

# Chapter 1

2006

People have a tendency to have an opinion on everything. Most times their opinions aren't direct. They come in the form of comments or questions.

'Did you gain weight' is a societies polite way to tell a woman she's fat; 'When are you getting married' equates to telling someone they've been single too long and 'Don't you want to have children?' is just another way of telling her that she is getting old.

No one understands the need for a child better than a woman who wishes to hear the cry of her own and no one has a greater desire to be with-child than a woman whose tradition measures her womanhood based on her ability to have children.

I mean, how can the value of my womanhood be determined by how many children my reproductive system can produce?

It's something I never really understood but I knew I would one day face. I was born in a tribe that deemed a woman unable to conceive prior to her marriage nothing more than furniture to be admired, something you look at through the window but must never purchase.

We are called the Watoto Wa Mungu people, from Kufuatia Mwanga. Kufuatia Mwanga is located in a forgotten part of Africa. We were basically lost to the world until recently. My father worked hard to have our people recognised. I saw him spend months away from home, working on trade deals and negotiations to ensure our kingdom would have some sort of relevance to the outside world.

My hometown is actually a city but I call it a village because of my people's backward thinking. That and the fact that we are still governed by a royal regime. We have electricity, water, cars and everything a modern society requires except sense. We are great in every aspect except for the way women are seen in our community. For example, how women who cannot have children are treated.

Fruitless woman or rather "Estéiril" as they are known, are ostracized and ridiculed. Forced to live lives of shame because they could not produce any offspring. According to the laws of Kufuatia Mwanga, if a woman can not conceive within two years after her wedding date is set, she is no longer eligible for marriage. From the moment you are engaged to your wedding date, it's a race for conception. If you don't conceive the date is moved forward until the two-year limit is reached. The young lady in question is then not eligible for engagement for a period of 3 years after the end of her previous engagement and she may

never reconcile with her ex-fiancé. We have a bit of a hit or miss situation going on.

It's something one can't really get away from either. Every marriage in our kingdom has to be approved by the king. We love our kingdom; we love our people and many would rather follow tradition so that they can celebrate their union with their loved ones than run away with the one they love.

Despite living in the 21st century, this tradition still takes precedent. I fail to see its importance or what benefit it brings. I see it as a celebrated form of prostitution. The men get to sleep around with as many women as they want, if she conceives, he has a wife and if she doesn't, he gets to find a new bed mate. This tradition puts young women at risk for HIV and other STI's and I hate that. I also hate the idea of anything that could knock down myself-esteem. Imagine the shame of being known as a woman who can't conceive and having to make sure that in your next relationship from day one, you're trying to get pregnant just so everyone can stop talking about you.

A friend of mine felt she couldn't survive the 3 years of shame and decided that she would rather have a child out of wedlock than be labelled barren. It was still something people looked down on but the punishment was simply that she would not be allowed to work or study until the child was at least a year old.

I tried to get my father to have the traditions overturned several times but he too was always held back by the elders, they seemed to enjoy it. The elder council was filled with mostly men who benefited from it, so it was no surprise that they felt that way.

The only good thing about our culture is that the by-laws do not allow fatherless children. Any man who is proved to have abandoned his child is hung or castrated. Out of fear, many men marry the mother of their children or make a conscious decision to risk impregnating women they can stand to co-parent with.

Men and women alike try to avoid finding themselves stuck with someone they don't want for the rest of their lives. They go for counselling, family planning and anything they can do to make sure things go smoothly. I feel for the women because I understand their anguish. I wrote this to tell my story. My story is not one told with the purpose of challenging the norms of society but rather to relay my trials and tribulations, and to ask you my fellowmen and women, for your opinion.

This is a story of how I loved a man with all of me and wanted to give him everything. I went against my own morals, even to the point of willingly sharing him, in the hopes that it would salvage my seemingly doomed marriage all because I was an Estèril.

I was an estèril but unlike the others, I was allowed to get married. A loophole I'll explain in time.

Like every story, there is a beginning, a middle and an end. It is only normal to start a story at the beginning, but sometimes the point before the beginning is needed to offer clarity.

My pre-beginning occurred on a night of passion. A night where I seized to be an Estèril, a night of lust and memories I can't forget. I still remember how he kissed and caressed me, touched me in all the right places, God that night. It reminded me of my wedding night, a night I first became a woman and my husband gave me a purpose, I was young but I know what I felt was love.

I married him because it was something my mother wanted me to do but when he touched me that night, I knew my heart began to accept him, even if just a little.

He made love to me, a love that echoed on the mahogany walls, bounced off the tiled floor and landed on the bed where it started.

It was slow at first so I could keep up but increased in tempo as I got into the swing of things. The kissing, handholding and touching made the sacrifice of my youth seem worthwhile. Our

journey started with moans, screams of passion and speaking in tongues. Every part of me was alive, all I wanted to do was distract myself from what was going on. I didn't want to think about the arranged marriage or what was going on with my parents and if he found any pleasure in what we were doing, then I would have had more than enough. That was my intention, that was the reason why I gave him my virginity without hesitation but I feel I was the one who received most of the pleasure, but then again, unlike most girls my age, I was allowed to do such, both legally and spiritually. I was 16 and married to a successful man, a man with a lot of potential, and he was only 24 and the fact that he was a hopeless romantic, was supposed to have made me the luckiest girl in the world.

I remember both nights very well. The night I lost my virginity to my husband and the night I conceived my daughter.

Both nights so similar, both involving passion, desire and determination to get away from the troubles in my life.

Daytime activities were filled with celebrations and surrounded by loved ones, while the evening had lingerie and slow music. I remember hands and lips crashing and separating all night.

Both nights stuck to my memory but the one that I remember most, was the night that changed my whole life, welcomed me to motherhood and gave me the greatest gift of all.

It was a night, with my husband's best friend.