

[Prologue]

I carry a red cabin suitcase with a broken handle, a suitcase that carries many crosses. I remember on the night before I boarded the flight to Ireland from Africa, right at the airport the zipper of the suitcase busted. I had to think of a quick fix, I wrapped two of my waist belts around it and pushed it to the side where it was plastic wrapped about 10 times. Immediately I thought to myself, could this be a bad omen for the trip? Then I dismissed the thought as soon as it came to my mind. I found myself praying for the journey, my heart was tied to the grief of what has been, and there I was expectantly grasping onto what can be. In my adult life as a young professional, as much as possible I prepared and made all the necessary arrangements. I made a checklist of all the vital elements like health, a fulfilling job, family, and friends and aligned myself spiritually. This was a heavy price to pay, forsaking everything in pursuit of a sanctuary. Staring at the unbearable uncertainty of whether I would be able to see my parents again?

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I remember in 1986, when I was 9 years old I had my first encounter and consciousness of the turmoil in my country. I remember we were playing hopscotch with other girls my age in the backyard, one midweek afternoon. Then suddenly two men jumped over the fence from the backyard and ran into our backyard shanty to hide. One of the men shouted at us to run inside the house and never say that we saw them. The atmosphere was filled with dense smoke from the burnt tires. The protest songs resounding loudly drew nearer, the protest march was in Dingaan the main street behind our four-roomed township house. Before long there were sounds of sirens, and my eyes and my nose began to itch. Mom called us to come inside the house and told my friends to quickly run home. I complained to my mom about my burning eyes, she said it must have been from the effects of the teargas in the atmosphere. Mom wet the cloth, then she wiped my eyes and afterward she pressed the same cloth against my nose to inhale. I told my mom of the two men who were hiding in the shack, and she told me not to worry as they were seeking safety.

I am a Black woman and a mother of two girls. I am the firstborn of two children, my mom and dad were ballroom dance partners, although I have two left feet. I come from a diamond mining city, characterized by a dry climate, extreme thunderstorms, and sometimes sandstorms. I love to try new things. I value the beauty of the human soul; I love seeing justice prevail. I am quick to realize every little nuance of those looks of being scaled down and surveyed by enquiring eyes every time I enter an expensive shop. I grit my teeth in frustration and roll my eyes subliminally at the thought of being profiled racially. Otherwise, being given extra attention due to the unconscious biases. Equity is power, and every human being should be treated with respect. Class is not limited to financial stature, influence, or social prestige but class to me is how people relate to one another with tolerance.

It was only after a few days of settling in at the reception centre did I realize that the whole place was under guards and cameras. I never imagined it could be so hard being in a new country. It is the trivial things one misses like standing in front of the stove and washing loads of dishes. The hardest part was during the festive season of December I really missed my country, the food, the vibe. It is like continual mourning of the things one took for granted like the freedom to make your own decision on what to cook, until what time you socialize.

We all need a sense of worth, working and contributing meaningfully to our society. For the first time in my life, I became saddened seeing my days ending without having anything worthwhile to show for it. Like for many non-EU professionals the complicated terms and high registration fees for ethical

boards to practice under the Irish jurisdiction place a limitation on my ability to meet my full potential. It is a waste of needed skills. Notably many migrant professionals have no option, but to do menial jobs to survive. Fear of deportation is also polarising us. This dilemma presented me with a choice either to remain in limbo being imprisoned by the circumstances or not to allow the temporary limitations to lure me into believing there is nothing more. Carving my own way in a foreign country, I had to dig deep into myself and use my artistic gifts as a stream of income. I also use my gift and voice to assume the role of advocacy, and representation for collective needs. I have highlighted this issue that I and many other migrants experience on various platforms where I was invited to speak. I will continue to do so because I value the beauty of human soul and I love seeing justice prevail. Meanwhile, I am saving money for the registration fee for the Pharmacy Council and I am studying for an additional degree.

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[Epilogue]

Living in Direct Provision taught me about understanding diversified perspectives, due to shared living spaces. The women in the centre are my community. Babysitting to help each other, is one of the many ways that we carry each other's burdens in meaningful ways. Women in the block I live in are weaved by the commonality in diversity, we find solidarity in our shared experiences of pre-migratory trauma, desegregation, and accumulated immigration stress. The complex relationships among women in Direct Provision and the dynamic boundaries help us set new value systems in a new country. This whilst we remain grounded in our identities and cultural uniqueness.