

My name is Iza and this is my story. My mother was the first of three wives. The other wives were brought in because although my mother was a beauty and my father's true love, she had been unable to bear a child after some years of marriage. Pressure was thus put on my father to marry a wife who could give him children. My mother was displeased but she had no choice. Not long after the marriage rites, the new wife was pregnant. Everybody was overjoyed to see her stomach swell with life. My mother became the subject of ridicule since this was confirmation that the problem had been from her. She was called bad luck and asked to stay away from everything that concerned the baby. Months later, my father heard the cry of his first child, a baby girl that came with so much energy. Cows were killed in celebration of the latest father in town. To my father's utmost delight and my mother's dismay, wife number 2 seemed to get pregnant anytime my father so much as touched even her finger. After 6 years, wife number 2 had given birth to 6 breathtakingly beautiful girls who were promise of a good dowry when they would come of age to marry. However, my father still desired a son. My mother had been secretly consulting medicine men in her quest to conceive a child but all to no avail. By this time, my father's wife was pregnant with baby number 7. My mother finally met a medicine man who was positive that he could help her. He sent chills down her spine when he told her that she had to know "it took life to give life". He demanded seven fowls to be killed, which calmed my mother down because she believed that this was the life the medicine man had been talking about. She had been worried she would have been asked to kill somebody to get her baby. Being desperate, she felt she might have actually gone through with killing somebody, but was relieved to know it was fowls instead. Seven fowls dying would not be a problem. She was asked to make sure that my father made love to her seven times and stayed in her hut the whole night on the day of the sacrifice. After the sacrifice and incantations, she rushed home where she followed every instruction to the letter.

9 months later I was born. It had been a difficult birth, so my father had to transport my mother to a hospital quite far off from our home to make sure everything was okay. Just as I came out and let out my first cry, something went horribly wrong back at home. There were no cell phones, so my parents remained unaware whilst at the hospital, and those at home remained unaware of my birth. My father was overjoyed, seeing that his true love had finally had a child, and a son who was his spitting image! 2 days later when they got back to our home, beaming with smiles to announce the birth of a child who would carry on my father's name, they were met with the commotion at home. Apparently, on the day I was born, the daughters of my father's second wife had dropped dead like flies whilst she was having lunch with them. Fear gripped my mother and father at what had happened and the thought of it happening to me. There was total commotion in the house as my father's second wife rolled in agony, in complete madness at my father's feet, yelling the names of her daughters and foaming at the mouth. My father made fruitless attempts to console her whilst his mind drifted to new-born me, who was in my mother's hut. He was afraid of my fate being the same since a couple of families had also lost children recently. As he held on to his second wife, he made the decision to send me away to the city for my safety. As he walked into my mother's hut to inform her, they heard his second wife's mother yell, "May madness visit the home of whoever has caused my daughter this madness". As my parents ran out to see what was going on, they met the old woman dragging her behind on the floor, which was our traditional way of sealing a curse. And thus the commotion continued throughout the day, with everybody trying to pull wife number 2 out of the madness.

By dawn the next morning my mother and I were gone. My father had been so afraid; he could not wait. He made one of his good friends escort my mother and I out of the village to the city when everybody had calmed down and they had given his second wife some herbs to make her fall asleep. The madness of the second wife continued, since nobody could explain to her how and why this had

happened. My father was not allowed to divorce her and was expected to even attempt to conceive a baby with her.

It was thus I came to live in the city. My mother stayed with me, kept me at her breast even till I was 5 years old. How could she not? She had a son who had gotten the handsome looks of his father after her many years of suffering. At the age of 5, she was obligated to send me to the free public school so I could get an education. I cried a lot on the first day because I had been a mummy's boy, only seeing my father on every birthday when he came to visit his pride and joy. I didn't like to be so far away from my mother who even allowed me to call her by her first name instead of "Ma" like the other children. A week after I began school, a messenger came from the village. My mother was expected to return to the village to perform wife duties since I no longer needed to be nursed and my father had been unable to make another baby with his second wife. When she told me that night, we both cried till she carried me and put her breast in mouth and wiped my tears. It was my only comfort. Of course she wouldn't take me with her, what if what happened to my sisters happened to me? No. I would remain in the city to be registered in the boarding school since we did not have any direct family in the city to take care of me. The man who had escorted us out of the city lived here, but with the kind of punishments she had seen his wife met out to her own children she was afraid that if she left me with them, the man's wife would kill me before the end of the year. My mother left a week after I had been registered. I cried every day in the boarding school. The teachers were kind despite my behaviour because my mother ensured to grease their palms at the end of every month with a little money and some corned beef. Back in the village, my mother did not have any more children. The complications from my birth had ensured that, but she was content because she had me. Her husband's first son. Nobody could ridicule her anymore. However, our tradition saw having numerous children as riches. Since my mother was incapable of having more children and my father's second wife had bouts of madness, my father married his 3rd wife.

I was my parents joy as I excelled in school. After some months in the boarding house, my new friends had helped me to toughen up. I was no longer a cry-baby. My new group of friends helped me to adjust and as I managed to live without seeing my mother every day, I started to excel in school. It was a joy for my mother anytime she came to visit and the teachers told her I was excelling in school. Since she was the mother of my father's first son, and not childless like when my father had married a second wife, the third wife was submissive to my mother. She was given senior wife treatment especially as the third wife also gave birth to girls. This time she was allowed to partake in the care of the children since she had the golden boy who was excelling in school in the city. The last wife referred to her as "Ma" and pushed her children to go and play with my mother in her hut. I completed my education when I was 28 years old. My mother was overjoyed, and asked that I come to the village to visit. I knew she just wanted to raise her shoulders in the village and sing "my son is a scholar". The day I returned, my father's second wife came out of her madness for a few minutes. She thought I was one of her daughters and had come back. Her mother gave my mother and I a dirty eye as my mother with all her might pulled this second wife who was all over me off me. As I locked eyes with the old woman, I suddenly developed a headache and asked to lie down, thinking I was tired from my trip. That night, after all the celebrations, I broke into a fever. Sweat poured down my face as I shook in my mother's hut. Afraid that misfortune was about to revisit our home, my parents quickly rented a car to take me back to the city. Immediately I arrived, I felt calm. Seeing that I was okay, my mother returned to the village, tears in her eyes from being separated from her jewel again.

Two weeks after I started my first job, I met Jaila. She was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen and there she was, sitting behind a rubbish dump. I wondered why anyone would leave a girl with skin like honey just sitting behind the dump. Why hadn't anybody helped her? She didn't say anything as I helped her up and took her to my one-bedroom home that my father had helped me buy after I returned to the city. She seemed to be in a trance as I helped to clean her up. She refused to eat but I thought I saw her smile as I tucked her into my bed for the night and I slept in the hall. The next

morning, I skipped work because she was a bit more open with me, telling me about how her stepmother had run her out of their home. I felt compassion for her as she cried saying I shouldn't abandon her. She was so beautiful. My boss called me to find out what was wrong, and I felt an instant urge to quit my job. After all, my mother sent me money every month from her earnings as a trader. I had to take care of Jaila.

I cut off ties with everyone for months as I dedicated my time to caring for Jaila. She asked me not to tell anybody about her for fear that her stepmother would find her. I married her in less than a year. The ceremony took place in my chamber hall, where I doubled as both the groom and officiating minister since nobody was allowed to know about her. Anytime my mother or anybody else called to mention coming to visit, I'd find an excuse to prevent them from coming. Jaila wanted to always be alone with me, and with how I had fallen deeply in love with her, I dared not go against her wishes lest she left me. It was pure bliss being with Jaila. We seemed to have so much in common and I wanted my mother at least to know about her. We started trying for a baby after about eight months of marriage, but to no avail. After 6 months, Jaila's stomach was still not swelling. She cried constantly about it and I wanted to take her to a hospital, but she strongly refused, saying that her stepmother was like an eagle, watching and waiting for any slip, so she (stepmother) could catch her and kill her. I had to protect her. It had been over a year since I had heard from my mother. Knowing a little bit about how my mother had suffered to have me and the torment it had brought her, I decided to secretly go against Jaila's wishes and ask my mother for some help. I wouldn't be straightforward, I'd go round about it, making it seem like I was asking for a friend because I knew my mother was smart and would have caught me easily. However, the day I picked the phone to call my mother, Jaila caught me. We had our first argument and she yelled at me in the most unhuman way possible. I was afraid and thought she was going to leave me, but since I hadn't actually spoken to my mother, she forgave me and we made love that night.

After a few months Jaila's stomach began to swell. She was finally pregnant and she glowed more than ever. We were overjoyed and eager to meet our little one. By this time, it had been a little over two years since my family and had friends had heard from me. Unbeknownst to me, one of my friends had visited the village and informed my parents that I had quit my job and been practically a ghost to them as well for over two years as all their attempts to speak to or see me had been futile. I was laying on my wife's swollen belly when I heard a knock on the door. I avoided opening the door when I hadn't ordered anything to be delivered to my home, but I had ordered for some baby clothes to be delivered to our doorstep to complete all our purchases towards our new baby. I opened the door without peering through the window to make sure the delivery person was gone as I usually do and was greatly surprised to see my parents as well as a couple of my friends standing at the door. I had no time to tell Jaila to hide as they all trooped in to the living room crowded with baby stuff. I was both afraid and excited to see my people after so many months of hiding. I saw shock on their faces especially my mother's face. To sort of appease them, I ran to my room to bring Jaila out, happily introducing them to my pregnant wife. I was jabbering on when I heard my mother start to yell and roll on the floor as realization hit her. My father asked me "Iza, what is wrong with you? Are you mad? That is a dolly." After asking me this, realization hit him too and he slumped into the nearby chair in shock as he looked at my mother. I saw one of my friends place his head in his palms as another asked "When could he have gone mad?" I couldn't bear their reactions towards Jaila. I ran out with her as they chased us down the street.