



# Nama's Story Identity



# Identity

In you, O Lord, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame. Psalm 71: 1.

My name is Nama, and I repeat this prayer everyday so that God helps me. I am a strong, confident, and church-going woman. I work hard for my twins—a girl and a boy who are both in primary school. Their father left us just after they turned 2. That's when I decided to move to the city with my children in search of a better life instead of staying with my parents. I am 28 and live in a two-roomed house not far from the capital city. When it rains, the drains get blocked and it is hard to move around. The houses are very close so there is no privacy. Electricity is often off and we share communal outdoor toilets. Transport is also a problem, but I make sure that my children never miss a day of school or go to bed hungry. I know that my situation is temporary because God will help.

My favorite pastime is making jewelry. I collect beads and string them together creatively. At the salon where I plait hair, I manage to sell a few pieces to my customers. I want to make enough money to open a small shop and sell all kinds of pretty jewels.

After taking my children to school every morning, I go to work in the salon. The work does not pay well and I never seem to make enough to save. One day one of my regulars shared an ear-catching story about moneymaking. She told me that she often makes \$200 a night. She said another friend in the business was able to send her children to university. I asked about the business and was shocked when my client whispered to me that she does sex work. I thought I could never knowingly and willfully sin like that. But over the following weeks, I started envisioning my children in a good school and myself as a successful jeweler and eventually I reasoned that if I did it for my children, the Lord would show me mercy. I decided to try it. It was very difficult at first but I managed. Until...

**Go to Violence Strikes and take card 1.**



# Nama's Story

## Violence Strikes 1



## Violence Strikes 1

You slowly start to accept your new work and pray to God every day to forgive you and keep you safe. Sometimes it is scary, going with strange men, but thank God your experiences have been okay so far. There are some clients who do not even want to have sex. They just want to have someone to talk to as a friend. You are grateful for these opportunities and give them friendship however you can, feeling lucky to get paid for it.

It is a Saturday evening and you receive a client who takes you to a small hotel you've never been to before. You sit at the bar together and sip a soda. Suddenly, you feel a drowsiness and heaviness come over your body. You wake up hours later in the middle of a marshy area, your head pounding and your vagina very sore. Vulnerable and scared, you have no idea where you are. Finding your clothes scattered around you, you dress quickly and realize that all of your money has been stolen and that your client must have drugged you. The shock hits you so hard that you don't even know how to react. You see cars in the distance and walk toward the main road. A police patrol van flashes its blaring headlights at you. They ask what happened and you quickly cover the truth by explaining that you were robbed and thrown off the road. Seeing that you are in distress, the officer looks suspicious but grudgingly agrees to take you to the hospital where you are left to wait.

**If you are too embarrassed to speak to the nurses and prefer to go home, go to Return Home and take card 1.**

**If you decide to stay at the hospital in the hope of receiving treatment, go to Medical Care and take card 1.**

**If you decide to go to church to seek comfort in God, go to Religion and take card 1.**



# Nama's Story

## Return Home 1



## Return Home 1

As soon as the sun is up, you leave the hospital and get into a cab. When you reach home, you hurry inside for money to pay the driver. The house girl has already dressed the children for school. They run to you and ask where you have been. You hug them tight and tell them not to worry, explaining that you were just seeing a friend who was sick. After dropping them at school, the first thing you do is get on your knees and thank God that you are still alive. Next, you check your body for injuries, but you only have a few small scratches and a dull ache coming from your inner thighs. You decide to go see some of your colleagues. They are outraged when they hear your story. Applying some ointment to your body, they offer to give you a few self-defense tips. The first thing they tell you is to send a text to a colleague at the beginning of a job with your location and a text when finished. They caution you that the work is not always safe and that you all need to help each other stay safe. They also suggest that you buy a new phone and keep it with you at all times.

It takes you a few weeks to recover from the experience and to overcome the fear of returning to the street. You wonder if you have lost God's protection, but the money keeps pulling you. You return to work, following your friends' advice to get a new phone with a camera. You are determined not to fall into the same trap again. The sex work keeps you very busy, and you are grateful that you can keep your children in school and save up for the jewelry business. But your luck doesn't last for long...

**Go to Violence Strikes and take card 2.**



# Nama's Story

## Medical Care 1



## Medical Care 1

You are seated on a cold hard bench in the hospital waiting room. You want to ask the policemen to take you home but are afraid to tell them where you live or make them suspicious of your story. You have small cuts along your arms and legs and your vagina aches. The smell in the hospital makes you nauseous, and the other patients waiting to be seen look as desperate as you feel. Nobody pays attention to you. Many hours later, a woman in uniform comes and ushers you to her desk.

You explain to her that you were attacked, robbed, and left in the cold and need treatment. She tells you that you have to report the crime to the police first. You tell her that the police brought you and that you have been waiting a long time. When she demands payment, you remind her that all of your money was stolen. She looks at you with suspicion and scorn and tells you to go back and wait because there are more urgent patients that need attention and that she will help you later if she has time.

You return to the reception and wait a long time. In the meantime patient after patient receives care. After what seems like an eternity, a nurse beckons for you and roughly washes and dresses your wounds before sending you away. You find a taxi and promise to pay him when you arrive home. You are on edge and can't stop thinking about what that man could have done to you before he dumped you by the marsh. You pray to God that it never happens again. But it seems your prayer goes unheard...

**Go to Violence Strikes and take card 2.**





# Nama's Story

## Religion 1



## Religion 1

You do not feel well but are not seriously injured. You have only a few cuts on your arms and thighs, although you feel sore when you walk. When the sun comes up, you decide to go to your church, which is nearby. You wait for your close friend, Veronica, the pastor's wife, to come in. She usually appears for prayers before starting work and you are so glad to see her when she arrives.

She immediately sees that you are not fine and takes you to a quiet corner in the back of the church. She sits beside you and you pray together before she asks you to tell her what happened.

You do not feel comfortable telling Veronica that you do sex work so you tell her that after work at the salon, a man grabbed you, attacked and drugged you, and then you woke up near the marshes. Veronica is utterly distraught at the news and says you must report the crime to the police. When you refuse, she shakes her head disapprovingly and reminds you to continue praying and to make sure God knows of your devotion. You promise her that you will and agree to talk to her again after church on Sunday. But before you can...

**Go to Violence Strikes and take card 2.**



# Nama's Story

## Violence Strikes 2



## Violence Strikes 2

Cautiously, you return to sex work. By God's grace your children are not aware of what you do, but since you are not home to put them to bed, they sometimes ask where you go. You explain that you must work hard to pay their school fees, and they are happy that you can afford to buy them new clothes. You pray to God that your intention to support your children somehow lessens your sins.

Since the attack you always make sure to have a fully-charged phone with you. You also begin taking the time to talk with clients before going with them to get to know some of their personal information in case they behave criminally toward you.

One night you are standing on your usual street corner chatting with a potential client when you notice a rowdy scuffle. It appears to be a police roundup. The police grab you roughly, and your client, looking visibly scared, knows he is next. The police do not touch him but bundle you up in their truck with other women and speed away.

There are many women like you at the station. Some are already crying. Some are quite young. You recognize a few. A policeman throws you into a cold, dimly lit cell full of other sex workers. The room smells of urine, and police officers shout at you and push you around. They tell you that if any of you wants to be released, then you must move to the corner for 'processing'. You think about your health and what would happen to your children if you remain in prison. Disgusted and terrified, you move to the corner. Three policemen rape you in turn before they let you go. You are in much pain. As you leave the cell, they laugh while taking your money and phone.

**If you decide to go to your colleagues for help, go to Friends & Neighbors and take card 1.**

**If you decide to keep quiet about the incident and try to forget, go to Carry On and take card 1.**



# Nama's Story

## Friends & Neighbors 1



## Friends & Neighbors 1

As time passes, you feel like your world is becoming smaller and smaller. You sometimes avoid going to church because you feel like you are betraying God. You are scared that your friends and neighbors will find out that you are doing sex work, so the only people you can really confide in are your colleagues. The women express sympathy and admit that these incidents with police are a fairly typical part of the job.

To show their support, they invite you to join their circle of financial investment into which they each contribute regularly in order to raise money. Knowing your passion for jewelry, they are happy to include you. Over time, the good money you make grows enough for you to begin to save, and you dream of the day when you have enough to open your small jewelry shop. The colleagues in your investment circle encourage you to go for a check-up to ensure you have not caught any STIs and to check for HIV. You say you are too busy to make an appointment, but if you are honest, you'd have to admit that you are a little scared to go.

Your twins are about to sit for their final examinations in primary school. Secondary school fees are very expensive, so you need to save more money than ever. Your friends are extremely supportive and despite the pressure, everything is going well when you don't think too much about what you are doing. Until...

**Go to Violence Strikes and take card 3.**



# Nama's Story

## Carry On 1



## Carry On 1

You decide to take a few days off to spend time with your children. They enjoy having you home and you feel pleased to see how they are growing into fine young people. You certainly have that to be proud of.

You go to church on Sunday, but the sermon is about how God loves the sinner but hates the sin, and you feel the flush of shame as you sit and listen. You rush out the door after the service, thinking about finding another church or seeking God on your own.

When you are honest, you see that you are losing the person you used to be, but you continue praying each day and try to forgive the police officers for what they did to you. You want to visit your friends from the salon or call your mother or sister to chat, but you know they will ask about your work and how you are supporting your family and you cannot tell them the truth.

Your twins are about to take their final examinations and begin secondary school, so you know you must earn enough money to pay for their education. After a short break, you get back to work. But it is not calm for long...

**Go to Violence Strikes and take card 3.**





# Nama's Story

## Violence Strikes 3



## Violence Strikes 3

You continue with your work, making and saving good money. On one occasion, a very rich client takes you to a fancy hotel in the suburbs. You drive for a long time in his car, talking about life and your childhood. He says that he likes your smile and you feel comfortable with him. When he leads you into the hotel room, you stare at the beauty. There is even a water bed, which you have never seen before. The client, whose name is Obi, asks you to have sex without a condom because he wants to feel what it is like to be close to you without any barriers.

You shudder at the thought because you hate having sex without a condom, and you have already put your life at risk a few times to please customers who pay well. You know of friends who have died of HIV and you can't afford for anything to happen to you. When Obi offers you 500 US dollars for the night and shows you the new camera phone he has purchased for you, you cannot refuse his request. You ask him if you can use the bathroom first, and while you are there, you get onto your knees and ask God to be with you and protect you from any harm.

After sex, Obi tells you how much he enjoyed it and looks forward to many more nights with you. You cannot imagine how you will handle him. The money is so good, but you put yourself at risk every time you sleep with him unprotected.

When you tell your colleagues the next day, they shout at you, asking you if you want your children to become orphans. They insist that you go to the hospital for a check-up.

**If you take their advice and go to the hospital, go to Medical Care and take card 2.**

**If you decide to go to an NGO that supports women, go to NGO and take card 1.**



# Nama's Story

## Medical Care 2



## Medical Care 2

It takes a few weeks before you feel brave enough to go to the hospital. You know it is the right decision, but you feel nervous, thinking about what the test results might reveal.

You are tested for HIV and sexually transmitted infections. It takes a while before you can get your results, so you sit reading a newspaper, unable to pay attention to the words. Instead you repeatedly offer up a prayer for your tests to come back clean. When the results come back, the nurse says you have developed a sexually transmitted infection. She tells you that it is curable but highly contagious and can spread to other parts of your body if you do not take proper care. She eyes you suspiciously and warns you that sleeping around is dangerous, not to mention immoral. Your cheeks burn with shame and anger—how dare she judge you. You take your results and the box of medicine from her and leave as quickly and with as much dignity as possible.

Back outside, you take a deep breath and thank God that your condition is not deadly. Realizing that no amount of money is worth risking your life or your children's future for, you promise yourself to never have sex without a condom again.

You look closely at the test results and are even more relieved to see that you are not pregnant. You are so thankful that you pick your children up from school and take them out for ice cream as a celebration.

**Go to Work and take card 1.**



# Nama's Story

## NGO 1



## NGO 1

You have passed an office a number of times with a big signpost out front reading, “Women First!” You know that they help support women, and you have always been interested in learning about their work, but fear has prevented you from ever going inside. Now you finally feel ready to share your story and seek help.

When you arrive the receptionist is kind and asks you to sit and wait while she finds someone who can meet with you. After a short while, a woman comes and invites you to join her in her office. She introduces herself and talks briefly about the work the organization does. Then she asks you to tell her about yourself and what has brought you to seek support. You are nervous, but you open up to her and tell her about the work you do and some of the violence you have experienced. When you finish you can see the look of disapproval on her face. “I am sorry, but we do not offer services to women like you,” she tells you. You feel tears building up in your eyes and immediately rush out of her office. You are openly crying by the time you pass through the reception, and you are almost out the door when another woman touches your back. “Are you okay?” she asks, “I work here, can I help you?” You break down and tell her what happened with the first lady you spoke to. She puts her arm around you as you cry and apologizes for the way you were treated. She tells you that she respects you and invites you to return to speak with her anytime in the future. She also tells you that you are welcome to attend a weekly support group that she leads if you feel comfortable. You leave feeling shaken and unsure.

**If you want to visit your parents, go to Family and take card 1.**

**If you want to take a chance to change your life, go to Chance and take card 1.**



# Nama's Story

## Family 1



## Family 1

Your parents are surprised to see you. It has been a long time since you've visited, and they chastise you for your absence. You brought your father a new shirt and a scarf for your mother in her favorite color. After updating them on the twins' accomplishments in school, you begin to get uncomfortable, knowing that they may soon ask how you have been able to earn enough money to pay school fees and bring such lovely gifts.

It is time to prepare dinner, and as soon as you are alone, your mother looks at you closely.

"Nama, I can see in the lines on your face that something is troubling you. What is it, my child? I know you have left us for city life, but I am your mother and I can tell when something is wrong."

Unable to carry your stress alone any longer, you open up to your mother. You tell her that you have been having sex with men for money for the last few years and that you have done quite well for yourself. You break down in tears when you think about your sins, your health, and your children and the risks you are taking. When you look up to meet your mother's eyes, they are ablaze. She slaps your cheek. "How can you bring such shame upon your family?" she demands, turning away from you. "How can those two innocent children be raised with a whore for a mother?"

Furious at your mother's cruel words, you spit back at her, "Everything I do, I do for my children! You will never see them again," and you storm out of the house without another word. It is not until you are seated alone on the bus that the hurt and sadness sink in.

**If you decide to start sex work during the day, go to Work and take card 1.**

**If you decide to take a chance and open your jewelry shop, go to Chance and take card 1.**





# Nama's Story

## Work 1



## Work 1

Your children have started secondary school and you emptied your pockets paying the fees.

They still need money for books and uniforms, and you are still trying to save enough to open your jewelry business. You don't know how you will ever get out from under the financial burdens, but you keep working day and night.

You continue to worry about your health as you struggle to remain faithful to your promise never to have unsafe sex again. Most men want 'live' sex, and they offer so much more money without a condom. You continue to take risks and live in constant fear for your health, not to mention your soul. You feel sad and desperate for the company of friends and family and the comfort you used to take in the Lord. Some days you just feel like giving up, but you know you have to keep going for your children.

Late one night after working since morning, you are ready to go home and count your earnings for the day when you hear the all too familiar police sirens coming toward your street corner. They are at it again. In despair, you think of running, but their blue and red lights flash as the car pulls up in front of you and the officers stream out of the car. You wonder if this will ever end.

### **THE END**

This is the end of this version of Nama's story. Take a few minutes to sit quietly to reflect on Nama's experience. When you are ready, ask the facilitator for another woman's story.



# Nama's Story

## Chance 1



## Chance 1

At home, you consider a variety of new work strategies to increase your income and save for your family's future. You decide to make some long-term investments and use the little money you have left to set up the jewelry shop. You decide that this is as good a time as any to pursue your dream. It will also be good for your children to spend more time with you. You will continue with the sex work at night when needed.

You plunge in headfirst and rent a small space in town, and very soon you have shelves of all types of jewelry. Customers come from all over the surrounding area and business slowly increases. You begin to train younger girls in the business and even earn enough money to hire an assistant. Your daughter expresses interest and begins to learn the art as well, which makes you very proud.

Business remains steady, but you start feeling sick. You vomit almost every day, and a strange weakness overcomes your body. The feeling is terrifying and you cannot help but fear the worst. After a month of increasing fatigue, you force yourself to go to the hospital for testing. Tears stream down your face when a pregnancy test comes back positive. You hold your head in your hands and cry while the nurse talks about pre-natal care. What are you going to tell your children? How are you going to take care of another child? What has become of your life?

### **THE END**

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