

## Nine Weeks

Tonight is my last night in Kenya; my last night sleeping on a foam mattress underneath a mosquito net. As I look around the faded white walls my tiny room in the guesthouse and listen to distant hum of vehicles and men laughing with deep, happy voices, my mind wanders back along my path through Kenya. I said goodbye to all of my friends in Eldoret and Kimilili, aside from a few short phone calls tonight. I drove through the country for six hours today and tried to eat up as much of its beauty as I could. Green trees, green fields, rusty red dirt roads; women in bright clothing tending to children; men all dressed up but with nowhere to go. I've fallen in love. I love the people. I love the land. I love the language. I love the laughter. I have very little desire to return to the States, honestly. There's something magical about this place. There is so much life, so much culture; so much potential. I don't know how to explain how I feel because honestly, I'm not quite sure how I feel. Right now, I'm just going through the motions. I packed because I had to. I shook hands for the last time and stepped onto the bus because I had to. I'll wake up at 4:30 a.m. tomorrow morning because I have to. But I will return home and work harder than ever because I want to. I have been given opportunity. I have a great responsibility.

I have no idea what I will do with all the things I've seen and learned in the last nine weeks. I don't know all the ways my life will change--or not change. I don't really know why God gave me such a desire to come to Africa, and why He has allowed me to fall deeply in love with Kenya. I don't know if I'll come back. I don't like unknowns. They require trust, and not just trust on Sunday, but trust everyday, every hour. I'm afraid of squandering my experience. I want meaningful things to come out of it. It needs to bear fruit.

I have to believe that I came to Kenya for a reason. Every conversation, every experience, every friendship was ordained for a specific purpose in my life. I lived with the leader of a new political party for a month. I don't think it's coincidence that my brother and I have an insider understanding of the way politics work in Kenya, and we know the men who have the potential to change the fate of this country; people who can lift it out of poverty and into the developed world. But what is my role in this journey? I think I need to learn to listen to God. To really listen, and not just pretend. Because I have no idea what to do with all of this. I need Him to tell me the role He wants me to play in His story.

Nine weeks ago, I kissed my parents goodbye and got on a plane to another country where I didn't know the language, to live with people I had never met, and to try things I had never dreamed of. I boarded a bus and rode it for eight bumpy, miserable hours across a country that was strange and beautiful to me. Maybe I wasn't terrified, but I was nervous and uncomfortable. I had never been a minority before, and here I was the only white person on the bus. Now I don't remember what it's like to walk down the street without getting stared at. I'm not fluent, I don't know everything about Kenya and the culture, and the color of my skin hasn't changed. But nine weeks later, I can speak *kidogo* Kiswahili, I can confidently walk down the street alone, and I can comfortably

navigate my way with both strangers and friends. I have learned that people are people everywhere, and a kind smile, "*Habari yako?*" and a good sense of humor will take you a long way into a person's heart. I have seen poverty, neglect, alcoholism, ignorance. I have seen affluence, corruption, and greed. I have seen life, rhythm, the heartbeat of Africa. I have seen death. I have danced and rejoiced, and I have questioned and grieved. I have learned to be comfortable outside my comfort zone, to be bold, and to step out in faith. I have experienced God's protection and providence, and seen His attention to detail. I have lived and learned and thrived in Kenya, and it is my hope and prayer that I live every day a little differently because of it.