



Mazuba's Story Identity



Identity

My name is Mazuba, which means “fierce one.” Where I come from, women are called to be strong because there is a lot of responsibility on our shoulders. I got married after secondary school, as do many girls in my village area. My mother also left school to begin her family. My joy comes from seeing my children grow. My husband, Tapiwa, works as a long distance truck driver and has to spend days or even weeks away. I make sure he finds the home nice and organized when he returns. I am faithful to my husband and cannot even think of cheating on him even though I wonder if he sees other women.

We have three children, and they all attend school nearby. The eldest, a girl, is fourteen years old and the other two are boys, eleven and nine respectively. I long to see them grow into great people whom society can lean on. I have always known that there is a good spirit looking after my children because on each of the days they were born, there was a full moon which is a good luck charm. There is a traditional healer called Mama Fisi who lives on the edge of the village, and she is the one who gave us the assurance that our children would be wealthy when they grow up. After hearing this, we have been offering the necessary sacrifices to make sure that this comes true.

Of late, I have been feeling tired and weak, and there have been more rumors than usual about my husband’s infidelity. Some of my neighbors even say that he has brought back sickness which could kill me. I try to keep busy sewing clothes from home and selling food on market day, but it is hardly enough to pay for the children’s school fees. Tapiwa earns enough to feed and clothe us, but money is always tight and things are quite tense...

Go to Violence Strikes and take card 1.

Mazuba's Story

Violence Strikes 1





Violence Strikes 1

Neighbors and people at the market whisper about your husband more and more, and you feel in the pit of your stomach that the rumors must be based on some truth. You just don't know how you will ever find out. Even though he does not beat you, Tapiwa is an aggressive man and his temper flares easily. You know that asking him about the rumors will be tricky. After his return from a long trip, you actually tremble as you help unpack his belongings and prepare his water for a bath.

"Welcome home, dear," you greet him. "How was your trip?"

"It was exhausting, but I came back with a lot of money so tonight we can celebrate."

And celebrate he does. After supper, he makes you undress in front of him since that always turns him on. As he removes his trousers, you blurt out, "Tapiwa, do you think that tonight we could use a condom? It is better to be safe than sorry."

"Mazuba, is this some kind of a joke? Why should we suddenly use condoms? That is a ridiculous suggestion." He pauses, staring at you heavily. "Unless," he says, "you are seeing other men." After assuring him repeatedly that you are faithful to him, he seems satisfied and you decide it is too risky to ask for a condom again.

Tapiwa is rough during sex, and this, added to the tension and uneasiness in your body, leads to a lot of pain. Even after Tapiwa drops off to sleep, you remain awake long into the night. Weighing your options, you think Mama Fisi or maybe your friends will have a solution...

If you decide to go to Mama Fisi for advice, go to Traditional Healer and take card 1.

If you decide to talk to your friends, go to Friends & Neighbors and take card 1.

Mazuba's Story

Traditional Healer 1





Traditional Healer 1

Mama Fisi lives up on a small hill. She is very powerful. Many of the villagers visit her for medicine or advice. This time, you want to visit her so that she can help stop Tapiwa from sleeping with other women. For the next few days, Tapiwa stays at home resting and visiting neighbors. At last, he decides to go to the town and purchase some things before his next trip. You can finally visit Mama Fisi. Of course you cannot go and visit without any offerings. You buy two chickens and take them to her.

“Mazuba, I see you.” Her voice spooks you as you walk the path to her door.

“Mama Fisi, I bring greetings and gifts to you. This is to thank you for protecting us in our homes.”

“Thank you. I know you have come with a serious problem. What is it?”

“You must have heard the rumors about Tapiwa. He is away a lot and people have started saying that he is sleeping with other women. I have not been well, and I am afraid that he may bring sickness if this continues. What do I do?”

“I have the perfect remedy for you Mazuba,” says Mama Fisi. “I have a potion which you will pour in your bathing water. If you do this every day for a month, Tapiwa will stop sleeping with other women and devote himself to you only.”

“Thank you so much, Mama Fisi.” You obey her strict instructions and wait for the results. Unfortunately, after a month there is no change. You begin to question whether you followed directions correctly. Your husband’s infidelity is now a common source of gossip in the village, and your health has continued to deteriorate. He returns from his long distance trips and you are too afraid to try negotiating for safe sex.

Go to Medical Care and take card 1.



Mazuba's Story Friends & Neighbors 1



Friends & Neighbors 1

Your friends are all married and have children. They usually spend the day at home cooking, cleaning, and washing clothes like you.

One day you visit with some of them and say, “I know that you have heard the rumors about Tapiwa spending so much time with other women and about his sickness. I am always tired and I am getting scared. We have been having sex since he returned from one of his work trips and I have a strong feeling that I am not okay.”

“Mazuba, you know that you will never be able to stop your husband from sleeping with other women. It is what they do. Maybe you are not satisfying him anymore. I think you should go home and focus on your wifely duties,” one of them suggests.

“But what if I am sick?” you ask. “That is nonsense, Mazuba. It is just the worry that is making you sick. Focus on making Tapiwa happy. You will be fine,” she answers.

“Well, maybe you should go for a test,” another friend speaks up. “But be very careful that no one sees you or Tapiwa could find out. He would be very angry. Find a clinic a bit far, where people don’t know you, then people won’t see you and gossip more about your troubles with Tapiwa.” You decide that you must go see Mama Fisi before you consult a doctor.

Go to Traditional Healer and take card 1.



Mazuba's Story

Medical Care 1



Medical Care 1

As you approach the clinic your heart is racing and your palms are sweaty.

When you are called in by a nurse, you feel yourself shaking. Her room is filled with posters about STIs and HIV, and it only makes you feel worse.

“Why haven’t you come with your partner?” the nurse asks.

You tell her that your husband travels and is unable to come with you. She seems impatient and continues quickly, “What will you do if you are positive?”

The question jolts you. “If I am positive, honestly I don’t know what I will do. I have children. I cannot be positive. There is no way. I must be negative.”

The nurse does not respond. After taking your blood, she tells you to wait for about an hour. It feels like the longest wait of your life. When she finally calls you back, the flicker in her eyes makes you scared. “Mazuba, we have your results. I’m sorry, you are positive.”

There is a heaviness that drops from your throat to the pit of your stomach. The nurse says that your CD4 count is low and that you can start taking antiretroviral drugs immediately. She gives you a list of NGOs that have support groups.

Somehow you leave the clinic and get home. The days that follow are agonizing. When you prepare food for the children, you wonder how many more meals you have left with them. Bearing the reality of your status alone is impossible, but whom can you talk to about this?

If you decide to go to the support group, go to NGO and take card 1.

If your parents are the only ones you can trust, go to Family and take card 1.



Mazuba's Story

NGO 1



NGO 1

As weeks pass, you continue with your daily work, carrying the weight of your status and your anger at Tapiwa inside you. It is stressful to get used to your new routine and you are always afraid that someone will catch you taking your medication or sneaking off to the health clinic for check-ups. You wish you could confide in someone, but who would understand? Your friends would look down on you if they knew. Your relatives might never speak to you again. You have never felt so alone. In desperation, you decide to seek the support of strangers.

An organization holds different support groups for people living with HIV near the health center in town. You are worried about who might see you there.

When you explain to the receptionist that you would like to join a support group for HIV-positive women, she looks at you with pity and points down a hallway. You bow your head in shame as you walk toward the room.

There are about seven women sitting in a circle. Some of them look very thin and worn and no one looks up when you walk in.

You stand awkwardly in the doorway, not sure what to do.

“Um, excuse me. My name is Mazuba and...”

Unable to go on, you run out, hoping no one you know has seen you. It is a few weeks before you gather the courage to return. The group has grown. This time you are able to go through with the introduction, and the other women are friendlier. When you share that you have been faithful in your marriage but still contracted the virus from your husband, the women are very empathetic.

If you decide to go and see Mama Fisi again, go to Traditional Healer and take card 2.

If you decide to keep quiet and continue living life as usual, go to Carry On and take card 1.



Mazuba's Story

Carry On 1



Carry On 1

Time passes slowly and you feel so much sadness and anxiety. The ARVs make you feel sick and dizzy. You always feel hungry, and sometimes you wake up at night from terrible nightmares. You have to remember to take them diligently at required times. It is difficult to hide this from your husband and children but for now, the drugs are in a safe place where nobody else in the house ever goes.

Thinking about the children also worries you. *What if they find out? How will they react?* All these questions make you sad and listless.

“Mama, why do you seem so sad these days?” your daughter asks one night while you are cooking dinner.

“Oh, I am thinking about how fast you are all growing and how you are becoming a woman,” you tell her. She seems to believe your lie.

Fear builds up inside of you. Even though you are attending the support group, it is difficult not to be able to confide in anyone close to you. But whenever you think about the risk of disclosing your status, you feel it is too great.

You are also furious at Tapiwa for infecting you. He has been away from home for awhile, and you resent how he just comes and goes. At the same time, you don’t know what you would say to him if he were around.

You resign yourself to keeping your secret and try to focus on tending to your home and keeping your children safe and happy.

Then things take a turn for the worse...

Go to Violence Strikes and take card 2.

Mazuba's Story

Traditional Healer 2





Traditional Healer 2

When you return to Mama Fisi, she exclaims that you have been away for too long. “Yes, Mama, for that I am sorry. But I have another problem. I used all of the herbs that you gave me, but nothing worked. Now I have HIV.”

Mama Fisi motions for you to quiet down. “My child, I gave you all of the medicine that you needed to stop Tapiwa from seeing other women and to make your sickness go away. If my herbs did not work, it is because you are bewitched. There is a curse on you, Mazuba.”

You feel angry, but you know better than to argue with Mama Fisi, especially since you need her help. “What can I do?” you plead with her, desperate for a solution.

“Let me think.” She closes her eyes for a few moments and then opens them again with a start. “Yes, I know just the thing.” She leaves the room for some time and returns with a bundle wrapped in cloth. “Here I have the things which will cure you of that deadly disease. But you must bring me two white goats.”

You gasp, wondering how you could get two goats for her. You do not think it is possible, at least not without asking Tapiwa for money, which would certainly arouse suspicion. You leave without receiving any help.

Go to Carry On and take card 1.



Mazuba's Story

Family 1



Family 1

Living with HIV makes you feel like you are half dead already. You look at your children each day and wonder if you will ever see them get married or have children. As your neighbors go to work and to the market, you know that your market days are numbered. And while you used to enjoy the sight of the moon and asking for good luck, the moon now seems empty and hollow. You are also furious at Tapiwa for infecting you and then going about his travels, leaving you to bear the enormity of it all. You are afraid to tell your parents, but you can't handle it alone.

Both your ageing parents are at home. "I bring you greetings. I hope you are well." They greet you in return and welcome you. After chatting for a few moments, you cannot contain your secret any longer. "I have something very disturbing to share with you," you begin. Your mother tells you to sit on the mat beside her.

"I went for a medical check-up and found out that I am HIV positive. I am so scared. I don't know what to do." Your mother throws her scarf to the ground and wrings her hands.

"Mazuba, what is this you have done? What shame is this that you have brought to your family?" Your father shouts, "How did this happen? Do you want your children to be without a mother?"

Your mother is quietly crying, and there is sympathy in her eyes. She reaches out to you but your father slaps her hand away. "Don't touch her!" he warns, then walks away. Your mother moves closer to you and whispers, "You must go back to Tapiwa now. Don't tell anyone about this; just let us see what to do."

You are deeply saddened by your father's reaction. You hoped he would still love you. How wrong you were...

Go to Violence Strikes and take card 2.

Mazuba's Story

Violence Strikes 2



Violence Strikes 2

Tapiwa is home on a break between jobs. Your stress is always greater when he is around, and you are carrying around so much anger toward him for giving you HIV. You don't know how to confront him about it though, so you keep quiet, wondering if he notices your strange behavior.

You arrive home from the market one day, holding bags of things you have purchased. As soon as he hears the door open, Tapiwa rushes into the front room, his eyes ablaze.

"Woman! What are these?" he hollers, shaking your ARVs in your face. Your heart sinks. You thought you had hidden them well, but he found them. Before you can explain, Tapiwa slaps you across the face and yells at you, calling you many cruel names. The children come running from the bedroom and Tapiwa shouts at them to return.

"Woman, how could you bring this curse into our home? What have you done?"

"Tapiwa, please wait," you plead.

He does not want to hear anything from you. Pacing around the room, he begins to throw things, some of them hit you. You cower and pray that your children do not come out again.

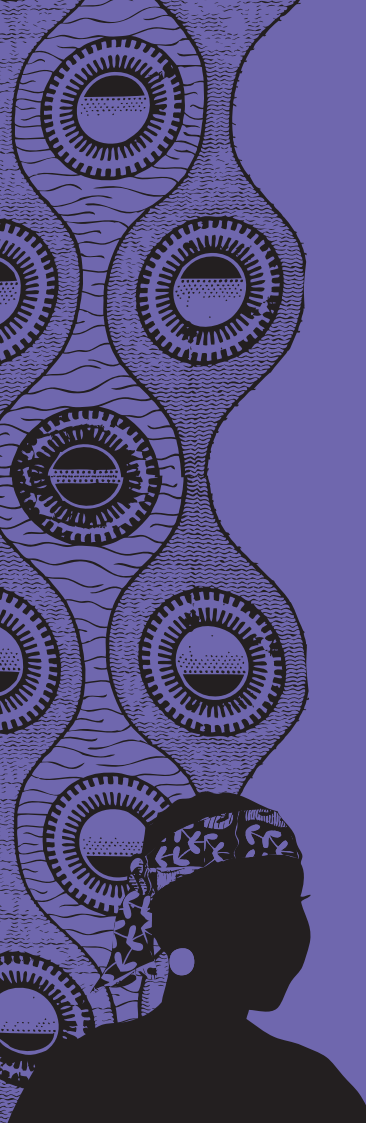
"Please. I am sorry Tapiwa, but it wasn't me who..."

"Get out! You brought this disease into our home and now you must leave!" He shoves you and then storms into the bedroom. Stumbling, you follow him there and he is throwing your clothes around and clearing the room of your things. "But what about the children?" you ask through your tears. "They will stay here with me. Do you wish to give them that horrible disease as well? We are finished with you." With that, he drags you out the door.

Outside the house, your belongings are scattered everywhere. Hearing the noise, some of the neighbors have gathered nearby. Many turn away. Fortunately, one of them takes you in for the night.

If you decide to go to your parents, go to Family and take card 2.

If you want to ask your husband for another chance, go to Chance and take card 1.





Mazuba's Story

Chance 1



Chance 1

Your neighbor is kind to you for that night. She asks you why your husband was so angry and you tell her that you just had a misunderstanding. Thanking her for her kindness, you decide to go back to your house to try to talk with Tapiwa.

You find him drinking beer on the front porch at midday, and as soon as he sees you he shouts out, “What are you doing here, you prostitute? I told you not to come back here with your sickness!” Your neighbors and people passing by look at you in confusion as you begin to cry. You feel so stupid, trying to talk to Tapiwa where everyone can hear. You ask him quietly if you can go inside to talk about things, but instead he stands up from his chair and grows louder, accusing you of being a witch and bringing a curse to his home.

By now, a small crowd has gathered on the road in front of your house, and everyone is listening. Your children have also come out of the house and are staring at you in confusion. “Get away from us!” Tapiwa shouts and you feel you have no choice but to go.

Go to Carry On and take card 2.



Mazuba's Story

Carry On 2



Carry On 2

You have nowhere left to turn but your parents. When you arrive at their house with your belongings, they let you in, but tell you that you have brought great shame to them and that they are disappointed in you. You don't have any words left to defend yourself.

Soon, you are the talk of the community. You rarely go out because of the way people stare and whisper behind your back. Your world grows smaller and smaller and you feel your life closing in on you.

You see your children once in awhile when your mother can convince Tapiwa to let them visit. They miss you at home and were confused when you left. When they come over, they are scared and ask you if you are going to die. Although you love spending time with them, it breaks your heart for them to see you in such a bad state. At least your daughter is old enough to take care of her younger siblings; this brings you some relief.

Months turn to years, and as the seasons pass, you slowly grow sicker and more depressed. As the children get older, they visit less and less, and you hear gossip about how Tapiwa has married another woman. Your health has deteriorated, and you cannot leave your bed anymore. You feel like there is nothing left for you.

THE END

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



Mazuba's Story

Family 2



Family 2

You know that you have nowhere left to go but back to your parents' home. You remember the harsh words they used when you told them your status, and you cringe as you walk to their house.

They are not happy when you tell them what happened, and your mother cries, blaming you for letting Tapiwa find out about the HIV. You repeat that you didn't tell Tapiwa, that he found your drugs, but she does not understand. Your father doesn't have any words for you, but you can see from the look on his face that you have brought great shame to him.

You spend the next few weeks in the house, only coming out when your mother asks for your help or to go to the market on small errands. You miss your children and long to see them. You feel rage when you think of Tapiwa and what he might be telling them about you. You've heard that he is even living with another woman, and you fear for the safety of your children. You are losing hope.

As you notice your will to live decreasing, you decide to go back to the support group at the NGO that you used to attend. You haven't been for a long time, and maybe they will be able to help. Before you can find time, however...

Go to Violence Strikes and take card 3.

Mazuba's Story

Violence Strikes 3





Violence Strikes 3

Your father comes home one night, screaming your name in anger. You come out from the kitchen to see what is wrong. “Mazuba, everyone knows about your disease, and people are saying that you are bewitched!”

“What?” You don’t know how things got so out of control.

You soon learn that Tapiwa has told his siblings and his neighbors about your status, and it doesn’t take long for the news to spread through the entire community. Your life turns into one big nightmare. Your friends ostracize you from their lives, saying that they do not want their children to catch the disease. When you walk to the market, you get stares that make you feel like they are burning a hole into your heart.

You are living in constant fear and shame, wondering how long you can keep up this way, with everyone calling you a witch and no one coming near. The stress is taking a toll on your parents too, and you hope they do not ask you to leave because you have nowhere else to go.

You know that you must seek help from your support group.

Go to NGO and take card 2.



Mazuba's Story

NGO 2



NGO 2

The women from your support group are happy to see you back. But their happiness turns to concern when you tell them what has happened during your absence. They listen carefully as you cry, and many of them share similar stories when you have finished speaking.

The leader of the group encourages you to be strong and advises that you look for work so that you can save money and eventually move out of your parents' home, into a new community where you will not have to live in fear and isolation. Many other women agree, and one even points out that if you get a job and your own house, you may be able to get your children back from Tapiwa.

You think these are good ideas, but you just don't know how you can overcome your problems. These dreams seem so far away, and you wonder if you will live long enough to see them come true.

You continue to attend the weekly support group, and though life in your parents' home is agonizing, your spirits are lifted a bit by your weekly relief. Your children come visit occasionally when your mother insists that Tapiwa allow them to see you. The younger ones are sad and confused because Tapiwa has told them that you are going to die. Your oldest daughter, however, has grown into a kind and hard-working young woman, and you are proud to see her taking care of her siblings in your absence. You live for these rare visits.

The support group and your children offer you encouragement and strength, but you still struggle to make it through each day. You know that if you could find a job and secure a home, there might be a chance of getting them back someday, but you may not live that long. Most days, you just feel like giving up completely.

THE END

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