

to rest under a tree. The wild sounds of hyenas and birds wouldn't let me sleep. It was as if they were screaming at me. I tried to picture the face of a friendly mama greeting me at the house but then I would see my father's angry face. He had his stick, a gun, and he was killing me. My heart beat in wild rhythm with the thirsty cicadas as I stumbled along the dark road. I walked away from my father's house, my family, my life. I walked way out in the wilderness, into night. I walked beyond myself.

I was covered in dust when I arrived. Mama Naanyo was laughing, happy. It was like she had been waiting for me. There were so many other girls who had walked long distances. We were the girls who had to go. We were the girls who left our father's house. We were the girls who changed tradition. We were a tribe and we grew close. We went to school. I learned that even if there was a drought, my father had no right sell me. It was slavery. I learned that my clitoris belonged to me and could bring me pleasure when I got married. I learned that I can be anything and that girls can know as much as boys and we should be counted.

I found out later that after I ran away my father beat my mother but she stood up for me. My three younger sisters fled into the land. My mother went to the elders.

After a year Mama Naanyo called me in. She said *I have talked to your father and he will see you. She said I think you are that strong. I think he is ready to accept you.*

#### THE RECONCILIATION

My whole body was shaking when I came into his house. I didn't know if I could stand up. My father was there next to my mother and his four wives. He seemed so old and so much weaker than I

remembered him. I held on to Mama Naanyo. It had been a whole year. I knew I looked good. I had pretty clothes and I had changed. I was a strong confident girl. Everyone started crying. Even my father. Then my sisters came in. They had been living outside all year, in the fields. There was this screaming crying hugging that sisters do. Then I saw my father really looking at me. He could see I was no longer afraid. He could see I had walked through to the other side. He stood and slowly hugged me. He said I had done good and he thanked Mama Naanyo for making me respectable, then he spoke a miracle. He said he would accept me back into his family. He said he would not cut or sell my sisters either.

My mother was so happy. She has always given everything. Pocket money and clothes. This time she risked being beaten.

In spite of what was done to her, she asked the elders for my freedom.

There was a ceremony. All our tribe took the day off from the market to welcome me back. I stood in front and talked. I looked at the women sitting on the ground with their gorgeous beads and colorful cloth, shaved heads and open faces. I looked at my mother, my stepmothers, my sisters, and all my brothers. I loved my family. I loved our wandering and our ways. I loved the way we took care of the land. I loved sharing with the elephants and lions and zebras and cows. I loved that our culture had survived. I loved all of this, but I knew our life could be better.

My father was willing to sell me for five cows and a calf and a couple of blankets. That is about thirty thousand shillings. But when I am educated I will make more money. I will build him a house. I will take care of all of them.

I looked at the women in my family who had been sold, who had been cut when they were my age. My auntie was laughing. The rest of them were singing. This was all our celebration. This was all our beginning. Then in the middle of all of this I noticed we were soaking wet 'cause it was raining.