

**OUT OF THE**

**BLACK**

**SHADOWS**

**STEPHEN LUNGU WITH ANNE COOMES**

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# FOREWORD

Stephen Lungu has given a remarkable account of the wonderful dealings of God with him in those years straddling the coming of Independence to Southern Africa. I have been deeply moved to read such a graphic and expressive life story because so much of my life was entwined with his and, later, Rachel's. Never before have I been able to get such a complete picture, and I was especially struck by the intensity of the struggles in the most formative years of his life—some even unwittingly caused by me!

What a testimony to God's grace and power! To me, this is a wonderful demonstration of God's grace in forming a man who never had experienced much parental love or stable family life to become, with Rachel, a wonderful married couple frequently involved in marriage guidance. What an encouragement to any who fear to launch out into serving the Lord because their own lives were so disadvantaged.

Stephen has been most kind in his evaluation of Jill's and my input into his life. We were all much of the same

age, and I had so much to learn myself. I bow in adoration before the Lord for all that Africa, and especially my African team-mates, taught me of love, tact, understanding of local culture and walking with the Lord. There were the hard times, the clashes, the growing pains, but these were the foundation of so much of my subsequent ministry. In many ways Stephen was the closest to me of all my African colleagues and my best teacher. I share this here because I do not think Steve has done adequate justice to the fact that the learning was a two-way process.

May this testimony be an inspiration to many and bring much glory to the Lord Jesus!

**Patrick Johnstone**

WEC International

Author of *Operation World*

## CHAPTER ONE

# MY UNHAPPY HOME

I lay on the big untidy bed and watched my mother drink beer from her jug. She held it high in both hands, tilting her dark head back, drinking deeply, savouring each swallow. At last she sighed with contentment and lowered the jug to the floor, wiping her lips and chin with the back of her arm.

‘Ah,’ she breathed. Expertly her calloused toes eased the jug back into its hiding place under the bed.

A spasm hit me and I coughed, spitting onto the flowered bed cover. I stuck a grubby fist to my mouth to try and still the sound. Mama got cross with me because I coughed so much. She complained to my aunts that I was always sickly. But the pains in my chest had been bad today. When I opened my eyes, her dark eyes were full of exasperated affection—she always felt better after beer.

‘Ah Stephen, what can I do with you? You are always, always poorly.’ I liked it when she’d had beer, because it made her less cross with me.

‘Mama.’

She contentedly stretched out on the counterpane beside me and I snuggled up to her—her warm teenage body and bosom spelled love and contentment for me. She was tiny and very dark and I thought her beautiful.

Outside in the late afternoon heat the hens clucked drowsily to themselves, and some children squealed in play and raised clouds of dust. Some men called to one another. This was 1946 and the black township of old Highfield on the outskirts of Salisbury, Rhodesia, was a quiet place, if very poor.

Mama stroked my hot forehead. ‘So where’s your father then, eh?’ She whispered fretfully, watching the flies on the ceiling. We hadn’t seen him for the last few days, and Mama had not been happy about that. ‘I have no money to take you to the hospital.’

Papa worked for the government. He was a telephone repair man, based in a post office in Salisbury. Somehow, when he did not come home after work, it made Mama cross with me and John, my two-year-old brother. The following morning she’d stomp off to work in the field with the other women, muttering to herself. She would slap John and me for any little thing as we played near where the women worked.

It was a curious thing, because when my father finally did return, as he always did, Mama never seemed glad to see him. Standing in the doorway, her arms folded across the bosom of her colourful dress, her face would go darker than ever with anger.



Her marriage to my father, I would learn later, had always been difficult. Mama had been only thirteen years old when he had arrived in Highfield, a man nearly fifty years old, with two marriages behind him. According to traditional custom at the time, marriages were arranged, and for some reason, Mama's parents had decided to give her in marriage to him, much to Mama's distress. Mama had spent the first year of her marriage, even when she became pregnant, running away from her husband, seeking refuge back with her parents. They returned their young daughter every time, forcing her to go back to the husband she did not want. I was born out of this unhappy union, when Mama was only fourteen years old.

'I love you, Mama. Can't we just be happy together?' That was what my four-year-old mind felt, but I was not old enough yet to express it in words.

So I loved these times when she had, had some beer, either alone, or with some of her girlfriends. Beer helped Mama forget her misery for a while. It gave her the only comfort she had. The times when she drank beer with me were quiet, contented, dreamy times. She sat quiet and I could get close to her. My brother John, almost two, would play nearby. She'd even cuddle me.

The sun sets swiftly in Africa and our township experienced a brief flurry of activity as people went to and fro, locking away chickens, looking for children, looking for husbands (often in vain). Women busied themselves with their outdoor cooking fires and men gathered for an evening of beer-drinking as the sun set over the untidy mix

of corrugated asbestos roofing and the thatching of the older huts.

Mother got up and lit an oil lamp as the smell of cooking fires drifted in. She busied herself outside with the cooking pot, humming softly to herself. In the violet twilight, the bats flitted overhead as they left the forests around the township.

Then we heard footsteps and a neighbour's dog barked, and Mama stiffened and listened intently. I heard them too—a man's footsteps.

Mama rushed into the bedroom and swilled some water in her mouth. My cough was painful. 'Mama!' I held out my arms.

She turned on me with a look that made my words die on my lips. 'You shut your mouth! You're always fussing.'

I began to sob, which made me cough. 'Mama!' I wailed. She came to the bed and grabbed me tight by my upper arms. 'You be quiet! And if you tell him I've been drinking beer—I'll beat you—give you something to really cry about!'

Appalled by her anger, I slid even further under the flowered coverlet, pulling it tight over my head. I watched her through one of the holes in the coverlet.

Mama slid her hands to her hair, and patted it neatly into place. She quickly drank some water, and popped a small onion into her mouth to disguise the smell of the beer. She smoothed her sleeveless cotton frock down over her still slim eighteen-year-old hips. She stared up at the geckos on the ceiling for an instant, composing herself. As

she turned to go out of the room, I doubt she even heard my whimpers. The moths, tilting crazily, followed her oil lamp. The geckos watched them go in disappointment.

I lay tense as I heard the footsteps arrive outside our little red-brick house and my father's harsh voice demand, 'Where's my dinner?' as if he had been at work in Salisbury all day and not on one of his periodic disappearances.

My mother's reply was shrill and hostile. I buried my face in the grimy pillow and tried not to hear.

'... and Stephen's ill again, and how I gonna call the doctor with no money?'

'That boy is *always* ill,' my father sneered. I closed my eyes and clenched the coverlet tighter as my father stomped into the room. He held the oil lamp high above me. Roughly he pulled off the coverlet and rolled me over onto my back. I opened my eyes and peered fearfully up at him.

My mother was now shrilly defending my right to be ill though she sounded fairly angry with me as well. 'We could all die and you wouldn't know. You're not even here. You have another woman—I know you do.' She was probably right—Mama knew he'd left his last wife and son behind in Malawi some years before. He'd headed off to the goldmines of South Africa, and simply never gone back to them.

But Father stared down at me as if he were looking for something and could not find it. He wheeled on her. 'Well, why should I be here? Why should I raise this boy? You tell me this is my son. He doesn't look like me at all. I tell you

I am not his father.' He had said this before, and it always left me with a very strange lost feeling. 'Who is my papa then?' I would ask myself.

My mother cried protests, but got too close. My father suddenly sniffed suspiciously. 'Eletina, you have had beer,' he snarled.

'No! No! Always you accuse me.'

I lay still, hoping my father wouldn't push his big feet under the bed any further—he'd kick over mama's beer jug. Mother flounced out of the room with him close behind her. My coughs were ignored. As their argument raged in the other room, I lay, racked with pain, crying silent tears. Silence was safest. My parents got angry when I cried aloud.

\* \* \*

When I awoke next morning, everything was different. The house was quiet. Bright sunlight streamed through the curtains as a cheery breeze rustled them with unseen fingers. Chickens clucked contentedly outside the door.

My father washed and shaved in silence in the basin by the back door. My mother bustled around the bedroom, smoothing her hair, slipping into her best cotton flowered frock, fussing with a hat. That hat and the tranquillity made it a certainty: this must be Sunday. I stretched a little and coughed painfully, but felt content. Today would be all right. On Sundays my parents took a day of rest from fighting, and went to church and smiled at

people instead. I had no idea why; I just knew that this was so, and so liked Sundays.

Mother decided that I was well enough to go to church, and dressed me in my other pair of shorts and shirt—the Sunday ones. She carried John, and Papa swung me high up onto his shoulders. Papa walked in front, as usual. In African tradition, women generally walk behind their husbands.

‘Good morning!’ he said to all the neighbours we met along the way, flashing his brilliant smile at them with his perfect teeth. Papa was not very tall, but he was slim and fit. In old Highfield no one cared that he was not Rhodesian born and bred—there had been too many newcomers in recent years for that. Thousands of men from Malawi (then called Nyasaland) and Zambia (then called Northern Rhodesia) came to Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia), tempted by the goldmines and burgeoning industry of Rhodesia. Besides, Papa, who was much older than Mama, had a reputation for having seen something of life. Not for nothing was his nickname ‘Chiwaya—gun’. He had fought in the First World War.

‘Ah, Chiwaya! Eletina!’ Neighbours smiled and nodded at my parents. ‘Chiwaya, what are you going to preach about this morning?’

My father smiled and looked mysterious. ‘Ah, you must wait and see.’ He was an elder in our local Presbyterian church, and his thundering, oratorical style made him a popular preacher. Indeed, I once heard one of my aunties say that ‘big gun’ was a good description of how he preached.

Outside the church a lad was beating a length of rail which had been hung as a makeshift bell. The congregation was very proud of the church with its fresh mud walls and grass-thatched roof. Inside it even had fixed pews, built of bricks.

I lay content in my mother's arms throughout the long sermon as my father berated the congregation in angry staccato bursts. He was good at knowing what people felt guilty about, and got a lot of nods of agreement. I was happy to see him up there in front of everybody. But I was frightened of approaching him at home.

Papa's real name was William Tsoka. Tsoka meant 'unlucky'. This was an apt surname for our family, because in the months that followed, we lost even Sundays as the family truce day.

That happened because the government telecommunications department for whom Papa worked transferred him from Salisbury to a town called Bindura, about eighty kilometres away. Papa had to go. After a loose-jointed career in small hold farming and then the gold-mines of South Africa and Rhodesia, he needed to stick with this job if he was going to get any pension.

Mama was horrified at the news of the move. Although her family was from Zambia, her father had been in the police force in Rhodesia for forty years, and she had been born and grown up in Salisbury. Highfield township was home. Her family were all here. She'd met my papa when he'd arrived from the goldmines of Eiffel Flats in Kadoma, but she'd never had plans to leave old Highfield.

So amid much bitter haggling and rows, we moved to a small bungalow in Bindura. It was miserable from the first day. Mama drank more and more beer to ease her loneliness and misery when Papa was at work. Without the little Presbyterian church at Highfield, Sundays were as full of bitterness and anger as any other day. Mother also began to lose more and more of the arguments. Something was happening to her. She was tired a lot and her tummy was getting bigger and bigger.

But night after night, the rows went on, while John's teething screams soared an octave above the angry voices.

I often seemed to be the focal point of Papa's anger. 'That boy is not my son! We'll see if the next one is!'

Then who is my father? I would wonder again and again. Mama would become hysterical in her insistence that I was indeed Papa's son.

'No, he is not. And you, Eletina, are nothing but . . . ' and Papa would pour out a torrent of abuse and hate with as much fervour as he preached.

One night he beat Mama very badly, shoving her against the wall and throwing her across the bed. I tried to stop him. I clung to his leg. He kicked me across the room.

'I'll kill myself!' Mama screamed. 'I will!' She said it like it was the worst thing in the world.

I huddled on the floor, too terrified to move. Kill must be dreadful. What did it mean?

Finally one day, news reached Mama that a relative of hers had died back in Salisbury.

‘I’m going home,’ she said determinedly. ‘For the funeral.’ Then she added, as an afterthought, ‘And the birth.’ What birth?

She packed her bag and put John and me on the bus with her. Papa did not even come to the bus station to say goodbye.

It was a long, hot and weary journey. We stayed with her parents in old Highfield, and there were a few brief weeks of tranquillity until Papa returned. The government had changed its mind, and soon we all went back to our little house in Highfield.

Then it was 1947 and I had a new sister. With her arrival, and John now an active toddler, Mama, at nineteen years of age, had little time for me. I spent a lot of time playing in the dust outside our little house. Mama told me to watch my little brother, who at three was already nearly as big as me at five, and eager for mischief. I still coughed a lot, but Mama did not seem to notice any more. Though when I thrust a hot face against her, she would caress me with an absent-minded hand.

Whenever Papa was home, it seemed he was furious with Mama, accusing her of things that I didn’t understand, but which made her cry. In return, Mama was furious with Papa, especially when he did not come home at all some nights. I could not understand this, but I began to feel very guilty about it all. It was obviously all my fault that my parents fought. If Papa had thought I was his son, things would have been OK. So it was my fault that Papa did not love Mama. I felt embarrassed by my existence.



Then, when I was about seven, there came a time when Papa was gone for days on end. Mama cried all the time. Lots of aunts visited our house in a flurry of heaving bosoms and indignant cries. I gathered by the end of it all that Papa had been transferred away again by the government, and this time had left us all behind. I kicked pebbles around in the dust. Had it been my fault? I suspected it was. I would try and make it up to Mama. I felt guilty for being alive. I guessed I wasn't his son. Then who was I? I was Mama's son. I went and stood close to her as she wailed with the aunts.