

By Wangari Murathe



Jacob Mukiira sat on the hospital bed holding his wife Esther's hand. He had earlier visited the doctor's office for a brief on her condition. According to the doctor, who they had known for many years, her prognosis was not good. They had not been able to get all the cancer in the operation held two days before because it had spread too much to her vital organs. There was a chance that they could destroy it through further chemotherapy and radiotherapy but he doubted that it could help much. They would only be delaying the inevitable. There was a chance that she could not survive beyond a few months even with the treatment and maybe they should consider giving her quality last days at home. The doctor told him that he would discuss with him and his wife the next day to agree on the course of action.

Esther was lying on the hospital bed looking very tired and frail. She was a far cry from the energetic woman whose face was usually full of life. "Do not be scared dear, you know I will be beside you to fight this thing. We will try everything. Even take you abroad if necessary..."

"Thank you Jacob. I know you are always there for me. And the Lord we know and trust will not let us down."

The Power to Heal

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They were devoted members of their church where he was chairman and she headed the women's ministry. Most of their free time was spent doing various church activities especially now that they were both retired.

Jacob had arrived before visiting hours but they had only a few minutes before a deluge of visitors- most of them from their church. They were a popular couple and many came to give them hope through prayers.

A few hours later Jacob was home. As the cook served him supper, he could not help but think of how life was going to be without Esther. He had loved her but lately he had been getting rather bored with the endless meetings Esther dragged him to- to pray for this brother and that sister. And their home had these women praying and singing every day. A man had to have a life, please.

Jacob knew that his current feelings could be traced to the time when he met Mwende. She was a member of the choir but he had really only noticed her that day when she stood up for a solo in the church. That voice! He was as enthralled as others were. She was also very beautiful and very young -around nineteen or so, the age of his last born daughter. He had looked up and met her eyes even as she sang and he knew that he was in love. He could not remember when he had felt so excited and so alive since those college days, after he had met Esther. He could still remember with nostalgia how his heart had fluttered every time he saw her. And she always had a special smile for him.

He dared not approach Mwende directly. After all he was a "happily married man" and he was sure she was a good girl. However fate was to play its hand and he found her once at the bus stage near their house and gave her a lift to town. They had shared a lot that day and had developed their relationship both on phone and e-mail. She had become his lifesaver.

The phone rang. It was Mwende.

"Hi dear. How is everything?"

“Am okay. Especially after hearing your voice. Did you buy the equipment for the salon?”

“Yes. Thanks for the money. I don’t know what I could have done without you. You are always there for me....” They talked for almost half an hour. He slept like a baby.

They had discussed the treatments and Esther had opted to have them in spite of the doctor’s description of the likely effects of the chemotherapy. “I feel good about them and I am ready for the treatment. I have prayed and know God will work his miracles with me.” She had said.

Esther stayed for a month in the hospital and all the visits drained him. Sometimes she looked so bad that she looked like passing on any minute. He also had to constantly reassure through long daily calls, their two children who were studying abroad.

Even after she came home, Esther had to constantly go for various treatments in hospital. She was haggard looking but she still found time to pray. Most of the days at home she would be sitting in the wheelchair which would be wheeled into the sitting room especially in the evenings when various groups came to sit and pray with her. “Lord we pray for your blessings. We pray for healing God. Work your miracles Lord and heal our sister!” they would pray with the loudest voice being Susan’s, a neighbour and the closest friend to Esther.

Mwende would sometimes come for these prayers. The first time she came she was mesmerized by the sheer opulence of the Mukiira’s home. She could not help fantasizing that she was the mistress of the place.

“Sing for us sister Mwende”. People would implore.

And she sang. She was always eager to belt out the new songs she was composing and had a beautiful rich voice that moved everybody. Even after a hard day in her successful salon, she had a lot of energy. She planned on making it in the music world and Jacob had promised to finance her.

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Despite all the prayers and medical interventions, Esther continued to go down. She was very thin and her limbs looked all bones. All her hair had long gone and the wig Jacob had bought her looked too big for her thin face. All including Jacob thought that it was only a matter of time before the inevitable happened.

Jacob and Mwende had by now started meeting for trysts in a hotel in town. Jacob suppressed his initial guilt with the thought that they he was very human and anyway they would be married soon.

One day, while giving accounts on their Christianity, Job told Mwende that he had been saved since college days. He did not add that it was mostly due to the influence of his then beautiful and clever fiancée, Esther.

“Me I got saved last year when I got cured of a terminal disease” said Mwende.

“Terminal disease? Cancer?”

“Well, the doctors said I was HIV positive. But after prayers, I tested negative.”

Jacob stood up shocked beyond words. “And you did not tell me you had AIDs with all that we have done?”

“But I was cured? I can show you the certificate if you like.”

Jacob did not want to listen. He imagined she got one of those fake certificates he had read about in a daily newspaper, which were arranged by some fake faith healers and some back street laboratories. He could picture his life going down the drain. He staggered out of the room and drove to his home in a daze.

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He was met at the door by a new smiling Esther who was leaning on her clutches. "Hello sweetheart. Notice anything different."

"Yes. You are walking. You look better."

"Miracles happen" said Esther. But Jacob was not listening. His shock was too great.

"I am not feeling well. I have a headache, let me rest for sometime and join you later for dinner." said Jacob proceeding upstairs to their bedroom.

"Have you taken some medicine for it" asked Esther.

"I will take some from the bathroom cabinet."

As Esther continued to look brighter, Jacob started going down. The thought that he might have caught the "DISEASE" gave him nightmares. He could not imagine that the thought of using protection with Mwende had never even occurred to him. She looked like a nice holy girl. It was only now that he could think that she could not have been so "nice". She had not taken much persuasion.

Esther was soon up and about her many activities including church. She now sported a very short hair do which suited her. Her hair had started growing again and her body had also filled out. Susan had accompanied her shopping for new clothes to fit her smaller size. And as she joked, one of the advantages of her sickness was her new slim figure which she had tried for years to attain in vain.

The only drawback to Esther's happiness was Jacob's depression. She was shocked six month's later when she took him for tests and he tested positive for HIV. As she related their new problem to her friend and confidant Susan, she could only guess that he must have got it two years back when he had had an accident and had to be hospitalized. Susan could not meet

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her friend's eyes. Almost everybody knew of Jacob's affair with Mwende. Someone had seen them together as they entered a certain hotel in town and had leaked their secret. Susan felt however that it was lucky that Esther was not infected and that they were being careful. And Jacob appeared to be close to his wife now. "All is well that ends well" she reasoned.

With therapy, Jacob appeared healthier and on his way to recovery. They threw a party to celebrate God's mighty healing. However, Jacob refused to have their church choir sing. He denigrated their singing and especially that of Mwende even if she had produced that popular CD.

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