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Girl Rising

By Marie Arana

This is a simple story.
And it did not begin here.
This thing of beauty,
a joy forever rising.
This warm glow in darkness
like a harvest Moon.
A Khmer proverb whispers-
celebrate when the Moon is bright.
But for years she was
a child of the dump.
A place where smoke
blackened Sun and Moon.
And eyes seldom looked up from
the world of things tossed aside.
An orphan discarded, learning
lessons no school would teach.
Hunting the rot for glints of light,
metal containers, silver spoons.
Listening for the sound a prong
makes when it finds a plastic bottle.
Careful not to step on used syringes,
rusty nails or broken glass.
In daydreams she pictured freshly
sharpened pencils, rows of desks,
the chant of the alphabet.
Wandering visions to
pass long empty days
in a place where a girl is simply one
more thing the world has thrown away.
And when they found her,
when this girl's dreams came through
she had not dreamt of gold,
she had not wished for beauty.
Hers was a simple dream.
The bright white shirt
of a school uniform.
The crisp pleats of a skirt.
Shelves full of books.
A dream of school,
and how she dances behind
a contented smile
because she knows this is
no longer a simple story.
Now this is her story to write.

She is the author and this is not
the end, it is just a beginning.
This is Wadley.
She's 8 years old.
She plays herself on the story from
her own life that you're about to see.
Just like Sokha did.
And just like the other girls you will meet.
Senna.
Azmera.
Suma.
Mariama.
And Ruksana.
Two others who we'll
call Yasmin and Amina
could not appear on their stories
out of concern for their safety.
Each of these girls was paired with
a writer from her own country
to help tell her story.
These are true stories.
If sometimes we imagined
to capture the things
these girls and these writers
wanted to see.
And their stories are important.
Because these girls hold
our future in their hands.
If they and the millions
of girls like them succeed
in getting the kind of education they need
incredible things will happen.
For them, for their families,
for their community, for their country.
For all of us.
Here's the hard truth:
In spite of the fact that educating a girl
is one of the highest return investments
available in the developing world
millions of girls just aren't making it.
Right now there are 66 million
girls out of school.
And many more who struggle every day
to simply remain where they belong.

In a classroom.

WADLEY,

Haiti

The morning of January 12th 2010.

was bright and beautiful,

In a way that Wadley could not remember
any other morning ever having been before.

It was the dry season when

wild flowers bloomed

and flowers that bloomed on their own

without rain

fascinated some little girls.

It made impossible things seem possible.

Unachievable things appeared doable.

And the flowers, the hibiscus,

the azaleas, the bougainvilleas,

they all looked even brighter

when Wadley was happy.

Wadley! Wake up.

You're going to be late for school.

That morning Wadley was

working to memorize

Toussaint L'Ouverture's final speech

as he was removed

by Haiti by the French,

after he tried to win independence

for the country.

Wadley liked to imagine herself defiant,

like brave Toussaint L'Ouverture.

But she also wished she'd be given

some words by women to recite.

Brave and strong women

like her mother.

Wadley, one snack is enough!

Every day Wadley brought two snacks

from her mother's tray.

One for herself and one for another child.

That day she chose a

new friend, Shelda.

A girl whose father had

been killed the week before.

He was a taxi driver and someone

had gotten into his car

with a gun and asked him to

get out.

He had refused and the
person had shot him.

Soon the moment came for Wadley
and her classmates to recite
big words from the history lesson.
Wadley watched some of her friends
recited or failed to recite.

The stammers, stutters and hesitations
seemed to her like a long poem.

A love poem to history.

Wadley!

"In overthrowing me
you have cut down
in Saint Domingue
only the trunk of the tree of liberty.
It will spring up again from the roots,
for they are many and they are deep."

That afternoon all

Wadley could think was...

It was the dry season when
wild flowers bloomed.

And these words seemed a perfect
beginning for her composition
and a fitting book end to her day.

For they seemed to emerge
somehow out of the dream
that she had been having that morning.

Wadley could not remember how she
and her mother got to the open field
near the University.

It was still the dry season but wild
flowers no longer bloomed.

In the tent camp she often heard the
most days that the adults say:

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

This they said when
they were finally resigned
to the fact that their missing loved ones
would never be coming back.

Life tried to return to normal,
except now her mother roamed
the city during the day
looking for friends and family

for whom to seek help.
And instead of school
Wadley went to the water
fountain with a bucket.
Every day now, as she passed
through the camp
and the ruins of her neighborhood
she thought about school.
Sometimes as she walked by
the rubble of the school itself
she thought she heard
the voices of her friends
reciting the lessons that
she now missed so much.
Mama! Mama!
What happened, Wadley?
The school! The school is open!
I know.
Please go get the water, Wadley.
The school is open.
Why can't I go to school?
Because we have no money.
Money was still not completely
clear to Wadley.
She knew that there was never
enough of it.
That some people have
more of it than others.
And that it determined in many cases
how people looked at you.
And talked to you.
And treated you.
It was the reason some people
ate three meals every day,
while others ate every couple of days.
It was why, she was learning now,
some kids went to school and
others did not.
The next morning Wadley decided
that she would go to school
and sit on the bench in front of
madame Lorry, along with the others
no matter that there was no money.
That's what she would do.

Do you go to school here?
For a moment Wadley wondered how
madame Lorry could not recognize her,
but, remembered Wadley,
the earthquake had twisted
a lot of people's minds.
Many people did not even
recognize themselves anymore.
Yes, Madame, I was
your student here.
I know that, Wadley,
but actually, this is a new school.
Did your mother pay the money?
No, there is no money.
Well, I'm sorry...
But you have to go, Wadley.
Come back when she can pay.
Wadley decided that even though
money could do many things,
it was also a curse.
Because only a cursed thing
could keep her out of school.
But she was not cursed.
Hadn't she been hearing from her
mother and the others in the tent camp
that those who had survived
the earthquake were blessed?
Surely it meant that she was
supposed to do something special.
Ashes to ashes, dust to dust -
she thought to herself.
The next morning Wadley
started for the tent school again.
She wasn't sure what
she was going to do.
But she was determined
to go and stay.
Has your mother paid yet, Wadley?
Has your mother paid the money?
No.
Will you leave, Wadley?
No.
You need to go home, Wadley.
No.

This is the last time I'll tell you.
If you send me away,
I will come back every day
until I can stay.
What's this?
Even if you send me away, I will
come back every day until I can stay.
And the flowers, the hibiscus,
the azaleas, the bougainvilleas,
they all looked even brighter
when Wadley was happy.
They even seemed to thrive from it.
Girls who go to school see
immediate benefits
beyond the things they're learning.
Being a student enhances
their status in the community.
It improves their health.
It makes them safer.
But in the developing world,
getting an education is not
what people expect girls to do.
Girls are expected to work,
expected to fetch water.
To care for younger children.
To get jobs.
Or worse.
It happens to girls like Suma.
Suma's parents didn't
send her to school.
They sent her to work.
It's called kamlari.
I write songs to remind myself
that my memories are real.
And often because there's
so much sadness behind me
what comes out is sad.
Both of my parents were bonded as
kamlara and kamlari in their childhood.
That's the way things
have been around here.
That's the way they
have been for the poor.
You have to bond yourself to a

master, otherwise how will you live?

SUMA,

Nepal

This was the house of my first master.
My mother and father bonded me just
so that I would have somewhere to live.
And enough food to eat.

I was 6 years old.

Fabu Tauru was a landlord and a miller.

He made me work from 4 in
the morning to late at night.

I had to clean the house
and wash the dishes,
and go to the forest to fetch firewood.

When I wasn't minding the goats,

I had to mind the children.

The goats were nicer.

The daughters made fun of me
because my clothes were torn.

They teased me.

They beat me.

I wanted my mother and
father to take me back.

I wanted them to
let me stay at home.

And go to school like my brother.

But when I thought about

how poor they were,

and how much they

too had suffered,

it made me feel weak.

I couldn't ask.

This was the house of my second master.

Johna Kamala wore a uniform to work.

He and the mistress of the
house were very hardhearted.

Unlucky girl - they used to call me.

Hey, Unlucky girl, do this!

- they'd shout.

They made me sleep in the goat shed,

and wear rags and eat scraps

from their dirty plates.

I can't really talk about everything

that happened to me here.

But I will never forget.
This is where I began to write songs.
Only the songs got me through.
Selfish were my mother and father
They gave birth to a daughter
They gave birth to a daughter
My brothers go to school to study
while I, unfortunate,
slave at a master's house.
It's a hard life,
being beaten every day.
This was the house of my third master.
I was 11 years old when I
arrived at Chitai Tauru's house.
I had been a kamlari for 5 years.
It wasn't as bad here.
I mean it was bad because there
was a lot of work.
But there was a lodger in that house.
A school teacher called Bimal Sir.
He changed my life.
Bimal Sir convinced my master and
mistress to enroll me in a night class.
All of us would gather after
finishing our day's work
and we would learn to read and write.
I loved that night class so much.
It was run by social workers for
girls just like me - kamlaris.
We'd also talk to the teachers about
what it was like to be a kamlari.
And as we talked we began to
realize that bonded labor was,
and isn't it - slavery.
The teachers who ran the night class
began to go from house to house.
There is a small girl working here.
- I am here to take her.
- Why?
They wanted to liberate us.
One teacher, Sita Didi, told my
master that he was breaking the law
by keeping me as a kamlari.
She talked about the law

against bonded labor,
and the law about children's rights,
and the law on labor rights,
and the law against domestic
violence and trafficking.
She talked to him about
justice and injustice.
And she demanded
that he set me free.
My master said no.
Once maid a bond
couldn't be broken.
Sita Didi didn't give up.
She kept arguing.
She came back day after day.
And in the end she'd led me
home to my mother and father.
I am my own master now.
I have no mistress.
I was the last bonded
worker in my family.
After me, everyone will be free.
I feel as though I have power.
I feel like I can do anything.
And I have important
things to do.
Inside this house
is a girl like I was.
Away from her parents,
working morning to night.
Wanting so badly to be free.
We have come to this house,
the house of her master
to say - We know you have
a kamlari working for you.
You must set her free.
I've seen where change comes from.
When it comes it's like a song
you can't hold back.
Suddenly there's a breath
moving through you and...
You're singing.
And others pick up the tune
and start singing too.

And the sweet melody
goes out into the world
and touches the
heart of one person.
Then another.
And another.
The practice of kamlari has been
illegal in Nepal since 2000.
Now with the help of girls like Suma
it's finally coming to an end.
For Suma it is not enough
that she herself is free.
She's using her education to make
sure all girls are getting to school.
Because Suma knows that
when parents have to choose
they usually choose
to educate the boys.
So girls have less opportunity.
Less freedom.
And less education than the
boys they grow up with.
This means that girls suffer
more hunger,
more violence
and more disease.
It's a simple fact:
There is nobody more
vulnerable than a girl.
In far too much of the world girls
still suffer unspeakable things.
Girls like Yasmin.
YASMIN,
Egypt
Sit here.
I'm Sergeant Saif.
This is Officer Mansoor.
How old are you?
12.
Do you go to school?
No.
We have no money
to send a girl to school.
She works with me.

What do you do?
We sell tea by the
Sixth of October Bridge.
And your husband?
Jail.
She's just a street kid.
No, I'm not a street kid!
She's probably trying
to shake down a customer...
Can you tell us why you're here?
I'm a superhero.
A superhero?
Stop this nonsense, Yasmin.
Tell them what happened.
I was with my friend Aya.
We were going to get juice.
The juice from a man at the roundabout.
He has the best juice.
Aya had 80 piastre
and I had 2 pounds.
It was hot and we didn't wanna walk.
A man with the donkey cart
said that he would drive us
to the roundabout to get juice.
But then when we were nearing
the roundabout he turned off.
We didn't know where he was going.
He said don't worry,
that it was a fast way.
Aya got scared and ran away
but I was not scared.
You were not scared at all?
No.
Why not?
Because I am strong.
I can fight.
He said we had to stop
at his house for a moment.
He said he had juice at his house too.
When we got to his house I saw
that his wife was there too.
So I didn't think anything
bad would happen.
He told her to bring us some drinks.

And then leave us alone.
There was juice like he promised but...
It wasn't good.
It tasted sour.
He was drinking some beer and I
don't like it when people drink beer
so I got up to leave.
But he stopped me and
said he would take me home.
We got back in the cart,
but he didn't take me home.
He took me to a very dark place.
He told me he would not hurt me
but that he wanted to be with me.
He wanted...
And I said...
I told him I was not
an ordinary girl.
That I was a superhero,
that I'm powerful.
But he did not believe me.
He drew his sword and told me
it was time that I should
fight for my honor.
And I told him that I
did not want to kill him.
Because a true hero does not kill.
He swung his sword at me,
but I was too fast for him.
I drew my knife from beneath my clothes
and let him feel the
sharpness of my blade.
He was strong, but I was stronger.
He was fast, but I was faster.
I wanted to teach him a lesson.
To show him that girls are...
And then we...
He just...
This man - he was a bad man.
And he left me no choice.
We fought in that dark
place for a long time.
He begged for me to spare him.
So I spared his life.

Your mother said...
there was blood on your clothes
when you returned home.
Yes, it was a hard battle.
Could you show me your knife?
I promise I will return it to you.
Why don't you go with Officer Mansoor...
and let me speak to your mother.
Hungry, aren't you?
Go ahead, eat this
delicious cookie.
It's good you didn't
kill that cart driver.
I'd hate to put a smart girl
like you in jail.
These are very difficult cases.
Very hard to prove.
Perhaps...
We can get you some money.
The man has a cart and an apartment.
Some means.
My God.
What are you saying? I would rather
die than touch any of his money.
She is my daughter.
You see how she was hurt.
I only want justice!
Justice?
Nowadays?
I'm sorry.
Yasmin, can you show us
where he lives?
Well.
You know, I have a daughter
a little bit younger than you.
But I'm afraid...
she's not as strong or brave as you.
Perhaps you should meet her.
I would like her to learn
to be a superhero too.
50% of all the sexual
assaults in the world
are on girls under 15.
50%.

The risk of sexual assault is one
reason parents keep girls at home
or marry them off young.
The man who raped Yasmin
is still free.
She has never been to school,
cannot read or write.
But is now engaged to be married.
And did we mention?
She's 13 years old.
Early marriage is the
future for millions of girls.
14 million girls under 18
will be married this year.
That's 38000 girls married today.
That's 13 girls in the last 30 seconds.
AZMERA,
Ethiopia
Look up! There is a child in the sky.
There are angels. There are
beliefs to challenge,
wishes to be fulfilled.
And here is a girl named Azmera.
Feet grounded in Ethiopian soil,
in young girl's life. Her
eyes turn toward possibility.
Azmera - named for harvest,
golden crops, bounty.
Loved by family.
Intensely curious, painfully shy,
stubborn and kind.
Not yet 14.
Trapped.
Look up! There are myths
among the clouds.
A myth about a boy locked in
a prison tower with his father.
A famous maker of labyrinths.
The father made his son wings
from wax and feathers
and told him to fly out of the
window, to freedom.
Don't fly to close
to the Sun! - he warned.

The wax will melt and you will fall.
But the boy rose up,
flew too high,
and fell to the ground.
The burning Sun, the only
witness to his descent.
This is a myth. This is a
lesson about limits.
It reminds us that man
was not meant to fly.
We cannot reach the Sun with wings
crafted from feathers and wax.
And desperation.
But look! Here is Azmera.
She is in a life that is not a myth.
Living in a world with its own limits.
She is the only living
daughter of Etenesh.
My sister - she is called.
Etenesh was once the
wife of a loving man
and the mother of three -
a son and two daughters.
Azmera - her youngest.
Her life was full.
Then her husband died
and then her eldest daughter.
And Etenesh became a widow.
And a grieving mother.
Left with nothing to remind
her of those she lost.
No photographs, no drawings,
no letters.
What she has is Azmera,
and an older son - a young man
who loves his sister with the
same devotion as their mother.
What she's left with is the determination
to give her surviving children
what she can.
The elders warned Etenesh that
Azmera too would die
unless she was married young.
Give her hand - she was told.

Give her possibility.
A chance to live.
How much fear can one woman carry?
How many children can she stand to bury?
So when a man, 20 years old
and a stranger, came to ask
for Azmera's hand, Etenesh
opened the door and let him in.
She'd turn to the man and said:
"Here is my daughter."
And she held Azmera and said:
"Here is a chance, here is possibility."
"Go."
In Ethiopia this is how it was
done when Etenesh was a girl.
And when her own mother was a child.
And when her grandmother
was barely old enough
to do more than play
and fetch water.
Here it is said that if a
girl is married too young,
she is in danger of being
split by her husband.
13 is considered to be a safe
age. Though the law says 18,
Girls as young as 7
have been married.
What does it mean to split a girl?
Is it like tearing a photo
down the middle
while each half witnesses
the making of a ghost?
What if a girl's life could be more?
What if a mother's hopes
could mean something?
What if a boy could look up
into the Sun without falling?
Look at this young man.
He is not a myth. He is not
a stranger to failed dreams.
Meselu was the son
to a dying father.
He left school at 7 years old

to do the work of an adult.
A farmer who wants nothing
more than to be able to read.
He once tried to leap past
the edge of his world
and fly away from it all.
But here is the heart of
a man strong enough
to return to his
mother and his sister.
He was in the fields working the day
the man came for Azmera's hand.
He walked into the house and
saw stranger's talking to Etenesh.
And he knew what was happening.
Each of our stories pivot
on a single moment.
That short pause between
what is and what could be.
In a breath we can decide
between what we wish to be true
and what we can make happen.
Meselu said he would sell
everything he owned
to keep his sister in school,
to give her the gift of
a life with choices,
to give her chances he never had.
He told Etenesh - No.
And Azmera stepped
forward and told her mother:
"I want a better life."
Together they refused this marriage.
I want to tell Azmera the most
important parts of this story.
About a boy trapped in a tower.
Same Sun that brought this boy down,
raises you up and gives you strength.
You can go as far and
as high as you want,
as you are able to dream.
It is not ambition that destroys us.
It is not hope that leads us astray.
You are a girl who has

used her voice to say: No.
And every time you open a book,
you continue your journey forward and up.
We are from a country
full of split girls.
We must reach out with
firm hands and hold them
until the peace is fit again.
You are showing them how to
live by letting them hear you say:
I want a choice and this
life is mine to make.
This is how it happens.
One girl follows behind the other,
until together they move
forward, towards something.
A future.
Here's an unsettling fact:
The number one cause of
death for girls 15 to 19
it's not AIDS,
it's not hunger.
It's not war.
It's childbirth.
When girls marry young,
education ends.
And the old cycles continue.
Cycles of poverty,
cycles of violence,
cycles of ignorance.
But a girl who gets an education
starts a different kind of cycle
because she's going to stay healthier.
She's going to get married later.
She's going to have fewer
and healthier children.
And most of all, she's going to
have educated children.
And it's not just mothers.
Fathers too have to invest.
So their daughters can dream.
It was always hottest before
the rains came.
Sometimes even my daydreams

seemed ready to burst,
blistering beneath the
city's crushing heat.
And I remember how my
mother's eyes would shine
when my father talked about
moving back to the village one day.
"In the city", she used to say, "life rushes
through the streets like a thousand rivers."
"But in the village there's only one river."
"And it's real with cool waters flowing
besides mango trees full of parrots."
I would love to live besides a cool
river and eat free mangos all day.
But I was so far from that river.
I was born here, in the city.
In our house on the sidewalk.
RUKSANA,
India
My mother had her
parrots in the village.
In the city I had my own friends.
Stop dreaming!
You'll get us all killed one day!
Ruksana?
Come here.
Bring your notebook with you.
Drawing pictures?
Drawing pictures in math class!
Do you think this class is a joke?
Get out!
No more trouble! That's what
my father said last time.
And I promised - no more.
But somehow trouble always found me.
Mama and Papa are home.
You're going to get a blasting.
Papa's calling you.
Come on.
You know how hard I struggle
to send you to school
so you can study and
make something of yourself.
I don't send you to school

to draw, do I?
How many notebooks have
you ruined with your doodles?
I won't do it again.
I'll only draw this in this book
and I will study really hard.
I promise.
That was the happiest day of my life.
After that I would have
promised my father anything.
Somedays there wasn't even
enough money for food.
But today there was a notebook,
colored pens, no punishment.
Had there ever been a girl as lucky as me?
I remember thinking that one day
I would take my mother and
my father and my sisters
in an aeroplane.
We would fly high above the
city and the country side,
and see every part of Earth.
After we landed we wouldn't
live on the street anymore.
We would live in a big house
by the river in the village,
and everyone would have their own bed,
and my father would have many cows,
and my mother would have her parrots.
And I would have a monkey
who I'd call Musty,
and I'd teach him to do all my math.
Hey, what are you doing?
Drawing? Show us.
Don't be scared, we're your friends.
We won't hurt you. Just relax.
Why are you scared? Come on.
Come with us, we'll play in the alley.
Papa!
Daddy can't help you!
We won't do a thing to you.
I want to go back to our village!
No. I won't leave.
We came so far to educate our girls

so they can lead better lives.
I won't give up now.
School!
What's the point
if street thugs attack them?
We've come so far...
Our girls are doing well
in school and learning fast.
We can't go back.
After that my sisters and I
spent our nights at a shelter.
My father said it wasn't safe for us
to be on the streets after dark.
Who do you think you are?!
We run this night shelter
while you watch TV!
Go and do some work!
The rest of you as well!
How could so much beauty
and so much meanness
be together in one world?
Where was that magic place
inside the television?
And inside my head?
And why was I stuck here instead?
Maybe I was being punished after all.
After that long terrible night
the monsoon rains came.
My favorite time of the year.
But this time the rains
came with more tears.
Hey go, go, go all of you...
Come on!
Tear down this slum!
Everybody out!
These are our homes!
Please don't do this!
A thousand rivers flowing with life.
And us adrift.
No place in the soaking
world for roots to take hold.
Everyone was crying.
Even my drawings.
You were right.

Let's go...
Back to the village.
No.
You were right.
We've come this far
with such difficulty.
Why should we let them drive us away?
Even after all that
still we were together.
A family.
I felt in my heart that
everything would be OK.
My friends were still there.
That's when I learned
to never give up.
Because after the rain
there's always sunshine.
Ruksana is one of the lucky ones.
She's still in school.
Her parents can't afford
a place to live,
but they somehow find a way
to get their daughters to school.
It's not easy.
Because even though
it's a great investment,
in a lot of the world school isn't free.
Parents don't just
have to pay for school.
They have to buy books.
And uniforms.
Sometimes they pay for
exams and report cards.
For millions of families
it is simply too much.
A girl born on planet Earth today
has a 1 on 4 chance
being born into poverty.
And without a good school
that is where she'll stay.
But the right education
can change all that.
Knowledge is power.
Just ask Senna.

SENNA,
Peru
"The Black Heralds"
by the great poet Cesar Vallejo.
"There are blows in life,
so powerful...
I don't know!
Blows as from God's hatred,
Like a riptide of human suffering
rammed into a single soul...
I don't know!"
The first time I read that
it took my breath away.
The rhythm of it.
The force.
For me, it was unforgettable.
Poetry is how I turn ugliness into art.
Dark into light.
Fear into will.
I didn't learn this over the years
as I learned math or history.
I learned it all at once.
In a swift kick to my heart.
My name is Senna.
I am 14 years old.
I live and study in La Rinconada.
La Rinconada is a gold mining
town in Peru.
Perched on the side of a
dead volcano, 17000 feet up.
In the perpetual snow of the Andes.
They tell me my
town is harsh. Hazardous.
The highest human habitation in the world.
I don't know.
My father named me after
a famous warrior - Xena.
He had seen her on TV
but since he could neither read or write
he didn't know that her
name started with an X.
He said that like her
I would grow up to be a
fearless defender of the poor.

A heroine prepared to go to
war against ruthless men,
if honor demanded it.
If a warrior's name
was my father's first gift to me,
a brave heart was his second.
There is nothing I can't overcome.
My father knew something
about brave hearts.
For he, like all the men
of La Rinconada, was a miner.
He comes looking for hope
and finds nothing but misery.
For every golden ring,
two thousand tons of
rock must be moved.
For 35 years my father
drilled and dug.
Hunted tirelessly for a glimpse
of glitter winking in the ground.
But this mountain, she
will tremble the fiercest spirit,
shatter the strongest back.
I still don't know what
happened that day.
But I imagine it.
The slam of ice,
the rock of grove,
the crash, the grind,
the sudden black.
He survived but he never
returned to the mines.
And each day after that
he died a little bit more.
I was barely 5, but the memory
of that day still haunts me.
As if a shadow had fallen over my father.
As weeks went by and we
grew desperate for money
my father became a cook,
and my mother took his place
on the mountain.
Every day she and my
sister joined the women

who scrambled their way up
steep inclines to pound that rock,
looking for gold that miners had missed.
Until night fell and cold
stiffened their fingers.
Still my father insisted
that I go to school.
Learn all the things he hadn't.
"There's no hope for me",
he would say.
"But there is for you."
"Make a better person of
yourself, Senna. Study!"
He made sure I saw what became of
many girls who did not go to school.
It was impossible not to.
Beside every gold buyer store
was a loud rocker's canteen.
Above every canteen was
a busy brothel.
Miners squandered their gold
as fast as they could find it.
Drunks staggered out of whore
houses in the full light of day.
I had heard about the thousands
of girls sold to men in those places.
Many of them infected with AIDS.
They seemed hard-faced,
veiled eyed,
with an infinite sadness about them.
Don't die.
I love you too much!
But the corpse...
Ay, he kept dying.
I went to the man who owned
La Rinconada's public toilets.
And begged him to give me work.
My job was to get to
the stalls by dawn,
flush down each cubicle,
scrub up the holes in the floor
and take 20 cents per person.
I could add the earnings in my head,
as fast as the owner with his calculator.

My father beamed when he heard of it.
"You see", he cried, "you have
all the makings of an engineer."
In La Rinconada the engineers
are the bosses, the owners.
And the ones with all the money.
In truth, I was having
a hard time at school.
I was too worried to do anything
but think about my father.
With every day his health
sank to new lows.
I told myself I was a warrior,
a defender of the weak.
He needed me to stay strong.
I sang to him...
Did all his sums.
One day my mother told us
that she would take my
father down the mountain
to find a shaman, a herb,
anything to slow his racing pulse.
Stop the cough that was
threatening to claim him.
I never saw my father again.
He collapsed and died
in my mother's arms,
shortly after they got out of the
bosk at the foot of the mountain.
When my mother told us this
it was as if I had been
punched in the chest,
as if the ground beneath us
had fallen away.
For all the years that my family
had climbed that frozen rock,
for all the gold that had been dug out,
burned clean, sent to
glitter around the world,
we had never owned a fleck of it.
We were poor.
The poorest family in the
mudhole of poor people.
I cursed the mountain,

cursed the mines,
cursed the gold bearing
beneath my feet.
And then I found this,
this poem
about the black heralds of death,
about the powerful blows
that fate can sometimes rain on us...
I don't know.
Those poems, those words
altered something in me.
It was as if I had chance
upon a cache of buried treasure.
Each page opened a world,
each line stopped my heart.
I memorized every word
on every page.
Then all the people of the Earth
surrounded him.
The sad corpse gazed at them,
touched.
Slowly he sat up,
embraced the first man
and began to walk...
And so I say.
In time I saw that my father
had been right all along.
I was a fighter. Brave.
And words made for mighty weapons.
I began writing poems.
I recited them for all
my schoolmates to hear.
I even won a poetry contest.
I will be the engineer my
father always wanted me to be.
I will be a poet.
I know now that the fortune my
father sought so helplessly
was always buried in me.
It was just a matter of finding it.
Fewer than half the girls
in the developing world
will ever reach secondary school.
By beating the odds, Senna is

writing a new chapter for girls in Peru.
Girls need good schools.
And they need to stay.
Because a girl with one
extra year of education
can earn 20% more as an adult.
Because women operate the majority of farms
and small businesses in the developing world.
If India alone enrolled 1% more of its girls
in secondary school,
their GDP would rise by billions.
Educated girls are a powerful
force for change.
And this kind of change
- it happens fast.

MARIAMA,

Sierra Leone

You're probably wondering -
is that an ad for some charity?

But I actually have a normal
life for a teenage girl.

I get up, I brush my teeth,
I listen to Rihanna,
I pick my outfits,
I text.

Welcome to my world.

This is Freetown, Sierra Leone.

This is my Mom.

And this was my Dad.

My Dad died when I was really little.

I like to think he still watches over me.

This is my Dad's younger brother.

He had to marry my Mom because
she was his brother's widow.

She could have said no.

Or she could have
become a praying wife,
which is sort of like being
a wife, without the fun.

But then my Uncle was
really quite handsome,
so he became my stepdad.

A few years later Papa married Hava.

Now that was a love match

from the start.
I guess you could call us
a perfect family.
And it's true.
Isn't my school cool?
I'm the first person in
my family to go to school.
Everyone says I'm the lucky one.
This is our physics teacher.
He told us about Isaac Newton,
the biggest problem solver all time.
Lots of people think science
is boring. But I don't.
Science is about asking questions
and solving problems.
Just like Isaac Newton.
The most exciting change in my life
was when I got my first real job.
I was so happy when I landed a
spot as a host at Eagle Africa 91.3
These days radio is the biggest
thing in Sierra Leone.
Almost everyone listens to it.
On the radio show I'm able
to talk to lots of girls
all over the country and help them.
Every week we discuss a problem.
I don't mean a physics problem,
I mean real stuff.
One time a girl named
Esatu called in.
She lived with her
aunt who used her
to run errands instead of
letting her go to school.
Even worse her aunt's boyfriend had
a really bad wandering hand problem.
Poor Esatu didn't know what
to do so she called the show.
I thought about what I would do.
I told her to tel her Mom
everything, to not be afraid.
She wasn't doing anything wrong
and that she should be going to school.

A few weeks later she called to say she was back at home living with her Mom and going to school. She said I helped her solve her problem.

When I'm older my plan is to have my own TV show solving the greatest misteries in the world.

Welcome to Dr. Mariama's Miracle Mistery Show in which I, Mariama, find solutions to the planet's most vexing problems.

Filmed here in Freetown in front of live studio audience.

My big dream is to go to outer space, to be the first African in space.

But the truth is, I've never been on an aeroplane.

Actually, I've never even been to another country.

But I'm not afraid to dream big.

While I was busy dreaming, Papa was having some problems of his own. He was being criticized by other people in my town about me hosting the radio show and staying out at night with my friends from the radio station.

One night when I was out he found out where I was and stormed in.

I've never seen him so angry.

Papa refused to let me host the show.

I tried to talk my way out of it, which is something I can almost always do but he didn't wanna listen.

That night I didn't sleep.

I told you my parents never went to school, right?

Well what I didn't tell you was what Hava told me.

That people in those

days thought kids
who went to school lost
respect for their parents.
I worry that maybe my father thought
I'd lost respect for him by
having a job at a radio station.
For the first time I had a
problem I couldn't solve.
I thought - what would Isaac Newton do?
For every action there is an
equal and opposite reaction.
Newton's third law.
I needed to find a force
equal to my father.
Someone my father would listen to.
Maybe Hava could be my force.
So I borrowed a radio
and turn it to Eagle 91.3
I hated to hear the show
going on without me.
Hava really listened.
She liked what she heard.
She told Papa that he
might have made a mistake.
He agreed to hear me out.
I told him all the good things
the radio show is doing
like the way I was able to help
Esatu go back to her mother.
By being on the radio I could
help even more girls like her.
Hava said I should
have another chance.
Finally Papa agreed to let me
carry on with the show.
Only if I promised to come
straight home afterwards
and always let him or
my Moms know where I was.
I was back on the air.
Now everything is cool again.
So you out there, watch
this space because one day
you're gonna see Dr. Mariama's

Miracle Mystery Show.
Now there's nothing to stop me.
Nothing in the world.
Nothing in the universe.
Because I am the lucky one.
Girls are not the problem.
They're problem solvers.
You want to slow
the spread of the heat?
Educate a girl.
You want to grow the global economy?
Educate a girl.
So what exactly changes
when the 600 million girls
in the developing world
get a good education?
Everything.
If my husband heard these
words he might kill me.
So might my father or my brother.
Or anyone of thousands of my countrymen.
Killed because I want to learn.
Killed because I want to read.
For? my own truth.
Because I am a girl.
Now that I am no longer a child
I cannot show you my face.
I must wear the shroud
of blue. A shell.
I am a girl masked and muted.
So what can you truly know of me?
AMINA,
Afghanistan
But I will speak.
I will not be silenced.
My story is like thousands
of others. Millions.
No one bothered to record
the date of my birth.
As a girl I was considered
unworthy of a record.
I am told my mother burst into
tears when she learned my sex.
Set me aside in a dirt.

She already had one son
but wanted another.
Wanted a status of being
a bearer of boys.
My mother never learned to read or write.
She's never opened a book,
never written in a diary.
Can't even decide for the
scribbles on the bag of rice.
From the age of 3 years old
I spent my days working.
My hands and face were
chapped from carrying
icy mountain water to wash men's hands.
I woke before dawn,
cleaned the house,
washed the clothes, the dishes.
I carried my siblings on my back
until they were old enough to walk.
I learned early to serve.
I learned early that this is the way
things were always intended to be
for the women of my family.
A lifetime of servitude.
My happiest times were the
few short years of my education.
I learned to read and write
on an old blackboard
fixed to a crumbling stone wall.
Girls in other parts of my country
where the Taliban were in tight control
weren't allowed to go
to school at all.
Weren't allowed to step
outside their homes,
so I was always aware of my privilege.
I was 11 years old when my father
arranged for me to be married.
My mind was of little value,
but my body could settle
a dispute, pay a debt.
My body is a resource which can
be spent for men's pleasure
or profit.

Who will care that I have
been married against my will
for 250000 afghanis,
roughly 5000 dollars?
For that price my father
offered me in marriage to a cousin.
My empty-head mother
approved the match.
When the transaction was complete
they spent the money to
buy a used car for my brother.
I'm an Afghan woman
and I know from history
that it hasn't always been this way.
On my wedding day I tried to
think about all the many
strong Afghan women before me.
I've heard about Malalai,
Rabea Balkhi, Zarghuna Ana.
Women who lived a hundred years ago.
They could read and write.
They spoke their own minds and
were heroes for my country.
But now I'm imprisoned in marriage.
Only allowed outside in this cover.
There's no opening for
my mouth to talk.
My eyes are hidden beneath
this embroidered cage.
The first night of my marriage
my new husband barely spoke.
And the seed he planted was
not only the son he wanted,
but the anger that has
grown in me ever since.
I vowed that night I would find
a way not only to endure,
but to prevail.
The midwife who delivered
my son without complications
said I was one of the lucky ones.
More women die giving birth in Afghanistan
than in any other place in the world.
When I birth the baby,

prays Allah, a boy
I behaved dutifully.
As I suckled his innocence at my breast,
cupped his tiny feet in my hands,
all I felt was impatience.
Impatience because we are poor,
because we are silenced,
disenfranchised, beaten, cut,
married as children, sold, raped.
When we seek freedom we are burned.
When we speak the truth we are stoned.
When we go to school we are
bombed, poisoned, shot.
Don't tell me it's simply
has always been so.
I don't believe in your resignation.
I refused the ignorance long ago.
Don't tell me you're on my side.
Your silence has already spoken for you.
Don't tell me the blame lies in my
religion, in my culture, in my traditions.
I have not forgotten my vow.
Change is coming.
I will read, I will learn,
I will study.
I will return to school.
I dare you to tell me
it's a waste of time.
If you try to stop me
I will just try harder.
Put me in a pit, I will climb out.
If you kill me there will be other
girls who rise up and take my place.
I will find a way to endure,
to prevail.
The future of men lies in me.
And this is the future I see.
I am the beginning of a
different story in Afghanistan.
And when my granddaughter
explains how I withstood
the odds against me,
it will become legend.
Oh yes, perhaps it will

only be whispered at first
but just you watch.
It will grow into a roar.
An inexhaustible voice that will
usher in a brighter future.
Do you doubt me?
Do you underestimate my will?
Look into my eyes.
Do you see it now?
I am change.
Amina joins millions of
girls in Afghanistan
who have returned to school
there in spite of the dangers.
Thanks to a new generation
of leaders, men and women,
there are more girls in school
in Afghanistan now
than at any time in its history.
Because she refused to give up.
Just like Suma.
Wadley.
Like Senna.
And Azmera.
Like girls everywhere.
There are more stories.
There are more facts and figures.
But the simplest is the most important:
Educating girls works.
While making this film we met
hundreds of girls all over the world.
Our partners in this journey
were organizations
large and small, filled
with extraordinary people
who spend every day helping girls,
trying to fill the gaps between what
girls have and what girls need.
Each day they see what
you've just seen:
girls with fortitude and courage,
spirit and drive.
Girls succeeding against the odds.
Girls are rising.

But there are millions
who still need your help.
So what can you do?
As an individual you have enormous power.
Change can spread like wild fire
when minds are moved to make it so.
Right now help the next generation
of women grow up strong
and sure, aware of their rights.
You can make a difference by giving
just one girl renewed faith in herself.
And if you're able the girls of the
world need as much financial support
as you can give.
Yes, they need money.
Any donation however small
will change a young life.
This is for sure.
The 10x10 funds for girls' education
supports the organizations
that support girls,
including our partners
in making Girl rising.
By contributing to 10x10
you send a powerful message
that you strongly believe
that we all strongly believe
that girls are worth the investment.
Please, join us.
title by allynat23