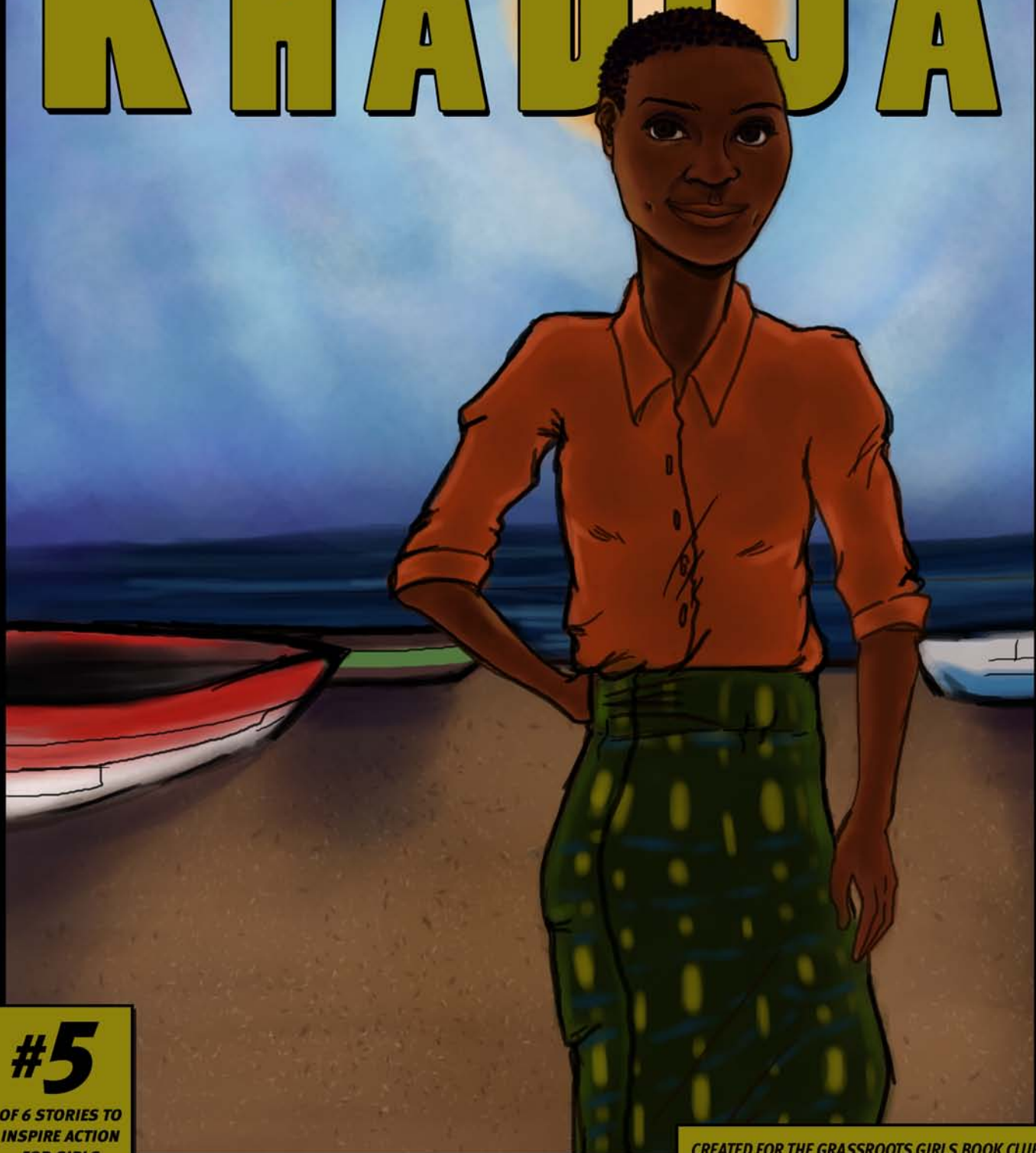


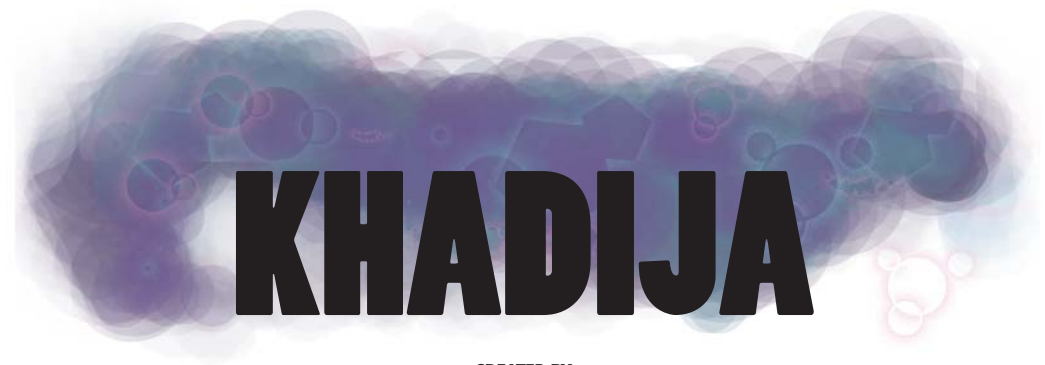
A TRUE STORY OF GIRL POWER IN MALAWI **KHADILJA**



#5

**OF 6 STORIES TO
INSPIRE ACTION
FOR GIRLS**

CREATED FOR THE GRASSROOTS GIRLS BOOK CLUB



KHADIJA

**CREATED BY
KHADIJA CHIKOYA
AND
LYDIA HOLDEN**

**ILLUSTRATED BY
DIANDREA ANCRUM (KOYUKI PANDA)**

**DESIGNED BY
DANIEL HAWKINS**

**EDITED BY
MEGAN SHANK**



INTRODUCTION

This graphic novella was made with Khadija Chikoya, now 20-years-old, in June 2013 at her home in Nkhotakota, Malawi. Khadija, a dedicated and talented student, had a bright future to look forward to after winning a scholarship to attend boarding school at 16 years old. But after leaving home for the first time, Khadija found herself ill-equipped to face the many challenges adolescents experience, including navigating her first relationship. An unexpected pregnancy forced Khadija to leave her boarding school and return home to raise her child. When Khadija thought her opportunity to complete school was lost, the grassroots organization Nkhotakota AIDS Support Organization (NASO) entered her life, reassuring her that as a teen mom she can indeed return to school, and they will support her in achieving her potential.

Established in 1992, NASO mobilizes communities, creates awareness and builds communities' ability and capacity to manage HIV- and pregnancy-related care and social services for vulnerable children. Recognizing that teenage pregnancy rates in sub-Saharan Africa are some of the highest in the world, NASO saw an opportunity to help girls in Malawi who had been forced to drop out of school after becoming

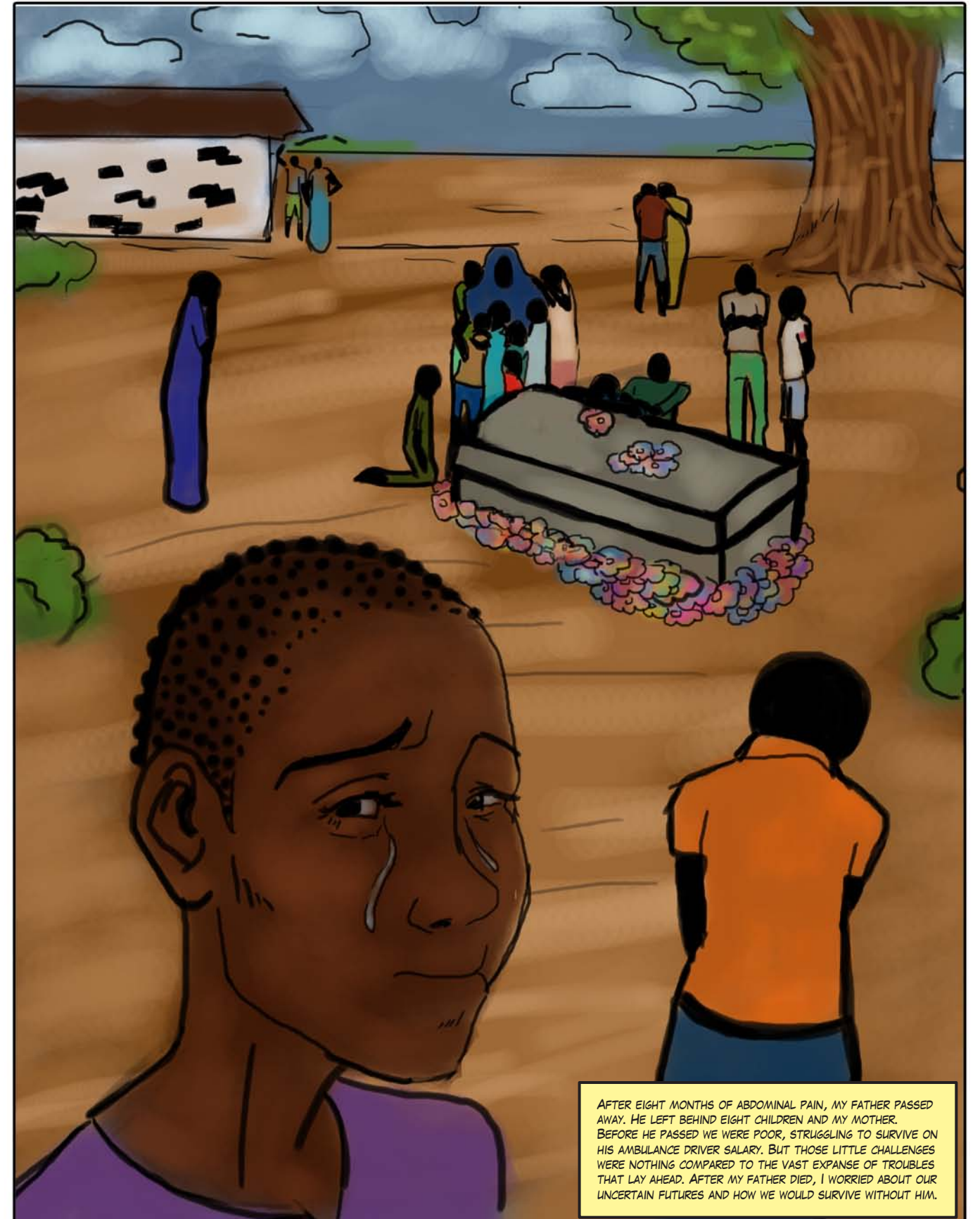
pregnant. NASO supports programming for smaller community-based organizations to create Girls' Corners in schools and community centers to provide safe spaces for adolescent girls, trainings on reproductive and sexual health and vocational skills. A key part of the Girls' Corner concept is to encourage teen moms to return to school, and to train them as peer mentors.

Khadija's story is part of the Grassroots Girls Book Club graphic novella series that depict the true stories of six incredible girls. Each girl co-authored her own story and one of six talented emerging female artists illustrated her words. These graphic novellas aim to show that positive change is happening for girls, and to also raise awareness for the many girls who still need urgent support from organizations like NASO. Khadija's hope is that her story will inspire you to discuss the issues facing girls globally and learn more about the grassroots organizations that are changing girls' lives for the better. At the end of this graphic novella is a discussion guide to dig deeper into the issues Khadija faced. Explore how you can take action with your friends and classmates online at grassrootsgirls.tumblr.com to help make the world better for girls everywhere.

NASO is supported through the Grassroots Girls Initiative by the Firelight Foundation. Based in Santa Cruz, California, the Firelight Foundation works to identify, fund and strengthen promising community organizations that support the health, resilience and education of children in Africa.

The Grassroots Girls Initiative is a partnership of six funders that believe grassroots organizations are uniquely qualified to create and implement effective, organic solutions for the most underserved girls in the communities where they work. Grassroots Girls Initiative partners are: American Jewish World Service, EMpower—the Emerging Markets Foundation, Firelight Foundation, Mama Cash, The Global Fund for Children and the Global Fund for Women.

Discover other Grassroots Girls Book Club graphic novellas made with girls in Poland, Kenya, the Dominican Republic, Colombia and India at grassrootsgirls.tumblr.com.



AFTER EIGHT MONTHS OF ABDOMINAL PAIN, MY FATHER PASSED AWAY. HE LEFT BEHIND EIGHT CHILDREN AND MY MOTHER. BEFORE HE PASSED WE WERE POOR, STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE ON HIS AMBULANCE DRIVER SALARY. BUT THOSE LITTLE CHALLENGES WERE NOTHING COMPARED TO THE VAST EXPANSE OF TROUBLES THAT LAY AHEAD. AFTER MY FATHER DIED, I WORRIED ABOUT OUR UNCERTAIN FUTURES AND HOW WE WOULD SURVIVE WITHOUT HIM.

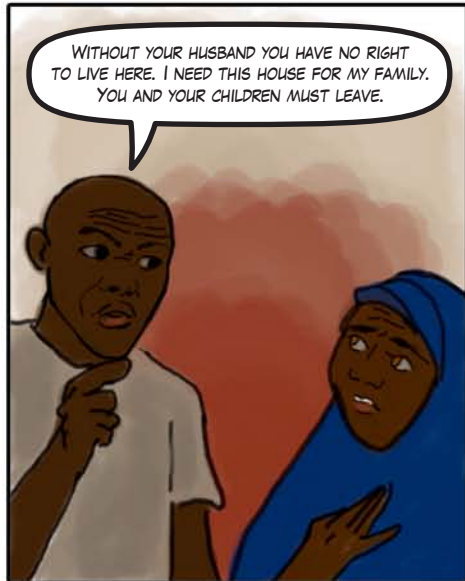


OH CHILDREN, HOW WILL I PROVIDE FOR ALL OF YOU NOW?



I KNOW YOU ARE STILL GRIEVING, BUT WE MUST TALK TO YOU.

YOU KNOW THIS HOUSE AND PROPERTY BELONGS TO YOUR LATE HUSBAND'S FAMILY, TO US, HIS BROTHERS.



WITHOUT YOUR HUSBAND YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO LIVE HERE. I NEED THIS HOUSE FOR MY FAMILY. YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN MUST LEAVE.

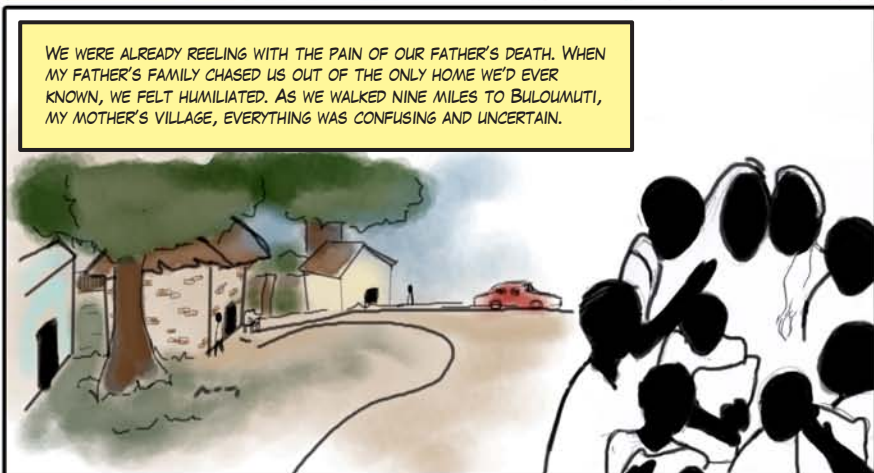


I HAVE EIGHT CHILDREN! WHERE WILL I GO? HOW WILL I CARE FOR THEM WITHOUT EVEN A ROOF OVER OUR HEADS?

GO BACK TO YOUR FAMILY. BEG THEM TO HELP YOU. WE CANNOT.



LEAVE NOW! THIS IS NO LONGER YOUR HOUSE.



WE WERE ALREADY REELING WITH THE PAIN OF OUR FATHER'S DEATH. WHEN MY FATHER'S FAMILY CHASED US OUT OF THE ONLY HOME WE'D EVER KNOWN, WE FELT HUMILIATED. AS WE WALKED NINE MILES TO BULOUMUTI, MY MOTHER'S VILLAGE, EVERYTHING WAS CONFUSING AND UNCERTAIN.



UNCLES, I AM SO ASHAMED, BUT I'VE BEEN LEFT STRANDED WITH NO HUSBAND AND NO HOUSE. IS THERE ANY LAND FOR US TO LIVE ON?



MOTHER'S RELATIVES ARE POOR SUBSISTENCE FARMERS, BUT THEY WERE ABLE TO GIVE US A LITTLE OF THEIR LAND. THEY COULDN'T HELP US WITH BUILDING A HOME THOUGH.



THE ONLY VALUABLES WE BROUGHT FROM OUR OLD LIFE WERE THREE BAGS OF RICE. MOTHER HAD TO BE SMART WITH OUR LAST POSSESSIONS.

EAT OR TRADE?



MOTHER TRADED TWO BAGS OF RICE FOR SOME DRIED EARTH AND CLAY.



I STAYED HOME FROM SCHOOL FOR A MONTH TO HELP MY FAMILY MAKE BRICKS TO BUILD A NEW HOME.



FINALLY WE TRADED OUR LAST BAG OF RICE WITH A KIND MAN TO BUILD OUR HOUSE. HE KNEW WE COULDN'T DO IT ALONE.



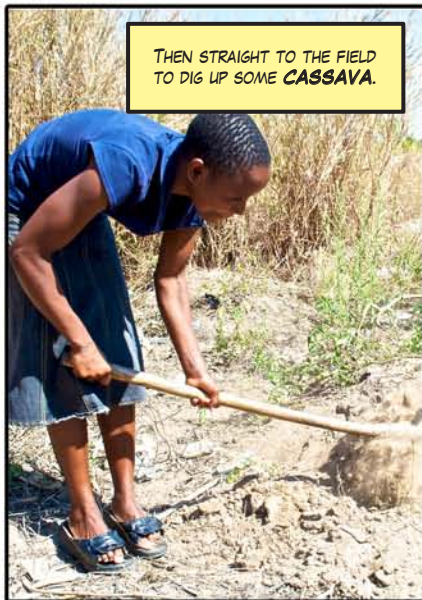
SLOWLY THE WALLS OF OUR HOUSE WENT UP AND OUR NEW LIFE TOOK SHAPE.



WE HELPED MOTHER TURN THE DRY DIRT PLOT NEXT TO OUR HOUSE INTO A GARDEN. THIS LAND WAS OUR ONLY MEANS OF SURVIVAL. WE PLANTED CASSAVA, RICE AND CORN. OUR PLOT OF LAND WAS NOT SO GOOD, AND THE FARMING SEASON LASTS FOR ONLY SIX MONTHS, SO WE COULDN'T PRODUCE ENOUGH FOOD. OUR FOCUS BECAME DAY-TO-DAY SURVIVAL.



BEFORE THE SUN CAME UP TO LIGHT OUR DARKNESS, I WOULD WAKE, GET DRESSED AND CLEAN THE HOUSE.



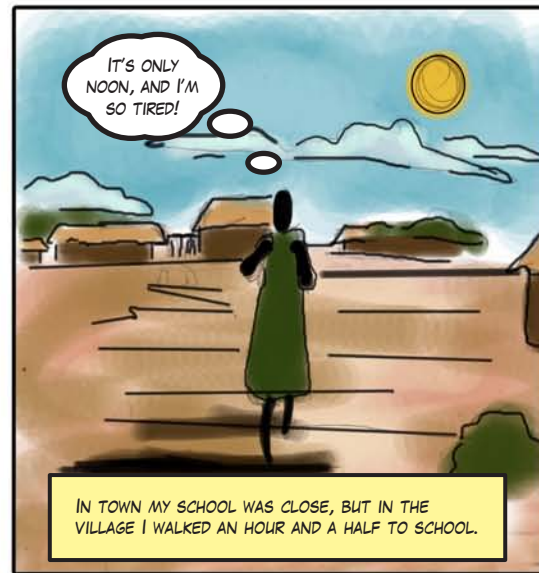
THEN STRAIGHT TO THE FIELD TO DIG UP SOME CASSAVA.



ONCE I HAD ENOUGH, I WOULD POUND THE CASSAVA ROOT, A VERY TIRING JOB, AND THEN MIX IT WITH BOILING WATER TO MAKE A PASTE THAT WE WOULD EAT FOR LUNCH.



WHEN MY FATHER WAS STILL WITH US, WE ATE THREE TIMES A DAY. BUT IN THE VILLAGE WE BARELY HAD ENOUGH FOR ONE DAILY MEAL.



IT'S ONLY NOON, AND I'M SO TIRED!

IN TOWN MY SCHOOL WAS CLOSE, BUT IN THE VILLAGE I WALKED AN HOUR AND A HALF TO SCHOOL.



JUST KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN!

EVERY DAY I ARRIVED AT SCHOOL EXHAUSTED. ADJUSTING TO MY NEW LIFE WAS TIRING, AND IT WAS HARD TO CONCENTRATE IN CLASS.



FOCUS KHADIJA! WITH NO EDUCATION YOU WILL BE A SLAVE TO THIS WORLD, TOILING TIRELESSLY LIKE MOTHER.



GLORIA, DID YOU HEAR THAT? IS SOMEONE HIDING OUT THERE?

OH KHADIJA, LET'S HURRY!

I'D LEAVE SCHOOL AT 5:30 PM, AND SOON IT WOULD GET DARK. WE WERE TOO POOR TO HAVE LANTERNS. MY CLASSMATE AND I WOULD SHAKE WITH FEAR WALKING THROUGH THE FOREST WHERE MEN SOMETIMES LURKED AND GRABBED GIRLS.

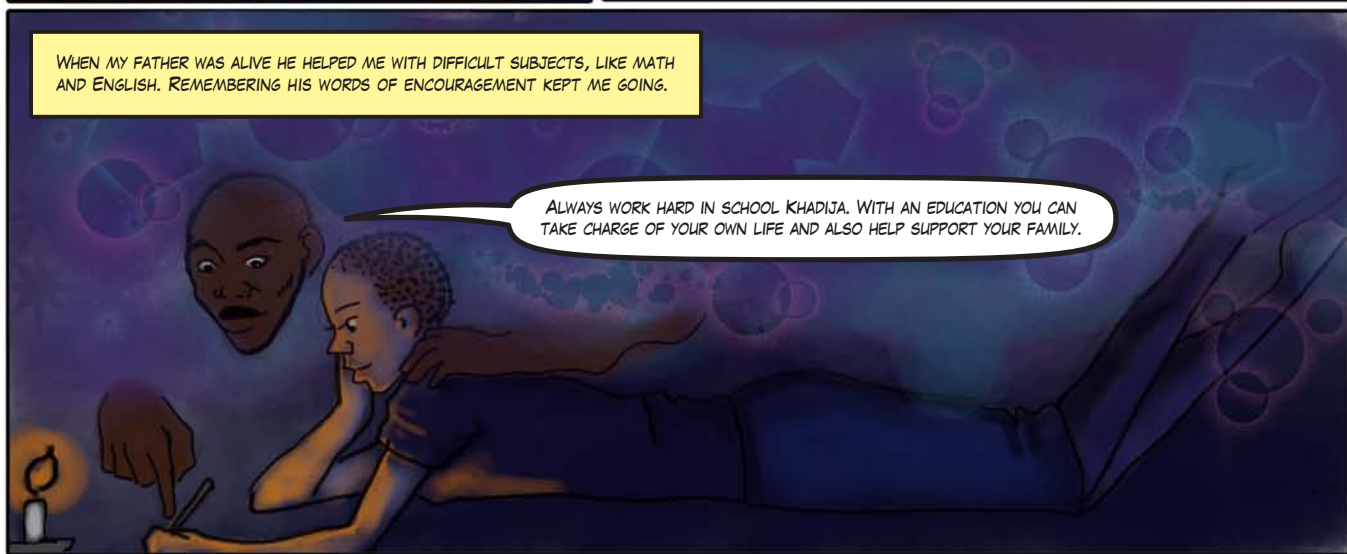


ANY SUPPER TONIGHT, MOTHER?

NOT TONIGHT MY DAUGHTER, NOT TONIGHT.



WITHOUT SUPPER IT WAS HARD TO CONCENTRATE ON MY HOMEWORK, BUT THEN I'D THINK ABOUT MY FATHER.



WHEN MY FATHER WAS ALIVE HE HELPED ME WITH DIFFICULT SUBJECTS, LIKE MATH AND ENGLISH. REMEMBERING HIS WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT KEPT ME GOING.

ALWAYS WORK HARD IN SCHOOL KHADIJA. WITH AN EDUCATION YOU CAN TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR OWN LIFE AND ALSO HELP SUPPORT YOUR FAMILY.



I WORKED HARDER EVERY DAY AND LEARNED TO CONTINUE WITH LESS SLEEP.



EVERY FREE MOMENT I HAD BETWEEN FARMING AND CLEANING THE HOUSE I STUDIED FOR THE FINAL EXAMS TO PASS INTO SECONDARY SCHOOL.



I PASSED! I'M GOING TO SECONDARY SCHOOL!



MOTHER, I PASSED! I WILL CONTINUE MY EDUCATION, JUST LIKE FATHER WANTED!



OH KHADIJA I HOPED I WOULDN'T HAVE TO TELL YOU THIS, BUT WE DON'T HAVE ANY MONEY TO PAY THE SCHOOL FEES.

BUT I STUDIED SO HARD...



IN MALAWI, PRIMARY SCHOOL IS FREE, BUT TO GO TO SECONDARY SCHOOL FAMILIES MUST PAY BETWEEN US\$60 AND US\$300 PER CHILD, PER YEAR. EVEN THE LOWEST FEE IS UNATTAINABLE FOR POOR SUBSISTENCE FARMING FAMILIES LIKE MINE. I WEPT BECAUSE THIS OPPORTUNITY WAS PASSING ME BY.



MALAWI, CALLED THE "WARM HEART OF AFRICA" BECAUSE OF HOW FRIENDLY MALAWIANS ARE, IS A POPULOUS LANDLOCKED COUNTRY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA. WHILE PICTURESQUE LAKE MALAWI IS STUNNING, MALAWI HAS A HIGH LEVEL OF POVERTY AND ONE OF THE WORST RECORDS IN THE WORLD IN THE AREAS OF HEALTH AND EDUCATION.



MALAWI HAS THE FOURTH LOWEST GDP PER CAPITA IN THE WORLD. ABOUT 74 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION STILL LIVES BELOW THE INCOME POVERTY LINE OF US\$1.25 A DAY AND 90 PERCENT BELOW THE US\$2 A DAY THRESHOLD.
(UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME'S HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT FOR 2009)



OF ITS POPULATION OF APPROXIMATELY 15 MILLION, MORE THAN 80 PERCENT OF MALAWI'S POPULATION IS RURAL AND DEPENDENT ON AGRICULTURE FOR SUBSISTENCE.
(WWW.POPULATIONACTION.ORG, MALAWI COUNTRY REPORT, 2012)



ALMOST 30 PERCENT OF POOR CHILDREN DO NOT EVEN START PRIMARY SCHOOL, WHICH IS FREE IN MALAWI. ACCESS TO SECONDARY AND HIGHER EDUCATION IS LARGELY CONFINED TO NON-POOR HOUSEHOLDS, MAINLY DUE TO ENROLLMENT FEES. SOME 82 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION BETWEEN THE AGES OF 15 AND 24 ARE ILLITERATE.
(WWW.RURALPOVERTYPORTAL.ORG/COUNTRY/HOME/TAGS/MALAWI)

ATTENDING SECONDARY SCHOOL IS A LUXURY FEW CAN AFFORD. POOR FAMILIES AREN'T ABLE TO SEND ALL THEIR CHILDREN TO SCHOOL AND WILL OFTEN CHOOSE TO SEND ONLY THEIR BOYS, BELIEVING THEY WILL BE BETTER POSITIONED TO EARN AND SUPPORT THE FAMILY AFTER FINISHING SCHOOL. IF CHILDREN ARE ABLE TO STAY IN SCHOOL, FACILITIES ARE OFTEN TOO INADEQUATE TO PROVIDE A QUALITY EDUCATION. OVERCROWDED CLASSROOMS, OUTDOOR LESSONS INTERRUPTED BY RAIN AND PERENNIAL TEACHER SHORTAGES MEAN THAT STUDENTS OFTEN DON'T GET THE ATTENTION THEY NEED IN CLASS, AND ARE NOT MOTIVATED TO CONTINUE.



FOR GIRLS, THE DROPOUT RATE GETS EVEN HIGHER WITH THE ONSET OF PUBERTY. MANY ARE FORCED INTO EARLY MARRIAGE, EITHER BY TRADITION, FAMILY FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS OR EARLY PREGNANCY.



CHILDBEARING AMONG ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA REMAINS HIGH. THE ADOLESCENT FERTILITY RATE IS 108 BIRTHS PER 1,000 GIRLS AGED 15-19 IN THE REGION, COMPARED TO 73 IN SOUTH ASIA AND 72 IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN.
(WORLD BANK, 2010)



CORRESPONDINGLY, CONTRACEPTIVE USE AMONG 15-19 YEAR OLD GIRLS IS LOW. ONLY 21 PERCENT OF MARRIED GIRLS WHO WANT TO AVOID PREGNANCY, AND JUST 41 PERCENT OF UNMARRIED SEXUALLY ACTIVE GIRLS WHO WANT TO AVOID PREGNANCY, ARE USING A MODERN CONTRACEPTIVE METHOD.
(GUTTMACHER INSTITUTE AND IPPF, 2010)



FOR A YEAR I HELPED MY MOTHER FARM. WHEN I GOT A LITTLE TIME I'D GO BACK TO MY OLD SCHOOL TO RE-LEARN THE LESSONS TO TAKE THE SECONDARY SCHOOL EXAM AGAIN.



THE WORDS OF MY FATHER PUSHED ME FORWARD, EVEN IN THE FACE OF DEFEAT.

LET IT RAIN, LET IT SHINE, I WILL PASS THESE EXAMS!



I DID BETTER THAN THE FIRST TIME AND EARNED A SCHOLARSHIP TO COVER HALF THE SCHOOL FEES.



I PASSED! AND I GOT THE SCHOLARSHIP FOR THE GIRLS' BOARDING SCHOOL!



WOOHOO!



NOW THAT YOUR FATHER'S BENEFITS HAVE COME IN, I CAN PAY THE REST OF YOUR SCHOOL FEES AFTER THE SCHOLARSHIP. YOU ARE THE PRIDE OF OUR FAMILY KHADIJA! TODAY IS A WONDERFUL DAY!



THAT WAS SUCH A HAPPY DAY! WE CELEBRATED, SANG AND DANCED. MY OLDER SIBLINGS GAVE ME SOME PRESENTS. EVEN THOUGH I STARTED SECONDARY SCHOOL LATE AT 16 YEARS OLD, EVERYONE WAS STILL SO PROUD OF ME.



KHADIJA, WHEN YOU GO TO BOARDING SCHOOL YOU WILL MEET NEW FRIENDS AND LEARN NEW IDEAS ABOUT LIFE. BUT LISTEN TO YOUR MOTHER: DON'T GET A BOYFRIEND. DON'T GO DOWN THAT PATH. STUDY HARD AND REACH YOUR POTENTIAL, FOR YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY.



I WILL MAKE YOU PROUD!



HI, MY NAME IS KHADIJA.

HI! I'M TADALA, AND THIS IS FYRESS.



SO WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO HERE?

WELL, WE'RE ALL FROM DIFFERENT PARTS OF MALAWI, SO WE HAVE FUN SHARING OUR DIFFERENT DIALECTS AND CULTURES WITH EACH OTHER.

WOW, THAT SOUNDS GREAT! MY MOM TOLD ME I'D LEARN NEW THINGS ABOUT LIFE. I GUESS SHE WAS RIGHT!



HEY KHADIJA, WE'RE GOING TO PLAY NETBALL.

I DON'T KNOW HOW TO PLAY THAT.

COME ON, WE'LL TEACH YOU. IT'S LOTS OF FUN!



GO GIRL!



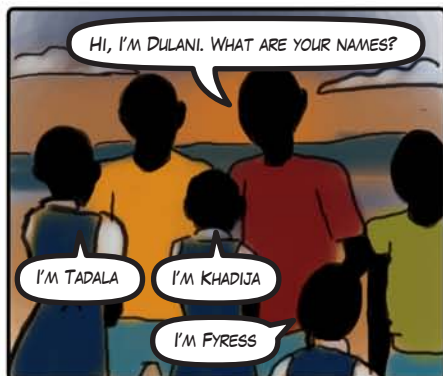
EVEN THOUGH I WAS HAVING A TERRIFIC TIME WITH MY NEW FRIENDS, I KEPT MY PROMISE TO MY MOTHER AND STUDIED HARD. MY FAMILY WAS DEPENDING ON ME!



I'M GLAD WE'RE HAVING A PARTY AT THE LAKE TODAY. I'VE BEEN STUDYING TOO MUCH!

YEAH IT'S NICE TO RELAX... AND TO MEET BOYS!

HA! LET'S AT LEAST MAKE NEW FRIENDS.

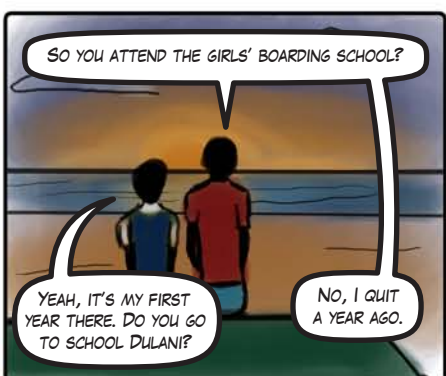


HI, I'M DULANI. WHAT ARE YOUR NAMES?

I'M TADALA

I'M KHADIJA

I'M FYRESS



SO YOU ATTEND THE GIRLS' BOARDING SCHOOL?

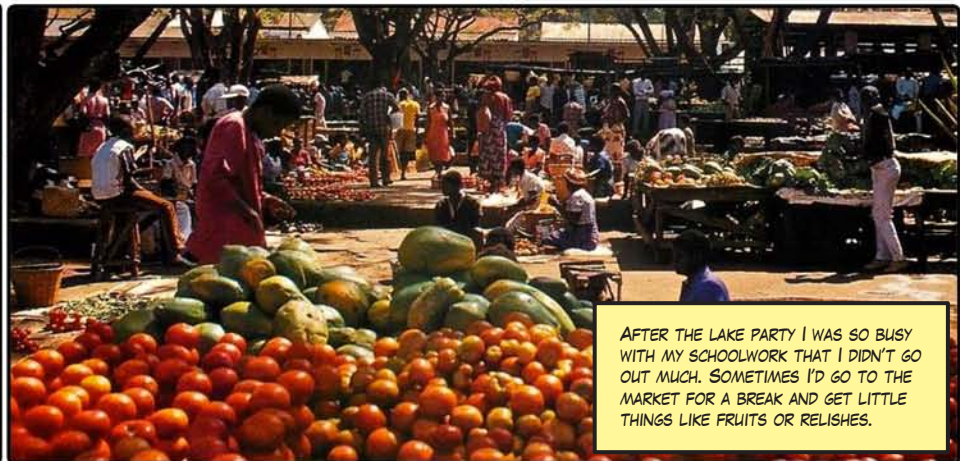
YEAH, IT'S MY FIRST YEAR THERE. DO YOU GO TO SCHOOL DULANI?

NO, I QUIT A YEAR AGO.



SO KHADIJA I SAW YOU AND DULANI SITTING TOGETHER. ARE YOU INTERESTED IN HIM?

DON'T MAKE ME BLUSH FYRESS!



AFTER THE LAKE PARTY I WAS SO BUSY WITH MY SCHOOLWORK THAT I DIDN'T GO OUT MUCH. SOMETIMES I'D GO TO THE MARKET FOR A BREAK AND GET LITTLE THINGS LIKE FRUITS OR RELISHES.



HEY KHADIJA! I'M SO HAPPY TO SEE YOU AGAIN.

OH!



I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT YOU A LOT SINCE THE LAKE. YOU'RE SO BEAUTIFUL AND NICE. I WANT YOU TO BE MY GIRL.

OH, DULANI, I DON'T KNOW. SCHOOL KEEPS ME SO BUSY.



I THINK WE SHOULD BE TOGETHER, AND I THINK YOU THINK SO TOO.

WELL, LET ME THINK ABOUT IT. I'LL MEET YOU BACK HERE IN TWO WEEKS AND GIVE YOU MY ANSWER.



I'M HAPPY YOU ARE GIVING US A CHANCE KHADIJA. THOSE TWO WEEKS WERE THE LONGEST OF MY LIFE!



YOU'RE SO PRETTY. I WANT TO SEE YOUR FACE EVERY DAY.

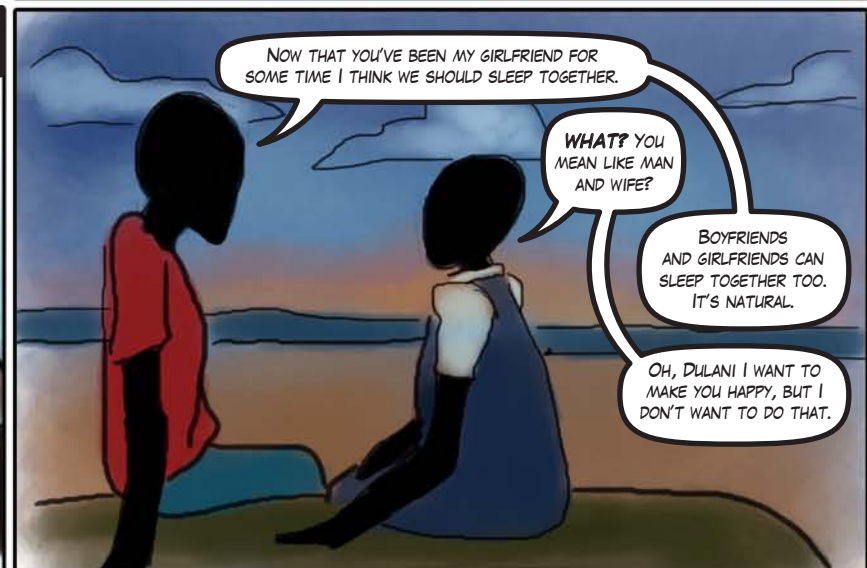
YOU'RE JUST SAYING THAT. NO ONE'S TOLD ME I'M PRETTY BEFORE.

WELL I THINK YOU'RE BEAUTIFUL.



SO WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN SNEAKING OFF TO THIS LAST MONTH KHADIJA? HAVE A SECRET BOYFRIEND OR SOMETHING?

EH? UM, NOTHING LIKE THAT. I'VE JUST BEEN GOING ON WALKS TO CLEAR MY HEAD.



NOW THAT YOU'VE BEEN MY GIRLFRIEND FOR SOME TIME I THINK WE SHOULD SLEEP TOGETHER.

WHAT? YOU MEAN LIKE MAN AND WIFE?

BOYFRIENDS AND GIRLFRIENDS CAN SLEEP TOGETHER TOO. IT'S NATURAL.

OH, DULANI I WANT TO MAKE YOU HAPPY, BUT I DON'T WANT TO DO THAT.



THIS IS SOMETHING YOU SHOULD DO AS A GIRLFRIEND TO MAKE ME HAPPY!

I DIDN'T KNOW HAVING A BOYFRIEND MEANS I HAVE TO SLEEP WITH HIM...



I'M SORRY I GOT SO ANGRY AT YOU LAST WEEK, BUT I EXPECTED YOU WOULD WANT TO BE WITH ME.

I DO WANT TO BE WITH YOU, BUT I DIDN'T KNOW I HAD TO DO THAT TO BE WITH YOU.



IF YOU LOVE ME, YOU WILL DO THIS. LOOK, I EVEN BROUGHT A CONDOM. YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT ANYTHING. I WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU.

UMM, WELL, I DO LOVE YOU DULANI.

GOOD, THEN COME WITH ME.



Nobody had ever talked to me about sex before. It was very confusing. I didn't even know what a condom was or how to use it. I trusted Dulani to keep me safe.



I was afraid to tell anyone about sleeping with Dulani. I really wanted advice. I wanted to ask the other girls what they knew about sex, but I was afraid they would be disappointed in me.

So what's new with you Khadija?

Oh nothing! You know me, study, study, study. How about you?



My friends told me if you've just had your, you know, your woman thing, then we don't have to use a condom.

I had mine last week, but is that safe?

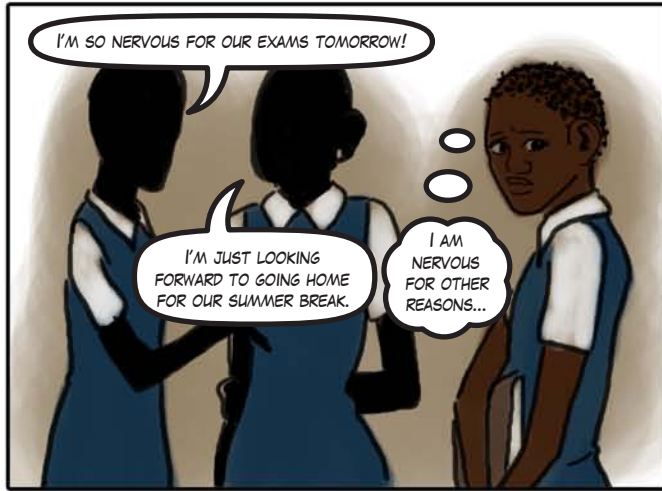


Trust me Khadija, I will take care of you.



Now girls, to prepare for your final exams you must...

55, 56, 57... Can that be right? It's almost been two months since my last period!



I'm so nervous for our exams tomorrow!

I'm just looking forward to going home for our summer break.

I am nervous for other reasons...



No more hiding and ignoring my situation. I must tell Dulani before I leave for break!



Dulani, I have to tell you something. I, um, I am pregnant. I've been pregnant for five months.

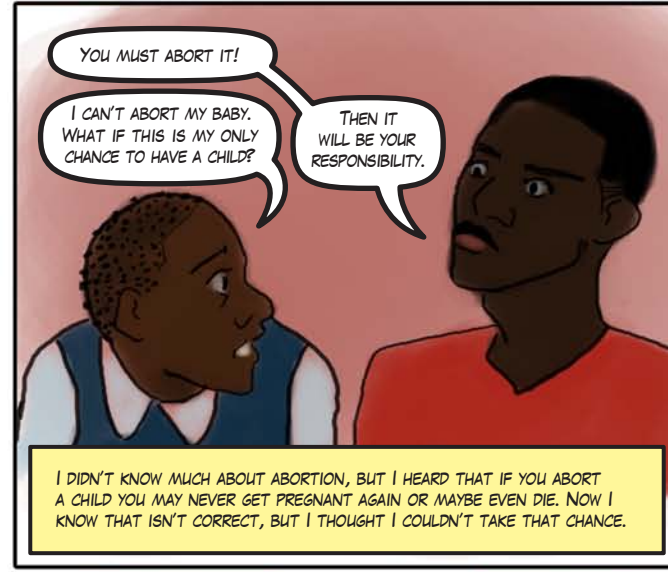
What? How is that possible? We used condoms.

Not every time...



It's impossible! You must be mistaken.

It's true. I am positive.



You must abort it!

I can't abort my baby. What if this is my only chance to have a child?

Then it will be your responsibility.

I didn't know much about abortion, but I heard that if you abort a child you may never get pregnant again or maybe even die. Now I know that isn't correct, but I thought I couldn't take that chance.



Welcome back my daughter! We are happy to have you home. We want to hear all about your new school.

There are so many things I can't tell! I feel so helpless and lost.



You seem different my daughter. Your body shape and complexion... you've changed so much.



Is there anything you want to tell me?

No mother, everything is fine. Nothing has changed.



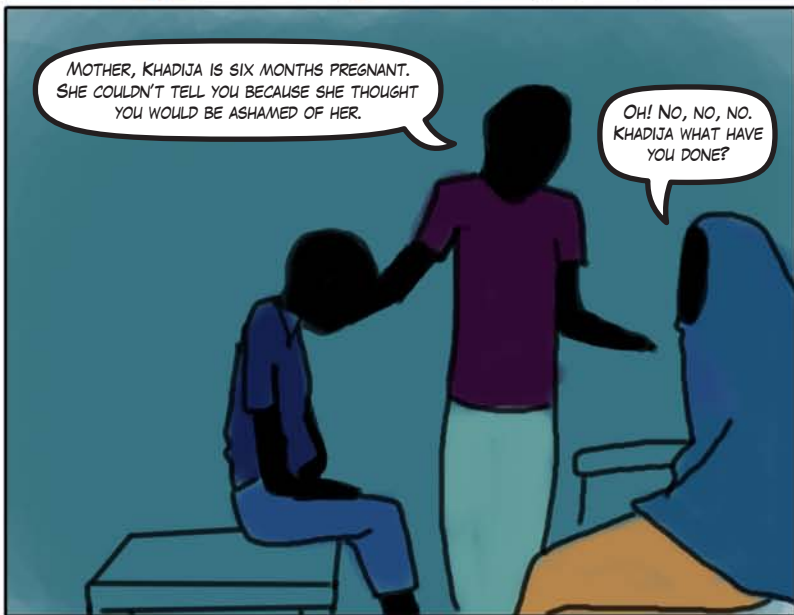
TODAY I WANT YOU TO GO SEE YOUR SISTER. SHE'S WORKING AT THE HOSPITAL NOW, SO GO MEET HER THERE.

YES MOTHER, I'LL BE HAPPY TO SEE HER.



I KNOW THIS IS DIFFICULT TO TALK ABOUT KHADIJA, BUT MOTHER BELIEVES YOU ARE PREGNANT. YOU'RE HERE TODAY TO HAVE AN EXAM.

OH, OK...

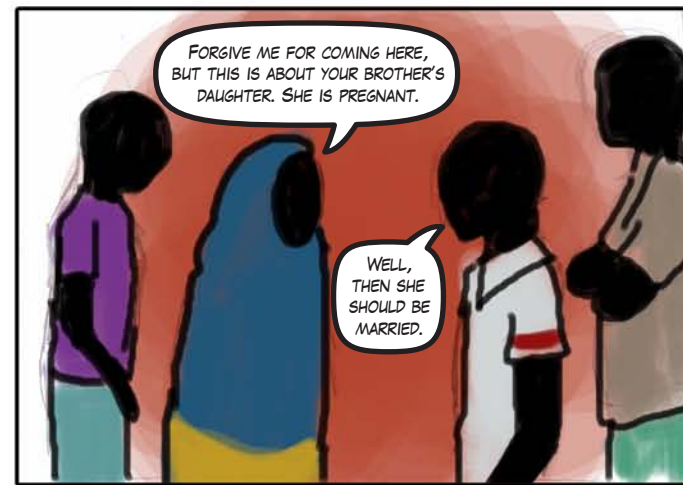


MOTHER, KHADIJA IS SIX MONTHS PREGNANT. SHE COULDN'T TELL YOU BECAUSE SHE THOUGHT YOU WOULD BE ASHAMED OF HER.

OH! NO, NO, NO. KHADIJA WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?

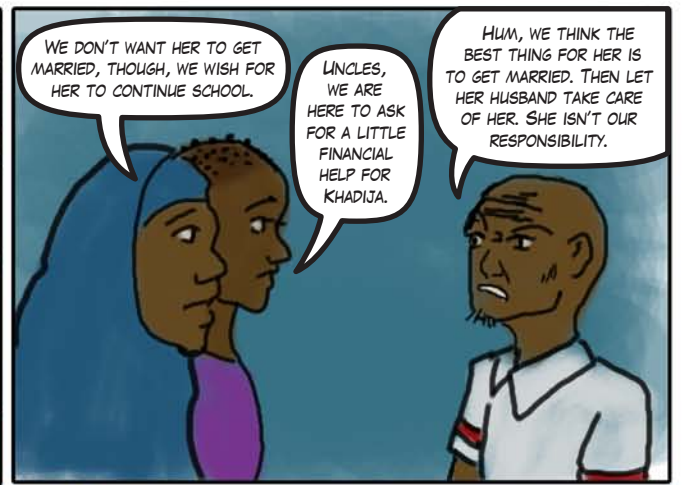


MY MOTHER WAS SO SHOCKED SHE DIDN'T EAT FOR FOUR DAYS. I DID NOT NEED HER TO TELL ME SHE WAS DISAPPOINTED. I WAS ALREADY ASHAMED OF MYSELF.



FORGIVE ME FOR COMING HERE, BUT THIS IS ABOUT YOUR BROTHER'S DAUGHTER. SHE IS PREGNANT.

WELL, THEN SHE SHOULD BE MARRIED.



WE DON'T WANT HER TO GET MARRIED, THOUGH, WE WISH FOR HER TO CONTINUE SCHOOL.

UNCLES, WE ARE HERE TO ASK FOR A LITTLE FINANCIAL HELP FOR KHADIJA.

HUM, WE THINK THE BEST THING FOR HER IS TO GET MARRIED. THEN LET HER HUSBAND TAKE CARE OF HER. SHE ISN'T OUR RESPONSIBILITY.



MOTHER, YOU'RE FINALLY UP! WHERE ARE YOU GOING?



YOUR SISTER AND I ARE GOING TO YOUR FATHER'S FAMILY. WE NEED THEIR HELP.



IF SHE GETS MARRIED SHE WON'T BE ABLE TO FINISH SCHOOL. SHE WILL JUST BE A WIFE. I WANT HER TO REACH HER POTENTIAL, TO HAVE A BETTER LIFE THAN ME.



I TRIED TO HELP MOTHER WITH THE HOUSEWORK AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE SO SHE WOULD FEEL LESS DISAPPOINTED IN ME.



OHH! OWW!

MOTHER HELP!



BUT IT HASN'T BEEN NINE MONTHS YET! HURRY, LET'S GET TO THE HOSPITAL.



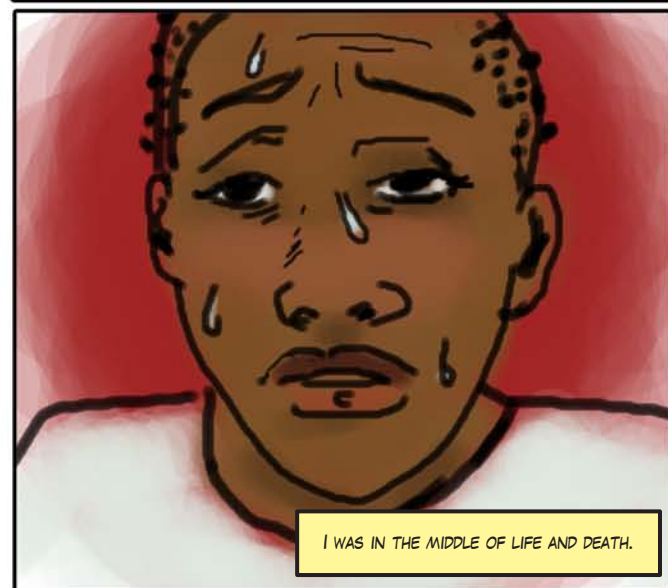
IT TOOK ALMOST TWO HOURS TO WALK TO THE HOSPITAL.

TODAY I WILL LOSE MY LIFE OR MY BABY'S...



LOOK AT THIS CHILD. HOW IS SHE GOING TO GIVE BIRTH?

YES, THESE GIRLS ARE CHILDREN THEMSELVES.



I WAS IN THE MIDDLE OF LIFE AND DEATH.



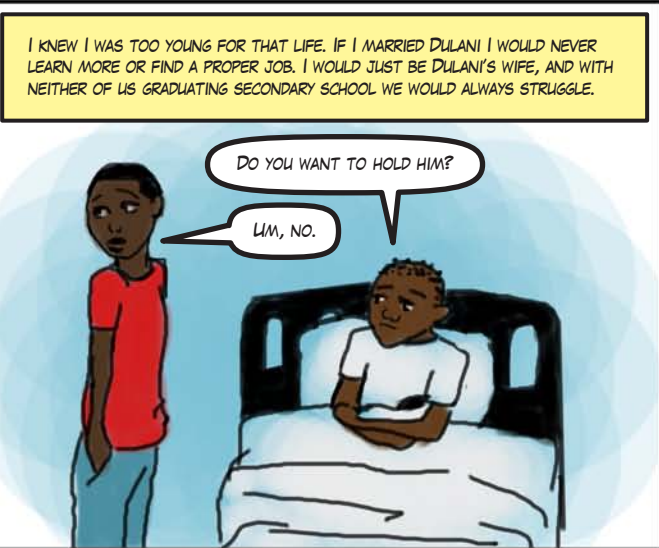
WHEN IT WAS OVER AND WE WERE BOTH OK I WAS SO HAPPY, BUT I ALSO WASN'T HAPPY BECAUSE I BELIEVED MY FUTURE WAS DOOMED.

WELCOME TO OUR FAMILY, LITTLE ONE.



KHADIJA, YOUR SISTER CAME THE OTHER DAY AND TOLD US YOU GAVE BIRTH. WE'VE COME TO TAKE YOU BACK WITH US. THE PROPER THING IS FOR YOU AND DULANI TO MARRY AND LIVE WITH HIS FATHER AND ME. YOU WILL BE HIS WIFE AND RAISE HIS CHILD.

NO, I'M SORRY I CAN'T DO THAT.



DO YOU WANT TO HOLD HIM?

UM, NO.



YOU MUST PRESS YOUR DAUGHTER TO MARRY MY SON.

IT IS KHADIJA'S CHOICE. I SUPPORT HER DECISION TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL.

THEN WE CAN'T HELP YOU WITH THE BABY. HE IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY NOW.



KHADIJA, WHAT IS YOUR PLAN? IF YOU WANT TO GET MARRIED DON'T CHEAT ME. BUT IF YOU INSIST TO RETURN TO SCHOOL THEN I WILL BRING YOU HOME AND HELP YOU.

I WANT TO RETURN TO SCHOOL MOTHER.



WE NEED TO RETURN TO OUR HOME. MY OTHER CHILDREN ARE ALONE AND UNPROTECTED.

THAT BABY IS STILL WEAK FROM BEING BORN EARLY. SHE SHOULD STAY HERE FOR A MONTH.



I HAVE NO CHOICE. I CAN'T LEAVE KHADIJA HERE ALONE, BUT I HAVE OTHER YOUNGER CHILDREN WHO NEED ME HOME.

IF YOU PROMISE TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY, YOU CAN TAKE HER AND THE BABY HOME.





I WANTED TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL, BUT I HAD TO CARE FOR MY BABY AND COULDN'T RETURN TO THE BOARDING SCHOOL SO I LOST MY SCHOLARSHIP. I WAS SO UNHAPPY.



ALL THE OLD PROBLEMS CAME BACK: NO SCHOOL FEES AND NOT ENOUGH FOOD. TO ADD TO THAT, I HAD TO PROVIDE FOR MY SON.



HOW ARE YOU GOING TO RETURN TO SCHOOL KHADIJA? MARTIN IS ALMOST A YEAR OLD. IF YOU DON'T RETURN TO SCHOOL SOON IT WILL BE TOO LATE.

I DON'T KNOW MOTHER. THERE ARE SO MANY OBSTACLES.



HELLO? I'M LOOKING FOR KHADIJA.



YES, I'M KHADIJA.

AH, GREAT. I AM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF A GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATION CALLED LOZI YOUTH ORGANIZATION, SUPPORTED BY THE NKHOTAKOTA AIDS SUPPORT ORGANIZATION.

WE ARE TRYING TO IDENTIFY ALL THE GIRLS IN THIS AREA WHO ARE NOT IN SCHOOL DUE TO HAVING AN EARLY PREGNANCY. YOUR VILLAGE CHIEF IDENTIFIED YOU. WE WANT TO HELP YOU RETURN TO SCHOOL.



OH? THAT WOULD BE A GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR ME. PLEASE COME IN.

THANK YOU.



SO KHADIJA, DO YOU WANT TO RETURN TO SCHOOL?

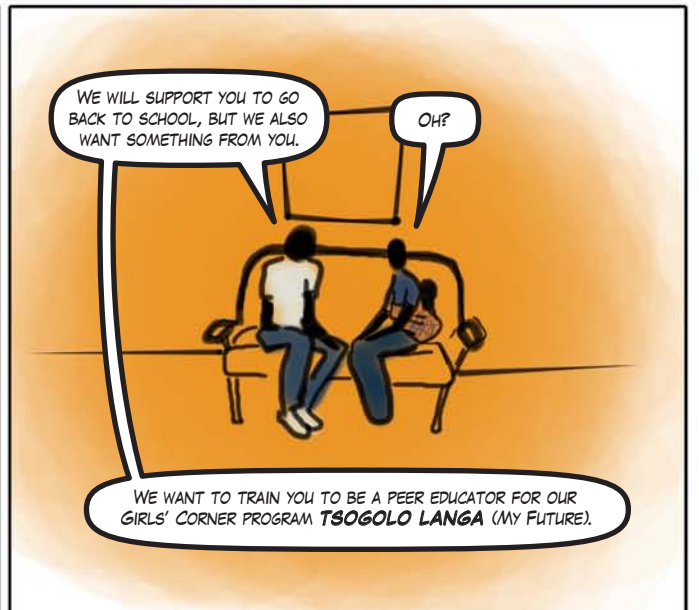
ZZZZZ

OH, YES! I THINK ABOUT IT EVERY DAY, BUT WE DON'T HAVE THE MONEY FOR SCHOOL FEES AND NOW I MUST ALSO TAKE CARE OF MY BABY.



DID YOU KNOW EARLY PREGNANCY IS A COMMON PROBLEM IN MALAWI? WE WANT GIRLS TO KNOW THEY HAVE SUPPORT TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL, GAIN AN EDUCATION AND PROVIDE A BETTER LIFE FOR THEIR FAMILY.

OH!



WE WILL SUPPORT YOU TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL, BUT WE ALSO WANT SOMETHING FROM YOU.

OH?

WE WANT TO TRAIN YOU TO BE A PEER EDUCATOR FOR OUR GIRLS' CORNER PROGRAM **TSOGOLO LANGA** (MY FUTURE).



AS A PEER EDUCATOR YOU WILL LEARN HOW TO PREVENT EARLY PREGNANCY WITH TRAININGS IN DECISION-MAKING, ASSERTIVENESS AND SELF-ESTEEM. WE WILL ALSO TRAIN YOU IN STIs, HIV AND GIRLS' RIGHTS.

AND WHAT WOULD MY RESPONSIBILITIES BE?



AFTER THE TRAINING, YOU WILL GO TO THE VARIOUS GIRLS' CORNER CLUBS TO SHARE YOUR STORY. YOU WILL BE A CAUTIONARY TALE, BUT YOU WILL ALSO HELP GIRLS UNDERSTAND HOW TO SAY NO TO MEN AND STAY IN SCHOOL. ARE YOU INTERESTED?

YES!

I KNEW MY FUTURE WOULD BE BRIGHTER IF I COULD START OVER AGAIN.



TO REACH THE MOST HIDDEN AND AT-RISK GIRLS, THE NKHOTAKOTA AIDS SUPPORT ORGANIZATION (NASO) PARTNERED WITH FOUR SMALLER GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS TO CREATE GIRLS' CORNER CLUBS IN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY CENTERS.

NASO'S FINANCIAL AND PROGRAM SUPPORT OF THE LOZI YOUTH ORGANIZATION HELPED THEM DEVELOP GIRLS' CORNERS AND ALSO IDENTIFY AND TRAIN 20 PEER EDUCATORS, INCLUDING KHADIJA. PEER EDUCATORS ARE EMPOWERED THROUGH TRAININGS ON DECISION MAKING, ASSERTIVENESS, SELF ESTEEM, HIV/AIDS, EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND HUMAN AND GENDER RIGHTS.



ONCE TRAINED, THE GIRLS GO TO VARIOUS GIRLS' CORNERS TO SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES AND NEW KNOWLEDGE AND TO OFFER GROUP AND ONE-ON-ONE MENTORING. PEER EDUCATORS ALSO GO OUT INTO THE COMMUNITY TO ENCOURAGE OUT-OF-SCHOOL GIRLS TO RETURN.



GIRLS AGED 10-19 ARE ENCOURAGED TO ATTEND GIRLS' CORNER MEETINGS. ACTIVITIES USUALLY TAKE PLACE IN THE AFTERNOON AND INCLUDE SPORTS, EMPOWERMENT TRAINING, DISCUSSIONS ABOUT REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, SAFE SEX AND HIV, PEER MENTORING, DEBATES, THEATER AND VOCATIONAL SKILL TRAINING.



WHILE EDUCATING GIRLS ABOUT PREGNANCY AND HIV IS VITAL, CREATING REAL CHANGE IN GIRLS' LIVES IS SLOW DUE TO POVERTY. TO CONFRONT POVERTY AND THE NEED FOR GIRLS TO EARN THEIR OWN MONEY TO PAY THEIR SECONDARY SCHOOL FEES, GIRLS' CORNERS TEACH GIRLS HOME CRAFTS, LIKE KNITTING AND SEWING SCHOOL UNIFORMS, THAT CAN BE SOLD IN THEIR COMMUNITIES. HOWEVER, THE NEED FOR MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT, LIKE SEWING MACHINES, IS A PERSISTENT PROBLEM.

A GIRL'S LIFE DOESN'T TRANSFORM WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF HER FAMILY AND COMMUNITY, SO GIRLS' CORNERS ORGANIZE COMMUNITY AWARENESS PROGRAMS ON THE CHALLENGES ADOLESCENT GIRLS FACE AND ENCOURAGE PARENTS TO SPREAD THE MESSAGE.



THANKS TO THE SUCCESS OF THE OUTREACH CAMPAIGNS, MEMBERSHIP IS GROWING AND PARENTS ARE ENCOURAGING THEIR DAUGHTERS TO JOIN THE GIRLS' CORNERS. BUT WITH INCREASED MEMBERSHIP COMES INCREASED NEED FOR MATERIALS, SCHOOL AND SPORTS UNIFORMS, HOME CRAFT EQUIPMENT AND MOST IMPORTANTLY SCHOOL FEES SO GIRLS CAN STAY IN SCHOOL.



AFTER MY TRAINING, I STARTED LEADING GIRLS' CORNER MEETINGS.

TODAY WE'RE GOING TO TALK ABOUT GIRL EMPOWERMENT AND PREVENTING EARLY PREGNANCY.



GIRL EMPOWERMENT IS WHEN A GIRL IS GIVEN THE POWER AND STRENGTH TO MAKE HER OWN CHOICES, TO BE ABLE TO SAY NO IF A MAN IS PRESSURING HER FOR SEX AND TO BE ABLE TO DEMAND TO STAY IN SCHOOL.



LET'S TALK ABOUT SOME STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTING PREGNANCY. YOUR FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE IS JUST COMING TO GIRLS' CORNER MEETINGS.

IF YOU'RE SPENDING YOUR FREE TIME HERE, THEN YOU'RE NOT OUT CHATTING WITH BOYS. HERE WE CAN SHARE NEW IDEAS AND HELP EACH OTHER BE STRONG TO PREVENT THESE PROBLEMS. WHAT ARE SOME OTHER IDEAS?



MY BOYFRIEND AND I ARE NEVER ALONE, SO WE CAN'T GIVE INTO TEMPTATION. WE ALWAYS PLAN ACTIVITIES WITH FRIENDS.



HAS HE EVER PRESSURED YOU TO HAVE SEX?

WELL, ONCE HE ASKED ME OVER TEXT MESSAGE, BUT I REMINDED HIM THAT WE BOTH HAVE GOALS. WE HAVE NOT REACHED THOSE GOALS YET, SO WE NEED TO STAY STRONG.



THAT'S GREAT! REMINDING EACH OTHER OF YOUR GOALS, LIKE STAYING IN SECONDARY SCHOOL, GOING TO COLLEGE AND GETTING A CAREER, IS A GREAT WAY TO STAY ON THE RIGHT PATH.



YOU HAVE ALL HEARD ABOUT MY CHALLENGES, BUT TODAY WE HAVE ANOTHER PEER EDUCATOR WITH US WHO IS GOING TO SHARE HER STORY. PLEASE WELCOME ZIONE!

THANKS KHADIJA! I NEVER LEARNED ABOUT PREGNANCY OR HOW TO PREVENT PREGNANCY FROM MY PARENTS OR SCHOOL, SO I AM REALLY MOTIVATED TO SHARE THIS INFORMATION WITH ALL OF YOU!



AFTER MY FATHER PASSED AWAY MY MOTHER DIDN'T HAVE ANY MONEY TO PAY THE SECONDARY SCHOOL FEES FOR THE SEVEN OF US. MOTHER SAID WE HAD TO FIND WORK TO PAY OUR FEES.



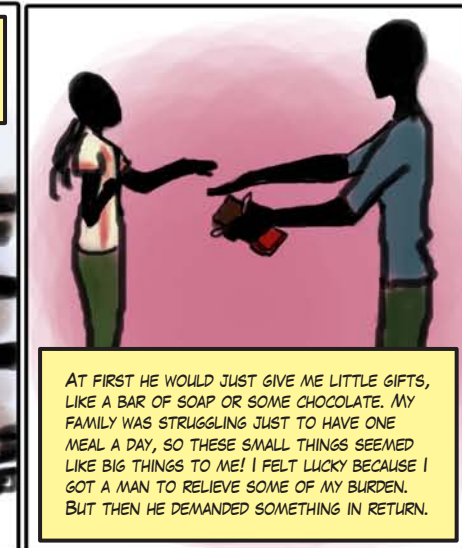
I FOUND WORK AS A WASHER, BUT THEY PAID ME A CHILD'S WAGE SO IT WASN'T ENOUGH.



I WORKED SO HARD TO GET LAUNDRY FROM ALL THE HOUSES AND DO THE WASHING BEFORE SCHOOL, SO WHEN I GOT TO CLASS I WAS SO TIRED.



I MET A MAN WHEN I WAS COLLECTING LAUNDRY AT ONE HOUSE. HE HAD HIS OWN FAMILY, BUT HE SAID HE FELT PITY FOR ME.



AT FIRST HE WOULD JUST GIVE ME LITTLE GIFTS, LIKE A BAR OF SOAP OR SOME CHOCOLATE. MY FAMILY WAS STRUGGLING JUST TO HAVE ONE MEAL A DAY, SO THESE SMALL THINGS SEEMED LIKE BIG THINGS TO ME! I FELT LUCKY BECAUSE I GOT A MAN TO RELIEVE SOME OF MY BURDEN. BUT THEN HE DEMANDED SOMETHING IN RETURN.



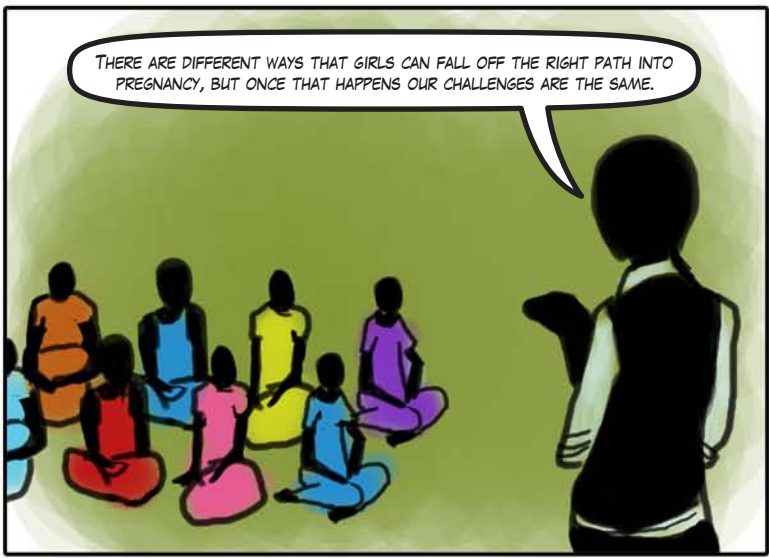
WHEN I FOUND OUT I WAS PREGNANT I THOUGHT THAT I HAD CAUGHT THIS MAN AND HE WOULD TAKE CARE OF ME. BUT WHEN I TOLD HIM, HE DENIED IT WAS HIS AND SAID THAT HE SAW ME WITH OTHER MEN. I GOT VERY WORRIED THEN THAT THIS MAN HAD CHEATED ME.



I LEARNED HOW A MAN CAN CHANGE. NOW I AM TRYING TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL, BUT LET ME TELL YOU GIRLS IT IS VERY HARD TO EARN ENOUGH FOR SCHOOL FEES WHEN YOU HAVE A BABY!



I AM LEARNING SEWING THROUGH THE GIRLS' CORNER THOUGH, SO I HOPE I WILL BE ABLE TO FIND WORK AS A TAILOR AND SAVE SOME MONEY TO RETURN TO SCHOOL NEXT YEAR.



THERE ARE DIFFERENT WAYS THAT GIRLS CAN FALL OFF THE RIGHT PATH INTO PREGNANCY, BUT ONCE THAT HAPPENS OUR CHALLENGES ARE THE SAME.



YOU HAVE TO HAVE THE HEART TO STAY IN SCHOOL AND NOT GET PREGNANT OR MARRIED YOUNG.

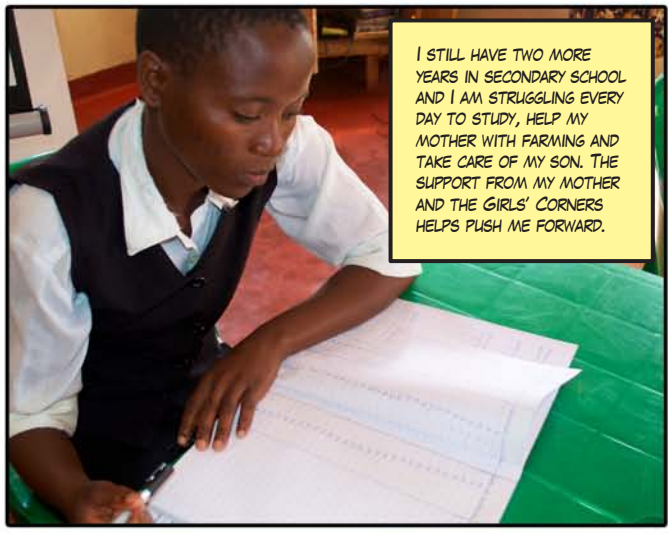
I FELL OFF THE PATH. I DIDN'T HAVE ACCESS TO THIS INFORMATION THAT WE ARE SHARING WITH YOU, BUT I KNOW STRUGGLING TO RETURN TO SCHOOL IS MY BEST OPTION NOW.



EVEN IF YOU THINK YOUR LIFE IS DIFFICULT NOW, THINK ABOUT HOW DIFFICULT IT WOULD BE WITH A CHILD WHO DEPENDS ON YOU. SO STAY STRONG AND STAY IN SCHOOL. DON'T THINK A MAN WILL SOLVE YOUR PROBLEMS!



IF YOU DON'T HAVE BASIC NECESSITIES YOU MUST LEARN A SKILL, LIKE WE DO AT GIRLS' CORNER, AND NOT GO LOOKING FOR A MAN. WITH AN EDUCATION AND GOOD SKILLS YOU CAN TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR FUTURE.



I STILL HAVE TWO MORE YEARS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL AND I AM STRUGGLING EVERY DAY TO STUDY, HELP MY MOTHER WITH FARMING AND TAKE CARE OF MY SON. THE SUPPORT FROM MY MOTHER AND THE GIRLS' CORNERS HELPS PUSH ME FORWARD.



I'M LUCKY THAT MY MOTHER CARES FOR MARTIN WHILE I AM AT SCHOOL.

SEE YOU AFTER SCHOOL, MARTIN. BE GOOD FOR GRANDMA!



EVERY NIGHT I TELL HIM STORIES ABOUT MY LIFE AND WHAT I WANT FOR HIM.

AND THEN YOU'LL GROW TO BE A BIG, SMART BOY!

EEE OOO
EEE!



I MUST STUDY HARD TO ACHIEVE MY DREAM OF BECOMING AN ACCOUNTANT. I WILL BE ABLE TO SUPPORT MY MOTHER AND MY CHILD THEN!



FINISHING SCHOOL IS THE FIRST STEP TO GIVING MYSELF AND MY SON A GOOD LIFE. I WILL TEACH HIM TO BE INDEPENDENT AND STAND ON HIS OWN BY EXAMPLE.

I AM A GIRL WHO HAS FACED SO MANY CHALLENGES. WHEN I GOT PREGNANT I THOUGHT MY LIFE WAS OVER, BUT WITH THE ENCOURAGEMENT FROM MY MOM AND THE GIRLS' CORNERS I HAVE THE CHANCE TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL. I CAN TEACH MY FELLOW GIRLS THE DANGERS OF EARLY PREGNANCY AND EARLY MARRIAGE. EVEN THOUGH I'M NOT PERFECT, I AM PROUD THAT NOW I AM A ROLE MODEL FOR OTHER GIRLS IN THE COMMUNITY, ENCOURAGING THOSE WHO ALSO HAVE CHILDREN TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL AND HELPING OTHER GIRLS PREVENT PREGNANCY. SHARING OUR STORIES, EXPERIENCES AND EVEN FAILURES WITH EACH OTHER IS ONE OF THE BEST WAYS GIRLS CAN SUPPORT EACH OTHER. TOGETHER WE'LL STAY ON THE RIGHT PATH.



READ, DISCUSS, ACT

This is Khadija's story, but there are other girls from many different countries also facing these challenges and seeking solutions. Grab some friends, get your school and after-school clubs interested and visit www.grassrootsgirls.tumblr.com to learn about, discuss and get involved in the issues below. After reading Khadija's story we hope you're feeling inspired and fired up to take action for girls everywhere!



WHY WE LOVE GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS

CONSIDER: Marginalized by cultural practices, poverty and discrimination, girls are often outside the reach of larger development projects led by governments and international aid agencies. Grassroots organizations are smaller and created by members of the community to address specific problems. Familiar with the local language, culture and challenges that shape girls' lives, grassroots organizations are uniquely equipped to address girls' urgent needs and create effective solutions. They also stay put, and offer girls support for the long run.

ASK: How does NASO address the problems of Malawi's adolescent girls, specially teenagers who become pregnant?

DISCUSS: If an organization from outside of Malawi tried to support teen moms in returning to school, how would it be different? What might work and what wouldn't work?

WHY WE LOVE GIRL POWER

CONSIDER: Bands in the 1990s like Bikini Kill and the Spice Girls made the phrase "girl power" popular, but we're not talking about pop culture. Girl power means that all girls everywhere are empowered to take control of their lives. We know that if a girl stays in school, has access to health services and is given an opportunity to earn a good wage, she will marry later, have fewer and healthier children and earn an income that she'll invest back into her family and community. That's amazing! But girls are still facing exploitation

and injustice. Girls in poverty, navigating the tricky years of adolescence, face additional challenges like child marriage, early pregnancy and violence.

ASK: What are the challenges that are most pressing for Malawi's girls? How are NASO's Girls' Corners spreading girl power?

DISCUSS: What problem in your community can you confront with girl power to create a positive solution?

WHY WE LOVE SAFE SPACES FOR GIRLS

CONSIDER: Safe spaces are all about building strong connections so girls can get the support they need to navigate the emotional and physical challenges of being a teenager. This means they become better equipped to avoid or deal with the negative experiences that threaten to derail girls in adolescence: dropping out of school, getting forced into having sex, getting pregnant or getting married too early. Safe spaces are where girls find friends, mentor each other, learn from role models, access services and become decision-makers. Not to mention, together, girls can find inspiration, build confidence and grow knowledge and skills to stay in school.

ASK: Why do Malawi's girls need safe spaces and Girls' Corners? How did the Girls' Corner transform Khadija's life?

DISCUSS: Are there any spaces just for girls in your community? If so, why are these spaces special to you or your friends? If not, how would your life be better if you had access to an all-girl space?

Discover how the Firelight Foundation works to identify, fund and strengthen promising community organizations that support the health, resilience and education of children in Africa at www.firelightfoundation.org.

Curious about the situation of girls globally? www.girleffect.org is bursting with videos, stats, stories and more. Dig into "The Girl Declaration" to learn the five goals and seven principles that can create a better future for girls and end poverty for the world: www.girleffect.org/2015-beyond/the-declaration/

KHADIJA CHALLENGES YOU!

Khadija brought her story to you by making this graphic novella, and now she wants you to do the same. Go digital, use a comic book app on your tablet or fill your notebook; use photos or illustrate your own life. To get you going: What are some problems that girls in your community face? How are you dealing with these challenges? Are there any organizations in your community helping girls tackle these challenges? What are you doing to spread girl power in your community and beyond? Every girl has a story and deserves to be heard. What's yours?

Submit your graphic novella to share with other girls at grassrootsgirls.tumblr.com

