

DEAREST, I SET
YOU FREE

Wanjiru wa Njeri

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INTRODUCTION

This book is a collection of poems written during different periods of my life. It is about appreciating life from the eyes of death. Not from a nihilistic point, but from a more positive perspective that awakens your hunger for life ensuring you devour each day with thanksgiving and use each day and interactions with purpose.

The death of a stranger cuts deeply but briefly. That of a loved one cuts deepest and longest.

It is my aim that these raw words, thoughts, and feelings described herein will capture your grief process and walk you through mourning, reflections, and healing.

Ecclesiastes 9:5 King James Version

⁵ For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.

Imagine thinking you were forgotten. And then finding your name remembered. Say for example, when you assume your number wasn't saved and you introduce yourself and the person says, "I know it's you." It is joyous to you, the living. For the departed soul it is life-giving when you remember them. This way they get to live on.

These words are for you and I. We who have lost and remember, keep remembering!



I: Who owns today?





1.

The world shattered when I got the news

I sought relief, I surrendered to grief

I needed solace, I got tears

I drowned in these words

Death is the architect of life

Look at the seasons, the falling leaves

The rotating earth, the divine cycles

Why did the Divine Creator do this to me?

2.

How do you begin to deny yourself the will to grief?

To absolve yourself of the pain you have to die

You have to kill the part that was before this loss

To be able to live in peace as they rest in peace

Life becomes untrustworthy in the aftermath

Routines become illusionary curtains of peace

Cushions of comfort and hopeful deceptions

Things they owned become your light tower



*But the waves of sadness are overwhelming
There isn't a life vest for this drowning*

3.

*For how long will you procrastinate pleasure?
Telling yourself you will live tomorrow?
How do you carry forward hope?
Telling yourself you will do it another day?*

*For how long can you usurp for yourself this power?
If tomorrow belongs to the gods, who owns today?
Should it not be under your custody?
Shall you then cower from life and its bountiful?*

4.

*I imagine your teeth to be jail bars, your lips are guards and your tongue,
your poor tongue is the prisoner. I know very well how words unspoken
chill your bones, grip your heart and knots your guts ushering butterflies
of anxieties and nauseousness.*

*I say to you 'You are a vampire!' Your warm blood seeps into your clogged
system because you always bite your tongue. The unsaid piles up to be an*



anvil, an anchor made of stale words that renders you dumb, tongue-tied.

I know very well why you do not let the words out. You are afraid. You are afraid nobody will understand what they hear from your mouth. A spillage that would be from the abundance of your grief stricken heart. Shards of your brokenness would make your voice too shaky. Your hoarse voice would reveal too much.

5.

Someone once said 'Sleep is just death being shy.'

In the dream world that night, I instructed my carpenter

'Take my measurements and construct a bed that is a coffin.'

My bed was too spacious and lidless anyway

Reader, never has sleep been so restful

Welcoming death made sleep less shy

It made my dreams seem so easy to achieve

It made my waking moments more conscious

Every night I would retire physically ready to depart

And every morning I rouse mentally prepared to partake

The gift of life is in denying the denial of death

When I woke up, I chose to day dream



6.

People who end their plans with 'God-willing' would years back hit me as self-righteous weak-minded people who had abdicated their power to God. They were lazy. For how could they give back power that which had been given to them – sweet precious life – sweet precious hope – sweet precious faith?

Years later I comprehend these words with a graceful reverence. And when I utter them, every so often I will smile, feeling hopeful and wise, very wise. Once you encounter loss so many times, the experience dillutes your pride, it tunes your heart to a rhythm that relies on the creator for the next beat.

I even memorised James 4:13-15, can you?

7.

Vanity of Vanities, so it is written by Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes. There is a delicateness in life that you can only caress oh so fondly when you read and follow the words in those verses. Those admonishing words, like the ones in the old testament and Revelation free the heart and embellish the spirit birthing ecstasy and awe. Words when said at the opportune time can alter one's entire state of being. A miracle awaits to be set free from everyone's mouth. With every interaction I wish someone can bless my ears with sayings that would ease me of the burden suffocating my current existence.



8.

Agonized

I moulded sorrow within my heart

A lengthy process that seemed endless

During the process, misery was born

I was angry, in anguish

With misery so intense it extinguished any rays of hope

I was incomplete

Lost

Held captive

Hurting

Faithless

Antagonized

Blind to the reason of being alive



9.

*A stranger once stitched my brokenness
Her kindness sent bubbles to my brain
My spine felt agile
As I could defy gravity and fly
She touched me with her smile
Her words broke my sober mood
I wanted to tell her I was mourning
To tell her I wished I could perish
But being normal for 3 minutes felt magical
The undisclosed might be forgotten
Small talk could be the remedy*

10.

*I embrace the last memories we shared
I have forgotten the last words you said
Even the memories are fading
I am truly sorry
Out of sight out of mind, they say
What they do not tell you is -*



'As the heart yearns more, the mind forgets even more'

Why isn't there a handbook for the heart?

A map that directs it away from this hurt

Reflection notes



II : Alone





11.

We were connected by birth; our eternal connection can never be severed. They always say you are a guardian angel watching over me. I suspect it is true. I have heard you whisper in the breeze. I have seen a constellation of which I was certain you asked the gods to arrange just for me. I have seen your face in the brightness of a full moon. I have felt your hand give me a pat or a nudge in the gust of wind. Here, and then POOF, gone! I have known the ache of someone disappearing suddenly. Like how I had fictitious friends when I was younger, I feel your unreal presence haunting and hovering. Perhaps it's why, today as an adult, I do not ghost people.

12.

*Etched in my mind forever
Like the words on your grave
Sometimes I wish we cremated you
Your grave has become my picnic spot*

*A sweet soothing balm for my hurt
Visiting the dead was a Western thingy'
But your loss has made me rethink plenty
The blessings that come with losses, huh?*



For instance, the undertaker has become my bestie

The first thing I asked him

'As a child, who was your favourite wrestler?'

You guessed right, it was the man who had an urn

I watch Coco the day before I visit

I listen to 'In the sweet by and by' on repeat

I go through pictures for visual effect

I pray to God, beg Him, say I understand then lament

13.

I try to actualize the phrase 'It is well with my soul'

To find my feet in this surreal reality

My therapist says it is a normal grief process

Similar words from my pastor fail to soothe my ache

My family is dealing with this individually

Unable to be strong for one another



*Friends have tried but I have failed to let them in
It is not well, it will never be well but it was once well
Before this misfortune befell us it was well*

*I have to exhume the hope and joy I buried with you
I suspect I am becoming gothic
I am obsessed with the burial ceremony and my attire*

*The black dress was stunning
This new gloomy aura is the finest accessory
For how long will your memory plague me?*

14.

*For a while, I lost my identity and became a sorrowful wanderer
When I threw in that handful of soil
symbolically in my life, I threw in the towel
Our dreams and plans no more*

*Happiness in me or others was a sin, a grave sin!
How could happiness exist at such a time?*



How could anyone allow their face to break into a smile when my existence was wobbly?

The world, its people, and its God were insensitive and mean

Why didn't the world stop for this moment?

Why was the earth still rotating and solid?

Whirlwind within, sinking sand, raging floods, no rescue

For sorrow was engulfing and choking me

15.

Alone

My heartache unfolds

In the darkness

I attempt to banish the anguish

In the silence

My sorrow beckons

The grim reaper appears

We converse in dead serious tones

I ask questions that go unanswered

There's an overflow of tears and mucus



If you hear my weeping

You will think it's a grief song I hum to

Alone

16.

There is a void in my heart

An abyss

A painful abscess that refuses to pop

A wound that by all indications might never heal

An existential crisis

I breathe but there is an absence of life within

The glaring awareness of the unknown paralyses me

What am I? Who am I? How am I? Where am I?

With you gone, how do I go on?

They tell me to keep the faith and be strong

But they don't carry you in their hearts as I do



17.

I think a midget as a kid goes to bed thinking they will wake up and miraculously be tall. In the same way, I think a person with a grieving heart goes to bed thinking they will wake up and miraculously be whole. As if the unwanted reality can be entombed, mummified, or thrown into what the Swahili people call 'kaburi la saha'u.' Only, one can never truly forget.

I have begged God on most desolate nights to strike me with amnesia. Because if He cannot mend my heart from the ache He has caused, then He can be quick and kind to annihilate the brain cells that store the memories of the beloved He took away.

Later, on the same desolate nights I pray and beg Him for strength and acceptance.

18.

Chained to a string of stinging words,

In my head the following words repeat;

Demise

Deceased

Bereaved

Bereavement package

Sincere and deepest condolences



Eulogy reading

God knows

Take heart (who's heart? I wonder)

God knows

These poisonous words

Endanger my sanity

19.

Never go near a casket

The dead isn't asleep

The dead will reach out

Your warm blood is irresistible

I say this because when I stepped forward

Underneath the mound of dirt

I heard scratching

A desperate need to escape from the new home

I pricked my thumb with the rose thorn

Dropped it on the grave

Patted the soil with the bleeding finger

There there beloved, there there!



20.

For hours, days, night – Eternity

Sleep has lost its seductive touch on my sensitive eyes

*Perhaps the salty liquid escaping my ravaged core through puffy eyes is
why*

In the terror of solitude and the unavoidable bright torches of sorrow

I stay awake, worshipping the gods of mortality and insomnia

Awake with a paralysing awareness that grief is oh-so-very lonely

*Sympathy, empathy, condolences, verses, and hugs, all fail to penetrate
the broken, and sooty corners of my bewailing heart*

Reflection notes.



III: The weight of death and life





21.

*When the casket was lowered
She fell to the ground
Life had robbed her
God who had given was now a robber
Without reservations, she wailed
A cry unheard to whom she had belonged to
Loving an absent person is disorienting
I hugged and breathed into the flowers I carried
I thanked God for life: gratefulness or selfishness?
Sadly, I watched her throw herself fully
into a place darker than the grave - Grief!*

22.

*How human beings reinvent themselves after the natural but unjust
death of a loved one strangely awakens the hunger to live and the
eagerness to face the angel of death.

We disintegrate under the weight of loss but under the tenderness of the
hour and minute hand, we can testify that time heals and soothes.*



A painful but refreshing process that detoxes and purges the mind towards more conscious living. Every day becomes precious, every anniversary becomes momentous.

23.

Like an enticed wolf

The purity of the breeze rattles my bones

I gaze upon the gibbous moon

And I think about that part of my heart

That part that is now in the dark

That part that was shattered when death struck

That part that throbs but is slowly accepting and numbing

Tonight, the incomplete moon completes me

It tells me that this heart will soon be full

I do not have questions for the Almighty

I no longer have the energy

24.

To throw some much-needed soil into the grave

An act so vital and mandatory,

She gave me her swaddled baby to hold



Her legs almost gave in as she walked toward the grave

And the weight of death and life hit me

Alas, look at the beautiful irony

In my arms, I carried the youngest form of life

Precious and delicate and hopeful

As the mother sunk in despair

I whispered to the cooing baby

'This is the time to be a true bundle of joy'

25.

Before me, there is freshly heaped soil

Heart-shaped flowers

A cross erected in his honour

But what honour is there in death?

A young man consumed by his folly ways

Leaving behind such turmoil

Hours later, before me, there are roasted pork ribs

Glasses of water, beer, soda, and wine

Those who were mourning are celebrating



*Life is accurately captured and displayed the day you die
Intrigued by the freshness of loss and this liveliness
I lubricate my aching soul with fatty pork chops*

26.

*I wake up every morning with my tongue dry
My throat too is a desert
In the night, in my disturbed sleep
I become a ghost chaser
Your face and voice haunt me
I perspire while labouring to capture you
I am exhausted and wrecked
You still live - you will always live
One word haunts me - MORTALITY!*

27.

*Her heart must be connected to Lot's wife
She's attracted to the past for she keeps looking back
Desiring, wishing, regretting
Again, and again*



*She tastes the salt in her tears
Tears blur her vision of future hope
She clings to everything she has lost
Which she laments is a lot
Why cause such pains, Lord?*

28.

*A physical wound is good
You can clean and dress it
The pain is tangible
Pills and balms do the trick
You witness it fester
Grow a scab
And heal*

*What is an emotional wound?
The acid that erodes the soul?
Venom with no antidote?
Psychological? Spiritual?
How does one address these woes?*



Is the bone marrow the black hole for sorrow?

Which platelets heal this wound?

29.

How is it promotion to glory?

A celebration of life?

What is so glorious about this?

Why are we holding a wake?

A wake for one eternally asleep?

Why are they telling me sorry?

Sorry for my loss, which loss?

They say 'Accept my condolences

I reject these empty cliché phrases

I say 'Accept my silence and sad smile'

Oh, and please remove me from that WhatsApp group "celebrating life"

30.

Rain makes sleep pleasant

It forces one to take shelter

Weeping also isolates a person



*Tears moisten a chapped broken heart
Similarly, rain falls on unfertile soil
Tears trickle down a frowning face
Like rain, grieving also lulls the barren soul
Readying it for growth and renewal
My Bible says 'You shall know them by their fruits'
God, when will I then pluck these fruits of long suffering and sprout
endless fruits of joy?*

Reflection notes.



IV: Unleashed living





31.

Spooky!

Like the people we claim to love but we 'ghost'

The dead have also been neglected

Leaves and plastic litter their gravesite

Deep pain and questions clutter my mind

The ghosts of their lives arouse my spirits

I call myself a 'wander woman'

The living lady that roams amongst the dead

I get to the grave and wonder

'If the dead are to rest in peace eternally,

For how long should the living be distraught?

I clear the rubbish by kicking and again birth a wonder

'Why did they term it as kicking the bucket?

And bury the hatchet?'

God, know this: I am not burying this hatchet

In the end, when we meet I will request an explanation

'Everything happens for a reason' they say

Currently in this lifetime I don't see any



*As I leave the graveyard, I play UB40
And alter the lyrics 'The reasons why I loved you'*

32.

Envy and curiosity

*Those are the only emotions left
You saw the unknown ever after before I did
What lies beneath and beyond?
Dry bones are soft to the touch
But a heart that refuses to mourn is hard
Eyes that do not cry see logically and clearer
But unshed tears drown the heart in despair*

33.

*Soon the flowers will wither
But before they do, bees will feed on the nectar
They will dry up and also feed the soil
The weight of my sorrow will wiggle
Wiggling intrusively into all our special memories*



Memories I treasure will also wither, devoured by time

The maggots will wiggle around you as you decay

You now belong to Him but you were once mine

Mine, mine, mine, mine

I cannot free you, I will never say goodbye

I seek peace and release from this distress, loneliness, lifelessness

34.

Your voice, your memories, your essence

Everything that was you is fading

But your scent still lingers

You are alive in photos and videos

Artificial immortality confuses me

Increasing the deep longing

Your false presence is overwhelming

35.

Why did we place flowers on your grave?

Why do I buy them when I come to you?

When they are so fresh and fragile akin to life



Is it not ironic?

Pointless even

You will not see or smell them

What is their purpose?

I am tempted to eat the petals

Red petals for a bleeding heart

Black petals for an anguished soul

White petals for eternal peace

Yellow petals for joy desired

Despair is like hunger

Always seeking to be alleviated

A recurring nuisance

As necessary as breathing

36.

My mind strings up images

I light a candle for you every night

To see the shadows of life



*To remember you had been my light
My dear beloved, the departed that I miss
How can I take strides away from this strife?*

37.

*On some days I glorify death
I ponder on its magnificence
Marvel at the mystery
Enchanting*

*I imagine the afterlife
The one beyond this one
The place where you reside
Eternity*

*It steers me to see beauty in life
To hear sweet delicate life, beckon every minute
The warm welcome to living fully
Grateful*



The need to understand has died

Acceptance embraces me now

Trust in the divine cushions the sorrow

Hopeful

38.

I held on, denying your demise

My heart is no longer restless

It has taken years

But the other day, I gave away your items

I deleted your voice and text messages

I have memorised them anyways

You have been shared with strangers

You have become a part of their stories

You are a blessing now, no more my loss

Say hello to the heavens

Shout my name to the angels



Rest in peace

39.

What we had was our allotted time

Fondly I remember days wasted in arguments

Disagreements we should have ignored

Places we should have gone

Things we had wanted but went undone

Unexplored activities!

What we had was our allotted time

Now, I carefully count my blessings and days

I no longer waste time on trivial issues

Today, my alias is Serenity and Christopher Columbus

No more I should have, regrets or unfulfilled wishes

Unleashed living!



*I am setting my heart free
Freeing it from all the hurt
Like incense or a fragrance
My thoughts waft and float
No longer haunting me
But comforting, like your spirit
Your memories are now painless
They surge within me with fondness
It is said 'If you love something set it free.'
Dearest I set you free and share your legacy
I am setting my heart free*

*I am setting my heart free
Freeing it from all the searching
I have ceased asking 'why: eloi eloi lama sabachthani'
I no longer wonder where you are
Heaven? Hell? Limbo? Purgatory?
Magical and enigmatic, life is the epitome of awe
I am resurrecting: Learning to live again*



Blossoming in your absence feels unnatural

*Like your desire to be an amphibian so that
you can live everywhere*

To live as fully as you did, dearest I set you free you

I am setting my heart free

Reflection notes



While we have the gift of life, it seems to me the only tragedy is to allow part of us to die - whether it is our spirit, our creativity or our glorious uniqueness.

~Gilda Radner.



If you have gotten to the end of these pieces, you have travelled with me through the dark tunnel of grief. In the freshness of loss, grief secures permanency in your heart, it dims your life. Over time, if you steer it patiently it refines you and gifts you new layers to your identity. I urge you not to resist for too long, it is futile.

Embody and enjoy the new identity!



About the Author.

Wanjiru is a Social Psychologist from Kenyatta University, main campus. She is most fulfilled when doing community work and transforming lives through developmental aid. She is enthusiastic about mental health and believes that one can effectively actualize their potential if their internal world is at optimum.

She is the head of programs at Together For Africa (TOFA). An NGO committed to impacting the youth. You are invited to volunteer with them or join their TOFA book club. Here, Wanjiru writes book summaries that you can check out on the website.

She is a content creator at Hardiness Unearths Greatness (HUGs). An NGO committed to creating awareness and eradicating mental health stigma and misinformation. You can check out weekly topics and discussions on the website and social media platforms.

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