

## Grace, Life And The Tanzanite Man

Grace sews to make money to support her family. She lives on the peripheries of Arusha Town in Tanzania, East Africa. She makes curtains for a shop in the town centre, one of the expensive shops where all the ex-pats go to spend their money. Arusha is a small town with one main street and two small markets. Even though Arusha is sometimes called a city there are no traffic lights and only three traffic circles. It is not much of a city really.

Grace's husband works in the Tanzanite mines which is a grueling half day travel by bus towards Kilimanjaro. Grace's husband visits home at weekends if he has money if not Grace can wait a whole month and not even hear from her husband.

Working on the Tanzanite mines does not bring money into the home. To work in the narrow underground tunnels will pay only when the precious Tanzanite is found. Grace gets fed up with waiting for the Tanzanite to make an appearance. She tells her husband they have to eat and pay the rent for their two roomed house. Because there is no money she sews fabric into curtains and earns not quite enough to pay the rent and feed the family. Life has become very hard.

Grace has two daughters the first born aged four years and the youngest just four months old. Not so long ago Grace had completed a large order for curtains and decided to walk into town to get the wages for her work. She had a young relative, named Anna, living in her home to look after the two children and to help around the house.

Grace carried the newly made curtains on her head and as she left her home a young male neighbor was at the door. This young man was keen to marry Anna the house help. Grace chased him away as he would distract Anna from her work. Anyway Anna was too young and not very keen on this young man. However, he was persistent and though Grace just a little stubborn as he was just not able to accept being rejected.

I met Grace as she walked into town to sell her nice curtains; we had a chat and I was invited for lunch. It had been some time since I had visited Grace's home and decided I would enjoy passing an hour and catching up on all the news about her family.

The curtains were delivered and wages collected. We returned home with a detour through the busy central market to buy cooking oil and some spinach for lunch. As we approached her home we could see black smoke billowing up above the few stunted thorn trees that surrounded the small cluster of houses where Grace lived. Shouts and screams were heard. Grace dropped her shopping and ran towards the smoke.

As we arrived most of the drama of the fire was over. Mostly Women were screaming and wailing, the fire that had begun in Grace's house had spread to four neighboring houses; they were all burnt down to the sandy soil.

Later we were to learn after Grace had left for town the young man seeking to marry Anna the house help, returned to see Anna. He begged Anna to reconsider accepting him as a husband. Anna refused and refused despite the pleading and threats. The young man then lunged across the room and seized a plastic bottle full of kerosene that was used as fuel for the Chinese stove. He poured the kerosene over himself.

Anna screamed and ran for the door. The young man grabbed her and threw her against the far wall away from the door. The young man lit a match and cried and begged Anna to reconsider. All Anna could do was to cry and stubbornly refuse to answer. A neighbor, the mother of the young man, started to bang at the door as she was concerned about all the noise.

The young man dropped the match and the kerosene ignited. The house was ablaze in seconds. Neighbors rushed to the scene and eventually broke down the door. Anna, the young man and the two children were dragged out into the open they had sustained major burns. A car was found and the injured rushed to hospital.

That night at 11 pm the young man died in hospital. Despite round the clock care, in our small but efficient local hospital, Anna died in great pain three days after the fire. The two children also suffered, Rebecca the eldest started to recover but died after a two weeks. Remarkably the four month old baby survived.

The last time I spoke with Grace she was still finding it hard to restart her life. For the poor such as Grace there are no banks or insurance, if she had saved any money it had burnt with the house. Everything she had bought with money she managed to glean from her work was lost along with the smoke in the fire.

The last time I spoke with Grace she said she was thinking of leaving Arusha with her husband and baby to live with her Sister in Dar es Salaam. She

said it is warmer in Dar, life is a little easier and her sister has money to help with the continuing medical bills for the baby.

A short while latter the husband of Grace, he is named Muna, he came to visit me. I like Muna he is a nice man with a big smile. However, today he wasn't smiling. Grace had kicked him out. Two days latter she had packed up the little she now owned got on a bus with her baby and returned to Dar es Salaam. She was tired of poverty, tired of waiting for the Tanzanite to appear and wanted to get a teaching job in Dar es Salaam and start life over again. There was no room for Muna now.

I wish there were a happier end to this tale of great sorrow, unfortunately there is not. Grace left Muna and Arusha permanently. As far as I know the baby is well and Grace is working and has a new house in Dar es Salaam. Muna, he disappeared and no one is quite sure where he is. I believe he still looks for tanzanite and if he ever finds the tanzanite, I believe with money it earns he will go try to get his family back.

### About the Author

This article was written by a group called Tunaweza. They support and set up Community Initiatives in East Africa. <http://www.tunaweza.com> - for information on Tanzania safaris and tourist information <http://www.betheladventure.co.uk> this company supports responsible tourism.

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