



REFLECTIONS

*of the*



HEART



*A Story of  
Hope*

TSUNGI CHIWARA

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Cover design by BookBaby

## **Dedication**

To Jimi, my beloved husband and soul mate. You believe in me and are always there for me - thanks for helping with the book formatting. I couldn't have done it without you! I love you very much.

To Kombo, Kudzo, Anesu and Inyasha, my children. You're a great support and you encouraged me to begin writing the book. Much love to you.

To my mother, Anna C. Mupawaenda. Thank you for the gift that you are to me. I love you.

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## Foreword

In my kitchen in Florida is a beautiful teapot. It has black-and-white zebra stripes twirling round and round it from top to bottom. I got it at a small shop on the road that links Harare and Bulawayo. Whenever I see the teapot, it reminds me of the creativity in Zimbabwe.

In my office is a folder. It's fashioned from hand-made paper, moss green and crinkly. To close it you wind an attached piece of twine around a small wooden clasp. I got it at a small shop in Victoria Falls. Whenever I see the folder, it reminds me of that magnificent place—and of the creativity in Zimbabwe.

Holding Tsungi Chiwara's first book also reminds me of that 2005 trip to Zimbabwe—and the creativity in that great country—because that is where I first met Tsungi. I had been invited to come to Harare to teach a writer's workshop at Celebration Centre. More than fifty people came who had books inside them longing to get out. Those books-to-come were locked inside their heart, and I could see the reflections on their faces.

In fact I had seen that look on many faces before—the look that reflected a dream deep inside the heart. A dream that wouldn't die. A dream that seemed so far-fetched yet so real you could taste it. A dream that said in spite of everything going wrong around you, "I will come to pass. You just work and do your part and watch what happens."

So many people attended the workshop that the organizers asked me to teach a second session. So many people came to that one that we added a third session. Tsungi later told me she was shocked by how many people wanted to write a book.

Long after I returned to the United States, I was still impacted by the creativity, artistry, and longing to produce something beautiful that I saw in the hearts of so many Zimbabweans. They were laboring to create in spite of obstacles that would have stopped less resilient and tough people. Their perseverance and fortitude inspired and challenged me.

Tsungi kept in contact with me, as did many of the other students in the workshops. She told me about the book she longed to write—now a different one than she was thinking of when she attended my workshop. She had no idea how to get it out of her heart and on to paper, nor how she would get it published once it was on paper, but she kept pressing forward.

When I launched a blog to share tips from my own journey and adventure as a writer, Tsungi was one of the first subscribers. She would often email me short encouraging words in response to my posts. (She knew that all writers, whether published or not, love encouraging, uplifting feedback.)

Over the years she would email me with questions—How should she do this? What would I recommend about that? Her life was already full—a husband, four children, a full-time job, no maid evenings and weekends, and oh yes studying for a Master's degree at the same time. Still the dream to write a book wouldn't die and she worked on it as she could in spite of a very busy schedule.

One day she emailed me with the news that she was about halfway through her book. About a year later the long-awaited email arrived announcing that she was finished and was looking for a publisher. In fact, a publishing company was actually pursuing her! I don't

know if she believed my email, mostly in capital letters, congratulating her on this feat and trying to convince her that this doesn't happen to all first-time authors so quickly.

More emails came and I followed her progress as she interviewed agents, publishers, and self-publishers. The choices were many and she had to weigh all the pros and cons, as does every writer everywhere on earth.

Today you hold in your hands that seemingly unreachable dream. Writing a book is not easy, but it can be done, and Tsungi is proof of that. It took perseverance, patience, dealing with fears, ignoring fears, facing failure, being willing to try again, and more.

Those in fact are some of the lessons that Kui, the heroine in *Reflections of the Heart*, learns. And yes of course she learns them the hard way—we wouldn't have a story if she didn't.

I am inspired by Tsungi's story and I'm inspired by Kui's story. *Reflections of the Heart* will likewise inspire you—perhaps to do great things yourself, as Tsungi and Kui have done. Everyone has a dream inside them, whether to write a book or do something else wonderful, exciting, and frightening. *Reflections of the Heart* will give you the encouragement you need.

Tsungi's book and Kui's story are proof that no matter what you face, the dream inside your heart can be birthed. Tsungi's journey was far from easy, as anyone in Zimbabwe can attest, but she did it. Over the years she signed most of her emails to me with this: "With God all things are possible." It's true. Tsungi is proof of that. And I am so proud of her.

- Diana Scimone

Orlando, Florida, USA

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# Chapter 1

## The early years

### It's not how you start...

"I'm not sure why I did it," repeated Kui with a somewhat disinterested tone.

The psychiatrist, the hospital Matron and her mum looked at each other almost as though each expected the other to have an answer.

After a while, Kui's mother stood up and thanked the psychiatrist for coming. After seeing her out along with the matron, who had also taken the cue to leave, she came back to sit by Kui's bedside.

She sighed, looked at her daughter, and fighting back the tears in her eyes whispered softly to her, "You know that I love you very much Kuitakwashe, don't you?"

Kui looked at her mother, always trying to be strong for her, and as she noticed the tears in her eyes, suddenly a flood of regret filled her whole being.

"You've done nothing but love and support me all my life and for that I am eternally grateful mum."

Kui's mother leaned over and kissed her on the cheek and whispered, "Good night and see you in the morning."

"Good night," replied Kui.

Her mother picked up her handbag and left the room, switching off the light and closing the door behind her. Only the side lamp remained on.

Kui lay facing up and staring at the ceiling as she reflected on her life from as far back as she could remember. She had fragmented memories, and some of what she 'remembered' was really stuff she had been told, especially from the time she was born till the age of four.

Kui was born on a cold winter morning at St. Mark's Hospital. It was one of the largest mission hospitals in Salisbury, the capital city of the then Rhodesia. She was born in July 1971 and named Kuitakwashe Janice, her surname being Mtetwa. At that time there was civil war in Rhodesia. This would carry on until 1980 when Rhodesia would finally be liberated from the Ian Smith Regime to gain independence.

Kui was the third and last child to be born to Tendai and Tsitsi Mtetwa. Her siblings were twin brothers aged three, Farirai and Tarisai. Kui's birth was non-eventful. Her mother was discharged after only one night in the hospital. The doctor did not see any point in 'detaining' her any further since this was not a first time delivery for her. There were no complications at all relating to her or the baby.

During the colonial times, Africans were referred to as 'blacks' and the colonialists were the 'whites'. These terms could have been viewed as racially offensive but unfortunately that was just the way things were at that time. In those war torn days, blacks were not permitted to live in affluent areas such as Lendale, Riverview or Orangegrove.

The Mtetwas lived in Glen Voy, one of the largest and oldest townships for blacks, to the south of Salisbury. Their home was small but comfortable and cosy.

Kui's father was a clerk at a white-owned law firm. He supplemented his income by working most weekends at a local City Council library. Her mother was a nurse. She also worked at the City Council - a clinic. It was pretty much either nursing or teaching for blacks who had not done too badly in those days.

Mr. and Mrs. Mtetwa were doing reasonably well for a black couple and their lives were comfortable. They had managed to buy and pay off the house they lived in. They had a car and they could afford a live-in maid. The twins were already attending a local crèche by the time they were three years old.

When Kui was born, her mother was able to take maternity leave. She had already used up three weeks before the delivery, leaving her with only just over two months to be with Kui before returning to work.

Fortunately, Mrs. Mtetwa had a very good maid who doubled up as a nanny. She also had Kui's maternal grandmother, fondly referred to as *Gogo*, the Ndebele word for grandmother. *Gogo* had offered to come and help for several months while the maid adjusted to managing both the housework and looking after Kui.

The weeks and months flew by, and before anyone knew it, a year had gone by. Kui and the twins' world, as they knew it, was about to change significantly. Kui had just been weaned. Being very ambitious, Mrs. Mtetwa decided to pursue her Master's degree in Community Medicine at a university in the U.K. Her studies would be full-time and last two years. Mr. Mtetwa was very keen on the idea and encouraged her to go, seeing as the advantages far outweighed any disadvantages. The way he saw it, this would definitely open up career opportunities and bring more income.

The only pressure was that there was a small window for this opportunity. Mrs. Mtetwa had been one of the four black female nurses selected from the City Council and had been given a scholarship that had to be taken up within 18 months otherwise it would be forfeited. So the sooner she went the better. The support structure was already in place since the maid would remain. *Gogo* offered to come and live at the house for the two years her daughter would be away.

Mrs. Mtetwa left in early August 1972. It was traumatic for all the children. The twins were now four years old and did not want their mother to leave at all. For Kui it was somewhat better as she was the only one who was not aware of what was going on. This long separation from her mother would later affect her negatively; her mother would also be missing many of Kui's developmental milestones.

Kui's mother would call about three times a month, usually in the evenings before bedtime, to make sure she spoke to everyone. The family missed her terribly, but life had to go on. *Gogo* was wonderful and got on well with the maid, who continued taking time off on the weekends.

Mr. Mtetwa continued with his full time and part time jobs and Mrs. Mtetwa managed to send some money monthly from her part time job. The only bone of contention was that Mr. Mtetwa seldom spent quality time with his children.

When he came back from work, he would come and sit in the lounge for several minutes which was just enough time to gobble his food and watch the news highlights. He

would then say a hurried “Good night.” and vanish into his bedroom for the remainder of the night.

Presumably he would be reading his newspaper or sleeping. Whichever the case, it was always well before the twin’s bedtime of 7:30 pm. So if he really wanted to, he could have spent more time with them! Well, this really came as no surprise since he had been doing that even before his wife left. He was very reserved and kept to himself; he was disturbingly unsociable.

On Sundays *Gogo* insisted on taking the three children to her Methodist church which was within walking distance from the house. That was the highlight of the week especially for the twins. They got to go to Sunday school, learn songs and play by the swings and see-saws. Kui sat with *Gogo* and slept through most of the service each week seeing as she would have gotten up early in order to get ready for church. Initially, after Mrs. Mtetwa left, *Gogo* had a hard time with Kui refusing to eat or spitting out her food and waking up as much as four times on some nights.

Occasionally temper tantrums occurred, especially in public places. This was probably her way of dealing with her mother’s absence. With time, she settled down and became very close and inseparable from her grandmother. The boys also developed a strong bond with *Gogo*. The children had formed a stronger bond with their grandmother than with their father.

Fortunately, the crèche opened during the school holidays. This made life easier for *Gogo* and the maid who had lots of house work, especially the laundry.

Weeks turned to months, and then a year went by. The following year went by quickly.

Soon it was time for Kui’s mother to come home. Everyone was so excited.

Kui’s father even stayed up with the family until 9:00 pm the night before her arrival! The following morning he went to the airport alone since the flight was arriving very early. By the time the kids woke up, their mother had already arrived. The boys were so excited to see her. Kui was very cautious at first, refusing to be held by her until several hours later when she had relaxed and started warming up to her.

It took several months but life did return to normal. It was then time for *Gogo* to leave, the consolation being that she promised to visit. Because of Kui’s age and the strong bond she had developed with her grandmother over the two years, it was heart breaking to see her leave, and she cried for weeks on end. *Gogo* had become like a second mother to her.

After three weeks, Kui’s mum went back to work at the City Council, where she had applied to take two years study leave. She devoted almost all her spare time to making applications for a new job as she now had the advantage of a post graduate qualification which she had passed with honours. After four months of perseverance she finally landed a very good position as an assistant lecturer.

Had it not been for her race, she definitely would have been appointed a lecturer in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Rhodesia. This was the only university in the country at the time. The hours were flexible and she was paid significantly more than her previous job. One of the immediate benefits was that the family was allowed to move to a

house belonging to the university, which was located within the university grounds in the vicinity of Tsitsi Mtetwa's workplace.

The garden was much bigger and the house was definitely more spacious than where they were coming from; it had three bedrooms, a lounge combined with a dining room, bathroom and kitchen. Kui continued sharing her bedroom with the maid. The boys used the other bedroom whilst her parents had the main one.

Kui started going to crèche soon after her mother's return since she had just turned three years. The year after that the boys started school at age seven at a Catholic school, St. Patrick's, located in one of the low-density suburbs in northern Salisbury.

Since it was still the colonial era, most blacks attended schools in the high-density suburbs or in the rural areas. However the policy of Catholic schools was that they needed a certain percentage of the children to be from minority groups which at the time would more often be blacks or those from a mixed race. At that moment in time in Rhodesia there were hardly any Chinese or other minority races. Mr. and Mrs. Mtetwa secured the twins' places through a Catholic family friend of many years.

One of Kui's deepest memories was of her fighting a lot with Tarisai but getting on very well with her other brother Farirai. This carried on despite efforts by her parents to talk and reason with them both. From what Kui remembered, it was nearly always her brother who would pick a fight or do something to her or get her into trouble.

At seven years of age in 1978, Kui also joined St. Patrick's. She, like her brothers, had had the advantage of going to crèche early in life and could speak some English, but she remembered many of her fellow classmates not being in the same boat. Most of them had typically gone to crèche for just a year before attending Kindergarten at St. Patrick's, and their English was therefore not as good. Kindergarten consisted of Grades 1 and 2.

From an early age Kui found it hard to open up and play with other children. She was more of a loner and preferred to stay in the classroom during the morning and lunch breaks. During that time she would be drawing, colouring pictures or just plain day dreaming. It's not that other children did not come and ask to play with her; she just did not want to play with others.

At first Farirai would come and check on her during the breaks to find out if she was O.K., but he later stopped when he felt that she had settled in and was fine. Kui loved the school work and thrived academically. She particularly loved creative writing as she had a wild imagination and found it easy to make up stories and loved reading them out loud in class as well.

She had to bring her own food, usually a sandwich or crisps with a drink for the morning break. St. Patrick's provided lunch which consisted of a hot meal and dessert and at 3:30 pm they had what was called 'high tea' which was a sweet or savoury snack with a cup of tea or soft drink.

The usual school routine started at 8:00 am and ended at 1:00 pm. On some days they had physical education. Everyone ate lunch in the school dining hall and then afterwards the Kindergarten children all had to go take a nap for an hour and then wake up in time for tea.

Something else Kui remembered quite vividly was that all the Catholics would disappear for about 30 minutes before lunch each day. They had to go for some sort of Catholic religious instruction which was not compulsory for those who were not Catholic.

Kui really thought she was destined not to have any friends, and she was very sad because of this. *Even at crèche, in the last months it was the same, so why would it change now?* she would always ask herself. In a way she knew it was her fault because she was an introvert, but it was hard for her to believe she had anything to offer other people or that they would see anything in her. Besides, she was not very comfortable around some of them since they were mostly whites; she felt like they were staring at her most of the time.

Sometimes she would watch from the classroom door other kids her age laughing and playing. Even the blacks seemed to be mingling well and having fun. She envied them so much.

A year into Kindergarten, she was desperate to have someone to play with but she rationalised that it was now too late to make friends as everyone by now had their own friends.

What would they think if she intruded on their friendships? So she continued with her sadness and loneliness, finding refuge in her school work.

She looked forward to going home every day because she could spend time with her mother. She found that her mum always had time for her, and she loved her dearly. Her mother, having bought a car at the beginning of the year, would pick her and her brothers up at the end of the day. If her brothers had afternoon activities that went beyond that time, their father would then pick them up later after work.

Their mother would genuinely ask them how their day was and Kui felt free talking about school and all the new things she was learning. Her mother seemed concerned that she had not made friends and yet the year was almost through. Kui assured her it was a matter of time, and secretly hoped so too!

Kui found her homework easy, and she spent the little time left after doing her homework bathing, eating, watching TV and talking to her mother. She hardly saw her father as he would leave early in the morning before she got up. He would drop the boys off by the gate on days he picked them up from school and then he usually came home after Kui's bedtime.

Even when she did see him on the weekends, he seemed disinterested in her, or her brothers for that matter, hardly asking about school and how it was going. Come to think of it, he seldom asked about anything. Going for picnics as a family or the boys going fishing with their dad, those kinds of things were a mere fantasy in the Mtetwa household.

After her first year at school, Kui's brothers who were in Grade 5 by now, were sent to boarding school in a little town about 80 kilometres east of Salisbury called Marandellas, and she became even lonelier. She didn't mind too much about Tarisai leaving, but she missed Farirai awfully. The twins would be finishing their schooling years, including high school, there and that made Kui anything but happy.

Many times Kui wondered if she had any cousins. She had never met any and longed for someone to play with at home. Neither had she ever met her other relatives from either of her parents' families except for her two grandmothers, her paternal grandfather and one of her mother's four sisters.

She knew other relatives existed since once in a blue moon her parents would mention an aunt, uncle or another relative. She found it really odd that her family lived in isolation from their extended family. She once likened her family to the weird Addams Family from

TV – her family was not freaky like them but they lived pretty much in their own little world and did their own thing.

As Kui started her second year at St. Patrick's, a pleasant surprise awaited her. There was a new girl in her class. Her name was Favianna, or Favi as she preferred to be called. She was Italian. Her father's company had relocated him from Italy to Rhodesia; the family followed several months later. From the moment Kui met Favi, she liked her. There was something about Favi that was interesting and inviting.

Of course this was almost like a 'second chance' to make friends at school. Being a new girl, Favi initially was quite reserved. She did not venture into the playground at break time, unlike the rest of the children. So Kui and Favi started talking during the morning breaks in the classroom, and soon they became very good friends and with time inseparable.

Favi was very likeable, and she got on with everyone. After a few weeks, she even managed to convince Kui that they should go play outside. While Favi would mingle with the other boys and girls, Kui would either play by herself or sit by the benches, waiting for Favi to come and play with her. She did not like her playing with the other children because she felt Favi was *her* friend. Favi seemed to be ignorant of this until one day when Kui refused to come out of the classroom and stayed inside crying. Favi asked her, "What's wrong?"

She eventually explained, "Well, it's just that I thought you were *my* friend only."

Favi replied, "You *are* my best friend Kui, but I have other friends too. You should also have other friends!"

Kui relaxed with the declaration of her being Favi's best friend although Favi continued playing with the other kids. Kui either played with Favi or by herself.

Favi's family was very friendly and Kui loved going over to their house from time to time, sometimes even overnight. Favi's mother was a house wife and she had five children – Favi was the youngest and only girl. Food was a big deal at their house, and they always made it a habit to eat at the dining room table at meal times. How Kui longed for that to happen in her own family.

At the Mtetwas each person ate wherever they wanted, whether it was in front of the TV, in the dining room, on the veranda or even in the bedroom! They could even eat meals in the garage and no one would be bothered!

At Favi's house they ate a lot of Italian food like spaghetti bolognese, lasagne and pizza. Kui loved the food and she could not get enough of it.

At home, though, they usually ate *sadza*, the staple food made from maize meal, meat and a green leafy vegetable called rape, every day. Kui could not understand why anyone would want to name a vegetable 'rape'. To her, this meal was so monotonous but apparently Kui's father preferred that to western meals, and so alas the Mtetwa family was destined to see rice, coleslaw salad, roast chicken and the like at Christmas time only, or if they were lucky, when visitors came.

Grade 2 whizzed by and soon it was Grade 3. It was an exciting grade primarily because it marked the end of Kindergarten. Kui and Favi decided to join the junior choir at the beginning of the year. Being in choir was really fun as it meant getting involved in competitions, leading the school singing in assembly most mornings, and getting involved in the annual school play. The choir really made Kui feel useful and significant.

This was the year that they also started sports after lunchtime, although there was not much choice except for athletics, swimming and netball. Kui chose athletics and swimming.

Mr. Mtetwa at some stage had decided to also take his studies to another level. He had decided to take up distance learning and registered for a three year Master's degree program in Business Administration with a South African University.

In April of that year, 1980, Kui was told by her parents that Rhodesia had been renamed Zimbabwe. She didn't really understand, but apparently the majority blacks had finally gained independence from the minority whites, and a lot of things were now going to change in favour of blacks, which was a good thing.

For Kui the day to day life did not change much really, since she lived in a rather cushioned environment, but towards the end of the year, her parents told her that with immediate effect blacks who could afford it were now permitted to move into the white suburbs. Life was about to drastically change for the better!

Her parents, wanting to maximize on the opportunity, quickly found a nice comfortable house in an area called Lowlands, which was only a ten minute drive to school. The packing was done during the week and they moved one Saturday in late October. Kui was so excited and her brothers had come home that weekend to move house together with the family.

Everyone loved the house. It had five bedrooms, two bathrooms including an en suite, two lounges, a separate dining room, a very large kitchen, laundry room, two lock-up garages and best of all a swimming pool! Kui could not wait to get into the pool! It was really great that they were moving to a house with a pool in the hottest month.

Each of them now had their own bedroom with the fifth one being the visitors' bedroom. The maid and gardener each had their own bedrooms and had a communal kitchen and bathroom in the servants' quarters behind the garage.

The gardener, Sixpence, was a bold and proactive young man. He had just presented himself at their house shortly after they had moved in, looking for a job. On further investigations it turned out that Sixpence's father worked as a gardener just a few houses away. Father and son had noticed a removals truck offloading goods and had quickly realised that a new gardener might just be what this new family needed. Sixpence was conveniently at the right place at the right time.

As soon as they had settled in Kui invited Favi over for the weekend. She was so excited because before that she had been too embarrassed to invite her over to their small house in the university grounds. Deep down in her heart Kui knew that Favi would not have minded at all. It was actually a shameful thing to think of her home like that in the first place.

At the end of that year, Kui obtained her first prize since attending St. Patrick's. She won a prize for maths and also came fourth in class which was very good by any standard. She was quite pleased with herself but would have preferred to get the English prize and to come first in class. She made up her mind that she would aim higher the following year.

The Christmas holidays began. Kui really cherished her new home. She had a feeling they were going to be there for a very long time. That's what she hoped anyway. Her brothers came home and as usual she hung out with one and fought with the other. Christmas Day was the same every year. If they were lucky they were invited to someone else's house rather than

spending it at their house. Otherwise, Mr. and Mrs. Mtetwa's usual friends came over year in and year out with their unsociable children.

As was typical of their culture, all the men sat together outside, and all the women sat together somewhere else. They would clear the lounge and play loud music while they danced, usually to LP's of ABBA and Boney 'M', had fizzy drinks and ate exclusively western food until they were sick, literally.

But this Christmas was a bit peculiar because the Mtetwas now had a new, bigger house in the *suburbs*, and *that* was a big deal! Most of their friends still lived in the high density suburbs. Only a handful had managed to move.

So of course the Christmas party was more of a house warming party, with Kui's mother, the more vocal of the Mtetwa couple, making a speech of 'how this had all come about' and taking each person, as they arrived, on a guided tour of the house and garden.

She could easily have been mistaken for a real estate sales person! Somehow at the end of it all there was still time left to eat and dance intensely and repeatedly to 'Brown girl in the ring' by an artist Kui could not recall.

Grade 4 had two main highlights, school-wise.

Firstly Kui made the school swimming team. This was a huge achievement because the school was predominantly white and it was viewed as a 'white' sport, unlike for example netball, which was dominated by blacks.

She had to come to school thirty minutes early each morning in order to practise with the rest of the squad. The only annoying thing about the swimming was when the pool had too much acid. It would then be necessary to have milk put in their eyes. Kui loved being a member of the swimming team because it gave her a sense of purpose and achievement.

Secondly one of Kui's essays was entered into a local art competition. She obtained an Honours Grade. She was ecstatic. That certainly made up for not getting any class prizes like she had hoped for.

Grade 5 had a few key events that were significant in Kui's eyes. She obtained a second Honours Grade for an essay submitted to another art competition. This for her ranked tops out of all the year's events.

Towards the end of the first term, a new class teacher, Ms Matthews, came from New Zealand.

She was really nice, with a hearty genuine laugh. She also had a way with words and phrases. Her favourite description that she used when she was trying to describe how large something looked was 'great big huge'. Kui reckoned she must have been in her late 40s. She wondered why she wasn't married since she was such a wonderful person.

On the other hand, half way into the year her choir teacher, Ms Thomas got married. The wedding was lovely and the choir was invited to sing there.

The only sad thing was that she had married a foreigner which meant there was a possibility of her leaving. So not surprisingly she left soon after the wedding to start a new life in his homeland, Spain. However, this was after first going on a whirlwind honeymoon to several countries in Europe.

Kui was enjoying school, and she had started relaxing and slowly coming out of her shell over the years. Besides her best friend Favi, she gained two more friends, Anita and

Tendai. They were both in her class. Together with Favi they all got on very well. At last Kui felt she had found happiness because she had people who liked her.

She had a sense of belonging. She still felt quite possessive of Favi, especially when she felt people were getting too close to her, but she pretended that she didn't mind – but she suspected Favi, who now knew her very well, could see that her body language and what she said were inconsistent.

Kui had started attending Scripture Union Club in Grade 4, mainly because of Anita and Favi who came from very religious families – she carried on going although she found it very boring; there was no religious bone in her. She did not understand who this 'Jesus' person that was referred to was. The teacher kept talking about Him week in and week out.

In the end, she decided that she actually did not mind whiling away time because they almost always gave away chocolates such as Lunch-bar and Turkish Delights for reciting Bible verses correctly. The songs were also very simple and catchy. She actually found herself enjoying them and remembering the words. She was to remember them for the rest of her life.

The Christmas play that year was the first one without Ms Thomas, now Mrs Ronaldo, but all the same it went fairly well with the new choir mistress. Prize giving was uneventful and quite frankly disappointing for Kui as she did not get a single prize, not even the one for effort. Kui did not understand how the teachers chose the prize winners; it was a mystery to her because she felt that she deserved a prize.

Grade 6 started off very well with all of the three Grade 6 classes going on a wildlife and nature camp for a week together with their class teachers.

Rumor had it that the teachers would be on the lookout during the camp for potential prefects for the following year, Grade 7, as well as the Head Girl and Head Boy.

What that basically meant was that you had to be on your best behaviour as they would be spying on you and seeing how you interacted with other children. The camp was so much fun for Kui. They slept in dormitories, went for nature walks and had to collect samples of plants. They recorded their observations about insects and animals, and the food was wonderful.

When they returned, they were given two weeks in which to compile a project on the camp. They were to include specimens of whatever they had collected. Kui loved this type of thing, and she completed her project in a week and handed it in. She was so ecstatic when she later was told that her project was the best, and it was even announced during the morning assembly in the school hall.

Her mum was so pleased that she doubled her pocket money and bought her a new stereo. Her father seemed pleased, but Kui was not sure as he did not express himself so readily.

Grade 6 was really great because it was considered a senior grade and besides Grade 7, it was the next best thing: Once you were in Grade 7, the rest of the school suddenly showed more respect. Kui was happy that the lower grades could then assist with errands – she was tired of going up and down.

Towards the end of Grade 6, Kui received some heart breaking news. Favi's father was being transferred to Australia.

*He really is Vasco da Gama*, Kui thought, on hearing the news. He would be in Australia for at least five years and then goodness knew where next. After hearing the news, both Favi and Kui cried for days until they had no more tears to shed. It really was unbearable to think of the inevitable separation. They spent alternating weekends at each other's homes until Favi left.

Kui's own father was making progress. He had finally finished his studies and subsequently joined a bank. The change in their lifestyle was almost immediate because they suddenly seemed to have lots more money than ever before. This was evident in the new sofas, built in stove and new dining room suite that suddenly appeared a few months into his new job.

Kui figured that a bank was a very rewarding place to work and that it paid an awful lot of money and offered many loans. The only thing now was her father would come home much later than even before which led to Kui assuming that in a bank, you probably have to work for every penny as well. For her, it didn't make much difference because she hardly saw him anyway.

Favi left several days after school closed in December. Kui and her mum went to see her and her family off at the airport. Kui and Favi hugged and cried, promising each other that they would stay in touch, and hopefully visit each other someday soon.

Back in school, Kui was not even bothered by the fact that her other friends, Anita and Tendai, were both made prefects. It was announced at the prize giving; Kui was not made a prefect. But she had more depressing things on her mind such as how Favi had abandoned her. That's what Favi had done as far as she was concerned.

The Christmas of 1983 was the worst ever for Kui largely due to the fact that her best friend had left. She was very upset about the whole thing. She just could not understand why life had to be like that.

Grade 7 was her final year at St. Patrick's and Kui actually was excited about the prospect of leaving and going to high school as compared to enjoying her last year. The first term saw her having a marathon of entrance exams and interviews at several private schools. Her first choice and also her parents, was Maryhouse which was in Harare, previously Salisbury before Independence.

Round about the same time Kui's mum started talking to her slowly but surely about puberty and about having her monthly menstrual periods. In fact, one Saturday, her mum insisted on going into town with Kui to buy sanitary ware, 'just in case'. Kui found the topic very uncomfortable and she certainly did not want to keep any pads. But her mum insisted nevertheless and off they went. Kui found herself having to face the fact that she was no longer a child but that she was now transitioning into a teenager.

It felt weird. Some of the girls in her class had boyfriends, but she had not even gone on a date. She could not even look a boy in the eye, or anyone else for that matter. Anyway no one had ever asked her out on a date.

The year ended off with school exams and the Leaver's Dance. Mr. Mtetwa had just come back from a business trip and to Kui's shock he had bought her several outfits. She decided to wear one of them, a beautiful electric blue 60's style dress.

The Saturday of the dance, she had her hair relaxed and put in a beehive hairstyle in order to complete the 60's look then she rushed off to buy silver earrings and matching shoes.

To her surprise, her father commented, “You are looking stunning today,” as he dropped her off.

Tendai and Anita ran to hug her as she entered the hall, and she could see heads turning. That night was very memorable for her because, in a way, she felt almost like Cinderella. She was normally a tomboy and it was as though she had been transformed.

She was asked to dance by four boys from her class. They had no girlfriends. It seemed the other ones did not dare ask as their girlfriends were right there, clinging to them. Of the boys she danced with, two asked for her number, and she gave them wrong numbers since the issue of dating at her age was not a topic for discussion at her house at all.

The year ended off with some excellent news. Kui could not believe that she had made it into Maryhouse, the best girls’ school in the country! Tendai and Anita had also made it there!

## Chapter 2

### More memories

Two more weeks left before Form 1 at Maryhouse! The day that she had gone to buy her uniform was still very vivid in Kui's mind.

Kui and her mum had only taken an afternoon to buy her uniform seeing as all but three items were available at the school shop. They had to go into town to find a size 4 pair of black shoes, a navy blue raincoat and a navy blue satchel. The satchel was required for sports.

The school was not very fussy about what type it was, but they were particular about the school bag which carried books and other school items. It had to be the approved black Maryhouse bag bearing the school emblem printed on the front.

Kui loved the school colors – pale yellow, navy blue and black. They were definitely a winning combination.

To Kui's annoyance, her mum insisted, "We need to buy one size up for all your uniform, size 34."

That afternoon, she argued with her mum at the school shop, located at a nearby shopping mall. It was so bad that people started throwing glances at them.

Her mum then snatched the clothes from her, and went to the till to pay. Kui did not talk to her until they reached town. She was so upset because she liked fitted clothes not clothes that would hang on her.

"Mum, why did you insist that I buy size 34?" Kui asked her mum. "You *know* I wear size 32. I'll look terrible. Baggy clothes are so not in!"

Her mum kept quiet for a few minutes before retorting, "I've told you before and I'll keep telling you again and again. You are a growing girl and a perfect fit will be far too tight. You're bound to put on a little bit of weight here and there. Kui, remember that you're going for school and not for a fashion show. This isn't *haute couture* we're talking about, so it doesn't matter if they hang on you for a while! Now that's that! I don't want to hear anymore, unless you want me to phone your father."

Kui was scared of her father, so any mention of her father, in that regard, was a conversation killer to her. She loved her mum, but she hated the way her mum couldn't stand on her own feet and resolve situations, at least with regards to the family.

She would try to sort out issues, but as a last resort she would, without fail, end up saying, "If you don't listen, I am going to tell your father." So with no further ado Kui, sulking, got out of the car and followed her mum into another shopping mall to buy the rest of the things. They entered a shop and her mum quickly rounded up the items that she needed and moved towards the till.

Kui didn't know what came over her but she suddenly could not resist the temptation to be cheeky to her mum. "Why don't I buy size 6 shoes, in case my feet grow? I mean, that's at least two sizes up isn't it?" she asked her mum, putting on a serious face.

Her mother put the items down on the counter and with her hands on her hips she narrowed her eyes and replied, "*Wati chii?*" meaning "WHAT did you say?"

Kui thought *that* was actually very witty. But then Kui realized how serious her mum was. She usually spoke Shona when she was either very angry or excited. She quickly changed her stance and mumbled, “*Hapana.*” meaning “Nothing.”

They finished paying for her stuff then headed home. They were both quiet all the way home. Kui was quite annoyed by the whole uniform affair. On arrival Kui lied to her mum that she had a headache and spent the rest of the day in her room, choosing to only come out for a quick bath and supper in the early evening.

If she could have had her way, she would have preferred to eat most of her meals in her bedroom, but her mother, though she had allowed it in the earlier years, forbade it because she believed that as children grew older, they needed to ‘socialise’ with everyone in the house. That meant her parents and brothers, when they were at home, as well as the maid, Sis V.

The family had decided to shorten her name from Valencia to simply ‘V’. Employing Sis V had all happened so fast, but Kui’s mum had been desperate as her maid at the time had suddenly left due to ill health. Kui’s mum had been overwhelmed with the house work, being a working mother.

Kui got on very well with Sis V. In fact, she was like the older sister she never had. She was twenty years old, had been orphaned at a very young age and had been brought up by her grandmother in the rural areas.

Somehow her granny had managed to grow enough crops to feed and school her three grandchildren and as a result Sis V had at least managed to complete her Form 2 when she was fifteen years old. That explained why her English was good. Her granny had then passed away, and the grandchildren had been separated and dispersed among different relatives.

Sis V was sent to Mutare to a rogue of an uncle and aunt who barely fed her and did not see the necessity of a girl finishing high school. In return for a roof over her head, clothes once every few months and the little food she got, she worked as the nanny for her aunt and uncle’s three small children; she was never paid a penny.

Finally she plucked up enough courage to run away when she was eighteen, rationalising that she was no longer a minor by Zimbabwean law and that she could therefore look for greener pastures. In order to finance the trip she had sold all the clothes she had and left the small eastern town of Mutare in favour of the capital city.

She had taken the train as it was the cheapest transport available and on arrival in Harare she had gone door to door looking for house work, since she knew no other trade. She had had enough money to last only two weeks staying in a hostel in Tinogara, one of the oldest townships, and eating a paltry meal once a day.

She had found a job as a maid after about ten days, just in the nick of time, and lived well with the family that she worked for, until they decided to move to England. They had wanted to take her with them, but Sis V did not have a birth certificate. Without proof of birth she could not get a passport. The family could not wait for her to sort out her documents, so they left without her.

Just when there seemed to be no hope of Sis V finding another job, Mrs. Mtetwa saw an advert in the paper. The advert had been put there by the family that had gone overseas – they had felt that was the least they could do to assist. Mrs. Mtetwa quickly contacted them, interviewed Sis V and employed her within a week. The Mtetwa family grew to love her.

Sis V was a good listener and Kui regularly poured out her heart to her especially concerning issues that bothered her - one example was that of her father not having much to do with her life and her not having many friends. They spent a lot of time together, often walking to the shops or watching TV when Kui's parents were not at home.

Kui sometimes helped Sis V with the cooking. Sis V did not know where any of her relatives were – it was sad how she had never managed to reunite with her siblings. She had nowhere to go on the weekends. As a result she was always at the Mtetwa's house resting in her quarters when she was officially off duty. She was to stay with her new family for a very long time.

The other maids the Mtetwas had employed over the years were very different from Sis V, to say the least. The Mtetwas certainly had had quite a lot of maids pass through their house over the years. One maid Kui remembered well was named *Hazvinei* meaning 'It doesn't matter'. She was quite likeable and hardworking, but she had sticky fingers – the moment she started working at their house, things started disappearing.

Small things like pens, coins, spoons could suddenly not be found. As she became bolder, bigger things also started vanishing, like Kui's sneakers and the twins' swimming towels. Now that Kui thought about it, this was why Hazvinei always insisted on going off on the weekends, without fail. She needed to dispose of her loot. She must have been making a quick buck.

When confronted she would look very startled and concerned, then look away and barely whisper to Kui's mum, "I don't know mother, have you looked everywhere?" But the evidence pointing in her direction was increasingly overwhelming.

The last straw was when Kui's father's wallet with several hundreds of American dollars went missing. It would have been silly to have carried out investigations as to the culprit when everyone already knew it was her. She was fired on the spot!

She had to run out of the house with only half of her belongings hanging out of a plastic bag as Kui's father chased her in a fit of rage. He made it clear that she was to immediately disappear or go to jail.

Then there was *Gogo Jetina*, in her mid-50's. She was very loving and gentle. Unfortunately she had barked up the wrong tree. With her being the oldest in the house, she thought she could boss everyone else around, especially Mrs. Mtetwa who she called *Mwanangu* meaning 'My child'. *Or was it because perhaps she was a little too old to do chores?* Kui had wondered.

She would leave work half done and expect Mrs. Mtetwa to finish it. She once asked Kui's mum to dash to the shops on her behalf to get the bread and milk since she was younger and had more energy than herself. Needless to say she only lasted three weeks.

There was also *Mai Schola* meaning 'Schola's mother', because her first child's full name was Scholastic-ability. She had not worked as a maid or nanny before. She was very good with the children, but she was very slow and took forever to learn the day to day work needing to be done around the house such as doing the laundry, ironing and so on.

She actually thought she was a full and equal member of the family. She would come and sit in the lounge together with the rest of the family.

She would take her sweet time eating, laughing loudly with her mouth full, and forgetting there was still work to do. To make matters worse she would interject almost every conversation and think nothing of it – regardless of whether there were visitors or not.

The one who really took the cup was Loveness or Lovey, as she preferred to be called. She had been ‘scouted’ from Kui’s father’s rural home. She came from an extremely rural background. The only English words she knew were ‘yes’ and ‘no’, but she didn’t even know what they meant.

So what would often happen was she would be shaking her head indicating ‘no’ but she would instead say ‘yes’, or she would nod her head to indicate ‘yes’ but then say ‘no’. In the end Kui’s mum asked her to just speak in her mother tongue, Shona, and say ‘hongu’ meaning ‘yes’ or ‘kwete’ meaning ‘no’.

This particular maid had to be taught how to switch on the stove and lights, seeing as she was only familiar with firewood, she had no notion of electricity. The first few days she would ‘iron’ the clothes without switching on the iron. Everyone would wonder why their clothes were always creased and suspected that the iron was faulty. It soon became clear that it wasn’t the iron that was the problem, but rather the one using it.

Lovey would also sit on the floor and cut vegetables with a knife directly into a bowl, choosing to leave the wooden cutting board; she obviously didn’t mind the risk of slicing her fingers in the process!

She had some annoying habits, for instance she was fascinated with toothpicks as she had never seen them before. So what she would do was to use them and put them back so as not to be wasteful. Another time, she spread pork sausage meat onto Mr. Mtetwa’s sandwiches for work because she thought it was as good as polony. Mrs. Mtetwa had reasoned that a rural girl would be more manageable and not given to the ways of the city, but it became such an effort to teach her everything and Lovey just had to be released, and go she did!

There were several other maids after that, and with time and luck better ones came along and some even stayed for up to two years. But from Kui’s point of view Sis V was the best one to date.

The two weeks of holiday left seemed to take forever to come to an end, and Kui was so excited about going to high school such that she could hardly eat anything or sleep most of the time. Thanks to Sis V, all her belongings were beautifully labelled on time; Kui also managed to buy and pack her stationery, toiletries and tuck. This was all done a week before school was to start.

## Chapter 3

### High school begins

Monday 18 January 1985 arrived. Kui remembered almost every detail of that day that was to mark a new chapter of her life – high school!

She was up at the crack of dawn, rearing to start her new life at Maryhouse. Being her first year at the high school, she had to be there with the rest of the Form 1's by 12:00 noon. It was only a ten minute drive to Maryhouse, but the one thing her father had drilled into her was that 'exactly on time' was late, and that it was always best to be there much earlier.

She resolved to bath early then decided that she would watch a video until later on in the morning. She would change into her uniform closer to midday.

At about 7:00 am her parents left the bedroom, had some breakfast and said good bye as always. The only thing that was different that her father said was, "Don't embarrass us, just work hard otherwise your future is doomed," and off he went to work. That was it; no "I'll miss you" or "all the best" – nothing!

Kui could not believe her father could be so callous and that all he cared about was how well she did for the family's sake. Well, actually, she could believe it. He was a nasty recluse. If he had said anything nice, it actually would have been out of character.

Her mum waved a friendly good-bye and said she would be back around 10:30 am to make sure that she was ready and then take her to Maryhouse.

By 10:00 am Kui was all dressed up, luggage by the door, ready to go and very excited, though a bit anxious. She spent the last 30 minutes chatting to Sis V who made her promise she would write to her soon.

At exactly 10:30 am the electric gate opened and her mum, punctual as usual, drove into the driveway. Mrs. Mtetwa came in and double checked that everything was in order. At long last it was time to go. On the way to Maryhouse, Kui's mum encouraged her to remember all that she and her father had taught her as she was growing up.

"Kui, remember to be a person of integrity. Don't lie or cheat in anything you do," she said. "Education is your ticket to make a good life for yourself. I hope you realise that not all children, especially girls, get such an opportunity."

She emphasized that making them proud was secondary. The one thing she did say though, which made Kui laugh inside was, "Stay away from boys."

*Of course I will, after all it's a girls' school isn't it?* she sarcastically thought to herself.

Her parents, especially her father, were very strict, and there was no chance of Kui having a relationship with any boy in the foreseeable future. Not as long as her parents were alive!

After driving for about ten kilometres, they passed a shopping centre, went over some humps and drove along a very high pale yellow wall for about a kilometre. They turned left where the wall ended. They found themselves in front of a huge blue and yellow gate with large gold letters written 'Maryhouse Girls School'. The gate was partially open, with enough space to let in one car at a time. There was a boom blocking road access into the school.

Two security guards were by the gate. A third person, presumably a school official, came and asked Mrs. Mtetwa for the name of the girl she was dropping off. He then quickly checked on a list he had and ticked the name off. He signalled to one of the guards to open the boom. As they were let through, Kui could see more cars pulling up just behind them. *So I'm not unreasonably early after all*, she thought.

The first thing about Maryhouse that Kui had noticed was the daunting yellow wall that seemed to encircle the whole school. Perhaps that was why Maryhouse was called 'The Yellow Jail' by people she knew. She wondered what other prison-like features lay ahead. *I hope to God it's not run like a prison*, she thought.

As they drove toward her hostel, Kui thought about the betrayal by her friends, Anita and Tendai, who had all along said they would also become boarders. They had suddenly 'changed their minds' and decided to be day scholars instead. She was upset because something inside her told her it was a conspiracy and that they had ganged up against her intentionally.

If they had told her in good time, she could have tried to convince her parents otherwise and she could also have been a day scholar. She hated having to miss the phone calls, hanging out on weekends and all the other benefits of being a day scholar. She was in two minds; probably it wouldn't have made a difference because although her mum was more flexible, her dad had been resolute about boarding school.

They drove past a beautiful building that resembled a church; it was enclosed by a wooden white fence. Kui wasn't much of a church fan since her immediate family never went to church, except for weddings and funerals. That meant that in some years she did not as much as set foot within the gates of a church yard. She did not see many benefits of going to church. *Gogo* used to go, but her life seemed just as ordinary as anyone else's.

Church was a waste of time as far as Kui was concerned, and she hoped it would be optional at Maryhouse. At St. Patrick's Kui had only attended scripture sessions when accompanying her friends.

Kui had been placed in Kudu Hostel. She had read quite a lot about the school and knew that the hostels were named after wild animals, more specifically antelopes. There were three other hostels - Impala, Sable and Gazelle. There were four competitive houses, named after authors, for both boarders and day scholars. If you were a boarder your competitive house corresponded to a specific hostel. Their names were Dahl, Blyton, and Orwell and Lewis. Kui was in Blyton.

It was pretty obvious that the school was trying to incorporate an indigenous touch, judging from the names of the hostels. Everything else in the school was pretty much white-orientated, which came as no surprise seeing as five years prior to Kui coming, Maryhouse had been a white's only school.

Kui was grateful that the country's independence had bought about so much reformation for the blacks. Things were certainly looking up. At least now blacks were increasingly getting equal opportunities in their own country.

Mrs. Mtetwa parked the car in front of Kudu, and they got out. They had arrived about an hour before the specified time, but already several cars spanned the car park. They took the luggage from the trunk and went into the entrance hall.

A friendly white middle-aged lady shook Mrs. Mtetwa's hand and introduced herself, "Good morning. I am Mrs. Williams. Welcome to Kudu. I'm the Boarding Mistress for this hostel." She beckoned for Kui's mum to fill in a form after which she directed her, "You may proceed upstairs to the dormitories."

They got to the dormitory and found a cubicle with Kui's name on it. After leaving her luggage, they walked around for a bit, inspecting the dormitory and bathrooms. Everything was clean and immaculate.

Kui's mum hugged her for a full minute and said a teary "goodbye" before going downstairs. After Kui's mum had gone, Kui sat on her bed and closed her eyes for a moment. *Thank goodness it's not an open dormitory with rows and rows of beds like some schools*, she thought to herself. *At least we don't have to sleep like sardines!* She was a very private person, and preferred the cubicle arrangement.

Her cubicle was very nice. To the left there was a window overlooking the car park. *Good*, she thought. *At least I can see my visitors from here.*

Each cubicle had a bed, a table, a lamp, a rug, several built-in cupboards and a closet for hanging clothes and putting shoes.

There was also a mirror between the closet and cupboards and each cubicle had a curtain rather than a door. After lying down for a while and taking everything in, Kui opened her eyes, got up and started to unpack. She was almost done when someone suddenly popped their head through the curtain and said, "Hi! I'm Susan and I'm your neighbour. Are you done so we can go downstairs? We have 30 minutes before the meeting with Mrs. Williams starts."

Kui was a bit taken aback and her mouth could only gape, then she pulled herself together, sat up and replied, "No not yet, but I'm almost done."

Without waiting for an invitation this Susan girl drew the curtain wide open and plonked herself on Kui's bed. "O.K., so I'll wait for you."

She was hard to shake off. *How irritating! Does she really have to sit there and watch me like a hawk while I unpack?* Kui thought.

She didn't like being rushed but today was an exception so she decided to fast track the unpacking and she was done in no time. She hated having her privacy invaded.

"Right, I'm done." Kui said. "Let's go."

It was just after midday.

She decided to reciprocate Susan's friendliness and introduced herself as they walked down the stairs towards the common room. They found Mrs. Williams already there, and they sat down with the rest of the girls. By 12:30 pm all the Form 1 girls were seated and all eyes were on Mrs. Williams...