

## MY MOTHER, MY HEROINE



● AFRICA ● ASIA ● AMERICA ● EUROPE

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**The names, places, and businesses mentioned are entirely not connected to any real-life entities. Its the authors sense of immersion in a world crafted solely by the imagination.**

**DEDICATION TO MY SISTERS.**

In the tapestry of life, you are the threads that add vibrancy, strength, and beauty to its fabric. This dedication is a testament to the profound impact you've had on my journey.

With each step we've taken together, you've been my pillars of support, my confidantes, and my partners in laughter and tears. Through the highs and lows, your unwavering love and encouragement have been a constant source of inspiration.

**You've** always been my rock. Thank you for your endless guidance, and wisdom. Your strength is a beacon of light that guides me through life's storms.

**You always** share my laughter, and understand my quirks. Thank you for your companionship, and for being the confidantes of my secrets and dreams.

**You** lights up every room with **your** presence, thank you for your infectious joy and for reminding me to find beauty in every moment.

Together, we've weathered storms and celebrated triumphs. Our bond is unbreakable, woven with threads of love, trust, and understanding.

This dedication is a small token of my immense gratitude for the invaluable role you play in my life. May our sisterhood continue to flourish and grow, filling each day with laughter.

## **INTRODUCTION.**

What is a heroine? In today's modern times we hear the word heroine all of the time. The news media throws the term around as if it is an everyday word. What exactly is a heroine? Who, or what, can be classified as heroic? The correct definition of the word heroine is: a woman admired for her courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities; brave woman, hero, woman of courage, great woman, woman of the hour, victor, winner, conqueror, star, idol, superstar, megastar, celebrity, celebutante, luminary, lion, ideal, ideal woman, paragon, exemplar, shining example, perfect example, favorite, darling, celeb. She is a woman of superhuman qualities and often semi-divine origin, in particular, one whose deeds are extraordinary, one invested with heroic qualities in the opinions of others. That is a fine definition for books, and intellectual minds. To the average person, however, a heroine is much more. To better understand what a heroic quality is, it may be easier to describe what a heroine is not.

The title heroic is not given by occupation, rather by achievement. So what exactly is a heroine? Parents are true heroes. Most parental units sacrifice time, money, love, and everything else for their children. When times are tough good parents do all they can to make things better for their children. Mothers and fathers often work two jobs, late at night, or on weekends to provide for their kids.

## MY MOTHER, MY HEROINE

I am a son of a woman. That is what I am. At first, it never made sense to me but as I grew up, I realized how close I was to the girls who surrounded me. They shaped my life. They made me appreciate women. In fact, the impact they had on me was so deep rooted that I came to believe that men cannot survive without women in this world.

When I was fairly young, I remember growing up among women. First of all, there was my mother. She was my biggest mentor. I actually adored her. I was very close to her. Then there were my sisters, cousins, aunties, grandmother, and several other visitors who frequented our home at Kihiga in Sisley. In most cases, they were women!

I had four sisters who always surrounded me. They literally pampered me. My mother made it worse by openly showing me love due to my closeness to her. I was her first born boy, it was understandable. My behavior was inevitably shaped by women.

My mother, Regina, mostly known as *mama* Wambui, was the only child. She had no brothers or sisters. All her siblings died at an early age before they reached three years of age. Most likely, they died due to the common treatable diseases we know today which by then were killer diseases. As she grew up, my mother was pampered and protected by her parents, lest she also die like her siblings. Her parents hovered over her, and ensured that she lived to adulthood.

My mother's bosom friend was her first cousin, Rahab, who was also her age mate. As fate would have it, Rahab later became my mother-in-law after I got married to her daughter! Our traditions allowed one to get married to a first cousin on the maternal side. In fact, such marriages among first cousins on the maternal side were deliberately encouraged, the argument being that it would cement the **marriage due** to the blood relationship.

On the flip side, my mother was the village beauty queen. She strutted the village streets like a peacock. She was elegant, tall, and brown. God also endowed her with the gift of the

garb. With that killer combination, she was the talk of the village.

*Mama* could talk like a parrot. She was talkative, and an outgoing lady who would not shy away from engaging anyone in a heated discussion. She would say what was in her mind even if it was controversial.

The only drawback was that she came from a very poor family which could hardly afford to pay her school fees. Inevitably, this abject poverty shaped her future life. In the absence of any other viable option, she dropped out of school and opted to get married at a very tender age.

Meanwhile, my father originally came from Kimera, a village situated at the north of the Valley Mountains along the river. Actually, the original Kimera village was swept away by the floods. The villagers were forced to shift to higher grounds. They founded a new settlement they named it Sera.

My father went to Seragoi Primary School before proceeding to high school for his O' Level examination. After school, he went

for a four year medical course. He ended up being posted as a Clinical Officer.

That was the turning point for the family. My father fell in love with the village beauty queen, and married her. Then the children came in quick succession. The first two were girls. I was the third born. I was *mama's* first baby boy. She was elated to give birth to me. She named me after her father-in-law.

While I was in standard three, I became conscious of my *mama's* pregnancy. She looked weak with a large protruding belly. She lost a lot of weight. I realized that she received so many visitors, especially women. They would examine her, sometimes massage her before leaving. The women were Traditional Birth Attendants (TBA). I came to learn that they were worried that my *mum's* belly had protruded to an unimaginable size. Were they oversized twins?

One day, *mama* went for her usual monthly pre-natal clinic checks at the Hospital. The doctor in charge at the time, Dr. Peter Fox, was also worried. He was a white Missionary doctor. He was very close to my father. He opined that *mom's*

condition might develop complications during birth. Those days, hospital equipment was limited to the basic tools. If it were today, a simple scan would have reduced the worries but in the 1960s, it was a matter of life and death. The doctor examined her, and recommended that **she** should be airlifted to Nakuru District Hospital which was more equipped as a matter of urgency.

He issued instructions for the Amref Flying Doctors to be alerted. All was set, and the Amref Flying Doctors were booked accordingly. The following week, we all went to the local airstrip to see **mum** off. She could barely walk on her own. She was supported on both sides by nurses. I thought she was sick. My father, and Dr. Peter accompanied her to Nakuru. We were left behind under the care of one of our aunties.

There were no mobile phones those days. Even the landlines were few, and scattered. We definitely didn't have a telephone line either in our house. The landline which was in the hospital was actually a radio call facility. A week later, a radio call came from the hospital informing all, and sundry that **she** had given birth to triplets. Yes, a total of three babies, all girls! Mother, and babies were all in good health.

Though people were expecting more than one baby, the most that was in their minds was two, not three. We were all tongue tied, three babies? Triplets? Well, that was the marvel of nature. It happens. We waited with bated breath. We thought they would come back home immediately. They didn't. We continued waiting. Come the third day, no babies were brought home. The excitement started fading away.

One day while we were playing outside, the hospital ambulance drove into our compound. It parked very near the front door. My father literally jumped out of the vehicle followed by Dr Peter. The rear door of the ambulance was opened. Out came one of the nurses holding two tiny babies. Then out came **mum** holding yet another tiny baby. What a picture to behold. Three tiny babies!

We finally went to the sitting room with our surprise bundle of joy. Their faces were unwrapped, and their equally tiny hands popped out from the baby shawls that were covering them. They were identical triplets. They had tags on their tiny wrists to confirm their names.

In a short span of time, our house was a beehive of activity. Tiny clothes here, tiny clothes there. Baby shawls here, baby

shawls there. As if to show that they were more than one baby, the washing line was full of napkins. There were no disposable diapers those days. Mothers used white napkins which were neatly folded thereafter for them to be used by the next baby in line! **Talk of the good old days!**

The three little birds could not get enough milk from their mother's breasts. They had to be supplemented by diluted cows milk. Nothing came easy. Washing of clothes tripled. Washing basins were increased. There were three baby cots. Everything was tripled.

It literally became a nightmare. When one baby cried, you can rest assured that the remaining two would also cry. If one was hungry, the other two would also be hungry. **Mum** was overwhelmed. In the guise of assisting her, women from all walks of life became a common sight in our house.

Dr. Peter advised my father to end the baby boom. We were already eight of us, two boys and six girls! The doctor was amazed. When he loudly raised his concern about the high number of children my father had, he was told that it was common among our people to have even twelve children. One

of my aunties proudly confirmed that she had given birth to fourteen children!

Undeterred by those sentiments, Dr. Peter advised my mother to stop giving birth.

"Your husband is a doctor. Take family planning pills. You can even do tubal ligation, if need be," he advised her.

My mother looked at the doctor but she did not answer. She merely smiled. Like any other African woman at the time, she knew that it was her husband who had the final say. On the other hand, Dr. Peter could not understand how an educated man like my father could have eight children, and still find it difficult to do family planning.

Dr. Peter was surprised by this turn of events, he must have been shocked when mama conceived again the following year. The belly kept on growing and finally, she gave birth to a bouncing baby boy. Fortunately, he was to be our last born in the family of nine.

Reality started dawning on my parents that taking care of a big family of nine children plus extended relatives was not easy. It became a financial burden to my father, bearing in mind that **mum** was a housewife with no income of her own. To the outside world, my father passed off as a well-to-do man according to the local standards. As a matter of fact, there was no day when we slept hungry. There was no day when we could say we had no food in the house. To the outside world, therefore, my father was fairly wealthy!

A ray of hope came our way. Dr Fox was informed that there was a vacancy of a Clinical Officer at Macalder. There was a private company which was prospecting for gold at Macalder. They had opened a private hospital for the company staff. Could Dr. Fox look for a dedicated Clinical Officer with experience to fill in the vacancy? He did not hesitate to approach my father with the idea. After all, it was more financially rewarding than the job he was holding.

After consultations, my father agreed to go, and work for Macalder Mines Company. He left the same year Robert our last born was born. Back home, it created a vacuum. We were not used to staying without him. After some time, we got used to it, albeit, with a heavy heart.

Dad was also not comfortable staying alone at Macalder. Within no time, he relocated his family to Macalder. We found ourselves living in a big bungalow with an equally big compound. We had two house helps. It was a life we would cherish for a long time to come. We also found ourselves schooling among the new. I was transferred to another primary school while my two elder sisters were transferred to girls' boarding school which was being run by the Catholic sisters.

It became a ritual, going to school and back to Macalder for the holidays. We adopted accordingly. We all passed our national examinations. I proceeded to secondary school. I remember when the **Kenya** Certificate of Primary Examination (KCPE) results were announced, I went to the school to check my results. I was met by my English teacher, Mr. Odero, a huge man. He told me that I had passed my exams. Not only that, I had recorded the best performance in English. He was elated. He carried me shoulder high to the amazement of the other children.

My two elder sisters also passed well. They proceeded to girls' boarding secondary school respectively. We focused on

what was ahead of us. It was a culmination of discipline, and hard work in school. It paid off, and we were not disappointed.

"Everything which you see in this house is mine," my father used to remind us, "study hard, and get yours. Nothing comes easy in this world."

That became the routine verse whenever we closed school, especially if one dropped his position in class at the end of the term. My parents had no room for failure. They would not accept any reason to justify failure. I remember one day I hiked a lift from school, and went to Macalder for half term without the prior knowledge of my parents. I was excited. I thought it would be a sweet surprise for them. I was salivating, knowing very well that I would get something nice to eat. How I longed for ice cream which was a common pastime in our house at Macalder! It was drizzling. I increased my pace, and knocked on the door. It was my mother who opened for me. I greeted her with a wide grin. What I saw in turn, made me freeze. Her face changed, and she barked at me.

"Don't even greet me. What has brought you here yet you have not closed school?"

"But mama..." As I struggled to get an appropriate answer, she gave me her piece of mind; it was a tongue lashing.

"I know you only think about the food in the house instead of concentrating on your studies. I have time, and again told you that I want you to be number one in your class. Did you become number one last term?" she paused, and looked at me straight in the face.

"No, I was number three," I answered innocently hoping that it would appease her. Maybe she had forgotten that I had improved from position five to position three that term.

"No, I said you should improve to number one. Who was number one in your class last term?" she barked.

"Onyango."

"So, are you telling me that Onyango has more brains than you?"

I had no answer. What was I supposed to say? In fact, come to think of it, how does one measure somebody's intelligence?

"Listen, go and warm the food in the fridge and tomorrow morning, you will go back to school," she said with finality.

In the process, I even forgot to tell her that we were on half-term holiday!

"But tomorrow is Saturday..."

I did not even finish my sentence. She cut me short.

"Shhhhhhhh! That's enough. I said you will go back to school tomorrow."

That was my mother. She was strict to that extent. I think she wanted to cover up what she missed in her childhood. Due to abject poverty in her home, she dropped out of school. Now that she had a family of her own, she wanted all her children to excel in school.

And I did not disappoint her. I went for my A' levels, and passed. I eventually proceeded to the University of Nairobi where I graduated with an upper second class Bachelor of Arts, Honors degree, in Public Administration. I invited my parents for the graduation. It was a wonderful time for them to see me in a graduation gown. She was a proud mother of a son who had gone through university. Very few students went beyond O' levels in the district during our time when I was in school.

Incidentally, the mere fact that I was at the university also gave me extra marks to boast of. I was a hero in our village, many people wanted me to guide their children on how to concentrate on studies, and pass the exams. I became a role model. Wherever I went, people would proudly introduce me as 'the local boy who is currently studying at the University of Nairobi.' It was a rare feat those days for a local boy to be admitted at the university.

In the process, my growing up was also phenomenon. Girls were throwing themselves over to get my attention. It was a tight race among the local girls, possibly of who gets me first. I had a wide choice to select from. It was a big challenge. In the process, I broke the hearts of quite a number of girls who

thought I would marry them. I also broke the hearts of quite a number of parents who thought I would marry their daughters. At the back of my mind, I had set criteria of who I wanted to be my future wife. The first quality was that she must be beautiful, like my mother! She had to be brown, like my mother! She had to be educated past O levels, possibly to fill in the gap that my own mother failed to achieve after she dropped out of school. She had to be well behaved and focused, like my mother! She had to be hard working, like my mother! Can you see my mother reincarnate?

Right from the word 'go' I wanted to see my mother in the girl I was to get married to. No wonder mothers-in-law are known for disliking their daughters-in-law. They would never let go of their sons! With such a set criteria in my mind, it was difficult for me to find a girl who had all the qualities I wanted to see in my future wife. If one was beautiful, something else would miss in the expected mix. So, the search went on. My mother even advised me to visit my aunties, and uncles in other villages outside Kihiga to look for a wife.

"May be you can get a beautiful girl to marry from other villages," she advised me one day.

"I am okay mother," I responded.

"After all, **the beautiful ones are not yet born,** " I casually quoted Ayi Kweyi Armah, the Ghanaian author, out of context.

Little did I know that the beautiful ones were indeed there. They had been born already. In fact, everyday, a beautiful girl is born in every village. That realization came when I was taking a walk one afternoon. I saw a beautiful girl coming out of a shop in the village. She was brown, and well endowed physically. She hypnotized me. She walked out of the shop, and our eyes met. She breathed in, and I thought her chest was bursting with the size of breasts that I saw through the corners of my eyes.

She avoided my gaze, and moved on as if nothing had happened but I knew she had also noticed my presence. Once she was out of my sight, I asked one of the kids who was playing nearby to tell me the name of that girl.

"She is called Emma, " the children said in a chorus, "are you saying that you don't know her?" they asked me in surprise.

"Can you take me to her home?" I pointed at one of the children who looked more responsible.

In deed he took me to Emma's home in the middle of the village. He knocked on the door, and enquired if Emma had gone back from the shops.

"Yes, she is in. **Who wants** to see her?" Came the response from inside the house. It was Emma's grandmother who was shooting the questions.

"I don't know his name but it is that university student who stays at the house on the hill," she tried to describe me.

Well, my heart was pumping. Emma, and her grandmother came to the sitting room where I was seated. Our eyes met again. I guess she wanted to melt due to the surprise visit. Her grandmother introduced me to her as my first cousin since our mothers were closely related. She was asked to prepare tea **which** she served me with tea as we chatted over nothing specific. I eventually excused myself.

"Grandma, I want to go now. Thanks for the tea. And thanks too for introducing me to Emma."

"You are welcome at any time. Emma, please escort the visitor. It is not good to allow a visitor to leave the compound without being escorted," she turned to tell Emma who was standing next to her.

That was the beginning of a long journey towards my marriage. I came to know her better as days went by. I became closer, and closer to her. I introduced her to my parents. Within no time, I got married to her. We got our first born son. Our second born was a baby girl. We named her Regina, after my mother. The last born was a baby boy.

**Mum** was very close to my children. She pampered them. My parents had returned to the village after the sojourn to Macalder. My wife and I were now trying to build our own separate home, away from my parents. I got employment with the government. I was employed as an assistant secretary in the Office of the President. Meanwhile, I saved some money and started constructing a block house. It was one of the first permanent houses to be built at Kihiga.

Due to the nature of my work, I stayed with my family at Nairobi. My children went to school at Nairobi. I noticed that I was as strict as my parents when it came to education. Like father like son. I wanted my children to excel in education. I took no chances. I would check their report forms every term. I would follow up any issues that were pulling them behind academically. That close supervision paid off. My first boy went to a prestigious national school; Moi Forces Academy. My girl went to a prestigious provincial school; State House Girls High School. Finally, my last born was also admitted to a prestigious national school; Nairobi School.

They all excelled, and proceeded to various universities to pursue their degrees. My boys went for their Bachelor of Arts degrees while the girl went to Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) for her Bachelor of Science in Information Technology degree. I thanked God for that achievement, and looked forward to a bright future for my children.

But life is not a bed of roses. Life will never be a straight line. And if it ever becomes a straight line, it would be very boring in

deed. Every time my children went to school, I was worried about their future just like any other parent. I was keen to know the kind of friends they mingled with. I would rarely poke my nose into their private affairs. I would rarely walk into their rooms in their absence but I would closely monitor what they were doing. I was very particular about their performance. The first thing they were supposed to show me every term after they closed school was their report form. I did not compromise on academic performance. Their smooth progression to good schools and finally to universities, therefore, was not a walk in the park.

Then another challenge came up when they moved to colleges. It was a nightmare for us. This was a period when the children had grown into adolescents, and sometimes you would not know how to handle them. Remember, there is no college for training couples on parenting. While I would go slow on the boys, my biggest worry was my daughter. She was my only daughter! She was named after my mother. She was a beautiful girl who blossomed into a well rounded adult. Any boy with sharp eyes would definitely admire her.

My daughter knew that I was very close to her. She was aware that she took after my own mother in more ways than one. She was even named after my mother. Where there was

something that others found difficult to get from me, they **would** send her to tell me on their behalf. They knew that my daughter would somehow convince me, no matter how difficult the issue was. As days passed by, it was her turn to leave the strict **life of high school** and move on to University where there was unlimited freedom. Any parent who has a daughter in a college or university today will agree with me that it is not easy to think about what can easily happen to her. You think about premarital sex and the resultant unwanted pregnancies, which is prevalent nowadays among students. You think about irresponsible drinking, and general misbehavior which is not uncommon among students. Then you imagine that your own daughter could easily fall prey to such unbecoming behavior, most likely due to peer pressure.

We kept a close watch on my daughter despite the fact that she was away. We would visit her as frequently as possible, and look out for any tell tale signs of misbehavior. We encouraged her to finish her course first then other things would naturally fall in place.

"Mummy, " I encouraged her, "**boys can easily mess you up.** If a boy is serious with you, bring him home so that we may know him, " I advised her. She just looked down, and smiled without uttering a word.

"Look at it this way; if you get your degree, then whoever comes to you must also have either a degree, a Masters or even a PhD, nothing short of that. If you are driving a *Toyota Corolla*, then you expect the guy who comes knocking to be driving a *Mercedes Benz!* But if you fail your exams, you will remain a pauper."

I don't know whether my advice sunk but she proceeded to second, and third years without much fuss. During her fourth year, we noticed a slight change in her usual programmes. She started being rare in her room. Her visits to Kigari started becoming fewer by the day. I wanted her to take two short courses in the evenings to spruce up her degree in Information Technology but she declined.

"Dad, we are very busy with CATs here. It is not possible to add another course on top of what is already on our laps."

She was referring to the Continuous Assessment Tests (CAT) which is part of any course at the universities.

"But any extra professional course will be an added advantage to you when you start looking for a job!" I tried to persuade her.

"No dad. I will not manage these frequent CATs together with the normal course. Remember, I am in fourth year now, and things are tough. I am sure you don't want me to fail or get a supplementary simply because I am overloading myself with extra courses which I can easily do after my graduation!"

I gave up. At the back of my mind, taking a short course over the weekends and in the evenings would not only make her more competitive in the job market but it would divert her attention from potential bad company, and force her to concentrate on her studies. It did not take long before the bubble burst. I was in my office one day when she sent me a text message. She told me that somebody wanted to see me. **She asked whether I could spare a few minutes the following day.** I hesitated then replied **that I would be free at around eleven o'clock in the following day.** She was okay with her.

At around that time, my secretary alerted me that there was a visitor who wanted to see me. Since I did not have the details about the expected visitor, it never occurred into my mind that it was Regina's visitor who was at the reception waiting to

see me. He was a young man who was smartly dressed. He had a suit with a matching tie. His shoes were sparkling. He walked into the office. I greeted, and offered him a seat.

"What can I do for you?" I asked the typical office question managers are fond of asking when a stranger walks into the office.

"My name is Bil. I am your daughter's boyfriend, and I wanted to talk to you," he said politely while choosing his words carefully.

I adjusted my chair, and started paying attention to what he was saying.

"What **have** you said is your name?" I asked while I frantically looked for a notebook to take some short notes lest I forget some information.

The world has really changed. During our days, there was no way a young man would walk into his potential father-in-laws place, and start talking about his alleged girlfriend as if nothing had happened. He would not even be given an

audience. He would be chased away with a whip, and told categorically that he should return with his father. By talking to his potential father-in-law directly, he would be seen as a boisterous young man who had no manners.

But here he was, this young man who was supposed to be my daughter's boyfriend, talking to me as if I was his equal or his peer. I listened to him. He gave me an insight into his background. He was raised by a single mother. He found himself being under the care of a step father. They were living in the neighborhood at Buru Buru police quarters. His mother was still in employment at Embu. She was an employee of the Kenya Power Company. I continued taking notes as I listened to his story. I did not interrupt him, save for quick clarification once in a while.

"So, what did you want? I finally asked him.

"*Mzee*, I wanted to get married to your daughter. She did not have the courage to tell you. That is why we agreed that I come, and see you."

Well, they are the *dotcom* children. What do you tell them?

"Do you realize that you are breaking all the known norms by telling me you wanted to get married to my daughter? It is your father who should come, and relay that information to me, not you."

"I know but I told you that I was raised by a single mother."

"But you have a father. I mean your step father is still alive. He is the one to take over that role of your father. The Nigerians have a saying that anyone who stays with your mother is your father."

"It is true but I wanted your consent first so that I do not disappoint my mother, step father, and girlfriend."

"Why do you think so?"

"There are cultural differences. Your daughter also told me about your closeness with her, and it is important that I get clearance from you even before I make a move to introduce her formally to my parents."

"Does your mother know?"

"Mmmm, she has seen her on several occasions. She knows her but I have not told her about our ultimate intention."

"Better introduce the topic to her so that she can be in the picture."

We ended up going to the restaurant for lunch. He was a young lawyer who had just graduated from the University of Nairobi. He was waiting to join the Kenya School of Law for his pupillage. By the time we parted, it was well past three o'clock in the afternoon. In between the meal, he wanted to hear from me about my expectations.

"You are now aware that she is my only daughter. I named her after my mother. Coincidentally, my mother is also only daughter, and child. So, you can imagine how close I am to her. I have no problem in you two getting married if that is your heart's desire. In fact, I would love to give her the best wedding ever held in our village as my way of expressing my love to her."

I looked at Bill, and gave him a veiled warning about premarital sex.

“Please avoid any monkey business. If you seriously want to get married to my daughter, set the ball in motion and we will support you.”

In the evening, I shared the information with my wife. If it came to pass, that was okay. I did not mind my daughter getting married to a different tribe for that matter. What mattered to me was for them to remain in a happy marriage.

One day my daughter came home. It was slightly cold but I thought she was overdressed. She was in a big overflowing sweater. I asked her mother whether she had noticed that.

“Have you seen Mummy today?” I asked my wife.

“Yes. Why are you asking?” she posed.

"I thought she was overdressed. That is not the way she usually dresses. It looks a bit odd. You know girls of today like exposing quite a bit of their flesh! " I said with a loud burst of laughter.

"Please sit down with her, and find out whether her plans with her boyfriend are still on course," I told her.

I left it at that. She was counseled by her mother, and off she went to college. She came back another day. Again, I noticed the overdressing. She was uneasy this time round. She was in her room most of the time. Ironically, she did not go back to college on Sunday as was expected. As usual, we woke up very early the following day, and went to our places of work.

In the evening, we got the bomb shell. I opened my bedroom door, and found a letter stashed under the door. It looked odd. I opened the envelope. It was a letter written by my daughter.

*Dear dad,*

*I am sorry for what has happened. I literally trembled as I read the letter. I could not muster enough courage to face you but I am six months pregnant. I had a choice to abort the pregnancy, and keep quiet as if nothing had happened but after much soul searching, I have decided to keep the baby. I will not drop out of college. I will carry the pregnancy to its full term. I will also sit for my final exams as scheduled. It is very difficult to explain how it happened. I can imagine your reaction, and how bitter you will be with me. I imagine you being angry with me. That is why I could only write this letter for you to know the truth rather than tell you face to face. I am sorry dad.*

*Your daughter,  
Regina.*

I think I was in a world of my own because I did not see my wife coming in. She must have noted that I was not myself. I was still holding the letter in my hands.

“Why are you looking as if you have swallowed a frog?” she jokingly asked me. I almost jumped out of my skin.

"Nothing," I answered back while folding the letter.

I made sure that it was out of her view even though she had seen it. She looked at me with suspicious eyes, and kept quiet. I did not have courage to break the news to her immediately. She would have been devastated. I took my time. One day when we were in the bedroom, I told her the devastating news.

"Do you remember the letter I was reading last week when you walked into the room?"

"Yes. I am still wondering aloud what it was all about."

I looked straight into her face, and broke the unpleasant news.

"She is six months pregnant."

I could see her face contract as if she was in labour pain. She took time to digest the words. I realized she would easily collapse. I repeated the words slowly this time round.

"Mummy is pregnant, six months pregnant. Read her letter first, and look at her commitment. I think we should accept this reality, and move on with life, " I told her as I removed the letter from my trouser pocket for her to read.

It was a big blow to all of us but reality sinks hard and the earlier you accept that, the better for you. The pain came back to haunt me again. All those ideas about a grand wedding, and giving the wedding party the best I could afford for my only daughter went up in smoke. I remembered what I had told Bil in my office. Couldn't they wait? And if it was difficult for them to wait, couldn't they have used contraceptives? It devastated me as a father.

I took my phone, and responded to her letter through a text message. I told her that I had shared the news with her mother and at the same time, assured her that we had forgiven her. She should not attempt to abort. It was risky, and it would endanger her life. We had overcome the shock, and we were looking forward to being proud grandparents. I looked at my shaken wife again, and put some fun in my talk.

"Imagine we shall be grandparents very soon..." I cracked a joke, and laughed at that imagination. Well, our daughter was now a grown up, otherwise she would not have been made pregnant.

I called my mother, and broke the news to her. We had overcome the pain and suddenly, the news about Regina's pregnancy was becoming interesting. *Mama* would be adding yet another great grandchild! She spoke fondly of her name sake, and wished her well. She even wanted my daughter to go home immediately after giving birth so that she could see her great grandchild.

*Mama* had become sickly of late. She complained of her heart beating extremely fast such that it made her feel weak. When the heartbeats increased, she was left gasping for breath. I asked her to visit the nearby District Hospital for treatment. She never went to the hospital though. I ended up buying all manner of drugs from the chemist in the hope that I would get the right drugs for her.

Then the inevitable happened. One day as I was seated in the office, I was told that *mama* had a mild stroke. She was sitting outside her house knitting her favorite traditional mat when she felt weak on one side, and could not control her

body balance. She fell over on the weaker side. She could not stand on her own. She could not even shout for someone to go, and help her. Some passers-by saw her leaning precariously on one side, and rushed to assist her. I was called immediately over the phone.

"Can she talk?" I asked my sister who had called me.

"She struggles to utter some words. Her tongue is heavy, and what I have noted is that her mouth has tilted a bit on one side," she answered back.

I knew there, and then that *mama* had a stroke. It was something I had not anticipated, and I had to think fast.

"Call for an ambulance, and take her to hospital. And make it quick," I barked on the phone.

The doctor examined her, and put her under bed rest. Fortunately, it was a mild stroke. She went through the medication, and physiotherapy at the hospital for two weeks then she was discharged. I travelled home the same week to go, and see my sick mother. She had greatly improved, and was recovering. She could talk, and crack jokes. She was very

excited to see me. The doctor had advised her to reduce her weight, and do more physical exercises. She should check her weight by walking briskly. She should avoid fat, salt, and fried food.

*Mama* improved greatly. The doctor put her on drugs to be taken every day. It became my responsibility to buy drugs for her on a monthly basis. As time went by, she would also enquire about my daughter, her namesake, and how she was doing. She was eagerly waiting for the new born kid.

How time flies. My daughter came home one day. She was heavily pregnant, and it was just a matter of time before she could deliver her baby. That weekend at around supper time, she developed labour pains. We were all rushing up and down, trying to assist her. I quickly entered my car, and rushed her to the nearby Metropolitan hospital where she had been booked earlier. Once she was received by the nurses and we were sure that she was in safe hands, we went back home. She delivered safely the same day at midnight. She got a baby girl. They named her Natalie. So the inevitable happened. We had graduated to become grandparents!

But wait a minute. Who said that problems come in droves? They never come singly. While I was sorting out my daughters issue, I was told that my mother's condition had suddenly deteriorated. I was required urgently at home to take charge of the situation. My father called me to confirm that *mama's* health was not good at all. I could hear him breathing heavily over the phone. There was some sense of urgency in his voice. He wanted to know when I would travel home.

"Please do not delay," he insisted.

I promised to go home as soon as possible. Luckily, my daughter was being discharged the following day in the morning. I was to leave for home immediately. By the time I cleared with Metropolitan hospital, it was around eleven o'clock in the morning. I dashed to my house with the new born baby, and started my long journey to Mombasa by road.

I arrived at Kihiga safely. I received numerous calls while I was driving. I assured all the callers that I was on my way home. I was driving the car at a moderate speed due to the tension I found myself in. When I arrived, I found many people milling around my father's house. At first, I thought *mama* had died.

"Why were there so many people in the compound?" I asked myself.

I parked my car, and went straight to *mama's* bedroom. I found her on the bed. There was a sense of relief when I appeared in the room. I greeted her. She weakly extended her hand, and greeted me. I could see tears building up in her eyes. I restrained myself from crying. The *mama* I saw on the bed was not the *mama* I knew. What could have gone wrong? She was a pale shadow of herself.

"*Mama*, it is okay. Do not cry. I am here for you. I will do everything possible to save your life," I told her.

"So what will you do?" she asked me as she wiped her tears.

"I will take you to a private hospital for further check up."

She sighed. At least, she was contented with my reply. My father was listening to our conversation. He agreed with my suggestion. We immediately embarked on preparations to transfer *mama* to another hospital. I slept past midnight. The

following day, I was up by five o'clock in the morning. Virtually everybody woke up early. Breakfast was ready by 6 a.m. A huge crowd had gathered in our homestead. Everybody was full of praise that I had travelled all the way from Nairobi to come, and take my mother to a specialized treatment. I was their hero, especially among the elderly people.

I was conscious about time. I hurried up everyone. I made sure that we were ready to leave by seven o'clock. We prayed, and *mama* was now being helped into my car. I really cannot recall what happened because I had moved to the outer door to clear the way for them. All of a sudden, I heard loud cries from the room. People were wailing at the top of their voices.

"What is wrong?" I asked in panic as I forced my way to the bedroom.

The first person I met was my father. He was crying uncontrollably. He was shouting at the top of his voice. He did not want to be consoled at all. Some men inside the room were also in tears. When I turned, I found virtually all the women in the bedroom crying, nay, wailing. In that confusion, I went to where my mother was, and found her shedding tears. She was alive. I held her hand firmly as if to assure her that I was there for her. She need not to cry. Once she stopped

crying, I went to where my father was. I did the same thing to him. I firmly held his hand, and whispered into his ears for him to stop crying.

I had never seen my parents crying like that. I had never seen my father shed tears before even when he was under very difficult situations. Emotions ran high. I was the only person who controlled my emotions. If I got carried away by emotions, I do not know how I would have driven my car in the first place.

My father asked me to confirm before the crowd that I would brief him about my mother's condition everyday; in the morning, and in the evening. I did so. He also wanted me to confirm that I would do everything within my powers to give my mother the best treatment I could afford. I did so. We finally prayed and he allowed me to take *mama* to the car, this time round, with less emotion being exhibited.

We arrived safely. We went straight to the private clinic owned by Dr. Vitalis. He was the leading cardiologist. After the initial tests, he gave me a letter to proceed to Nakuru Hospital for two other tests which could not be done there then return for admission.

I drove as if I had reserved all my energy for that exercise. It was a marathon journey but I made it. **She** was finally admitted that evening in a private ward.

My wife was torn into two. There was a newly born granddaughter at Nairobi, and a sick mother-in-law. She had to make a decision. I told her that the situation at home was not very good, and that she should join me. Throughout that week, **mum** would ensure that I was seated next to her on the hospital bed. She even wanted me to feed her!

"Take that spoon, and feed me," she told me one day.

At first, I thought it was a joke but she was serious.

"But mama, surely you are not that sick..."

"No, stop. I said that you take the spoon, and feed me!" she said with final authority.

I did feed her like a toddler until she finished all the food in her plate. She drowned it with a cup of milk. Then a banana!

Everyone in the ward was surprised that she could eat a whole plateful of rice.

There was another day she requested for tea at midnight. We were in the ward keeping her company until late. Then from the blues, she asked me to buy her tea from the nearby hotel. I reminded her that all the hotels were closed at that time of the night. It was midnight.

"How do you know, and yet you have not even gone out to check?" She asked while looking at me with that mother-child look.

"But mama, there is no hotel which opens at this hour."

"You have a car. Please do it for me, " she pleaded.

I went out with my wife looking for a place to buy the tea at that ungodly hour. Unfortunately, all the businesses which were open at that time were bars, and night clubs. As we were about to give up, we bumped into another joint that sold beer. We asked them if they had any tea. The bar attendant laughed.

He could not believe that I was looking for tea instead of beer. When I explained my predicament, he came to my assistance by preparing tea but at double the **normal** price.

By the time we were leaving the hospital, it was well past midnight. But we did not regret. We gave *mama* our best. Finally, she was discharged, and we prepared to go back home. A number of nurses came to our ward to bid us good bye. During the period *mama* had been at the hospital, she had made friends with the nurses too. On our way home, *mama* asked me questions, one after the other.

"Do you know how many children I have?" She asked me.

"Yes, you have nine children," I replied.

"You are right. How many of those children are in this car now?"

"I am the only child who is in the car now. But, **mum**, the car is not big enough to carry all the nine children. I am sure they would have loved to be with you at the hospital."

"I know. What I am saying is that you are my first born son. You are the one to take care of me. I am your burden. While I know that I gave birth to nine children, I do not want to be a burden to all the nine children. This burden is yours. I want you to carry this burden up to the last day when I leave this world. Do you understand what I am saying?"

All of us were quiet. I was driving the car but I was hardly concentrating. My palms were sweating. The steering wheel was slippery due to the thin sweat, and I was getting worried that I could easily cause an accident. What was my mother up to? Why was she saying that? Was it a premonition for her death?

"I had asked you whether you have understood!" She repeated her words since I had not responded.

"Yes, *mama*. I understand you. I promise to take care of you till the last day. That is a promise I am making today."

"I am happy that you have made that promise. *Namogo*, have you heard?" She asked my wife.

*Namogo*, is a polite word used by mothers to fondly refer to their daughters-in-law.

"Yes, *mama*. We shall take care of you," my wife concurred.

My mother seemed contented with what she had heard from us. She stopped asking any more questions. She drifted into a deep sleep thereafter. I looked at her from the interior mirror of the car. Though looking weak, she was the same *mama* I had loved and admired since my childhood. I vowed deep in my heart to do everything possible to make her happy, and comfortable up to her last day on earth.

Just as we had left a week earlier with a crowd in tow to bid us bye, we found an even bigger crowd waiting for us. Word had gone round the village that *mama* was coming back home after getting treatment. When I stopped at the entrance, the first person I saw was my father. He was visibly happy, and anxious to see his wife. *Mama* was assisted by several women to come out of the car. She was finally carried to her room like a newlywed groom.

While some people found it difficult to carry out some of *mama's* instructions and meet her long list of demands, there were two people she cherished and respected to her bones, my father and I. Where there were misunderstandings, she would only come down, and reason after I had talked to her or after my dad's intervention. She elevated us to an unprecedented position of superiority in our family hierarchy which led to grumbling among my brothers, and sisters. They complained that I was being favored for no known reason. The situation was made worse by my father. There was nothing which he did without concurring with me or at least getting my opinion first. To my siblings, that was outright favoritism. I had become the blue-eyed boy of the family. I was *mama's* boy. I was **dad's** favorite son.

When it was time to go back, *mama* looked gloomy. Naturally, even my father was not happy. If it were within their powers, I should stay a little bit longer than that.

"Can't you take a leave, and stay with us much longer than this?" My father asked.

"I would love to but I have an office to take care of. Look at mother, she is much better now. She has now stabilized. There is nothing to worry about," I told him.

I made sure we shared breakfast before I left. I joked about the old days when I would finish a whole thermos full of tea. It became my responsibility to buy the prescribed medicine for my mother every month. In fact, that was the first item I bought every month-end after I withdrew my salary. And *mama* was strict with her medication. She knew that her life depended on those drugs. I would go back home after every three months to take her for routine medical checkup.

Dr Vitalis, the consultant doctor, was always there for her. I would book an appointment over the phone, rush home, pick my mother and dash for check-up. I would be back after a day or two, stay with her for a few more days then go back. In case of any change in her health, the doctor would give instructions to my sister, a nurse at Kihiga, on what to do.

You should have seen the way my father took care of my mother. He would always sit next to her. He would massage her legs, and ensure that she was comfortable in all ways. They were like two love birds! We employed two people to

take care of our parents. There was nothing we did not do that was within our means. We gave them the best that we could afford.

**THE END.**