Sissy Says...



A Lady's Guide to Life

GIFTY E.

A Letter from Sissy

Dear Sis,

You don't need to have your life figured out to be here. You don't need the impressive career, the beautiful apartment, the perfect relationship or the bank account that makes everybody wonder what you do for a living. Come as you are.

Perhaps everything looks fine from the outside, but something inside you feels unsettled. Perhaps you are starting again after a disappointment. Or maybe you are simply curious about what your life could look like if other people's opinions stopped making so many of your decisions.

I wrote the original version of this book while I was learning to put myself back together, to stop shrinking and doubting myself. That journey inspired Sissy. Think of her as the sister who will listen to you describe the same situation for the fifth time, pour you something nice to drink and eventually ask the question you've been avoiding.

We will talk about healing, love, confidence and money. Some pages may make you laugh; others may send you looking for your journal. Read at your own pace. Question the advice, adapt the exercises and keep what is useful to you. You do not have to complete them in order to deserve a good life.

And when it comes to money? Oh, darling. We are definitely going to have that conversation.

Throughout these pages you will meet Esi, Ama and Nadia. They are fictional women whose situations illustrate the choices we discuss. Their lives are not accounts of my own experiences.

With love,

Sissy

PART ONE

Healing

Sissy says: Stop rushing it.

CHAPTER 01

The Woman Behind the Smile

By nine on Sunday evening, everybody has been accounted for. Your mother has her prescription, your friend is ready for her interview and your partner has had a chance to talk about his difficult day. You finally sit down. Nobody needs anything. Why, then, do you feel as though you are still on duty?

If that evening sounds familiar, think back to when being needed first began to feel like a measure of your worth.

When strength becomes a full-time job

Strength is a beautiful quality. The trouble begins when it becomes the only version of yourself you feel permitted to present. You apologise when you cry, minimise your disappointments because somebody else has it worse and volunteer before checking whether you have the energy.

Maybe you were the eldest daughter who was expected to be responsible. Maybe you learned that being helpful earned approval while having needs created inconvenience. Those lessons may have helped you navigate childhood; they do not have to govern every adult decision.

Take the family celebration you agree to organise during an already demanding week at work. You spend your evenings arranging food and transport, then feel angry when nobody offers to help. That anger is worth listening to. You may enjoy contributing but need a fairer division of the work, or you may need to decline this particular responsibility. The question is what you can reasonably offer, not whether you are a good daughter.

Who are you when nobody needs you?

Caring for people can be deeply meaningful. But your identity deserves to extend beyond the services you provide. What interests you? What would you do with an afternoon that belonged entirely to you? Which ambitions have you quietly abandoned?

Some women are excellent at giving and remarkably uncomfortable with receiving. If someone trustworthy offers appropriate help, try accepting it without immediately inventing a reason to refuse. When somebody compliments your dress, you don't need to explain how little it cost. Just say thank you. Enjoy being appreciated for a moment.

Rest is not a reward for finishing every task. Some tasks will still be there tomorrow. If a whole afternoon is impossible, could someone take over for twenty minutes? A walk around the block counts. Sis, please do not turn rest into another assignment.

Persistent exhaustion or low mood can have many causes, including sleep difficulties, anaemia, medication effects and mental health conditions. If these difficulties interfere with daily life, seek appropriate professional support rather than assuming you must solve them through reflection alone.

The invisible list

Imagine a Saturday morning in a household where everybody is technically helping. One person washes the dishes after being asked. Another collects the groceries after receiving a list. The woman who made the list, checked the cupboard, remembered the visitor's dietary restrictions and worked out when the shops close has also done a job. It is simply a job that nobody saw her doing.

This kind of responsibility can be difficult to explain because each individual task looks small. What exhausts her is the continuity of it. Even when she sits down, she is anticipating the next need. If she asks for help and still has to supervise every detail, the work has not entirely left her hands.

If you recognise this arrangement, start by distinguishing a task from ownership of a task. Asking someone to prepare dinner may mean agreeing that they will decide what to cook, check the ingredients and clean up afterwards. You do not have to become the manager of their contribution. Of course, children and people who require assistance may need guidance. The point is to examine which capable adults can assume more responsibility.

There is also the invisible work of keeping everybody comfortable. At a meeting, you notice the tension and make a joke. At home, you choose not to mention a disappointment because you know the evening will become unpleasant. In a friendship, you keep asking questions because silence would reveal that the other person rarely asks about you. These are choices you may make out of kindness, habit or necessity. You are allowed to reconsider them.

The Sunday evening audit

Meet Esi. She works in a busy office and lives with her younger sister. On Sunday evening she opens her calendar and realises that the only activity she chose for herself last week was buying lunch on Thursday. Even that lunch was eaten while answering messages. She has been telling herself that the problem is poor time management. But when she writes down the commitments, she sees something different: she has promised thirty hours of her evenings to people who have never actually asked whether she has thirty hours available.

She begins with a small experiment. For one week she writes down the time each favour takes, including travel, preparation and the time spent thinking about it. She does not cancel anything yet. At the end of the week she has information rather than an accusation. Her sister can take responsibility for groceries on Wednesdays. The committee can rotate its minute-taking. A friend can arrange her own transport. None of these changes is dramatic, but together they return an evening to Esi.

Try the same experiment with a sheet of paper. Put commitments in three columns: mine, shared and optional. Do not classify something as optional merely because you dislike it; rent, care and work obligations can have

real consequences. Instead, look for commitments whose timing, frequency or ownership can change. Pick one and make a specific request. If the answer is no, consider a different arrangement rather than assuming the entire experiment has failed.

And when you finally get that evening back, please don't immediately fill it with a new project. You are allowed to discover what an unremarkable Tuesday feels like when you are not rushing.

Esi's Tuesday

Esi's first free Tuesday was not particularly peaceful. She had arranged for her sister to buy the groceries and told the committee that somebody else would have to prepare the minutes. At six o'clock she was home, holding her phone, wondering whether she ought to check that everything was going according to plan.

Her sister arrived with the wrong brand of rice. Esi nearly launched into a lecture about the price difference, then noticed that dinner was perfectly possible with the rice they had. She thanked her sister and put the bag away. There was a small lesson in that kitchen: delegating a responsibility sometimes requires tolerating a different way of doing it. If a choice is safe, affordable and adequate, it need not be identical to yours.

Later that evening, Esi opened a novel she had bought months earlier. She read four pages before reaching for her phone. Nobody had asked her for anything. She was simply accustomed to being available. She put the phone on the other side of the room and read another chapter.

A month later, not every Tuesday belonged to her. There were deadlines and genuine emergencies. But she no longer regarded a free evening as a mistake in the schedule. She had discovered that rest could coexist with a life of responsibility.

Before asking for help, agree on what matters and leave the smaller choices to the person taking responsibility. Esi and her sister later agreed to review their division of groceries and utilities after a fortnight. Not every household can divide work equally; age, illness and disability matter. Aim for fairness, not identical contributions.

The chair at the table

At a family lunch, Esi notices that her aunt has eaten standing up. She has been bringing plates from the kitchen, finding extra chairs and asking everybody whether they have enough stew. When Esi offers to take over, her aunt laughs. She says she is used to it. Esi wonders how often a woman says those words when what she means is that nobody has made another arrangement.

There is a difference between a tradition you cherish and an arrangement you have never been invited to question. You may enjoy preparing food for the people you love. You may also want to sit down while it is still hot. These desires are not incompatible. Next time, ask who will serve, who will clear and who will wash up before the guests arrive. Let the conversation happen before the kitchen becomes a small emergency department.

Look beyond your own household, too. A friend who has recently become a caregiver may appreciate a specific offer rather than another message telling her to stay strong. Offer to collect a prescription, bring dinner or sit with her relative if appropriate. Ask what would actually help. We can create the kind of support we wish somebody had offered us, without appointing ourselves responsible for every woman we know.

The price of being available

Esi's colleague asks whether she can cover a Saturday shift. She could, technically. Her calendar is empty. But she had planned to visit the seamstress, cook something she likes and spend the evening with her sister. None of those things appears particularly urgent when placed beside a colleague's request. That is precisely why she has been losing her Saturdays.

She decides to offer a different solution: she can exchange a weekday shift next month, but this Saturday is unavailable. The colleague finds somebody else. There is no dramatic falling-out. Esi spends the afternoon choosing fabric and discovers that the world has continued operating without her assistance.

Sometimes a request really is urgent and you may choose to help. You can choose to interrupt your plans without treating every plan of your own as less important than somebody else's. Try putting one personal appointment in your calendar this week. Give it the same consideration you would give a meeting with another person. You can move it when circumstances demand, but do not erase it simply because nobody else is expecting you.

A moment with yourself

Write down three responsibilities you currently carry. Beside each, identify whether it is essential, shared or something you could decline. Ask one person for a specific form of help this week. Notice what happens when you make the request without apologising for having a need.

Once you have made a little room for yourself, you may notice feelings that busyness used to conceal. The next chapter is about listening to them.

Sissy says: Be dependable, sis. Just remember to include yourself among the people you look after.

Your story continues.

24 chapters. Four themes. A 30-day challenge.

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Bloom unapologetically.