



Betty's Story Identity



Identity

My name is Betty. I am 9 years old and my skin is dark and smooth like ghee. My long neck and the gap in my teeth make me stand out as the most beautiful girl in my class. I like school, especially science, which is my best subject. My best friend Fauzia sits next to me in class. She also lives near me and every day we walk to and from school with other girls and boys. When the boys get home they get to play or read their books. Sometimes they have to help cut firewood. The girls all have to go to the kitchen and cook. The only time we get to read our books is at school, but that does not stop Fauzia and me from reading. When we grow up, we will work in a big factory in town. It is our dream to go to the capital city one day.

Our village is rather small and almost everyone knows everyone. The houses are grouped together in homesteads and each house has an outdoor kitchen and we all share the bathrooms. Most families share big gardens with lots of food. I live with my parents, two elder brothers and one younger sister. My aunts, uncles, and cousins live in the next homestead. My mother, aunt, and almost all the women in the village stay at home gardening and looking after the young children. My cousins keep telling me that I should stop dreaming about working in a factory because village girls grow up to become wives and stay at home. I just laugh at them and tell them my life will never be like that. I don't pay any attention to my cousins but...

Go to Violence Strikes and take card 1.



Betty's Story

Violence Strikes 1



The illustration on the left side of the page features a black silhouette of a woman's head and shoulders, looking towards the right. To her right is a vertical decorative border composed of several overlapping circular motifs. Each motif consists of concentric circles with various internal patterns, including radiating lines, dots, and solid colors, set against a background of wavy, horizontal lines. The overall style is reminiscent of traditional folk art or textile patterns.

Violence Strikes 1

Today you and Fauzia race home from school balancing your books on your heads to see who can reach first without dropping her books. When you get home your mother explains that you will wake up early tomorrow to go somewhere special. You cannot imagine what she is talking about, but you know better than to ask many questions.

You can barely sleep from the excitement, and today, instead of going to school your mother takes you down the long road leading to the market. You think maybe she is going to buy you a new dress. You stop in front of a decorated hut. Two elderly women are standing at the entrance. One of them is the surgeon that treats women in the village. She is famous and people say she is the richest woman in the village. Your mother hugs you and wishes you well. Your head starts to spin as you are ushered through a compound full of sick women, to the back where you see a basin of water, another basin of green liquid, two knives, and cotton wool on a plate on the ground. One of the women tells you to lie down. Another woman comes and is holding your arms and legs to the ground forcefully. Before you know it, your panties have been pulled down and the surgeon is cutting you. You cannot describe the sharp pain going through your body. It is like fire has been placed inside your thighs. As your eyes widen with fright, you start to scream, but one of the women puts her hand over your mouth. She says it will be over soon. Finally it ends and the women apply wet cotton on the parts that are hurting. The pain seems to be traveling all over your body. Someone carries you from the dirty ground to a mat inside where you can only lie in agony.

Hours pass by and you see other girls shuffle in and out of the house. Your heart lifts when you glimpse Fauzia entering, but you don't have the strength to call for her as she passes into another dark room. You doze off and wake only when they come and clean your wounds. They also bring nice food for you to eat, but the pain does not go away.

If you want to look for Fauzia, go to Friends & Neighbors and take card 1.

If you decide to go home and find your mother, go to Family and take card 1.



Betty's Story

Friends & Neighbors 1



Friends & Neighbors 1

All you can think about is finding Fauzia, but when you try to stand up and go find her, the burning in your vagina is too much. So you lie in the dark alone again today and ask yourself over and over why your mother would have brought you here. You are so scared that the pain is not going to go away that you can't do much besides cry. Finally, after three long days you slowly start to move around the compound in search of Fauzia. The pain spreads down your legs like fire. You finally see her sitting under a tree taking tea. She smiles weakly when she sees you. You sit together but neither of you has many words as the elderly women keep their eyes on you. You want to tell her about the sharp coldness of the blade and the pain that has filled your body since then. You want to know if she also wanted to scream as they covered her mouth.

After a few minutes, Fauzia says that she must lie down. You can see that she is also in terrible pain. You hold her hand as she sleeps and pray that you both recover quickly. Over the next few days, you, Fauzia, and the other girls learn more about how to be a woman. The older women apply herbs to your wounds each night, but yours do not seem to be healing. Fauzia continues to check on you, and eventually you can walk without too much pain. The nightmare seems to be ending since they said it is time to return to school.

While you are happy to be back at school and continue to dream of the day when you will work in the capital city in a big factory, the pain from your wounds keeps you scared that it will never go away.

Years pass.

You are now closer to realizing your dreams. You are turning thirteen which means next year you will be in secondary school. But before that...

Go to Violence Strikes and take card 2.



Betty's Story

Family 1



Family 1

It has only been a few days since your cutting and the walk home is incredibly painful. Your mother is surprised to see you. She asks you what you are doing home and who let you go, that you were supposed to stay with the other women until the end of the week. You begin to cry, holding onto her. “You must return,” she tells you. “They will worry. You cannot come home until the work is finished.” You explain what happened to you with the knife, certain that your mother didn’t mean for them to cut you when she told you that you were going somewhere special.

You tell her about the pain you still feel and how urinating is difficult. She listens carefully and then applies some herbs on the wounds. It stings a little but she assures you that the herbs will heal you. She keeps saying how she is so proud of you for not bringing shame to the family. She says that now you are a woman and many men will want to marry you because you have kept yourself pure. You don’t understand anything but she promises to cook your favorite food when you come home for being a brave girl. Then she ushers you out of the gate and tells you that you must quickly return to the other girls. She tells you to be strong and ignore the pain and that all women must suffer.

You get back to the hut unnoticed and are taught about being a wife and mother. Slowly, the pain begins to lessen, and when most girls are healed there is a big ceremony where the whole village comes to celebrate the new women.

When you return to school, your teachers acknowledge you in a new way and you feel proud that you were cut. Weeks turn into months, and as each term goes by, you get more excited about joining secondary school, but...

Go to Violence Strikes and take card 2.



Betty's Story

Violence Strikes 2

The left side of the page features a decorative border with a repeating pattern of circular motifs, each containing a sun-like symbol. Below this border is a dark silhouette of a woman's head and shoulders, looking towards the right.

Violence Strikes 2

Little do you know that a different destiny awaits you. On the last day of primary school, you return home, dreaming about the adventures that await you in secondary school. During the first few days of holiday, you help the women around the house and talk with Fauzia. As you are falling asleep one night, you overhear your mother and aunties talking. You go closer to listen secretly and find that they are planning your marriage. You get up and ask what is going on.

Your mother informs you, “There is a rich man in the village who will pay bride price for you! He wants a wife who will bear him a son. His two other wives have only given birth to daughters. Betty, we know you will do this family proud.” You are stunned.

The next morning, everyone is preparing for your wedding. Women smear your body with oil and other herbs to prepare you for your wedding night and very smart clothes are sewn for you. On your wedding day, you meet your husband for the first time. He is very old. People around you are smiling and celebrating. But you can’t imagine the life you are going to lead with this man. You are filled with dread.

The first night of consummation splits open the skin that had grown together after you were cut. The pain during sex is almost as bad as when you were cut. However, you try to bear your new role with dignity, working hard in the garden, looking after the home, and trying your best to not cry out in pain during sex. There are days when you feel like your body is being torn apart but you know that as a wife, you should not complain.

It is only when the pain increases that you decide to seek help.

If you decide to go to the nearest medical clinic, go to Medical Care and take card 1.

If you decide to seek advice from the village elders, go to Cultural Leader and take card 1.

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



Betty's Story

Medical Care 1





Medical Care 1

You arrive at the clinic. It is as crowded as always since treatment is free, but you find somewhere to sit at last. You are in agony. It is like knives are piercing your body all over. When a doctor finally attends to you, he gives you a pregnancy test. He also dabs a solution on your open wound and explains that it is normal for wounds to re-open when a woman first has sex after cutting. He tells you that you should be stronger and not complain, that this problem is common to many women. The doctor then tells you that you are pregnant. You are elated. At last, you think to yourself, something good has come of this painful marriage. Of course, you hope desperately that now your husband won't demand sex from you anymore.

The constant pain dulls as you think about having a baby. You even let yourself dream about what may happen if you give birth to a boy. Perhaps then your husband will let you finish your studies! You can't wait to tell him and your mother about the pregnancy. You begin to think up names for the boy. Thanking everyone profusely, you walk out. The world suddenly doesn't seem as bad as it did when you walked in. If only Fauzia still lived nearby, she would be so happy to hear your news, but she lives far away with her new husband. You wonder if she already has a child. You hurry home to share the news with your husband.

Go to Return Home and take card 1.



Betty's Story

Family 2





Family 2

Your mother listens to you and takes pity. However, she says that it is normal to feel pain during sex, and that as long as you give birth to a son, look after the home, and do not bring your husband shame, everything will be okay. She reminds you that he paid a handsome bride price and asks you if you did anything to make your husband angry. When you tell her you were obedient, she then tells you to stay with her for a while until you feel better. She warns you that you must return to your husband when your wounds heal.

Looking at your old books from primary school, you turn the pages with fondness and then in a rush of anger, you throw them outside because you know that you have no use for them anymore. Lighting a match, you watch the books burn, just like your life. You think about Fauzia who has also been married and wonder how she is and if her husband treats her kindly, or if yours is the way for all married women.

Your mother smells the fire and comes outside to check on you. When she sees the books turning to ash, she sits down beside you. “It is better to let those dreams die, Betty. You should focus on having children. In fact, why don’t you go to the clinic for a pregnancy test tomorrow?”

If you decide to go and speak to the village elders, go to Cultural Leader and take card 1.

If you decide to go straight to the medical clinic, go to Medical Care and take card 1.



Betty's Story

Cultural Leader 1



Cultural Leader 1

Whenever there is a big problem in the village, people have always gone to speak with the elders. You remember the kind eyes of Mr. Moses from when you were very young and decide to go speak with him at his home.

When you arrive at his compound, you find him with another man from your village. A girl brings you a stool and you sit in the shade and wait for him to finish his meeting. When he finishes and beckons you toward him, you kneel down and offer him greetings and praise. He nods his head and asks what trouble has brought you to see him. You explain to him that you were taken out of school and forced to marry a much older man, and that now your body is in pain, and that you are missing out on your education. He chuckles and pats your head as though you are still a small child. “Betty,” he closes his eyes as he speaks to you, “This is your role in life—to be a good wife and mother. A very wealthy man has paid for you and now you must be obedient and give him many sons. School is not for girls like you. You must now return to your husband and not bring shame to our village.”

You bow your head sadly. You know you cannot discuss the matter of your physical pain with a respected man such as him, so you thank him and excuse yourself. As you walk home you think about what to do. You do not want to bring shame to your family, but you do not want to live in constant pain. Your only choice is to go to the nearest hospital for help.

Go to Medical Care and take card 1.



Betty's Story

Return Home 1





Return Home 1

Today is different from other days when you dread your husband's return. Today you prepare his favorite meal of roasted goat stew, green vegetables, peanut paste and yams.

He takes his meal seated on his stool while you respectfully wait for him to finish. When he is through, you share with him the news of your pregnancy. For the first time in a long time, he smiles and shows genuine happiness with you.

"Thank you for giving me a son. I know it will be a boy because I paid a heavy bride price for you. I know I shall have an heir at last."

He continues the celebration by lifting you to the bedroom. You tell him how your body is not ready for it because of the recent wounds and that the doctor says you need time to heal. He does not listen. All he cares about is himself. "There is no need to worry," he says. When you continue to resist and twist your body out from under his, he grows angry. He orders you to be still and pins you down roughly to the bed as you cry and beg him to stop.

Months pass by as your belly grows bigger and bigger. You thought that pregnancy would satisfy your husband, but he continues to force you to have sex. You have learned not to cry or beg him to stop because this only makes him more aggressive. You keep hoping that someday your stomach will be big enough to keep him away. Soon, it is time for you to deliver. Your co-wives bring the traditional birth attendant. Your labor is very long, more than two days. Finally, the attendant advises your husband to take you to the hospital.

Go to Medical Care and take card 2.



Betty's Story

Medical Care 2



Medical Care 2

At the hospital, the doctors help you deliver the baby. When the baby finally comes out, it is a boy...he is dead. You can't stop crying. The doctor explains that it is common for a young woman to have a very difficult labor and that the baby was stuck in your birth canal. Your mother and co-wives try to tell you not to worry and that you can try again, but you can't help feeling like it is your fault.

You just want to go home, but the misery is not over yet. Speaking to you and your mother privately, the doctor informs you that while giving birth, you developed a hole in your vagina, called a fistula, and now you will not be able control your urine. It will just leak out of you.

You are so grieved by the news that there is nothing anyone can do to console you. You only hope that your husband will pay for surgery to fix the leak so that you don't end up smelling and embarrassed like the doctor described. But he does not take the news so well...

Go to Violence Strikes and take card 3.



Betty's Story

Family 3





Family 3

Your co-wives let you in, but they are not friendly. They accuse you of being proud, when you couldn't give your husband a son either. They say leaking is what you deserve. You smell so bad that they send you out to eat away from them.

After a while, the bad odor and your constant need for care take a toll on your co-wives and they force you to sleep outside where your smell will not keep them awake all night. They constantly talk about what a disgrace you are and how you have ruined your life because no one could ever want you now.

One finally says, "You smell so bad that we can't even dig with you in the garden. We can't walk with you to the shops because you embarrass us. People have even stopped coming to see us. You need to go away." The next morning, you pack a small bundle of clothes and sneak away before dawn.

If you decide to go to your parents, go to Family and take card 4.

If you want to take a chance and see if your husband will take you back, go to Chance and take card 1.



Betty's Story

Violence Strikes 3



Violence Strikes 3

When you arrive home, your husband is eagerly waiting. At the news that you gave birth to a dead son, he is furious. He yells at you and throws a dish at your head. He accuses you of being a witch that has come to torment him and says he wants nothing more to do with you. Shoving you away from him, he tells you to get out of his sight and go find somewhere else to stay.

You don't even have time to talk to him about your fistula or ask for him to pay for the operation before he throws you and your clothes outside into the compound.

If you decide to go stay with your co-wives, go to Family and take card 3.

If you decide to seek help from the traditional healer in your village, go to Traditional Healer and take card 1.



Betty's Story

Traditional Healer 1



Traditional Healer 1

You remember the woman who cut you years before and that the village respects her as the best surgeon around. After your cutting she promised that you could always come to her. You think surely she will help you out of your misery.

You return to the compound where you endured such pain as a child and hesitate a bit, remembering, but you continue walking and approach the woman whose face will always be burned into your mind. “Greetings, it is me, Betty,” you say, expecting her to remember. But her face remains blank and then registers a look of disgust when she smells urine. You rush to tell her what has happened and ask for her help. She looks you over from head to toe, taking in your empty hands and the wetness that has now stained your skirt. “I cannot help you,” she says, shaking her head. “There is nothing I can do. That smell is not good for me and you will spoil the herbs. You must go at once.” She shoos you away and moves off.

So much for promises and dreams. You feel completely alone and hopeless.

If you decide to see if your co-wives will take you in, go to Family and take card 3.

If you decide that the only person who will accept you now is your mother, go to Family and take card 4.



Betty's Story

Chance 1



Chance 1

You cannot see how anything will improve unless you are able to get an operation to repair the fistula. Your husband is your only option so you go to the main house while he is still out and fix him a special dinner. When he arrives home, he sees you and demands to know what you are doing in the house. Without answering, you beg and plead for him to listen to you. He scorns you at first but you are so relentless that he finally listens to you. You explain how you will give him an heir. You remind him that you gave birth to a boy the first time and that it was only the lack of medical care that resulted in the stillbirth. You promise him that if he gives you another chance, you will take very good care of yourself and get the best medical care. You can see him considering the idea and you reassure him that you will produce a son for him. He finally agrees to pay for a surgery to repair the leak and to let you come back to stay in the main house.

Fortunately, the surgery is successful. And you conceive again soon. This time your husband offers special sacrifices which he says will bring him a healthy boy who will inherit his property now that he is growing old.

He takes very good care of you at the expense of his other wives who begin to resent you even more. They say you are ungrateful and proud, but you try not to mind them. You feel like you have been given another chance, but...

Go to Violence Strikes and take card 4.



Betty's Story

Family 4





Family 4

The smell emanating from your body is so bad that you stop talking to people. You feel isolated and alone. People do not invite you to their homes or to events anymore. Your only hope is that your mother will have a solution for you.

At your mother's house, you greet her and she takes you in kindly. She holds you for a moment and expresses her sadness about the baby that you lost. She says that you are always welcome in her home but that you cannot stay in the main house because the smell will bother your father. With sorrow, she leads you to a small hut behind the house that was abandoned years ago. She helps you unpack your few clothes and brings water for bathing.

This is how you live now—alone, an outcast, a member of nobody's family. Your hopes and dreams are now cruel memories.

THE END

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



Betty's Story

Violence Strikes 4



Violence Strikes 4

Nearing your delivery, you arrange to go to a nearby hospital at the first sign of labor.

“This time, your baby will be fine,” you assure your husband as you leave. Without any complications, the doctor delivers a baby girl a few hours later.

You are relieved that the baby is alive and that you have had no complications, but the fact that it is a girl will surely bring problems. You hold her close like the attendants show you and even begin breastfeeding.

When you arrive home a few days later, your husband does not even look at you or his daughter. He just tells the co-wives to take your things out and that you are never to return to his home. This time, your co-wives treat you with contempt and say that they cannot afford to look after another child when they have their own. You have no other choice but to go back to your mother’s home.

Go to Family and take card 5.



Betty's Story

Family 5





Family 5

You raise your daughter at your mother's home. She does not need to ask why your husband threw you out, nor does she condemn you for having a daughter. Instead, she helps you care for your daughter in the best way possible. You name her Miracle because to you, she is a miracle that has taught you a lot about love and life.

After weaning her, you get a job at a local restaurant cleaning up after they close. You use this money to help at home and save the little that is leftover for Miracle's education. Although your dreams are lost, you will do all it takes to make sure your daughter gets a proper education and even visits the city.

THE END

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