

Ever BLOOM

STORIES *of* LIVING DEEPLY ROOTED
AND TRANSFORMED LIVES



by women of
Redbud
WRITERS GUILD

**Edited by Shayne Moore
and Margaret Ann Philbrick**



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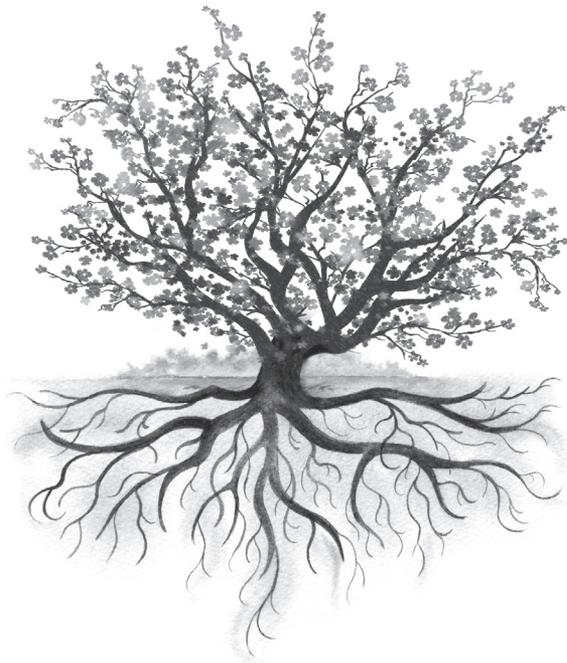
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Blossoms



A Fine Day for You to Be God

by Ronne Rock

What does true hope look like when shame fills the streets and threatens the lives of all it meets? Does hope exist at all?

I've been to so many countries where life is eked out in drops like sweat. If I close my eyes, I can see the arch-backed men on the side of the road carrying coffee beans they've plucked from the scrub in Guatemala, and the disease-ridden mothers struggling to raise wide-eyed and wondering children in precariously perched huts in India. But there's something about the Kayole Matopeni slum of Nairobi, Kenya—a shame that crawls through the streets and latches on without regard to age or ability. Less than five miles away, high-rise apartments and luxury hotels invite businesses to consider Kenya for economic development.

No one considers the slum.

The constant metallic din of hammers chipping away at stone fills the air. From dawn until dusk, mommas bend low and break rocks in the stifling heat and sudden rains. The work done to make others wealthy rarely provides enough to keep food on the table for the families living in metal shanties and cinder-block cells.

Across a river of waste, the Kenyan Army conducts military drills with live rounds. Wayward shots go ignored in this place where lives are lived in obscurity. The sewage of the entire city snakes through the center of the eastern Nairobi slum; trash dances in the streets in search of a resting place.

I had come to Kenya with a picture of slums painted in my mind—late-night infomercial images of desolation put on display for all to see.

And what my eyes saw confirmed the pain. But standing on the streets of Kayole Matopeni, I found something unexpected.

All around me, everyday life moved in tattered, high-walled miniature.

People live and die, work and rest, buy and sell and trade. Humanity is welcomed and lost. Parents go to work and children go to school and teenagers dream of a life that's bigger. Brooms are kept in quiet corners to sweep away the dust that returns and returns.

It was here in the dust that we found her home—the oldest of three siblings. Alice, the school director, had invited all three to attend school after watching them peek day after day through the iron gates that guard the entryway. Dhana led the way to the rusted, corrugated metal door to her home and moved the rock that kept it closed.

Inside, two dogs sniffed a frightened welcome in the mud-and-muck courtyard where a cow had been. Briefly, it had been a better time in the children's lives, a time when milk could be drunk and sold for a little food money. Then the cow was stolen. The courtyard felt ravaged. A grandmother staying with the family fled for higher ground.

And so it was just Dhana and her two brothers most hours of the day, there in the mud and the muck.

She quietly observed us, wondering what we would say about this place—about her. The door to her home was open, revealing one bed for everyone. There was no room for anything or anyone else, no room to invite guests, no room to have a seat and talk. But now here were guests, pale ghosts in clothes with no stains or tears, quietly taking in every small detail.

“Your home, it is so very beautiful.”

She looked with curious eyes and smiled, then stood a little taller in the doorway.

“It really is lovely.”

She smiled again, and watched each face intently as the ghosts prayed for her, prayed for her home, and prayed for the day there would be no need.

Stepping through the rusted metal outer door, we began our journey back to the noise and security of a school that had become the young girl's sanctuary and sustenance. Through a field of debris, a woman walked toward us, eyes like flint.

Alice recognized her. "Oh friends, this is Nzuri. She is the mother."

She didn't know why she felt the urgency to leave her work and walk across the slum. But Nzuri was here now, here with us. She stood there, resilient in the smog and dirt. I recognized the smell of the dump—of waste and chemicals and fire.

I have held the hands of the people of the Ravine in Guatemala so many times, but never have I known someone like Nzuri. Her labor had become her identity—pants shredded, boots warped, shirt like sandpaper, flies swarming skin embedded with refuse. The dump had tied itself around her.

And yet, she stood resolutely before us. I could hear the hiss of shame around her. And yet it could not touch her.

Nzuri shared her story...

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■ PRAYER

One word: Jesus. We need this reminder each day, Lord. Keep our hearts aching, Lord. Let the ache never choke out the hope that is always waiting to bloom in our lives. Let our prayer always be “God’s will, God’s grace, God’s mercy.” With Isaiah we pray:

*I celebrate and shout
because of my LORD God.
His saving power and justice
are the very clothes I wear.
They are more beautiful
than the jewelry worn
by a bride or a groom.
The LORD will bring about
justice and praise
in every nation on earth,*

*like flowers blooming
in a garden.*

—Isaiah 61:10–11 (CEV)

Amen.

■ WRITING PROMPT

How could you commune with and serve the desperate in your community? Describe where you have seen Eternity break into your world.