

TURNING POINT

BASED ON A TRUE STORY

FUNMI ANU BANKOLE

*"The Literary Queen
of Domestic Fiction"*

Reader's Digest

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BY

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Introduction

In life, we are empowered by the multitude of challenges that confront us. We are set in motion by the cause and consequences of actions we take, or refuse to. It is certainly not a question of whether we are good or great at what we do; rather, what counts is how we respond to life when we are knocked off-balance, even on a path that seems so straight. This book is no mere fictional narrative but, in fact, a biography of a kind focused on exploring the vulnerability of an ambitious woman. It digs into the pillars of life that can cripple one's ambitions and hopes of pushing further against the storms we all sometimes face.

For the author, the protagonist—Henna—mirrors the commonplace reality of typical Western women who, through grit and utmost dedication to self, family and more, are able to change their fortunes in life. The author goes further to assert that for every war conquered there is the emergence of another greater one; therefore, a warrior is never to be at peace with just winning a war. A true warrior will constantly build him or herself for a continuous life of victory. It is based on this principle that the reader is challenged to view victory as an experience that stems from inside out, and vice versa.

Yes, at some point we will fail. We will lose our families, our businesses, our homes, our status and even our mental and psychological stability. But these aren't enough as compared to us losing hope. Hope is an essential part of our lives and with it we are able to restructure our vulnerabilities as humans. It is with hope that we are able to see through ourselves and others. We become empowered by hope to understand that life is a response to what we feed it—that is, when we continue to feed our existence with negative thoughts and premonitions, we are bound for the greater evil that subtly creeps in on us and which might end up ruining our lives. By contrast, a life lived with maximum positivity and a good knowledge of self is a panacea back towards victory when we find ourselves at our lowest.

This book you are about to read has not too much of everything written inside it. Still, there is an essential for you to hold onto in every phase of your life. We all need a full awareness of when to take the most important turn in our lives. And if, like Henna, ours doesn't come until we have been drilled through life's bitter experiences then how best are we to respond? If we are able to take the turn when needed, what should

we continue to look out for thereafter? We will find out more as we journey through this story.

Chapter 1

At the Other End ...

The day had just begun when Henna's phone rang. The phone booth had always been her safe place but today seems different. The rashness of everything made her wish she had a better job than being a mobile therapist. "Yes, hello! This is Henna on the line. How may I help you?" The voice at the other end wasn't any firmer; it was full of brokenness and Henna felt her caller's pain through each phrase.

"Please, I need your help. I am very sad and my daughter has abandoned me. She thinks I'm not good enough but that's not true. I try my best to be a good mother. Motherhood isn't a perfect journey, you know. I failed several times and I never stopped coming back on track. My daughter is all I have. It is lonely here. Maybe, swallowing my antidepressants will give me peace? I am at war with myself and I don't know if I can ever win this."

"You can win this, madam, you can. Where are you presently? Henna asked.

"In my apartment, I've been in my bedroom all day," the caller responded.

"Okay, good. Can I have your address? And what's your name?" Henna enquired.

"I am Tamara and I don't think I want to give you my address," the caller replied.

"See, Tamara, you are a good mother and have done nothing wrong. Most times the need to explore makes young people rebel and they will do anything to achieve this. There is no need to feel guilty for her decision. She will be back when the fog is cleared. A mother's role is irreplaceable in a child's life, so be at peace with yourself."

These words streamed through Tamara's body. She found hope and companionship in them. It didn't take long before she gave Henna her vitals. Immediately, Henna called the intervention team to continue from where she stopped.

Still trying to gather up files for her monthly report, her phone rang. She began to switch the line to her colleague when she mistakenly picked up the call.

"Hello. This is Henna on the line. How may I be of help?"

“I am done with all these things. I just want to die. I am on London Bridge. I will jump and end it all,” the caller said, their voice full of fear.

“Please don’t jump! I need you to hang on a bit. There are a lot of people who need you in their life. I need you to stay on the line for me,” Henna begged the caller, whose name was Joel.

“But there isn’t a need for this. Everyone thinks I am a failure. I am constantly bullied in school due to my poor performance. No one believes in me. No one thinks I deserve the life I have, even my parents.”

“I understand you, Joel. They all seem to know it all but I must tell you this,” Henna answered, readjusting herself on her seat and pitching her voice a bit higher as she continued. “Joel, you are never a failure. I believe this even if you don’t. What others say about you is insignificant compared to what you say and believe about yourself. You are a product of your belief and not that of others.”

There was an overwhelming silence from both ends for some minutes before Henna charged up the conversation with further questions.

“Do your parents know about this? Do you know that even with a degree success isn’t guaranteed? Will you talk to your parents to speak with your teachers?” Henna probed. Still on the call with her bent neck holding the phone, she quickly sent a letter to the rescue unit to help save Joel.

Her phone never stopped ringing until it was lunch break. The custom of her workplace was to allow staff to go on a 15-minute break every three hours due to the nature of their jobs. For Henna, her break was better spent in the toilet where she could wallow in her reality as a struggling mother. She had been a superhero to all her callers and had provided solutions to their various challenges but here she was helpless and incapable of solving her own challenges. Tamara, who had called in earlier, was better than her. She had a daughter who spoke to her but just didn’t want to live with her. “Here I am, so lonely with no one ready to stick around me,” Henna whispered to herself. “I have four children and just one thinks I might not be guilty of shattering the family I built with everything I had.”

It’s been four years since she had joined the Speak Up Centre—a charity set up to provide counselling for troubled persons and, sometimes, offer practical self-help guidelines with partnership from other organisations and the government. Despite being a top-class therapist, Henna had resigned herself to a lonely life with no one to

counsel her or even reach out to her because she was seen as a competent professional. Many nights, she had tried to console herself with the truth that her work reaching out to others would, someday, lead her to personal healing. She snubbed the idea of reporting herself to her colleagues because it would mean she was exposing her position to queries concerning her suitability for her current role. Henna walked back into her booth exactly when the office siren blared. She had spent time wiping, washing and retouching her face so no one had an idea of the breakdown she'd had in the toilets.

One of her organisation's HR strategies was to make sure the staff were well prioritised. The manager, Mr Fred Hamilton, had reminded the entire staff two days before that there would be a work outing this weekend. For Henna, gestures like this didn't blend in but she had no choice, having missed two earlier invites. She feared masking up with a touch of makeup would easily make her vulnerable. She knew things weren't okay with her but pretence rules the world and that's exactly what she did.

While dressing up for the party, Henna let her eyes steal away the safety of her enclosed room. There was something about the room that made her stay sane—the bedding and the items on the French coffee-coloured wardrobe helped her hide her fears. Each moment she felt drained, she would immediately wrap herself underneath her duvet and there she would be filled with a kind of heat that served as her rebirth. But attending this party was like risking everything to save a face she never had. She's tried to talk to Dr Wallace a few times but all he gave her were medications which she took reluctantly. She knew too well that medications only become useful when one's diagnosis doesn't stem from a broken heart.

By 7:30pm, Mr Mike, her manager, had picked her up in a black limousine, in the company of her colleagues, who were all glammed up. A few meters from the venue, Henna watched her colleagues touch up their faces. She felt weird being among them. Whatever impression her friends had to make, she needed less to achieve that. She was a natural. They arrived at the venue and Henna was startled at how much happiness welled up in her. She danced and savoured every moment. At some point, she lost count on how sorrowful she had been back in her room. The blast of the music was all she needed to be free and boundless.