



# Mpho's Story Identity



# Identity

My name is Mpho and my hair is short like a boy because of the rules at school. It is okay though because I have big eyes and a pretty smile. I love to have fun with my friends even though they get me into trouble sometimes. Miss Okello is my favorite teacher. She teaches English and is very kind. Whenever I feel down because of my grades or hurt when the boys tease me, she is always there for me.

I am 15 years old and live in an urban area where my father works as a mechanic and my mother as an office assistant. My two older siblings died in an auto accident a long time ago, so now I am the only child at home. I really love my parents, but they work so hard that they rarely have time for me. I spend a lot of time home alone with only our house help to keep me company. Even though I was young when they died, I miss my siblings and often think of how much happier I would be if they were still here.

My mother's sister, Aunt Mary, tries her best to spend time with me. Sometimes she visits and brings her two children over. She laughs and talks loudly. I like to go and stay with her during school holidays.

I enjoy going to school because I have many friends there and I do not feel lonely. My best subject is art. When I grow up, I want to be a fashion designer and make nice clothes and always look smart. I will travel the world showing everyone my beautiful clothes. I have many dreams, but I do not know if they will really come true...

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



# Mpho's Story

## Violence Strikes 1



# Violence Strikes 1

You are at school, talking to some of your friends. You have been noticing that your friend Pamela has been coming to school with new necklaces and earrings. You feel a stab of jealousy. You compliment her on her style and she smiles proudly. She then whispers to you that they are from her new boyfriend. She asks if you want her to set you up with one of her boyfriend's friends.

At first you are hesitant because you have never had a boyfriend before. But then you think about sitting home alone every evening, and you decide that it may be fun. Pamela plans a double date.

When you arrive at the cafe you cannot believe your eyes as you look at the men sitting beside Pamela. They are not boys from your school; they could be twice your age! They are both handsomely dressed which makes you feel uncomfortable in your plain dress. Alim, your date, however, is very kind and friendly. Alim drives you home that night and kisses you gently before you get out of the car. It is your first kiss and you can hardly believe it just happened to you. He says he will call you soon.

Your relationship moves quickly and Alim calls you almost every night, taking you out to places you could never afford. One night he takes you to a hotel instead of a restaurant, and when he pays for a room, you begin to feel anxious. You have never had sex before, and this man is so much older. The first time is very painful and you try to hide your fear and pain but a few tears trickle down your cheeks. At least he uses a condom. It does not hurt as much the next time, and within a few weeks, you are even starting to feel good. Sometimes, though, you feel confused and unsure about being with such an older man.

**If you want to talk to Pamela about it, go to Friends & Neighbors and take card 1.**

**If you decide to seek advice from your mother, go to Family and take card 1.**



# Mpho's Story

## Friends & Neighbors 1



## Friends & Neighbors 1

A few days later, you are walking home from school with Pamela. You tell her that even though Alim is nice and buys you good food, you are still shy when he wants to sleep with you and that you're not sure about the age difference. Pamela laughs at you and says you are such a childish girl. You feel your face redden with embarrassment.

"Mpho, just do whatever Alim asks of you. Trust me, it is worth it. Let me show you." She then guides you toward her house and you follow her into the bedroom she shares with her sisters. She rummages under her bed and pulls out a suitcase. When she unlocks it, you are shocked to see piles of fancy clothes, jewelry, a cell phone, a camera, and a CD player. You let out a gasp and look longingly as Pamela explains that her boyfriend bought her all of those things. She tells you that as long as you continue to please Alim, he will also buy you many gifts, and that if you are lucky, he might even pay for you to go to university.

Leaving Pamela's house that day, you are determined to be the best girlfriend possible and to do whatever Alim wants in order to receive gifts like Pamela's. You do not know how hard that will be...

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



# Mpho's Story

## Family 1



## Family 1

You feel like you need to talk to someone about your relationship with Alim and how fast everything is happening. Even though your mother is very busy, you feel like she might be able to help you make sense of things.

You stay up very late one night waiting for her to return home. You begin to doze and before you know it, she is shaking you awake. “Mpho, you have fallen asleep in the sitting room. Go ahead to bed now.” You sit up and tell her that you were actually waiting for her and would like to talk about something important. “This is not the time for talking, my dear. I am very tired and we must both go to sleep. We shall talk another time.” She leaves you at the door to your room.

The next morning you get up early, trying to catch a moment with her before she goes to work, but she is talking on the phone to your auntie and motions to you to keep quiet. When you try to get her attention as she packs her things, she tells you that she will be very late and promises to talk to you on the weekend.

The following night, however, when Alim drops you off after your date, you are surprised to find your father in the front window, watching everything. When he confronts you about the kissing that he witnessed, you can’t even deny it. He is seething with anger and he slaps your face while shouting that you should not be seeing men at your age.

You go to bed in tears.

**If you want to talk to your Aunt Mary about your troubles, go to Family and take card 2.**

**If you decide to talk to Pamela about Alim, go to Friends & Neighbors and take card 1.**





# Mpho's Story

## Family 2



## Family 2

You are in despair and know very well that your Aunt Mary is probably the best person to talk to right now. She is understanding and always makes time for you, unlike your mother who is too busy.

She is reading a book on a mat in the garden when you arrive at her home. She smiles upon seeing you and tells you to help yourself to juice from the kitchen. Sitting next to her on the mat, she can immediately tell something is wrong.

You open up and tell her about your relationship with Alim and how you are not sure about what is going on. You also tell her that your father found out and was very upset. Your aunt is surprised, but she gives you a hug. “Your father is right. You are too young to be going out with men. Let me call your mother.”

You try to stop her from calling your mother because you no longer want her to find out about Alim. But she tells you that she must inform your mother and scolds you for wanting to keep secrets. After a long time on the phone, she returns to the garden.

“Your mother is very angry, Mpho. We are all disappointed to hear that you are moving around with an older man and wonder why you are not satisfied with the life you have been given. Your parents work very hard to provide for you, you know. You should be grateful. Your mother says she will speak to you this evening. You know we all love you very much, but you have to behave like a good girl.”

You choke back sobs as your aunt hugs you. You don’t think things can get worse, but you are wrong...

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



# Mpho's Story

## Violence Strikes 2



## Violence Strikes 2

You feel you need the kindness of Alim more than ever. As the weeks go by, you begin to master your double life. You flatter Alim and indulge his needs, and soon you begin receiving the beautiful clothes and luxurious jewelry that Pamela has. At home, you hide your gifts in the closet, read the Bible, and make sure that Alim always drops you off around the corner from your house. Your parents think that you are behaving like a good girl and commend you for the Bible study.

You feel like you finally have control of your life when one night Alim gives you the newest camera phone on the market. In the excitement he tells you that he does not want to use condoms anymore. You try to convince him but he is quite firm. “I can use condoms with anyone,” he tells you, “but you are special.” You resist again, tearing open a condom, but he rips it from your hand. “Don’t you think I can go find another girl to sleep with?” he demands, his tone changing from the earlier gentleness. “I won’t see you anymore if we don’t have ‘live’ sex!” he exclaims. You don’t want to lose him, so you quickly agree.

From then on Alim refuses to use a condom. You know that what you are doing is wrong and stupid. You could get a disease, or even worse, pregnant. After a while you feel a slight rash on your private parts and a discomfort every time you use the toilet. You wonder if this is the sign of an infection or something worse. You know you should go to the doctor, but you are afraid of what you might learn.

**If you decide to ask your teacher, Miss Okello, for advice go to Education and take card 1.**

**If you want to confide in Pamela, go to Friends & Neighbors and take card 2.**



# Mpho's Story

## Education 1



## Education 1

Your class teacher, Miss Okello, has always been fond of you, and you also look up to her. She has been showing concern about you because you have not been yourself, and your grades have been dropping since you started seeing Alim. When she asks how you are doing one day after class, you decide to open up to her.

When the classroom empties, she sits down next to you and asks if something is wrong. You hesitate for a moment and then tell her that you have been dating a man for a few months, and that things have been moving very quickly. You are about to tell her about the rash and ask what to do when she interrupts you. She says that a girl as bright as you should not spend time worrying about boys and that you should end the relationship. She advises you to focus on your studies and says that if you need extra help, she can set aside an evening each week to tutor you.

You feel like you have disappointed your teacher, and for a second you know that she is right about your studies and that you should put in extra effort at school. But then you remember all of the nice gifts you have been getting and what is certainly coming in the future, and you politely decline her offer.

**If you want to talk to Pamela about things, go to Friends & Neighbors and take card 2.**

**If you want to forget about the rash and continue dating Alim, go to Carry On and take card 1.**



# Mpho's Story

## Friends & Neighbors 2



## Friends & Neighbors 2

As soon as you can catch a moment alone with Pamela, you tell her that you need to talk to her about something very important. You go off to a secluded part of the school compound during lunch and she tells you that you seem overly stressed lately and that she has been wondering if something is wrong.

You can't think of an easy way of telling her, so you just blurt out your secret about sleeping with Alim without using condoms. Pamela is shocked and her eyes widen in disbelief. "Mpho, how could you do such a thing? What are you thinking?"

"Well, he insisted and I felt like I had to," you begin to stammer. You didn't think Pamela would be so surprised by your news.

"Oh, no, how could you do something so stupid, Mpho?" Pamela's fear grows when you tell her about the rash you have recently developed, and she insists that you go see a doctor. You tell her that you are afraid, but she demands that you go. She offers to come with you, but you feel you have shared enough with her. You agree to schedule an appointment.

As the date approaches, you are overcome with dread...

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





# Mpho's Story

## Carry On 1



## Carry On 1

As time passes, you continue to feel more and more confused about what is happening with Alim. On one hand, you love the attention and lavish gifts and the thought of having a different life than what your parents have. But you are also scared each time you have sex. Sometimes he notices your tension and asks why you are not enjoying yourself, but you blame it on stress from school.

Pamela has also noticed that you are stressed and tries to talk to you. You eventually admit to her that Alim has asked you not to use condoms anymore, and she is furious. “Be careful, Mpho,” she warns. “You don’t know how many other girls Alim may be sleeping with.” You are outraged and say that Alim is your boyfriend. Pamela just laughs and tells you not to be so foolish, that men like Alim have many women.

For the next few days, you are more troubled than ever, and your rash has still not gone away. Even though you are frightened, you decide to go to the hospital and see a doctor. You have no idea what is in store for you...

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



# Mpho's Story

## Violence Strikes 3



## Violence Strikes 3

At the hospital, you describe your symptoms to the nurse, and she takes a quick peek at your rash. She makes a small gasping sound and tells you that you will need to be tested for sexually transmitted infections and HIV. You are shocked. “I do not have HIV.” You state. “Well, do you use protection?” the nurse asks. You just look down in shame. “I’ll take that as a no,” the nurse says as she draws your blood murmuring, “I just don’t understand you girls these days—so young and having sex.” The nurse walks out the door before you can inquire further, leaving you alone.

You wait for a very long time and are confused when a different woman comes back and looks at you seriously. She begins to talk, asking if you know what HIV is. You roll your eyes, wondering if you are going to get a lecture. You feel your heart begin to race as she talks about statistics regarding HIV, treatment options, and how long people can live with the disease these days. You do not understand why she is talking to you about this. Then she slowly says, “Mpho, you are HIV positive.” The words hit your ears and the whole room feels as if it starts to spin as you faint. You wake up some time later in a hospital bed and find the first nurse sitting across the room. “We didn’t know who to call, Miss...” It takes you a moment to remember what happened, and then you burst into tears as the nurse talks to you about coming in again soon to speak to the counselor.

**If you want to call Pamela to come and pick you up, go to Friends & Neighbors and take card 3.**

**If you want to go home and keep quiet, go to Return Home and take card 1.**



# Mpho's Story

## Friends & Neighbors 3



## Friends & Neighbors 3

When Pamela arrives, you are crying quietly. She ushers you outside and looks very concerned. “Mpho, what is it? What’s wrong?” she asks. You can hardly get a word out between the tears. You are scared, but Pamela is your best friend and the only person you trust. “I am in trouble, Pamela. It’s Alim. He...he gave me HIV.” Pamela looks completely shocked and stops walking. “Oh no, Mpho! This is terrible! How did this happen? I told you to wear condoms,” she shouts at you and you begin to cry harder.

“What do I do?” you wail. “Shh, shh,” Pamela tries to soothe you and you walk with her to your empty house in silence. When you get there, Pamela tells you not to tell anyone else about the disease. “Not even Alim?” you ask, “Shouldn’t I tell him?” Pamela warns you that Alim will leave you if you tell him and advises that you keep your distance for awhile. She says she will think about what to do and see you at school.

You cry yourself to sleep and have nightmares all night long. When you wake up and remember your situation, you can barely get out of bed. Despite Pamela’s advice, you feel you must tell someone, keeping it inside makes you feel as if you are going to burst.

**If you decide to talk to your teacher, go to Education and take card 2.**

**If you want to take a chance and see Alim, go to Chance and take card 1.**



# Mpho's Story Education 2

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

## Education 2

Miss Okello is marking some work when you knock at the staffroom and ask for her. On seeing it is you, she asks you to meet her in the sick bay which is private. You are shaking as you tell her that you just learned that you are HIV positive. She cries out and then takes you in her arms as you start to sob. She asks you many questions about your boyfriend, but before you can answer she shakes her head and says, “Never mind. What’s done is done. Now we must think of what to do.” She sits with her head in her hands for awhile as many different emotions pass through you. You are relieved to have told her the truth and you are sure that she will help. At the same time, you are still scared that she will tell your parents, and your stomach is in knots of anxiety.

Eventually, she looks up at you with a hopeful expression. “I think I know what to do next,” she says. She tells you about an NGO she knows that supports people who are living with HIV. You tell her that you cannot go to such a place because you need to keep your condition a secret from your family, but Miss Okello assures you that your case will be confidential. You are still unsure and tell her that you don’t think you are ready.

She takes your hand and promises to go with you. You reluctantly give in. She also makes you promise to stop seeing Alim and to consider telling your parents about your disease so that you can get proper medical care. You think about the last two conditions, but you are not at all sure you can agree to them.

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





# Mpho's Story

## Return Home 1



## Return Home 1

You walk home, barely able to hold back your tears. You have no idea what to do or who you can turn to. When you get home, you don't even feel like eating. You go straight to bed before your parents get home. You have trouble sleeping and you wake the next morning with the realization that what happened was not a dream.

You tell your mother that you are not feeling well and you don't think you can go to school. She doesn't seem to mind and tells you to rest and feel better. After a few days at home your mother threatens to take you to the clinic, so you muster up the strength to return to school. But you are still listless and you can hardly concentrate in class. Miss Okello asks if everything is okay and you mumble that you are fine. Your parents begin to worry when you continue to dodge your food and sleep all weekend. Alim has been calling you, but you can't bring yourself to pick up. You feel so much anger at Alim for infecting you, yet you long for the comfort of his arms. You wish you could be riding in his car like the first night with no worries.

One day after school, Pamela demands that you tell her what is going on. You begin to cry and shake your head. "Mpho, I can tell that something is wrong," she pleads, but you cannot share your secret. Instead you just tell her that you have a very bad problem and cannot tell anyone. She says that if you won't tell her, you should at least tell someone because you are beginning to look sickly.

**If you want to talk to Miss Okello about things, go to Education and take card 2.**

**If you want to see Alim, go to Chance and take card 1.**



# Mpho's Story

## Chance 1



## Chance 1

After a few days, you decide to call Alim. When he hears your voice on the other end of the phone, he is almost hysterical. “What happened to you? Where have you been?” he demands. You apologize and explain to him that you have not been feeling well. He says he will pick you up for dinner the following evening.

You feel nauseous all of the following day as you think about seeing Alim. You have no idea what you are going to do and you keep going back and forth about whether or not you should tell him about your status. Eventually you decide that you must tell him the truth. Even though Pamela would laugh at you, you feel he loves you and are certain that he will feel terrible about making you sick and come to your aid. When you get into his car he tells you that you do not look well and have lost weight. You know that if you don’t tell him now, you never will. “Alim, I went to the hospital and found out that I have HIV.” At first Alim does not believe you, but then his face turns from shock to anger. “I cannot believe you, you little whore. How could you do this to me? I am a married man.” He begins to curse as you interrupt him, “Married? What? Alim, we have been together for months.”

“You stupid whore,” he beats his hand against the steering wheel and then reaches across your lap to open the door on your side. He pushes you out onto the street and tells you that he never wants to see or hear from you again.

He speeds away and you sit on the street around the corner from your house too numb to cry. You just stare into space, knowing you are more alone than you have ever been before.

### **THE END**

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



# Mpho's Story

## NGO 1



## NGO 1

The next day after school, Miss Okello takes you to an NGO that provides support to people who are HIV positive. You feel so scared you think you might vomit as you approach the office. You want to hide your face because you feel like everyone who looks at you must know your status. Miss Okello speaks to the woman at the reception and you wait next to her until you are called in to see a counselor. Miss Okello offers to come with you, but you say you would like to go alone.

The counselor introduces herself and asks you to tell her what led to this point in your life. You skip over your childhood and what it was like to grow up alone with your parents always gone, and instead go right to your relationship with Alim. She frowns when you tell her about not wearing condoms and she looks at you disapprovingly. You feel your heart sinking, but then she changes the subject and begins to talk about referring you to a clinic where your CD4 count can be tested and where you can receive treatment when the time comes. She explains the progression of the disease and how you may feel like a normal, healthy teenager for a long time. You feel a bit better when you hear this because you may be able to hide your disease.

She invites you to attend a weekly support group at the office for HIV positive youth. You dismiss the idea at first, but when Miss Okello nags you, you agree to try out one session. You are surprised by how comfortable you feel at the support group, and you even laugh for the first time in weeks. Soon you are in attendance every week and are making friends. You know you have a long way to go and that you must tell your parents about your status one day. The road ahead will not be easy, but with each day you feel a little bit stronger.

### THE END

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