looked compassionately at John. As she looked into the desperate eyes of Grace's husband, tears welled up in Rose's eyes. She didn't know what to say.

John was alarmed. "I'm going in."

"No—," Rose appealed, as Joseph held John back.

"John, you must wait outside right now—all will be well," Joseph said, as he gripped John firmly by the shoulders.

Rose continued. "She's still alive. But the baby's still in her womb. She fainted, and there's nothing I can do right now but wait for her to wake up."

John grew panicked. "Why did she faint?"

"I think the pain was too much for her, John. I promise that as soon as she wakes up, I'll continue helping her and the baby will be delivered. All will be well."

Five minutes later.

What's happening to me? Where am I? Oh God—what's this feeling in my body? I can't move! My muscles don't work! Oh, God, help me! Save me!

"Help!" Grace cried from inside.

Rose, John, and Joseph all went to the door. Rose entered while the men kept their distance. John stared helplessly at his wife who had attempted to roll over in panic. He saw the blood that she had lost, and as Rose tried to help Grace into a position that was more comfortable, John turned and slowly walked to the side of the shack where he slinked down to the

ground. His eyes stared off into an unknown place. Joseph followed silently after. John wiped the sweat from his forehead and stared off blankly. Joseph took a seat next to him and prayed while the children all gathered around and lay their heads on the shoulders of their fathers.

Inside, Rose and Grace resumed their breathing exercises. This time, Grace was more responsive and seemed to push with more commitment. Rose coached her friend on, telling her to keep pushing. Soon, Rose saw the crown of the baby's head.

“OH! Grace! He's coming! I can see him! Push! Push!”

Grace screamed, as she pushed with all her might. Soon, the baby's head was almost completely out, and Rose watched in the faint light as the round head and tiny shoulders emerged. The head was alarmingly small. Rose moved closer to observe him more accurately. His shoulders emerged, followed by his arms, which were like tiny sticks. Rose was nervous, but grabbed the blanket from her bag and prepared to catch him as he emerged completely. Grace had stopped screaming, but with one final shriek, Robert's bottom half came out in one quick jolt. Rose wrapped him in her blanket, waiting for him to start crying. She patted his back, which seemed to rouse him to let out a squeak in response. Rose sighed out of relief at the sign of his breathing. Grace lay in the same position, exhausted and nearly unconscious once again. Rose looked more closely at Robert, and her heart sank. He was virtually skin and bones. He was about half the size of what she remembered Patience being when she was born. His skin was wrinkled and alarmingly pale. While he could breathe, the breaths he took were shallow and he was obviously struggling. He had a small layer of curly black hair and barely a hint of eyelashes. Rose knew his little body wouldn't be able to sustain the first hours of life.

Rose looked upon Robert and thought to herself, “Oh Father, I'm afraid, I'm so

afraid.”

Moments later, Rose was startled as John walked into the room and headed straight for her. Upon seeing the baby, he smiled and immediately took Robert out of Rose's arms. His face instantly changed from excitement to disbelief. He stared down at his son, whose entire body fought desperately to continue breathing. John watched as Robert's tiny face twitched in a pained state, as he let out a barely audible whimper.

Rose took one last tender look at her friend's baby who would never live to see the next day. She couldn't take the devastation in John's face, and it made her anticipate all the more the unstoppable grief that Grace had to face. She turned and stumbled out of the room, leaving John and Grace alone with their son.

John stopped breathing for an instant. Then, his shoulders began to shake as he clung to his son. He held Robert gently and closely, as if attempting to protect him from the inevitable death that approached. He whispered the same prayer five times over: “Father, I'm so sorry for what I've done—but please, spare my son, spare my son! Let him live in spite of me...”

Robert's breathing was irregular and agitated. He made no sound but for the occasional whimper, which showed that he was fighting to survive but that he was losing quickly.

Grace began to stir.

Has he been born? Is he well? I can barely open my eyes—but I'm alive because my body hurts all over. I want to see him, I want to see him—.

Grace's head bobbed from side to side as she attempted to open her eyes. Candle light flickered around her, and she accidentally looked straight into the flame and flinched. She didn't care, since she was eager to see her baby. She peered around the room, letting her eyes adjust to the subtle light from the candles. She heard a faint whisper nearby, and she looked to see John's

silhouette in the middle of the room.

John held a small bundle to his chest. He was praying, which made Grace wonder what was going on.

Grace wanted to see her baby. She couldn't wait to hold him. "John?"

The air was filled with a heavy grief. John carried the grief alone for an instant—in an instant that should've been his most joyful. Robert needed to meet Grace before it was too late. John walked silently over to his wife's side. He knelt down and, with a tearful sob, placed tiny Robert onto Grace's chest.

Grace's heart filled with bittersweet emotion. Her son was skinny and obviously unhealthy, but he was breathing! He was alive! Grace put her arms underneath him to change his position so she could see his face more clearly. He reminded Grace of his father, although he was certainly too young to have developed significant resemblance in his features. Grace hummed a song and carefully observed her son's faint breathing. Soon, his inhalations were excruciating and his whole body struggled in the process. He squeaked as he exhaled. With one final whimper, Robert's body froze. Grace and John both watched desperately, waiting for Robert to breathe—but he never did.

"Oh, God! Oh, God, no! No! No! Not my baby! Please! Take me! Take me instead! Oh, God! No, no, no—," his mother cried loudly to God.

Grace brought Robert's head to her shoulder and while hugging him, wept violently with her head resting against his. John was on his elbows and knees with his head to the ground, sobbing and praying for forgiveness, asking God to give him one more chance by bringing Robert back to him. It was too late.

* * *

Case #: 56879992-PK

Kapyate, Patience

January 2008

dare mr and mrs Reyyes,

hi. i patience and thanks for payying scool fees. My mom love you much and me to. I like flowrs and playing with my toyz. My freinds like it to. You are nice to mee and am so hapy. Igo to churc and say songs to Jesu and read wit mom. I love you

Love,

PatienCe

You may write a letter to your sponsored child on the page provided. Writing a letter to your sponsored child can improve their self-esteem and encourage them in their hard work. We strongly encourage that letters written to sponsored children not reflect economic disparities between sponsors and children. We encourage sponsors not to send pictures of their house or allude to their material wealth in their letters, because this can harm the child's self-esteem and make it difficult for him/her to relate to the sponsor.

* * *

“Grace Kapyate, Dr. Johnson is waiting for you in the lab. Go right on back.”

Grace had been waiting outside the clinic for two hours. The blood test had been taken seven months before, but Grace hadn't returned for the results. She didn't even recall how long ago it had been. She gave the receptionist her name and the receptionist called a young man over and told him to look through the records for Grace's file.

Grace neglected to return to the clinic for results because she was afraid of what she'd learn. The last clinic visit had given her some hope. The doctor hinted that a change in diet would've been enough to help Grace start to feel better. And Grace did make a better effort to eat more, which helped her to have more strength during the day. Sometimes she would throw up, but other times, it was so difficult to eat because her appetite was non-existent. She was still sick. She initially believed that her illness was because of malnutrition alone; she didn't really believe that it was something else. She didn't want to believe it, so she didn't return to the clinic. When Robert and John died, she realized that she could no longer hide behind ignorance, because

she was all that Patience had. It was for Patience that she returned to the clinic, although it was months before she had the courage to do so.

Grace didn't expect it to be so difficult for the staff to find her records. She waited in line to get into the clinic for an hour and a half, but then waited thirty minutes for the staff member to find her chart. Grace was tempted to use the delay as an excuse to leave, but she knew she had to stay. Finally, the receptionist called Grace's name.

As Grace shuffled to the back room where blood was typically taken, she saw Dr. Johnson sitting silently in a metal chair by the window. She became alarmed.

I don't want to know. I just don't want to know. Oh, God, I feel so forgotten by You.

Dr. Johnson looked up at her with a nod and a smile. He stood and held his hand out to Grace, who, after a few seconds, took his hand cautiously and sat in a chair next to him. Dr. Johnson held a chart in his hand. He sighed. Grace shifted uncomfortably.

“Well, Grace, how have you been?”

Grace shrugged. “My daughter’s doing well, but that’s all.”

Dr. Johnson studied her face. “Grace, a woman came to the clinic a few months ago in tears, looking for me, asking for me to come help her friend 'Grace.' By any chance, has something happened?”

Grace felt a lump rise in her throat. While restraining her desire to cry, she nodded. “My husband died recently.”

Dr. Johnson covered his mouth in alarm. “Oh, no. No, no, that’s terrible. I’m so sorry.” Dr. Johnson looked at Grace sympathetically. He seemed uncomfortable, but he continued the conversation. “What happened to him, Grace?”

“He was very sick.”

Grace stared at the doctor in such a way as to make him aware that she would elaborate

no further. Dr. Johnson nodded and decided to change the subject.

“And what about your pregnancy? How did things go? Is your baby well?”

Grace swallowed deeply before answering. “He didn't live long.”

Dr. Johnson shook his head slowly and covered his whole face with his hands. He shifted in his seat and then placed his hand on Grace's shoulder. “Grace, I'm so very sorry for your loss. I'm so sorry—you've been through so many terrible things. I only wish it would get better.”

“So do I, but my daughter's still doing well. That's all I have left now.” Grace's voice cracked slightly, but she had no energy to cry.

Dr. Johnson studied Grace's face and knew it would be no use to try and talk more about the trauma of the previous months. He hesitated, before saying, “Grace, I'm glad you came back for your blood test results. Are you ready to know what we found?”

Of course not. God, may I leave now? I don't want to know!

Grace nodded. Dr. Johnson flipped through some papers on his chart. He searched for a few seconds before starting. “Grace, I noticed that you have several vitamin deficiencies. This is most likely because of your diet. However—.”

Grace's breathing became rapid and she covered her mouth to keep from coughing on Dr. Johnson. He backed away as she coughed violently three times into her hands. Dr. Johnson watched with concern.

“Are you all right?”

“Yes, go on,” Grace said as she cleared her throat.

“Ok—well, Grace, I—I don't know how prepared you are for this news. However, I need to tell you what we found in your blood. I can answer questions for you, but unfortunately I have other patients to see immediately after you, so I won't be able to talk to you for very long today.”

I don't want to hear it! I don't want to know!

“Grace, your blood tested positive for HIV.”

Grace's face burned with fear. Her chest tightened as she held her breath; questioning her own hearing.

“What? What did I test positive for?”

Dr. Johnson swallowed a gulp of saliva before responding quietly, “HIV. You’re HIV positive, Grace.”

Grace felt as though she would fall out of her chair.

This can't be true. It can't. Or, can it? I'm so afraid—. NO! No, I WILL NOT accept it! I've done nothing wrong! How could this have possibly happened?

Grace shook her head and doubled over slightly. She rocked herself; lost in shock and worry. Dr. Johnson shifted in his seat and hesitantly reached his arm to Grace before jerking it back.

“Grace, there’s medication available for you to take—I mean, it has a cost, but, it would help you live a longer and better life. I—I can meet with you on a regular basis to monitor your health—.”

Grace felt the room caving in on her. Her heart beat loudly as a drum—the beat vibrated in her head and throbbed in her temples. She felt as though she’d hyperventilate. Or worse, she felt as though she’d faint. She hadn't heard much of what Dr. Johnson said; except that her blood was tainted with HIV. Nothing else he said mattered after that.

Grace couldn’t take it any longer. She pulled herself out of the chair and walked out of the room as quickly as she could as the doctor called after her. He called once, only to realize that she wouldn't return and that chasing her would only make matters worse. It was fairly common for patients to deny their test results, but Dr. Johnson cared for Grace and hoped that she would take the news more rationally.

Dr. Johnson remained in the chair he had been sitting in during the consultation. He stared at the floor, dreading the remainder of his day at the clinic. It was only two o'clock. He had four hours left.

It's not true. It can't be true. Dr. Johnson lied! No, no, Dr. Johnson was given the wrong results! He only thought that it was my chart he was reading. He was mistaken! I know it.

Grace walked out of the clinic and turned down the hill to make her way home. It was a busy hour in the city. People and cars competed for space on the roads while children ran back and forth between cars selling post cards and holding washing fluid and cloths for drivers to see. Grace walked as fast as she could, trying to get through the cars to the other side of the road.

How can this be? The billboards all say that HIV comes from having too many lovers! I don't! I've only had one! And he—was he—oh, God—.

Grace froze in the center of the street. Cars honked past her and people stared as they walked by. A man on a bicycle swerved to miss her. Grace couldn't move. She couldn't feel. She no longer noticed the sounds of life around her. The only comprehension she had was of uncontainable fear.

I always suspected that John had been unfaithful, but I didn't know that he did THIS to me. Oh, my—this means that Robert was sick with this, too? I don't know! I simply don't know! Did John ever get tested? I—I just—just, don't know anything! Oh, no—what about Patience?

Grace kicked rocks angrily as she walked along the path which led her out of Kigali. She hadn't been well enough to make it into the city for months. She hadn't worked in Ms. Flora's house since John died. After that happened, she made efforts to improve on her sewing skills, for

she knew that she was at risk of developing the same illnesses that John had. Rose and Joseph had done a great thing for her family. A school program was established for poor families with small children. Patience was placed on a waiting list for a donor family in the United States or Europe to pay her school fees. Rose and Joseph worked hard to insure that every child on the list was given a sponsor family. With their hard work, Patience got a sponsor in early 2007. In the middle of that year, Patience started primary school. The program was not only designed for education; it was designed for recreation as well as skills development. Patience was learning how to read, write, count, and sew. She was also given a meal each day while at school. Even though it had only been a few weeks, Patience loved her school and teachers.

Grace was thankful for Patience's schooling. However, this day, there seemed to be little else to be thankful for.

Is this truly something I have to live with? What can I do? Where can I go? Should I say anything to anyone? I don't want anyone to know! I don't want to believe this.

* * *

January 2008

Patience crouched near her sleeping mother. Her little face wrinkled as she giggled into her mother's. Grace lay motionless, mouth wide open and her arms stretched out. Patience was entertained by her mother's odd sleep state.

“Hm, hm, hello—.”

Grace's dreams caused her to speak out loud frequently. Patience always loved to hear her

mother's sleep-talk. It was the second morning in a row that Patience got ready for school by herself. The previous morning wasn't the first time Grace stayed asleep while Patience prepared to leave, but it was the first time Grace didn't see Patience off at all.

“Tee-hee, he-he, wake up Ma!” Patience poked her mother's arm repeatedly. Grace opened and closed her mouth slowly, as though speaking to an invisible stranger. Patience played with the hem of her mother's skirt for a few minutes, humming to herself and hoping her mother would wake up and see how she had gotten herself completely ready for school on her own.

Patience made one more attempt. Crouching low near her mother's head, she put both hands on her mother's cheeks and patted them softly, anticipating a response. Grace remained still. Patience's shoulders dropped as she peered down at her barely conscious mother.

“Bye, Ma,” Patience said as she hugged the neck of her sick mother. With the little understanding that Patience had about grown up situations, she could only skip out the door quietly and let her mother sleep peacefully.

One hour later.

“Grace? Amikuru!”

Rose stood outside Grace's one-room shanty. When there was no response, Rose cautiously peeked through the curtain on the doorway. Grace lay on her pallet, completely oblivious to the world around her. Patience was gone. Rose shook her head with sadness while entering. Resources for keeping the indoors clean were scarce, but Grace's home had never looked so disheveled. A familiar odor hung in the air that caused Rose to stop and gain her composure. It was a smell reminiscent of the past that all of Rwanda hoped to forget. Decay. It

wasn't pronounced, but it was present.

Rose held her breath and exhaled slowly, letting her mind and body relax as she set out to arrange Grace's things. Her sewing materials lay strewn about and half-finished. Patience's mud creations which were normally outside the house now lay in various places around the room. The pallet that Grace slept on was covered in stains and hadn't been thoroughly cleaned. Rose sighed as she began to organize Grace's sewing supplies in one neat pile on the chair by the small table.

Every mud creation and worn-out toy that Patience had left lying about was moved into the corner near the window. Rose picked up and examined the mosquito net over Patience's sleeping area to check for holes. When she saw that there were none, she proceeded to the table and opened her basket to set a pot of porridge and a container of honey on the table.

As she set the table for breakfast, Rose contemplated her next action. That Sunday, for the first time in five months, Grace and Patience went to church. Grace had seemed so feeble that Rose decided to make weekly visits with meals and companionship. She waited for Grace to confirm her frightening suspicion.

Rose thought, "When I see Grace—lying like that on her pallet, in her home which is never this disorganized and unclean—all I can do is worry that my fears for her are correct. I don't want to think this, but, John's death was similar to so many others that I've known—but I could be wrong. I'm just waiting to hear it from Grace. I hope she'll wake soon so we can have this conversation. It's been long enough since Robert's and John's death that I think she can finally tell me."

Rose had to decide how she would help Grace wake up. Grace lay still on her back, with

her head twitching from side to side. After setting the table, Rose squatted down near Grace and put her hand on her shoulder.

“Grace? Grace? Wake up, dear. It's time for you to wake up.”

Grace shifted to her right side.

Rose crouched next to Grace and patted her shoulder. “Grace, wake up, it's late—Grace?”

With a yelp of surprise, Grace shook herself awake. She immediately searched all around the room, before looking up at Rose with wet eyes and saying, “Patience is gone. She woke up alone—again!”

Grace brought her hand over her mouth and shook her head sadly. Rose remained next to her, rubbing Grace's back.

“I'm sure she's fine. I can go check on her if you'd like.”

Grace looked at Rose in appreciation.

“She travels with the neighbors when they walk to the city—now that I can't walk her to school.”

Grace's mouth trembled as she held the sobs back. She hugged herself and looked up at Rose with a smile. “What are you doing here, Rose?”

Rose motioned to the table. “I've brought you some breakfast.”

Grace nodded her understanding and smiled.

“You're so kind to me, Rose.”

Without speaking, Rose placed her arm around Grace's waist to support her as she stood up. Grace held onto Rose tightly as her boney legs trembled in the attempt to balance herself. Rose held her steady while walking her over to the table. After moving the sewing materials back to the floor, Rose helped Grace into the seat. Grace stared off into space, contemplating.

She knows. My God—Rose knows. How? I haven't told her the necessary details for her to figure it out! She has only been watching me! She saw what happened to Robert—but, I never told her I was ill. And she probably didn't know about John's affairs. Does she think I had affairs? What should I say to her?

Rose poured porridge and honey into a bowl and set it before Grace. Grace was too lost in thought to see the bowl before her. Rose poured herself a bowl and studied Grace's face for a second. Rose patted Grace's shoulder while motioning to the porridge.

"Eat, Grace. This is for you, my dear."

Grace was petrified of telling Rose the truth. She didn't really know why. After all, she suspected that Rose already knew the truth anyway. Still, she didn't want to fully believe it herself. If she told Rose, then she would also have to believe it.

Rose watched Grace for a few seconds before pouring honey over her own porridge. In her heart, Rose prayed, "Lord, help my friend to open up to me. Her torment ends here, God. By Your grace and power, she'll free herself from her pain and give it over for others to share with her. This burden is too heavy—lift it from her by placing it on my shoulders."

Grace remained silent, thinking through what might happen if she told Rose the truth. As she thought to herself, she felt a cough coming, so she turned her head quickly and coughed away from the table. Spots of fluid fell to the floor and some even reached the pallet nearby. Grace knew it was useless to try and hide the truth. Rose held her breath and waited for Grace to turn towards her.

Rose placed a napkin in front of Grace and nodded. Grace covered her mouth with it and

cleared her throat. She then smiled sheepishly. In an instant when her pride no longer mattered, Grace looked over to Rose, who had started sipping her own porridge. Rose looked up and met Grace's gaze. Rose held her gaze as she placed her bowl of porridge back onto the table, waiting for Grace's words.

I can't believe I'm doing this.

"Rose, I have Slim."

Rose's shoulders slumped as she stared wide-eyed at her friend. Although she had suspected for so long, Rose was still in shock at hearing that it was true.

Rose and Grace looked each other in the eye nervously. Rose nodded and patted Grace's hand. Grace went on.

"The doctors call it AIDS. I don't know for sure, but I believe that Robert was sick, too. I—I also believe that John was sick. I don't really know for sure what happened, but, I think John was made sick by a woman. He—he had affairs, I believe. And he struggled with feelings of guilt about something that I didn't have the courage to ask him about. The truth is—I didn't want to know. Or maybe I didn't want to hear what I already knew. He had become so loving again that I, I just couldn't let him tell me the truth. So, we were both silent. He didn't speak the truth to me; I didn't ask him for it. We stayed away from church—I followed his lead in that. I longed to ask for help, but I was so afraid that my friends and relatives would accuse me of wrongdoing, especially since people would've probably known it was AIDS. I know now that people wouldn't have been that way. John and I would've had support from the church. But, it was so much easier to try and pretend that everything was fine. I've felt so alone all this time. When I finally received my test results a year ago, I couldn't bear to tell anyone the truth. My sister could tell that there was something very wrong when she came to visit—and she guessed what it was. We tried so many different things to cure my illness, but it was all useless. I only became sicker. I've

been so worried for Patience. So far, she doesn't seem sick, but, I can't be so sure. Rose—I don't want anything to go wrong for Patience. I want her to finish school. I want her to be healthy! I don't know if she is! I—I hope she is! But I just don't know!”

Grace spoke with a sad heart, but she didn't feel the need to cry. There was a feeling of liberation that she had yearned to have for so long! In admitting her condition, she was freeing herself from her prison. She was also freeing Patience from that same despair of ignorance.

As the afternoon sun hung brightly over Kigali, two women were saying no to a lonely death. The breathing would remain difficult—surviving would still be painful. Yet, they wouldn't be dissuaded from facing the tragedy. Victory would be found in the tiring pant of fearful breathing.

Rose smiled and patted her friend on the back.

“What will you do now?” Rose asked.

Grace smiled as she rubbed her eyes and shrugged.

“I simply don't know.”

* * *

Kapyate, Patience

Dear Patience,

Your picture is so beautiful! Your smile is lovely, and brings joy to our hearts. Kigali is such a beautiful city—my husband and I have been there, although it was many years ago. It's such a happy place, and the people of your country are so kind and hospitable!

We have a son your age. He is also in first grade, although he attends school in our city. Your handwriting is so good, and I can tell that you are a hard-worker in school. I'm sure your mother is so proud of all your accomplishments. Since you love to sing, I'm sure you love going to church. I remember a church we visited in Kigali where we sang and danced for almost an entire hour straight! Churches in Kentucky are not that way, although sometimes I wish they were.

May God bless you and your mother,

Love,

Linda and Brian Reyes

