



Temptation's

Concerto

"It's not me. It's you."

Anisha Namutowe

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TEMPTATION'S CONCERTO

BY

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CHAPTER ONE

Happiness is a state of mind, and sometimes a lucky few experience it as a state of reality. Mr and Mrs Ng'andu were a picture perfect couple, and each truly believed theirs was a marriage destined by the gods. And they were not disillusioned. Arthur and Katrina Ng'andu had been together for eleven years, married nine of those years. As with everything on the face of the earth, perfection is an illusion. The Ng'andu's had their fair share of ups and downs, but on most days, life was worth living.

Arthur considered himself the luckiest man alive when the then 29-year-old Katrina agreed to be his bride. She was 13 years his junior. Arthur had just survived an emotionally and financially draining divorce that left him a single father to an eighteen-year-old son, Andre. Despite his overwhelming love for the woman that had helped take him out of his depression, Arthur had worried that perhaps his new bride might have challenges being a step-mother to a fully grown teenage boy. His worries were confirmed when Andre showed up at the wedding cut out drunk and hailing insults at his new mother.

That was the very first time Katrina was meeting the teenager.

Andre had gone to the US as a sophomore four years before his parents divorced to get away from their constant bickering. His father had been expecting him back home after graduating high school but the rebellious teen had refused to come back home when he heard of his parent's divorce: only to appear two years later when his father threatened to remove him from his will if he did not show up at the wedding.

A sobbing Katrina had run out of the chapel in her white wedding gown, only to reappear thirty minutes later after Arthur had convinced her he would take care of the problem once and for all.

“Don’t even think for a second that you can replace my mother,” Andre had warned Katrina.

“Why would I want to be a mother to a disrespectful boy like you?” She retorted. “Stay in your lane and I’ll stay in mine if you want to have peace in my house.”

“This is my dad’s house!”

“Are you sure about that little boy?”

“Stop calling me little boy you witch! Bloody home wrecker.”

“What did you just call me?”

“You heard me.”

Andre turned to walk away but Katrina grabbed him by the shoulder and forced him to face her. “You need to get something straight right now,” she said, looking the boy squarely in the eye. “I am not going to sugarcoat anything for you because you think you’re such a big boy and you deserve an opinion about what the adults do so hear this; I was not there when your parents decided they couldn’t stand each other anymore. I found your father divorced, alone and miserable. I fell in-love with his brokenness and he fell in-love with me. We got married. Unfortunately, being his wife means I have to tolerate your insolent behavior but do not doubt for a second that I have the power to influence your dad into sending you to military school or some refugee camp closer to the Congo boarder where you will serve as a volunteer for the UN, without any privileges.”

Andre scoffed. “You think my father would do that to his only son?”

“Do I look barren to you?” Katrina asked, looking at her stomach for effect.

That look alone was enough to drive the rest of the point home in the mind of the teenager. Andre huffed and brushed past her to get out of the house for some fresh air.

That was nine years ago.

"I proposed to Jenna and she said yes," Andre announced to his parents during dinner.

Katrina put down her glass of water and glared at the 29-year-old. The look he returned was one daring her to say something out of line.

"Oh wow, that's wonderful son! I am very proud of you," his father said. "I like Jenna. She's got spunk, but she has a golden soul too. She's good for you."

"What do you mean she's good for me?" Andre challenged his father.

Arthur didn't look up from the plate of rice and beef stew he was devouring with impunity. "I think we both know what I mean," he laughed.

"Dad, that was centuries ago. I am a grown man now."

His father finally stopped eating and looked at him. "You're right," he said. "Forgive your old man. You have really impressed me with what you've achieved for yourself over the years. It's a far cry from that impudent little fella you were when you returned from the States. I am very proud of you."

"Can we not talk about the past, please?" Andre was looking at his step-mother as he made the plea, guilt written all over his face.

"You should thank your mother here for-"

"Honey?" Katrina threw her husband a disapproving look. "Didn't you hear him say we shouldn't discuss the past?"

"Look at the two of you," Arthur said, looking proudly at his wife and son. "I still get shocked seeing the two of you agree on something given the thunderous past you share. We've come a long way as a family. I am very proud of us!" He grabbed the bottle of wine, poured into all their glasses, and picking up his he added, "Cheers to more beautiful memories in the future!"

Katrina and Andre stared at each other first before reluctantly picking up their glasses and joining Arthur in the toast.

“I can hear someone at the gate,” Katrina excused herself. “I think mum has finally brought back the kids.”

“After we’re done eating huh?” Arthur remarked behind her.

Katrina kept going without looking back. When five minutes went by and there was no sound from outside, Arthur got up to check on his dear wife. “I hope my babies haven’t been kidnapped by aliens,” he said as he got up from the table.

Andre stood up too. “They wouldn’t dare attempt anything that crazy with Katrina,” he said, joining his father in the walk outside.

“I thought by now you would be calling her something else you know,” Arthur said, his tone laced with disappointment.

“What would you have me call her, mum? Or mother? You know very well how mum would feel about that. Besides, Katrina hates me calling her mum.” Andre said.

They spotted Katrina sitting in the garden overlooking the front yard. She was so lost in her thoughts that she did not hear the two join her at the table.

“A penny for your thoughts?” Arthur asked, flashing a K100 note in front of her.

A flustered Katrina took the note and placed it in front of Andre. “Keep that, you might need it for your wedding preps.” She said sarcastically.

Andre stared at the note for what felt like forever as a pregnant silence fell over them. Then he laughed, a soft laugh that was somewhere between a grunt and a chuckle. He slowly picked up the note and studied it inch by inch, side to side.

“Thanks mum, am gonna take this as a blessing from you,” Andre said, stressing the word mum deliberately. He finally looked up to give his step-mother a cheeky look. He neatly folded the bill and put it in his breast pocket. Once the money was safely

tucked inside, he proudly patted the pocket, and threw another smug look at Katrina, this time around, adding a wink.

“What’s taking *basebele* so long to bring my kids? Has she kidnapped them?” Arthur joked.

“I called her, she said Jason had napped and she didn’t want to wake him up. But he’s up now and she’s getting ready to bring them back.”

“I was hoping to see them before I join the boys for one or two, you know,” Arthur said.

“You can just go,” she said. “You know mum and her timing. Just go now so you can come back early. You can kiss them goodnight when you come back.”

“You know I love you right?” Arthur said, getting up and planting a kiss on her forehead.

“I’m just gonna change into something relaxing and then head out. Are you still around son?”

“Yes, I’ll say hi to the kids and then leave. There’s also something I want to talk about with Katrina.”

“Pass my regards to Jenna when you see her,” Arthur shouted to them as he walked back towards the house. “Tell her I’ll give her a call later to congratulate her!”

“I will!” Andre shouted back, and to Katrina, “you know where he’s going right?” he asked.

“I am not in the mood to get into this with you tonight,” Katrina said.

“He is going to my mother’s place,” he said.

“I told you I don’t wanna hear it!” Katrina snapped. She got up but Andre grabbed her hand.

“Sit down,” he said. “Please,” he added when she didn’t seem interested. “We need to talk.

“I also don’t want to talk about whatever you wanna talk about,” she said, sitting back down.

“It’s not like I didn’t talk to you about Jenna. Don’t take out your frustrations with my father on me.”

Katrina glared at him. “The two of you are exactly the same, you know that?”

This time it was his turn to get up. “I’m not gonna sit here and listen to you insult me.”

“Or what Andre? What are you going to do?” Katrina was standing in front of him, blocking his way.

“Let me go,” he said. “I’m not gonna get into this with you. We both know very well how this is gonna end.”

After a moment’s hesitation, the two of them glaring at each other, Katrina finally stepped away from him. “Go,” she said, choking back tears. “Go.”

Andre grabbed his car keys from the table and left. He had not walked far when his father appeared from the house, freshly dressed in denim from top to bottom. His youthful look despite his age was the reason no one could guess the actual age gap between him and his wife. Shaking his head, he looked back at his step mother, surreptitiously wiping away her tears as she faked a smile for her husband’s sake. She made no move to get closer and bid him goodbye. Instead, she stood erect where she was, her hands now crossed over her chest, watching every move her husband made as if she had to put it down in writing somewhere later.

“I’ll see you in a bit honey!” Arthur waved at his wife as he got into his vehicle.

Katrina only nodded her in response. The moment her husband had driven out, she walked straight towards the house without paying heed to Andre who had been watching her closely the while time she was watching her husband. She got inside and banged the door shut behind her. The moment she was in the safety of her bedroom, she broke down in tears.

Three minutes into her sobbing, Katrina heard the living room door open. She quickly wiped away her tears, sobered herself up and went to check at the door, expecting to see her mother with the kids. But there was no one there. She was about to look through the window when she felt a hand on her shoulder. She turned around to find Andre.

“What are you still doing here?” She asked.

“Because I wanted to do this.... ” Andrew put his arm around her waist, pulled her closer to him and started kissing her passionately.

CHAPTER TWO

Lying in bed after a round of forbidden pleasure, Arthur laid his head back on the pillow as Yvonne made herself comfortable resting hers on his chest.

"I need to get going now so don't get too comfortable," Arthur said, playfully stroking her hair.

Yvonne said something under her breath and moved away from him in protest. Arthur laughed and followed her, wrapping his arms around her and pulling her even closer to him.

"I'm sorry things have to be like this," he said. "But we do what we can with what we have, right?"

"Because it's my fault right?" She said, sitting up.

Arthur sat up too. "I never said that, you did," he said.

"You don't have to say it for me to hear it. This, you coming for a few hours and then going back to her. You are my husband too, but why does she get to be called your wife while I hide in the dark like a sinner?"

"Because she is my legal wife Yvonne. You are my ex-wife."

"You don't need to remind me, I know."

"You're the one who started this."

"How long do I have to pay for a mistake I made twelve years ago?" Yvonne asked. "I was a fool, angry, and lonely. I thought I was making you pay for neglecting me, but this? I honestly can't take this anymore."

"What are you trying to say?"

"You need to decide which family you want to keep Bashi Andre."

“Are you going back on your word now?” Arthur asked.

“That was many years ago,” she answered. “I was desperate and would have done and said anything to have you back in my life. However, reality is different. I can’t take this arrangement anymore. You love me, otherwise you wouldn’t have given me a chance. And if you loved her, we wouldn’t be here right now.”

“I love her Yvonne,” he said. “I know it’s hard for you to imagine that given the position you hold in my life, but Katrina means the world to me. She has never betrayed me. From the beginning she’s been there for me. She rescued me from that dark place you left me in when you ran off with that fool. She trusts me. She’s the mother of my children and she-“

“Enough!” Yvonne got off the bed.

“I’m sorry,” Arthur went to her and tried to touch her but she moved away. “I think even you know that what you’re asking me is very unfair. I asked you, eleven years ago, are you sure you’ll be okay with being the other woman for the rest of your life? You said you didn’t care as long as we were together. Do you think I would have agreed to this if it required me betraying the woman that has done so much for me? I have never made any promises to you Yvonne, never. If you tell me right now that you want me gone forever, I’ll leave. I will not be the reason for your unhappiness. All along I thought we were both content with our arrangement.”

“It’s an arrangement that only works for you, not me!” She cried.

“How does it work for me only? You are the one that proposed this same arrangement.”

“I told you, I was desperate!”

“And is that my fault?” He asked. “I have never broken any promise I made to you. You’re the one that seems good at that. You’re the one that demanded for a divorce because you couldn’t wait to start a brand new life with your lover. I watched you build

that new life using my hard earned money, only for you to be betrayed the same way you did to me when your very attentive lover ran off with every penny you had to your name. You're the one that came to me and begged for a second chance."

"I never forced you to take me back," she retorted. "You could have turned me away but you didn't. Don't put all of this on me. You wanted the best of both worlds; me and that wife of yours. You're the one getting the better deal here while I keep lonely nights hoping and praying that I have done enough to make up for my mistakes so we can go back to how we were before Katrina came into our lives."

Katrina didn't come into our lives honey; you came into our lives. Arthur thought.

However, he couldn't say that to her knowing how much it would break her. She was the reason he had found himself leading a double life. She had been the love of his life for so many years he had even stopped counting. He had known no other woman when she was in his life. He had begged for her understanding and patience while he tried to build an empire for them but her demand for his constant show of affection and attention had them fighting almost every day of the last five years of their twenty-year-old marriage.

Arthur and Yvonne had married young. The pressure of being high school sweethearts desperate to secure each other's commitment from the temptations and pressure that came with college life saw the two tying the knot when Arthur was only 20, and Yvonne 18. The young lovers had been naive enough to think their love for each other was enough to shield them from the challenges and responsibilities that came with being married at such a young age.

Having grown up together, the two were more than aware of each other's strengths and weaknesses. Yvonne's weakness was the desire to live as comfortable a life as she did when she was in her parent's home. Being an only child, she was spoiled in both her material and affection needs. Arthur's weakness on the other hand

developed out of his desire to become the sort of man deserving of a woman like Yvonne. He had neither the privileges nor the means of supporting or meeting the needs of a woman that had had the world at her feet in her parent's home.

Arthur was only a third year student when they got married, with no job or income to support his new family. His fear of disappointing his new bride and possibly losing her drove him to working like a maniac in order to give her the sort of life he thought she deserved. And Yvonne was not one to shy away from highlighting the stark differences in her new life to the life in her parent's home. Where most women would have been content and proud to build a whole new life from the ground with their husbands, Yvonne expected to resume the life she led in her parent's home when she moved into the one-bedroom apartment Arthur was renting for them during the first few years of marriage.

"How about I just ask my parents for money?" Yvonne would ask her husband every time he delayed to buy her the shoes or dress she desired, or when he delayed to pay rent for the month.

"I don't need your parent's money Yvonne," Arthur would always say, his pride silently bruised by his inability to provide for his family.

The arrival of Andre in their lives made things even harder, with Yvonne choosing to stay at her parent's home for the duration of the pregnancy, all the way into Andre's second birthday.

"I need to eat healthily, and take care of my baby," Yvonne would say. "What if my baby gets sick in that filthy shack and we have to spend millions at the hospital? We don't have that kind of money. We would still need to borrow from my parents, so what's the difference really? Just let me stay here a little longer. You know my parents don't mind us living with them. You could join me too but-"

Arthur could not stomach any more of her whining and inconsideration and he would end the call abruptly. What he considered a home was a shack to her. She had no

idea how proud of himself he felt every time he entered that little space and found her waiting for him. He would have forsaken the whole world to keep her right there with him, but unfortunately, to keep her there, he needed to bring the world with him.

Since then, Arthur vowed to work extra harder and become rich enough to keep Yvonne from staying at her parents forever. And succeed he did. He took a gamble and invested all of his little savings in a construction business with his two friends that saw them reaping profits four years later. Arthur watched his wife turn from being a grumpy and nagging wife to a very happy woman. The light in her eyes came back and shone brighter than ever before. She more than loved the new life her husband was able to provide for her.

No sooner had the Ng'andu's grown comfortable in their new found comfort than the realization of a whole new obstacle presented itself before Arthur; fear to lose the little he had achieved after so many years of hard work. Thus, from working hard to succeed, Arthur found himself working even harder to secure and keep that success. He could not imagine living any other kind of life. Unfortunately, as is with most good things, there's always a price one has to pay to achieve and keep that good thing. Arthur's sacrifice was his family. Each passing day saw him spending less and less time with his wife and son. And each passing day Yvonne grew lonelier and her feelings of neglect multiplied.

Being a woman accustomed to always getting her way, Yvonne could not understand why her husband insisted on drowning himself in work when they were already living such a comfortable life. It was impossible for someone that only saw and enjoyed the fruits of hard labor to imagine just what it took for one to continue enjoying such a life. Arthur too looked forward to a time when he would rest and enjoy the fruits of his hard labor. Unfortunately, his resolve was no match for the demons that a man whose feet had been dipped in poverty for far too long has to face every time he looked in the mirror, constantly tempting and frightening him with images of a past he had taken no part in creating.

Soon enough, the devil came to collect his dues.

“I could have given you the world if you asked Yvonne,” Arthur said to his ex-wife. She still had her back to him. “All I needed from you was a little patience and understanding, but instead, you threw yourself in the arms of another man while I bled to the bone trying to give you the life you desired so much. It is not my fault that we are here today. You are not the only one making sacrifices. I have sacrificed my new family just so I keep my old family.”

It was not an easy decision for him to make. Having Yvonne back in his life felt like he was finally getting the reward he deserved for all the hard work he had put in. Losing her had meant it had all been in vain. Granted, Katrina was there, but she had not been there when it all began. Now that Yvonne's parents were no longer rich, having lost their status due to some bad investments by his former father-in-law, now he was the only one Yvonne could run to for shelter.

Arthur was silently proud of the fact that Yvonne was now willing to serve at his feet just to be in his life. He had sacrificed so much to earn her love, only for her to betray him in the end. But here she was again, begging for his love and time as if her life depended on it. His was a twisted feeling of love and triumph reconciled. That poor little boy had finally earned the love of the princess. And now the princess could not imagine herself with anyone else by her side. No matter how often he reminded himself of his selfishness and foolishness, Arthur felt like completely letting go of Yvonne would erase the past that had built him into the man he now was. Looking at her reminded him of just how far he had come. And it was a good feeling, an almost impossible one to let go.

“And yet you still get to go back to her and act as if everything is great, isn’t it?” Yvonne remarked. “And what about me? I have no other man to keep me company while you’re out there in the arms of another woman.”

“I have never stopped you from seeing other people,” he said.

Yvonne scoffed. “I know you Arthur Ng’andu, you would stop seeing me the moment you hear I am seeing someone else.”

And that was not a reality Yvonne was prepared to face.

Arthur was the only man she had ever met willing to give her the kind of life she desired. Even though she no longer had him to herself, she still had at her disposal the lavish life he had exposed her to when they were married. The only thing missing in that life was Arthur’s constant presence in it.

Arthur had finally managed to find that balance between work and family, and unfortunately, it wasn’t her family he was spending that precious time with. May times Yvonne had found herself wondering what would have happened had she been just a little more patient twelve years ago. Would there be a Katrina in their lives? Would there be those three brats that had her man’s heart wrapped around their fingers?

Just what would it take for her to turn back the hands of time?

CHAPTER THREE

Before the two could get burned by their raving passion, there was a hoot at the gate that unglued their bodies faster than the speed of light.

"Should be mum bringing the kids," Katrina said, fixing her smeared lipstick by the huge mirror covering one of the living room walls.

It took only thirty seconds for Andre to completely recover from panic. He sat down, turned on the tele and settled for the first SuperSport channel that caught his attention. He looked right at home while Katrina worked on steadying her breath by the door before heading out. Her nervousness brought a smile to Andre's face. He ran his thumb over his lower lip before dipping it in his mouth to taste Katrina's lipstick and scent still lingering there.

As if she sensed him, Katrina looked back and found Andre still licking his finger. "You're enjoying this aren't you?"

In response, Andre walked over to her and tried to kiss her again but Katrina pulled her head away.

"You smell like heaven," he said, putting his arms around her torso and pulling her in against his body. He quickly placed a kiss on her neck before she could protest and went back to sit as if nothing had happened.

Katrina was smiling at his retreating figure.

"Am gonna spend the whole night trying to quench this fire you've started in me, alone. So you better show up at my doorstep tomorrow morning after dropping off the kids at school and day care," Andre said.

"And work?" Katrina laughed.

"We are our own bosses," he said. "We can report for work whenever we feel like."

Katrina wanted to ask him about his engagement but she figured it was not the right time to get into that kind of conversation.

“She’s done parking,” Katrina said, looking out the window. “You better behave yourself!” She said as she rushed out.

“Not with you around Trina,” Andre said to himself, a mischievous look on his face as he adjusted his pair of trousers to hide evidence of their sordid affair.

Katrina was ambushed by two very loud and excited fellas right outside the door; 7-year-old Kumbi, and 4-year-old Sarah. Katrina wrapped her arms around them, planted kisses all over their faces before walking to her mother to help her with the two-year-old Jason that had obviously gone back to sleep during the drive home. The other two kids ran into the house, expecting to see their big brother because they had seen his vehicle parked outside.

Andre hid in a corner and watched as the two rascals searched for him. He suddenly jumped in front of them and sent them running in all directions, wailing at the top of their voices. Laughing, he walked over to the fridge, took out a jar of lemonade and poured into two cups he found already placed on the dining table. As if summoned by a remote control, Kumbi and Sarah reappeared, all sobered up and picked up the cups for themselves.

“Thank you Andre,” they chorused as they joined him at the table.

“So, tell me about your day,” Andre said. “What did you do at grandma’s today?”

“We swam in the pool with Aunt Felistas, built a castle all the way to the top, and Jason cried, pooped, ate, and slept.” The seven-year-old boy said.

“We also had marshmallows,” Sarah whispered into Andre’s ear. “But grandma said we should keep it a secret from mum because she will kill her for giving us sweets.”

They all laughed.

“How are you Andre?” Katrina's mother Vivienne greeted her step-grandson as she and Katrina made their way through the dining room.

“Doing great grandma. How are you?” Andre replied.

“Alive and kicking my child,” the woman replied enthusiastically.

Once the women were in Jason's room, Katrina gently laid him down while her mother packed the things she had been carrying back into their spaces. Once she was sure her son was comfortable, Katrina sat down on the rocking chair next to his bed and watched him sleep soundly, a smile playing on her face. Her mother sat down on the spare bed on the other side of the room and watched her daughter, shaking her head.

Katrina felt her mother's gaze and looked up, “what?” she asked, moving from the chair to sit next to her on the bed.

“How can you smile like that when your husband is out there fueling another woman?” Vivienne asked.

“You've started,” Katrina said.

“What started? I haven't even said anything yet.”

“What exactly do you want from me mother?” Katrina asked.

“I want you to fight and protect what's yours,” she said.

“What haven't I done to ensure that my husband is happy, that I keep a good, happy, and clean home, and that my children are well taken care of and healthy? What more do you want me to do, confront the other woman and ask her to stay away from my husband when I know he enjoys taking himself there with his own two legs and four wheels? What sort of woman will that make me?”

“You know very well that's not what I meant,” Vivienne said.

"You are reason why am still in this marriage and playing happy family mum, don't forget that." Katrina said.

"You are not the only wife in the world doing that so don't act like you're a victim."

"I agree with you on that one," Katrina said. "Rather than a victim, I am a fool. Sometimes I have regrets."

"You wanted to leave your husband just after two years of your marriage Trina," Vivienne said. "Marriage is not always a bed of roses. You don't give up the first moment you experience an obstacle."

"But what's the point of staying married to a man who's in-love with another woman? Do you know that he still keeps her photo in his wallet to this day? It's right there behind my photo. He thinks am a fool and I don't know, but every single day I find myself checking his wallet just to check if he has finally gotten over her. I keep hoping that maybe today is my lucky day...that maybe I am finally the one."

"She is his first wife, and they have a child together. Maybe that's why he keeps her pictures."

"You always have an excuse for him don't you?"

"I just don't want you to give up on your marriage simply because your pride is hurt. Marriage is more than that. You have known about your husband's affair for years but you've never said anything to him. It's dangerous to keep such emotions to yourself. One day you will burst and do something really crazy."

"That ship already sailed," Katrina said.

Vivienne's eyes lit up in horror. "What do you mean?" She asked.

Katrina laughed. "I'm just joking," she said. "I just don't see any point talking about something I already fully understand. You discuss things to gain understanding

of a situation and reach some form of conclusion or compromise. I already understand that my husband has never gotten over his ex-wife, that he is willingly cheating on me, and that he has absolutely no plans of righting his wrongs. So tell me, what exactly should we talk about?"

"Maybe he keeps doing it because he thinks he's getting away with it," Vivienne said. "If he knew you knew, he would have stopped ages ago."

"He would have stopped and started a new one I don't know about," Katrina said. "That's the nature of cheating men. A responsible one will stop not because he is afraid of getting caught, but because he knows the price he would have to pay would be greater than the pleasure he derives from his escapades. Unfortunately, it appears my husband does not mind paying that price."

"You need to stop treating your husband and your marriage as if they were science projects. Not everything can be explained and dealt with logically."

"Why are we even having this conversation?"

"Because you never listen."

"Didn't I listen when you commanded me to stay in this marriage if not for my sake, then at least for the sake of you and dad?"

"Don't you love your husband? Don't you want to protect what you've built together?"

"I stopped loving him the day I discovered he would never love me as much as he loves her. I only tolerate him because I am paying my debt back to you and dad."

"Katrina--"

"I know that's not why you asked me to stay," Katrina interjected. "But I had to stay because I felt like if I didn't, I would be letting you and dad down...and I didn't want to disappoint you like that after everything you've done for me. I can never repay

your kindness and the love you've shown me ever since you adopted me, but staying in this marriage is my way of thanking you for saving my life."

Tears rolled down Vivienne's face. "I had no idea that's how you looked at things. Now I feel like such a terrible mother."

"It's not like that mum." Katrina put her arm over her mum's shoulders. "I didn't mean it like that."

But Vivienne would not stop crying. "I can't believe that you would think your father and I would trade your happiness for the years we spent loving you as our child. I have never thought you were someone else's child from the moment I laid eyes on you. I have loved you and taken care of you as if you were my own. I have not expected any form of payment whatsoever."

"Mum, you're blowing this out of proportion now," Katrina begged. "That's not what I meant. Why are you misunderstanding me? I am sorry, please, stop crying, am begging you."

Vivienne took her daughter's hands and held on to them as she spoke. "Leave if you are not happy my baby. Please, leave. Don't stay because of me and your father. When we said it would raise people's eyebrows if they heard our daughter got divorced just after two years of marriage, we didn't mean that you should stay just because of it. No parent wants to see their daughter divorced. We said what we said thinking we were helping you."

"I know you meant well, I know." Katrina said. "And I am okay with the way things are right now."

"How can you be okay?"

Katrina hesitated for a little bit before answering. "Because it's impossible for me to ever attain the things I desire," she said finally.

"What do you desire Trina?" Her mother asked.

“Love mother,” she said simply, her eyes filling up with tears.

“You’re a great woman my love. Any man would be lucky to have you in his life.”

“I am not such a great person mum, far from it.”

“You’re my daughter, I know you.”

Katrina was shaking her head vigorously, tears flowing down her cheeks.

“You’re wrong mum, I have done things I am not proud of. I have been hurt over and over again and I have wondered what to do. I have so much pain and anger in my heart I don’t know what it’s like to have a pure heart anymore. I am a very vindictive person. I always think about hurting the people that hurt me twice as much as they hurt me. I am not a good person at all.”

Vivienne put her arms around her daughter and let her cry her heart out. “It’s okay my baby,” she said. “It’s normal for any human to have those kinds of feelings. What matters is that you recognize them and you don’t let them get the better of you.”

Vivienne’s words of comfort were like a dagger straight to Katrina’s already torn heart.

She cried even more.

CHAPTER FOUR

Andre woke up earlier than usual the next Monday morning to prepare breakfast for Katrina. He knew she wouldn't have had time to eat from the moment she woke up to take care of her husband and prepare the kids for school. Katrina liked telling people that she was not a breakfast person but Andre always suspected that it was because she never found time to prepare it for herself, let alone sit down to eat. He had made it a point in his life to take care of her every chance he got. Andre was looking out the window every ten seconds for Katrina's arrival. It appeared she was to arrive later than he had anticipated.

"What's taking her so long?" He asked himself for the umpteenth time after checking his wristwatch.

Andre looked over the food he had passionately set up and smiled proudly. He reached into his back pocket for his phone only to realize he had left it upstairs in his bedroom. When he came back down a few seconds later, there was a knock at the door. He rushed over to the door and swung it wide open in excitement.

"Fina-"

"Surprise!"

A hurricane passed over Andre's face, completely wiping out any trace of the smile he had a few seconds ago.

"Jenna? What are you doing here?" The words came out before he could stop them. The look on his fiance's face was enough to tell him just how much he had blundered.

"I take it you were expecting someone else?" Jenna said, unable to mask her disappointment.

"Yes, no...I mean, come in. I'm sorry." He stepped aside to let her in.

She was two steps into the house when she came to an abrupt stop, her eyes moving from the well set table of breakfast by the dining room area, to the packed food boxed in the paper bag in her hand.

Andre searched for an explanation but couldn't find one in time. He could only run his hand guiltily through his hair. "It's...I was...." He was saved from offering a terrible lie right away when Katrina's car finally pulled up in front of his house.

"Did you prepare all of this for your step-mother?" Jenna asked. "Is it her birthday?"

"I would have told you if it was her birthday," he said. "I need to ask her for a favor concerning my dad so...you know...."

Jenna appeared to relax a little. She smiled. "Very sneaky," she said proudly. "You should have told me to come and help. What sort of favor do you need that you went all out like this? Now am even ashamed to show you what's inside these boxes. I had no idea you had master chef skills like this. How come you've never--"

Andre had been expecting that question and so he was ready with a response. "I hate cooking. I only cook once in a blue moon, and today is a blue moon situation." He kept looking at the door the whole time he was explaining to her.

Katrina opened the door. "Please don't kill me An-" She froze when she came upon the scene in the living room. She had been in such a hurry to arrive that she did not pay enough attention to notice Jenna's car parked among Andre's cars in the front.

"Oh, am sorry," Katrina said. "I didn't know you had company."

Jenna was looking at the pretty basket in Katrina's hands and could only guess the quality of breakfast packed inside. She had tasted the woman's food before and no matter her feelings for her, there was no denying the woman was a genius in the kitchen. Jenna looked at the paperback she was holding and found herself hiding it behind her. Her actions did not go unnoticed by the two in her company.

“Some food remained while I was packing for the kids so-” she shrugged her shoulders and deliberately left the sentence hanging. She dared not offer any further explanation to her presence in the house lest it was different from the one Andre had given her, if he gave her one.

But why didn't he call or text to warn me that his girlfriend was here? Katrina thought, angry slowly rising up her esophagus. Did she spend the night here? Is this why he invited me to come? Is it because he wanted me to see this?

Andre could see the colors changing on Katrina's face. She went from one extreme end of the color spectrum to the other end all in the space of twenty seconds. He didn't need a fortune teller to tell him just how much trouble he had landed himself in.

“Jenna just popped in to bring me some breakfast,” Andre quickly explained. “I forgot to tell her that I would be having a meeting with you so-”

“Good morning Mrs Ng'andu,” Jenna greeted, bending her head to the side slightly for effect.

Katrina could taste the salt in the little vixen's greeting. She pictured herself jumping on top of the 24-year-old and pounding her head in until she disappeared into oblivion. It's like her parent's had sex for the sole purpose of frustrating her life in future, Katrina thought.

Despite dating Andre for over a year, Jenna had not gotten comfortable enough with her boyfriend's step-mother to address her as mum. Jenna suspected that the woman did not like her very much and only tolerated her because she was her step-son's girlfriend. Jenna couldn't help feeling like Katrina thought she was not good enough for Andre. The former Mrs Ng'andu on the other hand was a different story. Yvonne had welcomed Jenna with wide open arms into her home and instructed her on the very first day of meeting that she call her mum. And she was okay with this

arrangement because at the end of the day, wasn't it the biological mother's approval that mattered the most? She had reasoned.

If there was one thing Katrina was good at, it was reading people. She had long concluded that Jenna preferred Andre's biological mother to her and she had absolutely no problem with that. She had no desire to be called mum or mother by either Andre or his girlfriend, for obvious reasons. And since the feeling was mutual, both women made no efforts to disguise their feelings towards each other.

"Good morning Jenna," Katrina said. "I see you are well and ready to be a wife now," she remarked whilst looking at the paper back behind Jenna's hands. "Congrats on your engagement." Her tone was laced with as much sarcasm as she wanted Jenna to feel as she mentally compared the things she had packed in that little plastic bag of hers to the food she had packed in the neat and matching lunch boxes in her food basket.

I've been doing this for centuries young one, try me. Katrina thought as she looked at the girl.

"I'm looking forward to learning more from you Mrs Ng'andu," Jenna said, forcing a smile. "I am sure there is a lot for me to learn from the 50 years you've been cooking on this earth."

Andre's jaw dropped. So did Katrina's.

"I am 41 years old, if you must know," Katrina said sternly. "However, I am flattered that you think me old enough to impart some wisdom in you. I can tell you could use some. I hear you lost your parents at a tender age huh?"

Jenna felt her uterus lining bust and thanked the heavens for having worn a pad in advance.

"How about we all sit down and have some breakfast before all this food gets cold?" Andre saved the galaxy from further explosions. He grabbed the basket and the paper bag from the women and laid them on the table.

"As you already know, am not a breakfast person Andre," Katrina said, not moving from where she was standing. "I only came here for that business but if now is not a good time...." She was looking at Jenna as she spoke.

"I only came to drop off his breakfast," Jenna said. "I was calling you earlier but you weren't picking my calls," she said to Andre. "I was going to drop off the food at work but I called your PA and he told me that you would be getting in late today. So I came here instead."

"Thank you babe. I think now I have enough food for a week," he joked.

Katrina didn't seem amused.

"I'll see you later in the evening today right?" Jenna asked.

"Yes, sure. I'll call you," Andre said. He walked her to the door and outside to her car while Katrina sat down in the living room, fuming from ear to ear.

"Aren't we going to have breakfast?" Andre asked when he returned. He had hoped to find her by the dining table.

"Am not in the mood to eat right now," Katrina sulked.

Andre chuckled. He got on his knees in front of her. "I'm sorry my love, I didn't know she was gonna pop in this morning. Don't look so mad, please. I woke up early today and made a special breakfast for you." He pointed to the table. "Come, let's go and eat."

"I told you--"

"Are you really going to break my heart like this?"

Katrina glared at him before giving up and walking to the table. "It's only because you're the only man that cooks for me, that's why am eating," she said as she made herself comfortable at the table. "But don't think I've forgiven you."

Andre excitedly started dishing out food and placed it in front of her. "I'm really sorry things happened like that, but you know it's not my fault."

"You could have picked up your phone," Katrina said.

"Oh yeah," Andre said, remembering Jenna had called before coming. Had he had his phone with him, he could have easily avoided that awkward situation.

"She really doesn't like me much that one," Katrina said.

"Can you blame her?" Andre laughed.

Katrina gave him a look of indignation.

"I'm kidding...but it's not like you like her either," he said.

"Marriage, huh?" Katrina finally brought up his engagement. The thought of it made her lose her appetite altogether. She put down her fork and looked at him with scintillation. "What am I doing here?" She asked.

Andre put down his fork as well. "It's the only way I could get your attention," he said.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Leave him and let's get married."

"We've had this conversation one too many times Andre."

"Are you okay with me marrying another woman?"

Katrina said nothing.

"You see?" Andre said.

"Do whatever you want. I don't care." Katrina said.

"Do you really mean that?" He asked.

Instead of answering, Katrina got up and started walking away.

“Run Katrina, go ahead, run,” Andre said from where he was sitting. He had turned around to face her retreating figure.

Katrina stopped. “What do you want me to do!?” She yelled. “I am your father’s wife, and –”

Andre walked over to her. “And you love me,” he said.

“I have never said that,” she said.

“You don’t need to say it Katrina,” he said. “I know it beyond reasonable doubt and I can feel it in every bone in your body. You love me and you hate that you love me so much. Just admit it. You hate anything that you can’t control and you hurt everyone that hurts you. You’ve hurt me too many times I’ve even stopped counting. This, what we have, I know you started it because you wanted to hurt my father. You wanted to hurt me too because I used to give you so much trouble, but now you love me. You can’t help it. You love me. Just admit it and stop hurting yourself and everyone around you already.”

“I didn't start this, you did.”

“You never stopped me.”

You sleep with an older woman and suddenly you think you know so much huh? Is that it?” Katrina said.

“Insult me all you want, but it doesn’t change the fact that you want me more than anything you’ve ever wanted in this world.”

Andre put his hand behind her head, and tilting her head an inch back, he bent over slightly and started kissing her around her neck, deliberately wetting his lips so she could feel every ounce of his pent up hunger for her against her skin. He could feel her grow weak under his spell, as she always did. He had come to master her body, every bit of it, and like a thief he had laid dominion over it against her will...or so she

loved to think. She wanted him, all of him. His body, mind and soul. She wanted all of it but....

Katrina tried to push him away. "We can't do this right now after everything that's happened," she said.

He was not listening to her, but he had heard her. He reached down her blouse and raised it over her breasts. Katrina tried to cover herself but he managed to pin her hands back while he used his lips to coax her breasts from her bra. Katrina gasped, loudly and longingly the moment his tongue playfully grazed against her nipple. She managed to free her hands from behind her and placed them around his neck.

"The door?" She asked, her eyes burning with passion.

Andre looked back at the door. "It's locked," he said, smiling.

Katrina wasted no time pulling him to her and kissing him as if her life depended on it. But it was Andre's turn this time around to put water to the fire.

"Leave him," he pleaded with her, their lips just a few inches apart. "Leave him," he repeated.

"I can't," Katrina said.

"Is it that you can't or you don't want to?" He asked.

Katrina tried to get away from him but he held her tightly in place. "Answer me," he said.

"Andre, even if I left him, do you think you and I can be together in the real world?"

"Aren't we in the real world right now?" He asked.

"It's different," she said. "No one will ever accept us together. Not my family, and certainly not yours. I am your father's wife and we have kids together."

“Kids?” Andre scoffed. “You must think me a fool Trina.”

“What do you mean?”

“Just because you’ve convinced yourself that they’re his kids does not mean they truly are.”

Katrina tried to pull away from him and this he didn’t stop her. “I have no idea what you’re talking about,” she said, turning her back to him, ready to bolt out the door.

“I know for a fact that Sarah and Jason are mine.” Andre said. He ran over to her before she could open the door and blocked her way.

“I had no idea you could be this delusional,” Katrina said, but her quivering voice betrayed her.

Andre put his hand under her chin and forced her to look up at him. “What better way to injure a man than to have kids by his son and have him raise them as if they were his own, huh?” He said.

Katrina tried to lower her gaze but Andre couldn’t have it. “You got what you wanted Trina, but what about me?” He asked.

“Andre-”

“I want what’s mine. I want you, and I want my kids, now.”

CHAPTER FIVE

Yvonne was reconciling her books at one of her elite boutiques in town one afternoon when she received a surprise visit from her mother Patricia. The seventy-year-old woman knocked once at the door of her daughter's office and before she could get a response, opened the door and let herself in. Yvonne gave the elegantly dressed woman looking ten years younger than her age a dead look of disapproval.

"I never said come in mother," Yvonne quipped.

"Do I look like I care?" Patricia retorted, offering herself a seat without invitation.

"I think sometimes you forget that you are not all that anymore," Yvonne said. "No wonder you can't make any friends. Everyone hates you because of those airs you carry yourself with. If you think those old gold diggers you call your friends hang out with you for your charm, then you need more than the things you came here to bother me about to fix you."

"My husband might have lost his fortune but I still have a very rich daughter, so whoever wants can talk all they want. I need a twenty pin. My girls and I are planning a trip to Dubai. I haven't done any shopping in ages."

Yvonne's jaw looked about ready to hit the floor. "Mum! Why do you need all that money for? I have plenty of clothes here if you want new clothes. No way am giving you millions of Kwacha to squander in Dubai. When are you going to start living within your means?"

"Is it you preaching to me about living within my means?" Patricia scoffed. "Who rescued you and your husband when you had nothing? You practically spend the first five years of your marriage in my house because you couldn't stand the poverty in your own home. Now you want to preach to me? Give me a break."

“When are you going to get it that I have no husband anymore? I am divorced, and I am not some billionaire you can make such demands to mum. I’m also trying to build a life for myself and for my son. I can’t keep dishing out millions to you every week for your useless adventures.”

“I wonder what they call a divorced woman who is still sleeping with the ex and is still under his financial control. Do you think Katrina Ng’andu might have the answer if I asked her?”

“Are you blackmailing me?”

“Why would I blackmail my own daughter?” Patricia laughed. “What type of mother do you think I am? I am simply trying to negotiate with you.”

“You’re blackmailing me and I don’t like it!” Yvonne snapped.

“Calm down,” her mother said. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to come out like that. I am just desperate. Forgive your mother. I am just so tired from taking care of your ailing father. All this in and out of hospital we’ve been doing for a year is taking a toll on me.”

“How?” Yvonne asked. She had hired a personal nurse to take care of her sick father while her mother gallivanted the world. The only time her mother showed up at his bedside was to check if he had finally died so she could get her freedom to trek the world without judgement from her peers.

“What do you mean how?” Patricia asked.

“Just leave mum,” Yvonne said. “I am very busy today and I don’t have time for this.”

“What about my money?”

“First of all, it’s not your money. It’s my money. Secondly, I don’t want to give you. I have it but I won’t give you. Dad is in such a critical condition right now and

anything can happen. You need to be by his side. I know you're shameless, but give the man the honor he deserves. He took very good care of you when he had the means. We never lacked for anything. Now it's your time to return the favor. You are seventy years old now, you have very little time left to turn yourself into a better person."

"You are really one to talk, you know that?"

"Don't judge me by my past mistakes," Yvonne said. "You and me are not the same anymore. I would love to blame you for the way I turned out, for ruining my own marriage but you know what, I am an adult. I knew what I was doing was wrong but I still went and did it because I thought I could get away with it. I learnt from my mistakes...the same can't be said about you."

"Don't lie to yourself my child," Patricia said. "You are still exactly like me. If you weren't, you wouldn't still be clinging onto to your ex-husband. I am even better. My only weakness is my love for money. I have never ever gone after another woman's man, ever."

"He is not another woman's man. He is mine," Yvonne said. "And I love that man as much as I love his money. Why should I love only him and not his money? If he was poor, people would expect me to love him for who he is so why can't I love my own husband for the rich man that he is?"

"Except he is not your husband," Patricia said. "Do you think he will continue seeing you the day his wife finds out about the two of you?"

"Pick a side and stick to it," Yvonne said. "You call him my husband when it's convenient for you and when I call him that you bring out your non-existent moral campus. Besides, I don't care about Katrina. I consider her simply as my karma, something I have to live with for the time being."

"She is a dumb woman that one," Yvonne said. "How long have I been with Arthur and she still doesn't know? She is too busy trying to create a perfect front for her

marriage that she can't see what's happening right under her nose. If she wanted to know, she would have found out by now. She is comfortable in her ignorance."

Patricia was shaking her head the whole time she was listening to her daughter. "I heard that woman speak at a conference once and she didn't sound dull at all," she said. "If anything, she sounded like the type that would poison her husband slowly for years and have him finally die in a place that would leave no trace to her. If I were you I would be very careful. There's no sane woman that can stay ignorant of her husband's affair that's lasted almost as long as her marriage. That woman knows and she will attack when you least expect it."

Yvonne laughed. "You give her too much credit," she said. "I know Katrina's type very well, the proud independent type that doesn't want the world to know she has flaws. Even if she was to find out about Arthur and me, there's nothing she can do about it. She needs that marriage to maintain her perfect facade in society. Do you think people would respect her as much if she became a divorced woman?"

"So you know that she will never divorce him right?" Patricia asked.

"I know," she answered. "But that doesn't mean Arthur won't divorce her. I just need to play my cards right and -"

Patricia laughed. "You've had over eight years to get him back but he still hasn't left her," she said. "You have nothing over that woman. You have only one child, she has three and your own son worships the ground she walks on. You have failed to make your own son forgive you and you think you can make a man you share no blood with sacrifice everything he has built for you? In what century?"

"There's no delay for people that are destined to be together," Yvonne said confidently. "And I will get my son's forgiveness soon. I intend to make better use of that girlfriend of his who's so eager to please me. She will help me earn my son's forgiveness."

"So are you really not going to give me my money?"

"Mum!"

"Fine, okay, am leaving."

"How long have you known?" Katrina asked Andre. They were back in the living room, sitting opposite each other like two strangers meeting for the first time.

"Since you were pregnant with Sarah," Andre answered.

There was a puzzled expression on Katrina's face.

"That first night you came to see me, that was the night you heard my mother was pregnant for dad," he answered her unspoken question. "I knew you were keeping tabs on them so I expected you to know about my mother's situation when it happened, including the miscarriage. Before that, I had done everything I could to show you I was sorry and that I was on your side but you kept pushing me away. And then one day you showed up at my place out of the blue, crying."

When Andre turned 23 and got his first job, he decided to move out of his father's house and rent his own place. More than anything, he had hoped that maybe by having a place of his own, he would have the freedom to love Katrina as much as he wanted and on his terms without his father's ghost haunting him in his own house.

"That day you said something to me that stayed with me. 'I want to hurt him as much as he has hurt me'. At first I thought you meant completely giving yourself to me...you know...coming to me like that... and then no protection?" Andre continued. "But a few months later you were pregnant and going on with your life as if everything was perfect. Then Sarah was born and I could tell right away that she was mine. Of course it helped that you insisted on having me there when you delivered. The Katrina I know wouldn't have cared whether I was there or not. You might think you're good at masking your emotions but when it comes to me, you suck."

“And Jason?” Katrina asked.

“We both wanted Jason,” he said. “Even without saying the words to each other, we wanted him to happen. By that time I had completely fallen in-love with you and I knew you were falling for me too despite everything. I was ready to face my father with the truth and face the consequences of my feelings. I just didn't care anymore.”

“We were both using each other,” Katrina said. “You keep talking as if I am the only one that had a hidden agenda but I know why you approached me.”

“I had mixed feelings when I first approached you, I'll admit that,” Andre said. “I didn't know what I wanted or what I was doing. I was just so mad that day that I gave in to my emotions at a whim.”

It was not a day Andre would forget so easily given that it was his 21st birthday. His father had promised him that if he went a whole year without smoking or drinking, he would get the latest Jaguar that he had been dreaming about for so long. However, when the day finally came, Arthur was nowhere to be seen. He had not yet returned from the business trip he had taken five days' prior despite promising his son that he would be back in time for his birthday.

At that time Katrina was working as a Marketing manager at Wade & Sons Inc. However, seeing that it was her step-son's birthday and his father was still out of town, Katrina had taken a half-day off to prepare a special birthday dinner for the boy who was yet to recognize her as an authority figure in her own house.

“What's your favorite type of cake?” Katrina had followed Andre to his room where he was gaming.

“Who asked you to bake me a cake?” Andre fired back, not bothering to stop his game to address her.

“Just tell me what you like and you can choose to eat it or throw it away if you like,” she said.

Andre suddenly stopped playing. "You're serious? I can do whatever I like with it right?" He asked.

For a few seconds Katrina wondered what he was plotting but decided to not bother about it. She was just going to do her duty and whatever happened after that was none of her business. "Yes, you can do whatever you like with it after," She said.

"Blue forest then," Andre said, smiling.

Katrina smiled back at him and left for the kitchen. When dinner was set, she went back to his room to call him out. As he was following Katrina behind along the hallway, Andre quietly stopped to pick up the fire extinguisher hanging against the wall and walked with it into the dining room.

"What are you doing with that?" Katrina asked when she saw him enter the room with it.

"To do this with it," Andre said, aiming the nozzle at the food set on the table. He squeezed the trigger and poured the pressurized water onto the food, including the well decorated blue forest cake that had 21 lit candles on it.

Tears poured from Katrina's eyes as she watched her hard work reduced to dust before her eyes while Andre laughed as he continued pouring water in all directions. Without saying a word, Katrina left the room and went back to the kitchen to clean up after herself. Andre put down the extinguisher and followed her behind.

"You said I could do whatever I wanted!"

Katrina threw the kitchen towel into the sink and turned around. "And you did," she said, pushing back her tears. "I hope you're happy. Happy birthday Andre." She then went back to her chores.

"You know, you could just leave with your little bastard and you wouldn't have to go through this," Andre said.

Katrina ignored him.

“I am talking to you!” Andre yelled.

Katrina still paid him no attention.

“You know that my parents are back together right?”

Katrina stopped what she doing, turned off the water by the sink and turned around. “How many times will I tell you that I am not responsible for your parent’s breakup?” She said. “You keep doing these things to me, hurting me, disrespecting me when I have been nothing but good to you. If you knew the truth about your mother, you would never again appear in front of me with that smug look on your face.”

“What are you talking about?” Andre asked.

“Why are you asking me? Go and ask her,” Katrina said and left him standing alone in the kitchen.

That night Andre paid his mother a surprise visit, mentally armed to ask her all the questions he had been meaning to ask her before but never quiet found the courage. The first thing he noticed when he entered through the gate was his father’s car parked in the front yard. Why was he not surprised to find him there?

Andre had come across some of his father’s things in his mother’s house every time he visited her. That was how he knew the two had gotten back together. If only Katrina was out of the picture, maybe his parents would officially get back together. He hated the woman for standing in the way of his parent’s freedom and happiness.

Andre quietly entered the house using the key his mother had given him. He tiptoed his way towards the bedroom and before he could reach the door, he heard his parents arguing.

“I still haven’t forgiven you for embarrassing me like that so you have no rights whatsoever to make such demands of me!” Arthur yelled.

“What did you expect me to do?” Yvonne asked. “I was lonely. What normal woman wants to spend all her nights alone waiting for a husband who is more committed to his work than his marriage? You left me to raise our child alone while you-“

“I am still not convinced that that boy is mine,” Arthur said and was immediately rewarded with a slap on what could have only been his cheek from the sound of it.

Andre leaned against the wall for support.

“I was never unfaithful all through our marriage. How can you accuse me of something like this?”

“Are you not the one that had a lover while I worked hard to give you the life you always demanded you deserved? We were still married in case you’ve forgotten. My lack of attention is not a good enough reason for you to repeatedly bring another man into my bed. You can’t expect me to believe that you weren’t prostituting yourself even before we got married!”

“I’ve had enough of you calling me names,” Yvonne cried. “How many times do you want me to apologize for my past mistakes? Andre is your son and you know it. If there was even a part of you that thought otherwise, you would have already done a test by now.”

“Who said I didn’t?” Arthur asked.

“What?”

“You left me no choice. I had to know if I was taking care of some other man’s bastard. Besides, there’s nothing about that boy that’s like me. I was never out of control like that when I was his age. All he does is drink, smoke and hang out with useless people. I don’t care what a piece of paper says.”

“He is yours!” Yvonne cried. “You can do fifty tests or a thousand if you like but the results will always come out the same. Why do you want to punish that precious boy for my sins? He has done nothing to deserve this from you.”

Precious boy?” Arthur scoffed. “If he is so precious, why were you willing to trade him for millions just so you would have the freedom to run away with your love without any baggage tying you to me? You literally sold that precious cargo to me. The only reason I paid you was because I knew you would eventually run out of money and come back to me. I needed to make sure that I had all the cards you could possibly use fully and under my control.”

“So you used our son as bait? What is wrong with you?” Yvonne asked.

“I am a man that knows what he wants,” Arthur said. “I wanted to have you and raise a family with you. It was always about you. I didn’t care about anything else. What is the point of investing my emotions into loving a boy I wasn’t even sure was mine anymore?”

“But you know for a fact that he is yours now so why are talking like this?”

“Because every time I look at him am reminded of you and it makes me so angry.”

“Then I will just kill myself right now, huh? Will that make you happy?”

Andre could hear a scuffle go on for a few minutes. “Let me just die right now so that my son doesn’t have to pay for my mistakes anymore! Here, kill me bashi Andre, just kill me!”

Andre could hear his mother sobbing as the two wrestled for whatever she was trying to use to kill herself or get him to kill her with. He was ready to kick the door in when it suddenly went quiet on the other side. He paused right outside the door and waited, wondering if something had happened. A few seconds later, he heard his parents making out. Disgusted and disappointed at the same time, Andre quickly

walked out of the house, making sure that his presence remained undiscovered. He locked the door outside and ran out of there in tears.

The thoughts of everything he had done against Katrina tormented Andre. He went searching for her the moment he got home but she was nowhere to be found in the house. He finally remembered that her favorite spot in the night was out in the garden in the backyard where she said she loved spending time alone to think. Andre made his way into the garden and spotted Katrina in her usual spot. She had her back to the house so she did not hear him approach.

“Katrina,” Andre called out to her from behind.

Katrina quickly wiped at her tears before turning around but it was already too late. He had already heard her and seen her trying to stifle her sobs with her chitenge. In a single day he had seen her cry twice. It was something he had never had the pleasure of seeing no matter how many times he tormented her. The woman seemed as though she was made of steel.

How many times do you come here to cry over the pain my father and I have caused you? Andre thought, oblivious to the tears running down his face.

“What are you doing here? What’s wrong?” Katrina asked.

“I am sorry,” was all he could manage to say to her.

“Did something happen?” Katrina was looking towards the house, wondering what trouble the boy had caused already. “Did something happen to Kumbi?” Her heart was ready to pop out of her chest.

“No, no, nothing like that,” Andre quickly reassured her.

“Then why are you crying?” Katrina asked.

“I just found out the truth,” he said. Unable to repeat the things he had just heard, Andre instead bust out crying.

Katrina stared at him for the first few seconds while he cried, wondering what to do with him. She had known such a day would come but she had not imagined such a reaction from him. The last thing she had expected to hear was an apology and him begging her for forgiveness in such a manner.

“I feel so stupid,” Andre said. “I had no idea and yet-“

Katrina finally gave in to her maternal instincts and reached out to the boy. She put her arms around him and patted his back. They stayed like that for a while until Andre calmed down a bit. Katrina gently placed her hands on his shoulders and held him away from her to check if he had finally stopped crying. However, Andre surprised her by staring straight into her eyes without saying anything. Sensing that something had changed, Katrina let go of him and stepped back.

“You look fine now, I think-“

Before she could finish her sentence, Andre had closed the distance between them and was kissing her passionately on the lips, completely catching Katrina off guard. The moment she knew what was happening, she pushed him away and slapped him hard across the face.

“I’m sorry, I-“

“Of course you’re sorry,” Katrina said and quickly walked back towards the house.

Andre stayed back, remembering only the kiss and not the slap as he placed his hand over his mouth.

“What the fuck just happened?” He asked himself.

Nothing was ever the same between step-mother and son.

Katrina avoided making any eye contact with the 21-year-old while Andre did everything to get her attention. He watched over her even when she was not looking

and did her favors in secret. Every time he saw her heading to the garden in the evening, he made sure to make a cup of tea for her and he would take it to her, leave it by her side without saying a word. And every time his father disappeared from the house to be with his mother, Andre brought Katrina fresh flowers and left them on the kitchen table without ever mentioning that they were for her, or from him.

On the day that Andre moved out of his father's house, he wrote Katrina a note and placed it under the cup of tea he left for her in the garden.

Dear Katrina,

I know you loathe the sight of me and I don't blame you. It's been almost two years now since that night and you've never looked at me. I made a mistake, I admit it. I wish I was sorry for my actions but I am not. I am only sorry that I did what I did without your consent but I do not in any way regret that kiss because it made me realize how I feel about you. I want you to know that if you ever need a place to escape to, instead of that garden packed with mosquitoes, please come to my place. My door will always be open. I know it's nothing compared to this mansion, but there will always be someone in there that will never break your heart.

I love you,

Andre.

It would take six months for Katrina to take him up on his offer.

CHAPTER SIX

Driving to work after Katrina's visit, Andre struggled to bring his racing heart to a steady beat. The near naked expanse of the Great East road ahead eerily void of the Monday mid-morning traffic did very little to calm his storming heart. A stop at the Mandahill traffic lights gave him an opportunity to take in a long uninterrupted breath.

However, just as he was about to talk himself into sanity, a cream white Sedan with mauve streaks around it came to a screeching halt next to him. Andre turned, ready to give the fatuous driver a heathen look that would condemn them both to eternal damnation. But behind the wheel was a roly-poly woman, with a pair of the most celestial eyes the 32-year-old had ever stumbled upon.

"Sorry," she mouthed the words to him as she curtsied towards her steering wheel.

The fire in Andre's eye's evaporated into huge bubbles of shame that turned into ash the moment they hit the air. Andre was humbled him back to his own inadequacies and sins.

'I can't leave him,' Katrina's words echoed through his car just as the light turned green.

How many times had he been at this point before, in the flowery moment that promised a bounty future, yet stuck to the ground by variables beyond his control? A hoot from behind sent Andre hitting his foot hard on the accelerator, propelling him into a future he hoped he had at least control over.

Ten minutes into his first meeting at work, Andre's mind drifted yet again. What would it take to get Katrina to leave his father? He had done everything he could to prove to her that his love was real and not just fantasies of a child. Should I just tell him myself? Andre mused. Many times he had stood in front of his father and entertained the idea of revealing the truth to him, that he was in-love with his step-mother and that

two of the children he thought were his actually weren't. Andre had imagined his father's rage and pictured himself dead from a bullet to his heart, with his father's hand behind the trigger.

Arthur was a man capable of exerting the most lethal revenge possible to man. Andre knew that much about his father. Who knew just what had happened to ex-wife's lover? Nothing was heard of him ever since his mother ran away from him. The world might not know the truth because to them he was a living saint, but Andre knew everything he needed to know but had no business knowing.

Andre had seen his father shamelessly inflict pain on the two women he claimed to love the most in the world and he did so without leaving any stains behind...at least not on the paths he took. Arthur was insatiable in his quest for revenge and equaling the scales of justice on his own terms. Yvonne was still paying the price for her betrayal in more ways than she could ever imagine. His revenge had been so ruthless it left blood spilling all over his own son and the people Yvonne cared about the most.

"Why do you hate your father so much?" Katrina had asked Andre earlier that morning.

"I don't hate him, I just don't like him," Andre replied.

For a man that loved being in control of everything around him, Arthur had made the gravest mistake of his life by making his son pay for his ex-wife's betrayal. By doing so, he had incurred the wrath of his son and set into motion a chain of events he had absolutely no control over. Arthur was too consumed in exerting revenge over his ex-wife and keeping his current wife under his control that he forgot to look out for his son. Andre had spent many years waiting for his father to apologize to him for treating him like a bastard child but that apology never came. Arthur was yet to look his son in the eye. Perhaps if he had done so earlier, he would have seen the truth hiding itself in plain sight.

As far as Arthur was concerned, Andre was neither aware of the doubts he had concerning his birth nor that his presence in his life was a cruel reminder of his mother's sins against him. Arthur was too long sighted to know that his treatment of his son over the years was too telling for him not to know that he was being made to pay for his mother's mistakes. Just like he had set into motion events in oblivion, Arthur was not aware that he had created in his son an enemy and that that son was now his greatest weakness. Where Arthur was unrelenting in his revenge, Andre was unforgiving in his anger.

"What's the difference?" Katrina had asked Andre.

"I can't hate my father because he gave me life whether I like it or not...or whether he likes it or not. I don't like him because he keeps hurting the people around him and doesn't care about the consequences because he thinks he can get away with so much. I also don't like him because he is your husband and yet he doesn't deserve you."

"I am no angel Andre," Katrina said. "We both know that I have done things far worse than him and yet you claim to love me."

"Claim?" Andre asked. "So you don't believe that I love you?"

"If you did, then why is there a Jenna in your life?" She asked.

"Sometimes people do stupid things for love," he said. "I got with Jenna to make you jealous, and I proposed to her to force you to leave dad. I know it sounds childish but ours isn't the regular kind of relationship. To protect you, I have to do certain things that might come off as shameless and abominable in the face of the world."

And what if protecting me means destroying yourself? Katrina thought.

"I have no intentions of living your father," she said instead. "Does that mean you will end up marrying her?"

“If that’s what it takes then yes, because I know the thought of that will kill you,” he said.

“You’ve been with her for a couple of years now and you still haven’t touched her. You want me to believe that you would actually go ahead and marry her just to hurt me?” Katrina asked.

“How ironic that you don’t believe me when I tell you that I love you and yet you believe me when I tell you other things? What if I lied to you about sleeping with her? I am after all my father’s son, remember?”

“I might not believe in your love, but I believe you when you say you do because you actually believe it,” she said.

“So it doesn’t qualify to be love because what? Because it’s with you?”

“Because I am your step-mother.”

“I have never ever thought of you as such.”

“Perhaps you should start.”

“Is that what you really want?”

“No,” she answered honestly.

Andre chuckled. “So what do you call what you feel for me then?” He asked.

“Lust, what else could it be?” She said.

“You know what?” Andre said after a moment’s hesitation. He got up. “Maybe you’re right,” he added. “Maybe if it was more, you could have already left him. I think you should leave. I need to get ready for work.”

Katrina watched him walk upstairs without finding the right words to say to him. There was something haunting about the look in his eyes she had never seen before. Was this the end of them? Had he finally given up on her? Wasn’t that what she

always wanted? So why was she feeling like someone was pulling the air out of her? Just how was she to protect a man that was more than ready to forsake the heavens just to be with her? Perhaps Andre was right, he truly was his father's son no matter how much he detested the man. Wasn't the love he had for her exactly the kind his father once had for his mother?

Where does that leave me and my kids? Katrina wondered.

As if she had been waiting for him to be alone, Jenna called his phone the moment he was alone in his room. Andre watched the phone ring without picking it up. When it stopped ringing, he picked up his laptop bag and was about to place the laptop in when a message came through. It was Jenna.

I hope you're having an awesome day.
If you're not, give me a buzz.
I love you.

"What am I gonna do with you sweet Jenna?" Andre asked himself.

"Sir? Mr Ng'andu?" Someone in the office forced Andre out of his reverie. "We are waiting for your feedback on the Salama case Ayanda just presented," he said.

"Put everything together and bring it here," Andre said. "I'll have a look at it and get back to you. If there's nothing else, you can get back to work."

The moment he was alone, Andre made the call he had been dreading to make ever since he left home that morning.

"Are you able to come to my office right now?" Andre asked his close friend and mentor Timothy Munalula.

Munalula was fifteen years Andre's senior. The two had formed a budding relationship when Andre enrolled in his Philosophy class at varsity and ended up in his tutorial group. The many open debates the two would have in class, with Andre mostly

challenging the professor later developed into a friendship the young man was more than willing to embrace.

Prof. Munalula had become the father figure that Andre had always longed for, a man he could talk to about the challenges he was facing in life, and a man with knowledge and wisdom he had come to accept and respect after putting him to the test over and over again. Over time, the professor proved to be everything his father was not in the eyes of Andre.

An hour and a half later, the professor was sitting in Andre's office. "I take it she still won't leave him?" The professor said.

This was not the first time he been summoned to Andre's office. If it was not in Andre's office, it was in his office or at his home. He had only met Katrina once, but the professor felt like he knew the woman more than he knew his own twin sister.

"I do not want to lose her, but I feel like for me to finally have her, losing her is exactly what I need to do," Andre said.

"What do you mean?" The professor asked.

"She is too afraid of people's judgement when they know the truth, and I understand her," Andre said. "However, I have been hoping that she would get to a point where our love matters to her more than the opinions of the world. I mean, we have literally set a life for ourselves together despite everything. We have businesses and real estate together. We even have kids together. We are practically married."

"I hate to play devil's advocate son, but the two of you aren't married," the professor said. "It might feel like it, but it's not the case."

"You think I don't know that?" Andre asked. "My point is, it's not like Katrina would starve to death or suffer if she left my father. The way I know Katrina, if she really wanted to, she was going to leave my father even if it meant starving to death and living on the streets. She doesn't care about his money. She has her own. It's this

fear of hers, this thing of not having control over what might happen between us once our relationship comes to light, or not being able to control what people say or do.

"Katrina is so conscious about what people think of her that she's become so obsessed with keeping up appearances because she thinks that's what will keep people from abandoning her like her biological parents did. She thinks that once I have her all to myself, I'll appreciate her less, that I might leave her for someone blameless."

"We've talked about this before," Prof Maunalula said. "She has valid reasons to worry despite her psychological make-up. The question you should be asking yourself is why you don't seem afraid of the consequences despite knowing your father very well and what he might do to you, Katrina, and the kids when, not if he finds out."

"I am not scared of my father," Andre said. "The worst that could happen is that he might kill me and then my kids would have no father. I know he wouldn't touch Katrina like that but he would make her life as hellish as possible. Of course my kids won't be spared, not even his own, Kumbi, I know that all too well. My mother still doesn't know that he is the one responsible for my grandparent's collapse."

"So why take the risk in the first place if you know the consequences are so dire?"

"Because taking the risk also means taking responsibility of my actions," Andre answered. "I made the bed, I should lie in it. Granted, I was young and stupid when I jumped into things with Katrina, but the damage is already done. I fell in-love with her. We have two kids together. Sooner or later the truth will come out, and I would rather it does so on my terms than on nature's terms, because then the price will be even higher. I have to do whatever I can right now to protect Katrina and my kids. Even if he kills me, at least I would be content knowing my family is safe."

"Katrina would never forgive you if you came out with the truth to your father."

"I know."

“But?”

“I will make it so that she tells him the truth herself.”

“And will that change the outcome in any way?” The professor asked.

“The thing about my father is that he has never once looked at me and thought I would be a threat in any way,” Andre said. “He still thinks of me as that spoiled teenager high on alcohol and weed. According to him, I straightened up because of Katrina’s good nature and he is not far off the mark. He was my main motivation for straightening up. I wanted to protect Katrina from the hurt he was causing her and the only way I could do that was to become the sort of man she would take seriously.

“I am my father’s biggest weakness and he doesn’t know it. That’s my advantage. I know things about him that no one else knows and I know things about his life that even he isn’t aware of. I am willing to pay the price for betraying him, I’ll give him that. But I intend to play my cards right to leverage the damage against Katrina and my kids. I will do whatever it takes to keep him from touching them.”

“So what cards are those?” Prof. Munalula asked.

“I have a dead man on my left, and a wedding ring on my right,” Andre said.

“I knew there was a reason you called me here,” the professor said. “So which card are you leaning towards?”

“Whichever one Katrina picks,” Andre answered.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Arthur Ng'andu tiptoed behind his wife and covered her eyes from behind. Katrina laughed, stopped steering the porridge for the nshima and placed the lid back on the pot.

"I could smell you from a mile away," she said, turning to give him a kiss. "You're home early today. Something to celebrate?" She pulled out a chair for him by the kitchen counter and poured out some juice for him while he settled down.

"We finally managed to settle with the Japanese," Arthur said. "I admire their work ethic those guys, but they're impossible to work with sometimes, eish."

"I hear that's what most people say about you," Katrina said, laughing as she joined him by the counter.

"Only by the lazy employees," he countered. "The Japs are not the only reason am home early," he added, his expression turning grim.

"Out with it, what did you do, or what do you want?" Katrina asked.

"I got a call from Yvonne earlier today," he said.

The name Yvonne in the Ng'andu household was code for strife. Every moment that came after the mentioning of the name was guaranteed to be a tragic one.

"Oh," Katrina said, sitting up straight and bracing herself up for the obvious. Every time her husband openly talked about his ex-wife, it was under the guise of discussing something concerning Andre. This time around she figured it would have something to do with Andre's engagement or pending wedding. In essence, he was planning on taking her out on a date in the open and he was covering his bases lest someone recognized them and brought the story back to her.

"I'm listening," Katrina said.

"She wants us to discuss Andre's engagement," Arthur said. "As it happens, Andre proposed before reaching Jenna's parents. She would like us to discuss the way forward."

"Did Andre mention anything about visiting Jenna's parents just yet?" she asked.

"He must have mentioned it to his mother," he said. "He never talks to me about anything, let alone his love life. The only reason he brings Jenna to this house is because of you."

"I don't see any reason why I should object then," Katrina said. "Does this mean you won't be having dinner home?"

"I'm afraid so. I'm sorry honey," he said, taking her hand in his.

"It's alright, I understand," she said.

A few minutes later, while Arthur was still in the driveway, Katrina placed a call to Andre.

"It appears your parents are discussing your pending nuptials this evening," she said.

"I can't believe he is still using me at this age," Andre said. "Should I come over?"

"I thought you were still mad at me," she said.

"I still am, but we can talk about that when I come."

"I was cooking nshima, which you hate," Katrina said. "Should I do some pasta for you instead? The kids are already looking forward to the lumanda. Some lady was selling it on the street on my way from work earlier today."

"With nuts?"

"Yes, the kids prefer it that way."

“Maybe they take after their father,” Andre said. “Count me in for the nshima as well.”

When they were done with dinner, Andre helped Katrina bathe the kids in readiness for bed. He then read to Sarah and Jason while Katrina read to Kumbi in bed. The moment the kids were out, the adults met in the living room for a glass of wine.

“What time do you think he’s going to be back?” Andre asked, stretching out his legs and placing his feet on the table.

“It’s always before midnight, that much I know.” Katrina said.

“You really don’t get bothered anymore, do you?” He said.

Katrina laughed. “The affair has lasted almost as long as this marriage. At this point am used to it as much as am used to your father’s snoring.”

“I can see,” Andre said.

“Are you still mad at me?”

“Yes,” he answered simply.

Katrina moved from where she was to sit on his lap. She placed her hands on either side of his face and started kissing him. Andre held her back and turned his head away.

“There’s no point to this anymore Trina,” he said.

“What do you mean? Are you breaking up with me?”

“I believe so,” he said without offering further explanation.

Katrina slowly moved from his laps to sit next to him. “Then why did you come here Andre?”

“Why shouldn’t I?” He asked. “Just because I feel like breaking up with you does not mean I automatically stop loving you. I promised you that I would always be there for you, I intend to keep my word.”

“How do you propose this will work?” Katrina asked, masking a laugh. There was no way Andre could be serious. He was obviously throwing one of his usual tantrums.

“I can see you are not taking me seriously,” he got up. “After all the years I have spent loving you Trina, I hoped that by now you would have the courage to at least face your feeling for me even though you’re afraid of facing the world. What you said today, reducing what we have to mere lust was exactly the blow I needed to get my head on straight. I can’t be in a position where am willing to risk everything I have for you and you can’t even acknowledge what you feel for me. I am tired of this roller coaster ride. There’s a woman out there loving me despite the many flaws I have shown her thanks to my obsession with you and I think I am done wasting a good woman’s time. I think both she and I deserve better, don’t you think?”

“Oh my God, you are serious, aren’t you?”

“I have always been serious Trina. It’s only my resolve that’s been weak,” he said. “Don’t worry, I have no intentions of making your life hard. I’ll get to see my kids the usual way. Of course I would rather have them in my own home but that can only happen if you were brave enough to confront your reality.” He moved closer to her, planted a kiss on her forehead and said goodbye.

Katrina watched him get on the phone right before driving off. “Is he calling her?” She wondered out loud.

Andre had just arrived home and was getting ready to take a shower before Jenna came through when his doorbell rang. He checked the time on the wall clock in his bedroom and concluded that it was too early for Jenna to show up already. It also couldn’t be Katrina because she had never visited him that late given that she had kids

to take care of.

With a towel wrapped around his waist, Andre took the stairs down only to stop dead half-way when he spotted Katrina standing in the center of his living room.

“Katrina?” He said, quickly taking the rest of the stairs down. “What are you doing here? What about the kids?”

“I called Jenna and asked her to look after them for me for a few hours,” she said.

“You called Jenna?”

“It was the best way of killing two birds with one stone. I saw you talking on the phone, figured it was her you were talking to. She was supposed to come here right?”

“Yes she was.”

“See, I knew that. I told her that my friend has an emergency situation she needs help with and because my mother has a program at church, I had no one else to help me look after the kids. Then I called my friend Martha, asked her to turn off her phone and leave home, then next I called my next door neighbor and asked her to lend me her sixteen-year-old daughter who sometimes babysits for me to come over before Jenna got home. While I was driving here, I called your father, but of course he couldn’t pick up my call because he is obviously busy, so instead I texted him and told him I would give him an update about Martha once I met with her.”

“Why are you here Trina?” Andre asked.

“Don’t be with her, please,” she said, crying.

“I think you’re being selfish now,” he said.

“I know,” she said.

“I can’t do that anymore. I’m done Trina. I’m tired.”

“He will never let us be together,” Katrina sobbed. “He will kill us both.”

Andre put his arms around her. "We'll get through this somehow," he said.

The two were about to kiss when they heard a sound of a vehicle outside.

"Are you expecting someone?" Katrina could hardly hear her own voice over the sound of her pounding heart.

"No," Andre said, walking over to the window. "Shit, it's dad!"

"What!" Katrina asked.

"Go to my room Trina," Andre said, his own heart threatening to pop out of his chest.

Katrina wasted no time running upstairs. It was only when she reached the top that she realized that her car was parked right in front of the house. She was about to head back down to alert Andre when she heard the door open.

"Dad," what are you doing here? Andre tried to greet his father with feigned enthusiasm but the death stare with which his greeting was received almost froze him in time.

"So Jenna was right," Arthur said. "Where is Katrina?"

CHAPTER EIGHT

"Honey?" Katrina appeared at the top of the stairs but dared not come down.

Arthur walked towards the stairs, his eyes holding her hostage in sight. "What's going on here?" He asked sternly.

"What do you think is going on dad?" Andre asked from behind him.

Arthur glared at his son with bloodshot eyes. Katrina quickly took the stairs down to calm the storm before it erupted.

"Honey," she said, giving Andre a warning look.

"Get out of my house!" Andre yelled, infuriated by Katrina's cowardice.

"Is it me you're talking to like that?" Arthur challenged him.

"I am talking to the both of you, get out, now. I am tired of being stuck in the middle, you using me to fool around with my mother, and your wife here using me as her venting machine. I want you both out of my house." And turning to Katrina, "This is the only chance am gonna give you to do the right thing. And if you don't, don't ever come looking for me again."

Arthur looked as confused as he was feeling inside. What in hell was going on? Nothing seemed to make any sense. Where Jenna's suspicious unfounded? Was he a fool to have been taken in by the girl's suspicions? Why had he even agreed to meet with her in the first place? He should have just stayed home and enjoyed supper with his family instead of lying to his wife about meeting his ex-wife to discuss Andre's engagement. He recoiled as he remembered the meeting he had just had with Jenna.

"What is so important and so damning that you insisted on meeting me at this hour without my wife's knowledge?" Arthur had asked Jenna earlier that evening. They were sitting in a restaurant in some strange neighborhood none of them was familiar with.

“I paid Andre a surprise visit this morning and I found he had prepared a bounty breakfast for someone he was expecting. I am still haunted by the disappointment I had the misfortune of seeing in his eyes when he realized that I was not the person he was expecting to see. In a flash second, I saw his face turn from disappointment to panic. Who do you think he was expecting to meet?”

Arthur chuckled. “I see where this is going,” he said. “I am just wondering why it was so important to you that Katrina doesn’t know that we are meeting. She wouldn't care whether Andre was cheating on you or not. She doesn't like to meddle.”

“It could be because the special guest Andre was expecting was your wife,” Jenna said.

Arthur laughed again. “Are you suggesting what I think you’re suggesting young lady?” He asked.

“I know I must sound so stupid to you right now but please hear me out before asking me to shut up.” Jenna said. “I don’t know how to say this to you sir,” she hesitated.

“You must have figured out a way before summoning me to accuse my wife of having an affair with my own son,” Arthur growled. “I understand my wife is a very beautiful woman and many women find her intimidating while men find her very attractive, however, I don’t think that’s cause enough for you to feel insecure. Andre is her son. Frankly, I am insulted that you would insinuate something like this about my wife but I guess it must bother you that much if you risked mentioning it to me in such a manner.”

“I am very sorry that you feel insulted Mr Ng’andu, I really didn’t mean to,” Jenna said. “If I had not seen what I saw this morning, believe me I wouldn’t have dared ask to meet you like this. But you have to believe me, and if you don’t, at least take time to do your own research.”

Arthur was not sure about how to progress in such a conversation. He could have easily put the girl in her place, stood up, walked away, and acted as if such a conversation had never taken place. He knew exactly why the girl had dared call for such a meeting. She was aggressive just as she was possessive. She was willing to gamble her relationship with her future in-laws just to ensure that her relationship with his son was secure. Even though he was appalled by her audacity, Arthur could not help but feel a tinge of admiration for the brazen princess.

“What happened in the morning?” Arthur asked.

“I am not accusing your wife of anything,” Jenna reiterated. “In fact, it is Andre I am accusing of something.”

“What has my son done?”

“I strongly believe that Andre is in-love with his step-mother, your wife.”

Arthur laughed. He was no stranger to jealousy tantrums, but Jenna’s was off the charts.

“I know I sound very stupid right now,” Jenna said. “And I wish I was wrong but I am a woman and I can feel these things. I don’t know about your wife but I know beyond reasonable doubt that Andre has romantic feelings for his step-mother. I noticed some things before but I brushed them off because they sounded ridiculous. However, I looked into Andre’s eyes this morning when he was expecting to entertain Mrs Ng’andu and those eyes were not for a man about to meet his step-mother. They were a lover's eyes.”

“I am aware of their meeting this morning,” Arthur lied. He was not sure whether he was protecting his wife’s virtue or his own pride by not jumping quickly into Jenna’s suspicion wagon. However, he couldn’t help but wonder why Katrina had not mentioned anything about visiting Andre that morning.

“Andre never told me he was meeting her,” Jenna said.

“Does he always tell you about the guests he receives in his own home?” Arthur asked, sounding just a tiny bit irritated.

“I don’t expect to know everything that goes on in his life but...you don’t understand. I wouldn’t have said anything had I not seen the things I saw today,” Jenna said. “I understand that the two of them have a very close relationship, closer than he is to his own mother actually. However, the way Andre treats his step-mother is a little overboard to me. My fear is that if he doesn’t control his feelings, and that if your wife is not very careful, something might develop between them.”

“Do you even know what you’re insinuating Jenna? How exactly do you want me to respond to this? Have you spoken to Andre about this? I would hope so, because there’s no way you would quickly jump to such conclusions and shamelessly bring them to my attention when you have no concrete evidence.”

“I have evidence,” Jenna said confidently.

Arthur raised his eyebrows. “What kind of evidence do you have?”

Despite Jenna’s conviction, Arthur could not bring himself to a position where he could entertain the possibility of the claims against his son being true. It was obvious Katrina was innocent because the girl had not made any claims against her...although there was the question of her presence in Andre’s house that she had kept secret from him. However, Katrina had never given him any reason to doubt her love and loyalty. She was the most virtuous woman Arthur had ever come across, so much so that he found himself wondering every now and then if he was worthy of her love.

Katrina had dedicated her life wholly to taking care of him and their children. She allowed him to be his own man and at the same time she had synced their lives into such perfection that he rarely found fault in her. The only time the two of them quarreled was when Yvonne was mentioned. Even then, Katrina rarely raised her voice or kept her moods against him. Even in her anger, she catered to him as if he was her

king and savior. He had fought so many wars with Yvonne in the past that sometimes he wondered if Katrina was too calm for his liking.

Katrina always informed him of her whereabouts and he knew all of her friends. When she was not with him, she was either working, picking up the kids from school, at her mother's place, or sometimes a friend's place. She always came home on time to prepare dinner, and was always the last to go to bed because she had to clean up after everyone. No matter how scheming she was, just when in her busy schedule would she have time to carry out an affair, and with her own step-son for that matter?

"Andre who has never even boiled water or an egg for me in all the times I have been to his place prepared a bounty and gourmet breakfast for his step-mother today," Jenna said. "He was waiting for her arrival like an infatuated teen, so much so that he looked like death when he realized it was only me at the door. He was nervous and agitated the whole time. He couldn't wait for me to leave. It also didn't help that your wife was very hostile to me and-"

"Katrina's character speaks for itself," Arthur interjected. "I am just not sure about my son. I hardly know the boy so maybe you're right, maybe you're wrong. All I know is that no matter what the truth is, Katrina would never allow things to get out of hand, that much I know. I would therefore suggest that-"

Jenna's phone rang just then.

She smiled as she looked at it. "Talk of the devil," she said, showing the phone to Arthur. "First it was Arthur calling, now it's your wife. Is your family telepathic?" She chuckled.

"Aren't you going to answer it?" Arthur asked.

"Hi Mrs Ng'andu?" She answered the call.

"Hi Jenna, sorry for disturbing you, but I need a favor," Katrina said.

"Please go ahead."

“A friend of mine has a situation that I need to get her away from. I was wondering if you are available to come through and stay with the kids while am gone. I’m not going to take very long, and the kids have already gone to bed. I was going to call my mum but unfortunately, they have something going on at church this evening so-“

“It’s fine ma’am, I’ll be on my way there soon. It’s not a problem at all.”

“How long do you think-“

“Give me about thirty minutes or so,” Jenna said.

“I have to leave right now so I’ve asked my neighbor's kid to come. She’ll leave once you get here. There’s food in the warmers and more in the fridge if you get hungry. Thank you so much Jenna.”

“You’re welcome,” she cut the line. Smiling, she looked up at Arthur. “Any idea what’s going on?”

Arthur shook his head. “I left my phone in the car. I am sure I’ll find a message or missed calls when I go back. What did she ask you to do?”

“She wants me to babysit for her,” Jenna replied. “Apparently her friend has an emergency situation so she’s running rescue.”

Arthur wondered which of Katrina's friends would be in an emergency situation requiring her help at that time of the night.

“In one of Doyle’s works,” Jenna said as she closely watched Arthur silently battle his demons. “He says that when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable must be the truth,”

“Excuse me?” Arthur said.

Jenna chortled. “It’s nothing, I should go before it gets very late. I am sorry if any of the things I said to you were offensive. I mean well. I know it’s very selfish of me to

do something like this, but I thought that if Andre is to be stopped, you are the only person capable of forcing him back to his senses.”

Arthur removed his wallet from his back pocket and was about to take out some notes when Jenna stopped him.

“I’m the one that asked you to meet, I’ll pay.” She quickly took out her purse from her handbag and placed a few notes on the table before beckoning the waiter.

Arthur quickly walked to his car and grabbed his phone from the front seat to check if there were any calls from Katrina. A huge smile lit up his face when she found three missed calls and a message from her.

“That insufferable bitch,” he said, looking towards the direction where he had been sitting with Jenna.

He was driving back home when Jenna’s words rang through his ears;

Andre is in-love with his step-mother.

Arthur tried to brush off the words but after driving for a few more seconds, he made a u-turn and drove towards his son’s house. For the first time since meeting Jenna. Arthur entertained the possibility of the young lady's suspicions holding ground when he spotted Katrina’s vehicle parked in front of his son’s house.

Didn’t she say she was helping out a friend? What is she doing at Andre’s place at that hour? Arthur wondered.

“I would like to know what’s going on between the two of you,” Arthur said, looking from his fuming son to his nervous looking wife. “Since when did you start talking to your step-mother like that?” He asked.

“Katrina, would you like to tell him?” Andre dared his lover.

“Honey, can we go home first? I’ll explain everything there, I promise.”

Arthur gave his son one cold look before answering. "We'll finish this another time young man," he said with furrowed brows drowning out half of his forehead. "Let's go," he said to Katrina and led the way out.

Five minutes later, Katrina received a text message from Andre on her drive back home.

"His blood or mine Katrina.
Your choice." The message read.

Katrina pulled to the side of the road and broke down in tears.

CHAPTER NINE

By the time Katrina got home, she found Jenna getting ready to leave after she had been relieved of her duties by Arthur's arrival.

"We almost missed each other," Jenna said the moment Katrina came through the door.

Katrina glared at her, a bemused look on her face. "I was hoping I would find you gone actually," she said.

Jenna laughed. "You know, I think most people are wrong about you," she said. "They think that you're a pretender, that you never show your true emotions but I think you're doing a great job of being yourself with me. Don't you think?"

"Get the hell out of my house Jenna, and don't ever let me see you anywhere near my family again," Katrina thundered.

"You would love that now wouldn't you?" Jenna said. "In as much as I would love to never see you again, especially anywhere near my man, it can't be helped that I'll soon be part of that same family you're asking me to steer clear off." She shrugged her shoulders for effect.

It was Katrina's turn to chuckle. "So you think that there's still a future between you and Andre after the stunt you pulled today?"

"I only did what I thought was best for my relationship, and for your family as well," Jenna said.

"By involving a third party to spew your suspicions about your own boyfriend even before confirming whether your suspicions are true or not?" Katrina said. "Not to mention, the person you vomited to is my husband, your future father in-law. What you did today was try and break up a family for your own selfish interests, and if you think that Andre will love you more for it, then you really don't know him at all."

“As opposed to how you know him I guess, ah?” Jenna countered.

“Leave my house right now,” Katrina said.

Jenna brushed passed her, only to stop at the door. “By the way, you’re welcome,” she said, referring to her free babysitting services she had just offered her.

“I will send you an e-wallet in the morning,” Katrina said and walked away.

“Keep your filthy money you miserable hag,” Jenna said under her breath before slamming the door behind her.

The moment she was outside, she made a call to Andre. “I know it’s late, but can I pass through to see you?” She asked.

“I’m already waiting for you at your place,” Andre said.

“You are!” Jenna skipped in happiness all the way to her car.

Back in the house, Arthur was sitting up on the bed waiting for Katrina.

“What took you so long?” He asked.

Katrina took off her 22 inches black Peruvian wig and placed it on the dresser. She sat down in front of the mirror and started taking her make-up.

“I had a lot to think about,” she said without looking at her husband.

Arthur turned fully around so he could be looking directly at her. “What exactly where you thinking about? And how did you end up at Andre’s place instead of the friend’s place you were talking about?”

Katrina stopped whatever she was doing to finally face him. “Before I can answer any of your questions, there’s something I need to ask you first. It’s been bugging me the whole way here.”

“You can ask me anything,” Arthur said.

“What did Andre mean when he said he’s tired of you using him to fool around with his mother?” Katrina asked.

Arthur had been expecting this question, but a huge part of him had hoped that Katrina had not heard his son’s statement spoken at the peak of his anger in passing. He was aware that Andre knew of his affair with his mother, but because the boy never addressed the issue and acted as if he knew nothing, Arthur had figured that there was no need for them to openly address it. Yvonne had already confirmed that Andre had confronted her about the affair and when she asked him to talk to his father about it, Andre had told her that he had no business discussing the issue with a man determined to lie to death to the people he proclaimed undying love. There was no question that there was bad blood between father and son, and Arthur had given up hope of reconciliation a long time ago.

“Is it that you don’t trust me that you would ask me such a question Trina?” Arthur said.

Typical, go ahead and attack me instead of answering my question. Katrina thought. “I could ask you the same question,” she replied. “I am asking you for the same reason you showed up at Andre’s place tonight after whatever that little brat told you. I am only going to ask this once, and your response will determine how much I tell you about what I was doing at Andre’s place.”

“Huh?” Arthur stood up. “Are you setting terms and conditions for me?” He asked.

It was the first time Katrina was using a tone and words that challenged him. Despite being an overall assertive woman, Katrina had over the years somehow managed to tame that part of her personality when it came to her husband. Even though she appeared calm, this time around, Arthur could tell that she was working very hard to control her demeanor before him. It was something she never allowed him to see before no matter how upset he had made her. She always pulled off her

controlled temper with ease, and whenever she felt too pushed, she would ask to be excused and she would disappear from his presence until such a time she was calm.

To the world, and to anyone watching the two, Arthur was the epitome of manhood for having such immense control over his wife. However, looking at her in that moment, Arthur couldn't help wondering if it was him controlling her all this while, all if it was her controlling him and the situation altogether?

"You might think me a fool for keeping my silence every time you come home freshly bathed from God knows where," Katrina said. She had no intentions of telling him about all the solid evidence she had of his sordid affair with his ex-wife. "And maybe you think using the same soap and fragrance will not raise any red flags but any woman knows how her husband who's spent the whole day at work smells like when he gets home. The fact that I am speaking to you in this manner today should tell you that I have reached my breaking point. I have kept my silence for over ten years and all I ask of you today is the truth, please." She was fighting back tears the whole time she was speaking to him.

"Are you crying?" Arthur asked, completely taken aback by his wife's complete turn-around.

As if triggered by his question, Katrina's tears streaked down her cheeks and landed on her laps. She made no efforts whatsoever to wipe them away as her eyes stayed glued on her husband. Arthur watched in awe the force of nature unraveling before his eyes. They were two streaks of tears, one from each eye that simultaneously streamed down her cheeks and the moment they hit her laps, they stopped. No more tears poured from her eyes. It was as if she had timed at which point they should appear and disappear. The only evidence of her moment of weakness left behind were the marks left where the tears had streamed down her cheeks.

She was still holding his gaze, intently.

Arthur had never ever seen his wife shed tears before, not even at funerals. Many times his friends and relatives had asked him why his wife never cries at funerals and Arthur always gave them the same response;

“She is always too busy helping around and taking care of everyone that she doesn’t have the luxury to sit down and cater to her emotions,” he would defend her. “When everything is done and everyone has gone their separate ways, that’s when reality sinks in for her and she cries.”

But he was lying.

That was the truth he had told himself to explain why his wife never cries in his presence or in the presence of others. It was a version that made everyone understand her behavior, and it was also a version that allowed him to sleep soundly at night.

“Katrina doesn’t cry,” his mother in-law had once told him after he confided in her. “Katrina thinks crying is a form of weakness and it invites people to feel pity for you. She’s repulsed by the idea of people pitying her, that’s why we never talk about her adoption. We simply tell people that she is our daughter and that’s it. The first time she overheard us telling someone that she was adopted, Katrina ran away from home.

“When my husband finally found her, under the bridge all the way by Mandahill, she told him that she didn’t want to go back with him if he was taking her out of pity,” Vivienne added. “He had to convince her that it was because we wanted her and that we loved her for whatever and whoever she was and wanted to be. It is not that she’s hard-hearted, if anything, she has the most fragile soul in the world. Because of that, she does everything humanly possible to protect herself. I am sure she cries when she’s alone. If you want to spend the rest of your life with her, don’t ever let her know that you saw her crying by herself. Just be there for her when she’s done.”

“It’s not what you think honey,” Arthur said.

“What do you think am thinking then?” Katrina asked.

“I am not having an affair with Yvonne. She and I were done long before I met you,” Arthur explained. “I don’t know what you mean when you say that I come home freshly bathed because I always shower here at home every time I come from work.”

“Then why would your own son accuse you of having an affair with his mother?” Katrina asked.

“You know Andre; he’s never liked me for some reason. Maybe he said that out of anger because of the way I stormed into his house. But you have to understand me, I wasn’t there because of what Jenna said. I was there because I wanted to resolve my issues with my son. He is going to get married soon, and if his girlfriend can’t even trust him with his own mother, then there’s a chance that he might be making the biggest mistake of his life.”

Katrina wanted to applaud him for his plausible lie. If she didn’t know any better, she would have believed every word that fell out of his mouth. She couldn’t help but be amazed by how easy and quick he was at lying to her. Just how many other things had he lied to her about all these years of their marriage?

“Your birthday is coming up in a couple of months,” Katrina said. “Andre has been helping me organize some things for you. It took a lot of convincing for me to get him to do this with me...for obvious reasons, but he finally agreed. I thought I could use this as an opportunity for the two of you to mend your relationship.”

“Is that why he was so mad at me that he levelled such ridiculous accusations against me?” Arthur asked.

“How else did you want him to respond?” She asked. “You stormed into his house and questioned him like a criminal all because some random jealous girl spewed nonsense into your ears. I’m going to sleep in Sarah’s bedroom tonight. Have a goodnight.” Katrina grabbed her night gown from the closet and walked out.

"I guess I deserved that," Arthur mumbled to himself. He then fell back on the bed and closed his eyes, sighing heavily.

Katrina locked the door behind her and took out her phone to send a message to Andre.

"Get my children out of the lion's den first. Then surprise your father on his birthday," her message read.

Just as Andre was reading the message from Katrina, Jenna walked into the living room.

"Hey love," she greeted him excitedly.

Andre looked up from his phone. "You have such perfect timing babe," he said, a cryptic smile on his face. "And what perfect timing to break up with you," he added as he walked over to her.

Jenna stood frozen to the spot by the shock of his announcement. Arthur planted a kiss on her forehead before adding, "that was for loving me when I didn't deserve your love. I think now we're even."

And he left.

CHAPTER TEN

Jenna ran after Andre and caught up with him outside.

“You can’t do this to me!” She cried, grabbing him by his shirt.

Andre raised his hands in the air, as if in surrender. “Let go of me Jenna. You’re acting crazy.”

“Crazy!? You think this is crazy?” She scoffed. “You haven’t seen crazy yet you perverted son of a bitch.” She spat on his face and pushed him away so hard he almost fell to the ground.

Andre managed to straighten himself back to balance. He pulled his shirt back in place and glared at her. “I am the fool for getting entangled with you,” he said and walked away.

“I am the fool for falling for a fool that’s in-love with his own mother!” Jenna shouted at his back.

She's definitely not my mother, Andre said to himself, smiling mischievously.

As Andre drove away, he spotted Jenna in his rear view mirror sitting on the floor and sobbing loudly. A part of him reached out to her, apologetic for using her in the manner he did. Perhaps she might not have jumped the gun and taken such drastic actions had he been a better man to her. Recalling Katrina’s message, Andre drove a safe distance away before parking on the side of the road to send a text message to someone saved in his phone as Mubita:

+DEF/1ABC.

Ec ne mm oc no it ar ep oe uc se rx

Upon sending the message, Andre laid his head back and waited for a response. It came a minute and half later and read:

"No ti ss ob."

He smiled triumphantly and got back on the road.

Katrina had just come out of the shower the weekend before Arthur's birthday when she found him waiting for her in the bedroom.

"Is everything okay?" She asked after his nervous demeanor.

"You're not gonna like this," he said, fidgeting slightly.

"Business trip?" Katrina guessed. After eleven years, the look was engraved in her memory.

"Yeah, apparently there is an issue with the largest order we placed in Finland," Arthur said. "They need me to be there on ground to sort out the mess."

"How long?" Katrina asked.

"I'll make sure that I return before my big day, I promise you."

"I think even you know that's an empty promise," she sulked, turning her back to him.

"Honey-"

"It's fine, I understand," she said in an almost whisper.

Arthur went over to her and put his arms around her from behind. "I promise I'll get back in time and give you a huge treat, I promise."

"You better, because if you don't, you gonna find me and all the kids gone. You'll have all this huge house to yourself."

Arthur chuckled. "Pulling out all the big guns now, ah?" He said, kissing her on the side of her face. "I guess I have to make sure I come back in good time lest I lose my angels, my reasons for living."

An hour later, Arthur was lying in bed with Yvonne at her place.

“So she let you go just like that?” Yvonne laughed at the supposed ignorance or innocence of her nemesis. “If I were her I would offer to drive you to the airport and then pick you up. That’s the problem when you’re only book smart.”

“I thought we agreed you couldn’t talk about my wife like that,” Arthur said.

Yvonne shrugged her shoulders dismissively, a smile playing on her face. She was just busking in the fact that Arthur had kept his promise to her to always spend the week of his birthday with her. He had honored that promise ever since they got back together and she swore she would make someone pay if he ever rescinded on that promise.

Katrina’s absolute trust in him was what constantly ate at Arthur whenever he was out with any of his women. That guilt was even more pronounced whenever he was with Yvonne because the nature of their affair made the woman feel she could easily disrespect his wife and get away with it. All his other flings knew how to act around him and to keep their mouths shut about their association to him. He had a reputation to uphold and no way in hell was he going to let those kinds of women ruin it for him. They knew better than to incur his wrath. Yvonne on the other hand was a different case.

No matter the reasons that brought Arthur back to Yvonne, or her to him, he secretly acknowledged the fact that she still had an effect on him. She was to some extent a weakness to him. She might not love him for the right reasons but Arthur knew that in a twisted way, that was the only way Yvonne knew how to love. It was a love she never hid from him. The honesty and freedom with which she expressed that love and her needs made her different from many women he had encountered in his life as a successful businessman.

Where others would be repulsed by Yvonne's shamelessness, Arthur found her honesty about her desires endearing and refreshing. He relished in the idea of being her

savior and her desperation to keep holding on to him for as long as humanly possible. He could not bear the thought of her suffering or let alone being in the arms of another man. He needed her to always want and need him like that. It was a feeling he was never gonna get from Katrina, and it was one he had come to accept never to expect.

Despite her caring and loving nature, Katrina was elusive in her expression of emotions. Where Yvonne expressed through words, Katrina showed, and she always went far and beyond expectation in her demonstration of both love and hate. That much Arthur was aware of. Having both women in his life was like having the best of both worlds. Where one woman lacked, the other supplied. He could have traded all other women he had ever encountered in his life, but Yvonne and Katrina would always remain a constant. His life would be all perfect were it not for the fact that Yvonne was deeply threatened by the main woman in his life and had over the years desperately tried to cast her rival out of the picture, though each instance ended painfully unsuccessful for her. In the end, he concluded that to keep the peace on both sides, he had to curve in to the demands of both women, no matter how ridiculous those demands were.

Pleasing Yvonne was the easiest, it was pleasing Katrina he faced the most difficulties. There was very little that seemed to move the woman, apart from keeping the peace in her marriage by being submissive to him and loving his children with all her blood and sweat. Katrina neither nagged nor complained.

“I really wish we were going to Hawaii instead of Zanzibar,” Yvonne said. “It’s so boring.”

“You know we can’t go that far. This is the first time my son is doing something for me. I need to be there no matter what.” Arthur said proudly.

Yvonne laughed. “He does something nice for you and finally you acknowledge him as your son?” She huffed. “You’re one shameless man Arthur Ng’andu.”

"I have always considered him my son," he said. "It's just that he hasn't given me a chance to make up for neglecting him after our divorce. He clearly still hasn't forgiven me for it."

"Same with me," Yvonne said. "The way he looks at me sometimes," she shook her head. "I have even found myself entertaining the idea that maybe you told him about what happened thirteen years ago."

"Do you think me a fool? Why would I tell him something like that? It's even awkward having a normal conversation with him unless Katrina is there. It's just his loyalty to Katrina that makes him act the way he does. He's still young and doesn't understand these things. But maybe now that he's ready to settle down, maybe he will start acting like a man once he understands the ways of real men. It just comes naturally when the time is right."

"Not every woman is as gullible as Katrina," Yvonne countered. "That Jenna girl has a tight leash on Andre."

Yvonne's words triggered a memory of the stunt Jenna had played a couple of months ago in Arthur's head. He laughed. "I think you need to give the girl a call for an update," he said. "Andre might be ready to settle down now, but it is not with Jenna."

Yvonne was incredulous. "He broke up with her!? When?" She asked.

"About two months ago. I'm surprised she hasn't told you about it. I thought the two of you were close." Arthur said.

"I was chatting with her on the phone just the other day, and she paid me a visit a few weeks ago. She never said anything about them breaking up. We were even making a list of the things she needs for the chilanga mililo." She then scoffed. "I told her there was no need for her to worry about that because we don't expect it of her but she was so insistent, saying she wants to show off to everyone that she can take good care of her husband. Is that girl crazy? Do you know why they broke up?"

"It's a long story," Arthur said dismissively. "She made the most ridiculous claims against Andre thanks to her insecurities and possessiveness."

"What claims? Don't tell me it's because she thinks he's gay?"

Arthur stared at her with furrowed brows. "Why would that thought even cross your mind? If he's truly my son then there's no chance of something like that."

"If he's truly your son? What's that supposed to mean?"

"Don't overreact," he said, trying to calm the fury pouring out of her Yvonne's pores. "I just meant that no son of mine can ever be a sissy. I know he is my son."

"Sometimes you say the most hurtful things you know?" Yvonne sulked. "Anyway, she was suspicious because apparently Andre has never touched her...romantically you know. I had no idea he was the type that waits for marriage. That's the excuse he gave her anyway, and she doesn't think that it's because there are other women in his life. She just thinks any man that's not jumping at the opportunity to sleep with her has to be gay."

Yvonne's words struck a chord in Arthur's mind. "He never touched her? Why?" He asked, more to himself than to Yvonne. All the while, Jenna's words were replaying themselves in his head; He is in-love with his step-mother.

"What's wrong with you?" Yvonne asked, her face towering over him. "You look like you've just received news of a funeral."

"What do you think about the way Andre treats Katrina?" Arthur asked.

"Huh? Why are you asking...." Her mouth fell wide-open. "You can't possibly--"

"No, of course not. Don't be ridiculous," Arthur said. "I just remembered something that Jenna said right before Andre broke up with her. She thought Andre has a crush on Katrina."

Yvonne busted out in laughter. "That insecure girl must have misconstrued Andre's treatment of Katrina compared to me. She once questioned me about it and I told her it was because Andre hasn't forgiven me for the divorce. I thought she had let it go."

"Obviously she didn't," Arthur said. "She saw Katrina at Andre's place some time back secretly planning my birthday party and she allowed her mind to go wild."

"Anyway, I can't blame Jenna for being jealous of Katrina. She is a beautiful woman, I'll give her that," Yvonne said. "And knowing her, there is no way she would entertain the idea of her step-son lusting after her. That's very bad PR for her!" She laughed.

Arthur glared at her and immediately brought her laughter to a stop.

Arthur arrived on the eve of his birthday. It was a Friday afternoon. His heart almost skipped a beat when he spotted Andre waving at him from the Arrivals waiting bay.

"I take it mum has a special flight back that won't tie her to you right?" Andre said as he relieved his father of his luggage, leading the way to the car park straight away as if everything about his presence at the airport was normal.

"What are you doing here?" Arthur asked.

"I came to pick you up. Isn't that obvious?" The young man said.

"What happened to Luther?" Arthur asked after his chauffeur.

"I gave him a day off," Andre said. "It's a special day today, remember? It's the eve of your big day. You're slowly starting to look your age dad, don't scowl like that." Andre laughed.

"Is this all part of my birthday surprise? Because if it is, I am thoroughly surprised...and pleased. You're the last person I would have ever imagined picking me up from the airport." Arthur said.

Arthur had had no idea just how much he longed for his oldest son's affection until that moment he saw him waiting for him at the airport. There was a bond he had come to accept for what it was; familial tolerance. However, the manner in which his heart was moved, almost against his will made Arthur realize just how much he had missed out on bonding with his son.

"You're too quiet," Andre said when ten minutes passed of their drive and his father had not said a word. "Missing the fun you had in Zanzibar?"

"How did you know I was in Zanzibar?" Arthur asked.

"I know more about you than you can ever imagine, dad," Andre said.

"I doubt it, but I like the thought," Arthur said.

Andre chuckled. "The problem with having so much power and being at the top of everyone is that the distance between you and the people that serve you becomes so long that your vision gets blurred."

"When did you become a philosopher?" Arthur laughed. "I appreciate you coming to pick me up son."

"I am just sorry that the only time I get to act like a good son is today of all days," Andre said.

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"Do you mind if we drive somewhere and have a drink together before we head home?"

Arthur smiled. "It's the first time my son is inviting me for a drink, so yeah, let's go." Arthur's smile widened. "So this is how fathers who get along with their son's feel ah? I feel like the luckiest man alive today. Growing old isn't so bad after all."

Andre looked into the rear view mirror to catch a glimpse of his father sitting in the back, a pang of guilt creeping all the way down his spine upon seeing his old man's smile.

"Didn't you ever have drinks with your father?" Andre asked in a desperate attempt to numb his guilty conscious.

"This is a bittersweet moment I guess," Arthur said.

"Why do you say so?" Andre asked, wondering if the man had caught onto him.

"Your question just made me realize how little we know about each other," Arthur said. "Your grandfather, my father...he passed away when I was only fifteen years old."

"I know that he's late, I just didn't know that he passed on when you were that young," Andre said.

"At that time I never even thought I was young. I didn't have the luxury to entertain such a thought," Arthur said. "My mother died from depression not long after my father. Your aunties in the US, the ones you were living with were just babies then. They didn't know anything so I had to step up and become their father. Things had gotten so bad for us that for three whole months we slept on the streets.

"I did things I am not proud of back then just to survive and protect my siblings," Arthur said. "Fortunately, before I could become a full blown monster, I stole from someone who thought I deserved a second chance so instead of sending me to jail, he gave me a job as a farm hand and gave me a one room for my sisters and I to live in at the farm.

"It was not a great life," he continued. "But it was certainly better than being on the streets. I worked like a mad person just to earn extra money to send your aunts and myself to school. I guess being so poor was what drove me to be as successful as I am today. I truly hated living like that." He laughed at the memories that once made him cry and hug himself to sleep.

Andre could not dare look into his rear-view mirror, fear that he might see in his father's eyes something he had never seen before that would make him regret everything he had come to know as his life.

Why did it have to be today of all days? Andre mused.

"I bet you didn't know all this about your old man huh?" Arthur asked, oblivious to his son's heart tearing apart under his shirt.

"No dad, I had no idea," Andre said. "How come you never speak about your past?"

"Some people have said it's my inferiority complex," he said. "I have to agree with them. I know most people would love to celebrate such a past after attaining some success in life but I guess am different. For a long time, I felt like a fraud living like a rich man. I thought that if people knew of my past, they will always treat me like I didn't belong. I have worked so hard for the things I have and I wanted to feel like I deserve to be rubbing shoulders with the people I used to worship from afar. The last thing I wanted was them treating me like I didn't belong. So naturally, I buried that past."

"Even from your own children?" Andre asked, wishing he had at least known that much about his father before choosing a path of hate and revenge. Maybe then he would have exercised a little patience and tried to understand him for who he was and the things that made him like that.

"Well, you finally know today?" Arthur chuckled. He was in very high spirits.

But today is a little too late, Andre thought, fighting back tears.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

“So what do you want to talk to your old man about?” Arthur asked his son once their drinks were served.

Andre shifted uncomfortably in his seat. He had confidence about this meeting before learning about his father's past that made him come off as a mere human. It had been all those years to think of him as an ogre, a human void of emotion. That way, every action Andre took against his father failed validated.

“Is this about Jenna?” Arthur asked, sensing his son's nervousness.

“No, it's got nothing to do with her,” Andre said. “I have thought about many ways of going about this...about the right thing to do or say, when...? I only realized recently that I don't have the right to any of those things. I am way passed the point of return that the only justice I can do for you right now is to allow you to hear the truth from me and not from anyone else.”

Arthur took a long gulp from his drink straight from the bottle before responding. “Is this about your feelings for your step-mother?” He nonchalantly asked.

Andre looked flustered. Did he already know about the affair? He wondered.

“Jenna once told me that if I eliminated the impossible, whatever remained, no matter how improbable must be the truth,” Arthur said. “She claimed that you had feelings for Katrina. It sounded impossible at first, but then I considered the possibilities again. It's an impossibility that a relationship might be going on between you and Katrina. So then, what's the possibility? The improbable possibility is that you have feelings for her.”

Andre was not sure whether to be happy about his father's ignorance that reeked of self-assuredness, or to feel sorry for him. He had always imagined the extent of his

father's disadvantage in his ignorance but to have to see it play out in 4D made Andre feel the weight of his betrayal to the fullest extent.

"Initially I paged down the suspicions to mere jealousy on Jenna's part, but something your mother said made me look at things a little differently," Arthur said.

"What exactly did mum say?" Andre asked.

"It's nothing important," his father answered. "The truth is something I had a hard time embracing but then again you're a man. It's normal for you to feel a certain way about her. She isn't even your biological mother after all. Katrina is a very attractive woman. I am yet to meet a man that has met her and has not felt some form of attraction to her. Your feelings aren't something to be apologetic for."

"I am afraid the truth is a little more complicated than you imagine," Andre said.

Arthur swallowed hard, bracing himself for the possibility of his worst fears coming to life. Was his son actually in-love with his step-mother? He was okay with it being a mere crush because it's something that can be easily squashed. However, anything more would definitely be cause for alarm.

Even before Andre could confirm it, his eyes had already leaked his emotions.

"You're in-love with her aren't you?" Arthur asked.

"Yes dad," Andre answered simply.

"Is she aware of your feelings?"

"She is."

"Then am sure you know what to do already," Arthur said dismissively. "I am just not sure why we are having this conversation. You could have easily resolved this between the two of you without getting me involved."

"See, that's where you're wrong," Andre said, sitting up straight to ensure that the next bombshell he dropoed landed with a Kim Jong-un kind of atomic force. "I told

Katrina that I was in-love with her nine years ago. That's how long she has known. She only gave me an answer two months ago."

For the very first time in his life, Andre saw fear in his father's eyes. "I get the feeling that you're telling me that the answer she gave you is different from the obvious answer I hope she gave."

"Yes," Andre said proudly. "I wish there was a better way of saying this but we're in-love with each other. Katrina loves me too dad."

Arthur gulped down the rest of the contents in his bottle and placed it back on the table with a thud. "Did she tell you she's in-love with you? And please, don't assume for a second that I am asking these questions because I believe the things you're saying. I am merely giving you the benefit of a doubt because of our relationship, even though it might be at the expense of my trust in my wife."

Andre wanted to scoff at his father's arrogance but he could only stare at him in pity. His father's biggest flaw had always been his hubris; believing that he knew more and knew better than everyone in the building, and that any woman he loved would have no business seeking for love elsewhere...even if she attempted to, like his first wife did, she would always come back to him.

"I know it must be hard for you to believe but I love Katrina and she loves me too," Andre said. "You said it yourself, when you've eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable must be the truth. Ask yourself this; how is it possible that a woman as intelligent as Katrina could be oblivious of the affair between you and mum that's been going on for almost as long as her marriage? Also ask yourself why you were so comfortable believing that she had absolutely no clue despite knowing how fast she is at picking up on things?"

"You wanted to believe whatever version of truth made you comfortable and worked to your advantage," Andre continued. "That is who you are dad. You see things only through your lenses, never from another's perspective. The truth is that

you've always known that Katrina knew about your affairs, but what mattered most to you was that she seemingly appeared not to do anything about it. So you continued and cheated on her over and over again. Look at the facts again and tell me what improbabilities you can come up with. Knowing Katrina the way you do, what do you imagine would be the right reaction from her after discovering that her beloved husband was cheating on her?"

Andre sat back to watch his father mull over the possibilities.

Arthur felt the walls around them narrow in on him, his mind replaying all the moments in his life he had chosen to gaze upon with a preconceived idea of what he wished them to look like. Images of purple and blue flowers kept flashing in his head.

"Since when did Andre become the florist of the house?" Arthur had asked Katrina when he walked into the kitchen and found her smelling the flowers, a smile on her face.

"He's been doing this for a while now," she had said. "And it's always the same type, purple hyacinth. I love them."

"only until they wilt and you throw them away," he said.

"I never throw them away," she said. "I always dry them up and use them as decor around the house. They will always have a place in this house no matter the condition."

"I take it they have a special meaning?" Arthur asked.

Katrina smiled, "All flowers have special meanings honey." She had offered no further explanations and Arthur made no attempts whatsoever to find out more.

Women. Was all he was thinking as he shook his head in wonder.

"Why do you always get her bellflowers on her birthday?" An image of Yvonne flashed across Arthur's mind.

The two were in her living room enjoying a late night movie with wine and popcorn on display.

"What bellflowers?" Arthur had asked.

"Here," Yvonne handed her phone to him.

It was Katrina's Instagram profile and on focus was a fresh bouquet of bellflowers she had posted with the caption; a birthday is not complete without some reassurance.

"Andre must have gotten her those," Arthur said, handing her back the phone and turning his eyes back on the screen.

"And you don't find that odd?" Yvonne asked.

Arthur chuckled. "You've started with your jealousy. Andre bought her flowers, I bought her a car, that's gonna last her for as long as she likes. These flower things are for weak-hearted boys. Andre has a lot of growing up to do."

"You really don't know women," Yvonne shook her head in disappointment. "It's not about how long the flowers last," she added. "It's about the meaning behind them. I am looking at these and I know without a doubt in my head that my own son loves his step-mother more than he will ever love me."

Arthur laughed. "Why? Because he sent her a bunch of cheap flowers? You never cease to amaze me with your competitiveness. It's always one thing after another."

"Is the truth taking shape yet?" Andre taunted his father who was visibly lost in reverie.

Arthur glared at him. "The flowers, it was always right there in front of me. The flowers...."

"Didn't you ever wonder why the flowers in the kitchen only appeared when you returned home from one of your escapades?" Andre asked. "Each bouquet in the

kitchen was in place of the apology I knew she would never get from you because as long as you thought she didn't know; you were going to continue cheating on her. I gave her bellflowers on her birthday to convince her of my unwavering love, to show her that I was different from you. "

"When did you start liking her?" Arthur asked, still unable to come to terms with the possibilities unravelling before him. "When the flowers started coming, you had completely stopped acting out. Is that when this...this whole thing started?"

Arthur would have easily believed someone that told him he was blind even though his eyes could clearly see than believe that his wife was having an affair with his own son. Everything happening in that moment felt so surreal to the 55-year-old.

"It started on my 20th birthday," Andre replied. "I had done something terrible to Katrina and I somehow ended up at mum's place. That was the day I discovered why the two of you divorced and exactly what you felt about me."

"So all of this is because you're mad at me and your mother? Is this why you're making up these crazy stories?" Arthur asked, controlling himself to avoid attracting the attention of other patrons at the restaurant.

"You think I am telling you this because of that? Even in this moment, you're still full of it," Andre snapped.

"Control yourself," Arthur said, looking around them.

"What, afraid that people will know you for who you really are when they discover that your own son has been sleeping with your wife for over ten years?" Andre said.

Arthur got up and stormed outside. Andre ran after him and threw him his keys. "My car is here, you can drive yourself home," he said. "I brought you here so we could talk like adults in a controlled environment, without your weapons. I am well aware of the things you do to your rivals."

"Rival?" Arthur scoffed. "You're nowhere near being any rival of mine young man."

"Maybe you're right," Andre said. "Because it is me she loves and she has two of my children. You only have one with her."

"I will not believe any of that garbage coming out of your mouth until I talk to Katrina myself," Arthur said. "You have spent so many years lusting after my wife and now you're so deluded you actually believe she's in-love with you. You need to get help son."

"Do whatever you want but you won't find Katrina at home. She's long gone."

"Where is she?"

"Somewhere you will never find her." Andre said.

Rather than waste another second arguing with his son, Arthur got into his car and sped off.

Andre called Katrina right away.

"I tried to talk to him but the man is stubborn," he said. "He is so sure of himself and of you that he won't believe anything I say," he added.

"I know," Katrina said.

"You know?" Arthur asked.

"Yes, that's why am waiting for him at home."

"Katrina, what do you mean you're waiting for him home? Where are you right now?"

"I'm at my matrimonial home Andre. I'll talk to you soon." She cut the line.

Andre smashed his phone on the ground in anger and frantically ran to his car. Just what was Katrina doing back in the country when he had arranged for her and the

kids to be safely out before confronting his father. Andre searched around him for his phone as he drove to make a call to Mubita only to remember that he had smashed it to the ground only a few minutes ago.

“What have you done Katrina?” Andre asked himself as he kept hitting at his steering wheel in frustration.

I need to get home before my father does, Andre thought as he drove like a maniac on the highway.

But he was too late. Arthur had arrived before him. With the world spinning around him, Andre ran towards the door with all his might.

He was just a few feet away when he heard the gunshot.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Andre stormed through the room only to freeze in his tracks when he spotted an incapacitated Katrina on the floor, Arthur towering over her. A few inches away from them a gun lay in its full glory.

"Dad, what have you done?" Andre cried, still unable to move the rest of his body.

"I...I...I didn't. I swear to you...." Arthur struggled to find the right words to say. Even his own thoughts couldn't make sense to him.

Finally getting his senses back, Andre shoved his father aside and got to check on Trina. She moaned in pain just as Andre got on top of her.

"Katrina! Katrina! Open your eyes, it's me," Andre shouted frantically.

"I'm ok," Katrina murmured. "It's just my shoulder."

Andre gently pulled down her blouse to check her bleeding wound. "It only grazed your shoulder." He heaved a huge sigh and dropped to the floor in relief.

"I didn't shoot her," Arthur said from where he was standing. "She's the one that pointed the gun at me, she fired right over my shoulder, I went down and the bullet hit the steel bars around the window and ricocheted back towards her."

"He said he was going to kill you," Katrina said.

Andre glared at his father before shifting attention back to Katrina who was obviously in pain. He was going in search of a first aid box when a thought occurred to him. He walked back and picked up the gun lying on the floor.

Arthur laughed. "I have no intentions whatsoever of using a gun today," he said nonchalantly. "I wouldn't waste good bullets on either of you."

“As well you shouldn’t,” Andre said. “Because if you do, I have someone out there ready to reveal all the things you’ve strived to keep hidden all these years. Just one leak and your house of cards will come tumbling down.”

“Why should I get blood on my hands when the sinners are the two of you?” Arthur asked.

Andre laughed. “You think you’re the innocent one in all this?” He asked. Katrina reached out her hand and touched Andre’s leg. “Please help me up,” Katrina asked.

Andre unconsciously placed the gun on the arm of the sofa to gently help Katrina from the floor to the sofa.

“Wait right here. I’ll get you something for the pain and something to stop the bleeding.”

“I just have one question,” Arthur said to Katrina once they were alone. “Why now? I mean, why reveal the truth now after so many years?”

“Because I am tired of living a double life,” she said.

“So you picked my son over me?”

“I didn’t pick one over the other,” she answered. “I simply fell out of love with you, and in-love with Andre.”

“And you think that what the two of you have is love?” He scoffed. “I gave you everything you ever wanted Katrina.”

“Everything?” She asked. “What do you think I wanted? A mansion? Cars? Money? Do you even know me? You cheated on me in the second year of our marriage. You couldn’t even allow me to finish enjoying the honeymoon phase. How do you think I felt knowing you were back with your ex-wife? I felt used and rejected. The

constant lying and pretending as if your world revolved around me made me sick to my stomach."

"So you thought keeping quiet about everything was the right thing to do?"

"I was giving you a chance to make amends on your own," she said.

Andre appeared just then but sensing the heated conversation between the two, he stepped back and listened in from the other side of the dining room.

"I didn't want you to stop seeing her simply because I caught you," Katrina said. "Then I would have to live the rest of my life wondering if you've gone back there or if you've found someone else to replace her. But, if you made the decision on your own, I could have easily trusted your love and looked at everything you did as a mere mistake."

"So all these years, everything you did, it was all an act?" Arthur asked.

"I could say the same about you," Katrina said. "I did the best I could to keep up with the façade. You played your part too."

"I am trying to wrap my head around you sleeping with my son, however, what am finding even harder to grasp is the children. So it wasn't enough for you to just sleep with my son, you had to have his children as well and pass them off as mine?"

"I am not like you," Katrina said. "I never once told you that they were your children. You assumed they were naturally yours."

"That's because am your husband goddammit!" Arthur said. "What man wants to question the paternity of his children borne to him by his own wife?"

"It never stops you before," Katrina said. "Your arrogance and selfishness, that's why we are here today. I kept hoping year after year that you would stop but you never did. And each time that happened, it hurt even more. I wanted to numb myself enough to stop feeling the pain and the more I continued to meet Andre, I started to realize how

much I didn't hurt anymore. He was very attentive and caring. He made me forget about everything that was going wrong in my marriage, and before I knew it, I was in love."

"You could have simply left," Arthur said.

"That was never an option for me, until now."

"I could have forgiven the affair, if the man in question was not my son," Arthur said. "Even worse, the two of you have kids together. Now, without asking too much from you, give me my son Kumbi and you and your young lover can disappear from my life with your little bastards to wherever you want. Just give me my son."

"I am not giving my son to you!" Katrina yelled.

"I am ready to raise the boy as if he's my own," Andre said, finally rejoining the party. He sat down next to Katrina and started dressing her wound.

Arthur started laughing, slowly but surely. Before they knew up, he was laughing his belly off.

"Get me out of here," Katrina whispered to Andre.

Andre quickly finished attending to her wound and helped her up.

"I am sorry that things turned out this way *Bashi* Kumbi," Katrina stopped to address Arthur for the last time. "But I have no intention of separating my children from each other. I had entertained the idea for a brief moment, but then I remembered what you did to Andre. I do not want my son to have to pay for my sins. I will bear the consequences myself."

Arthur laughed even harder. "So you have this whole thing planned out right?" He asked. "Screw over your husband of over ten years and run away with your lover who just happens to be your step-son, and deprive me of my rights to my son, huh?"

He laughed again. "You must think yourself so smart burning me like this don't you? I'll give the two of you two days to bring back my son."

"He is never coming back here," Katrina said sternly.

"I know that's what you think," Arthur said. "Now get the hell out of my house, right now!" He thundered.

Andre quickly led them out of the house and straight to his car.

Unbeknownst to the two, Arthur was watching them from behind the curtains. The moment they were out of sight, he walked over to where Andre had placed the gun. With both hands in his pockets, Arthur intently stared down at the gun, a mysterious smile on his face as he relished over the grave mistake Katrina and Andre had just made.

"You know this isn't over for him right?" Katrina said in panic as they drove back to the motel in the outskirts where Andre was staying. "He is going to come after Kumbi, and then he is going to kill us both." She started crying. "I have no idea what I was thinking. This was a stupid idea. What will happen to my kids if something happens to us? This was--"

Andre placed his hand on her lap to reassure her. "Don't overthink things babe," he said. "Just calm down and try to relax. I'm gonna fix all this just please, trust me."

"I really want to trust you, I do...but you don't know your father," Katrina cried.

"It's not like we didn't plan for a retaliation from him," Andre said. "We both knew the risk Katrina, so why are you losing faith all of a sudden?"

He is too calm," Katrina said. "I know that man. He is just too calm for my liking. It just gives me this bad feeling."

"It's okay for you to feel like that in this situation, but let's get to the hotel first so you can sit down and relax a bit and we will get back to the drawing board. Deal?"

Katrina nodded.

“So how did you get back here?” Andre asked.

“I am a great mastermind, have you already forgotten?” Katrina chuckled.

“You almost made me lose my mind, you know that?” He said.

“I am sorry. I didn’t mean to surprise you like that. I knew you wouldn’t have allowed me to stay if I told you about it...also, I guess I felt like a coward running away without according him the opportunity for closure. He might be the big bad wolf in our lives but he’s not all-out evil. His only mistake was marrying a woman whose expectations of love he could not meet. Maybe your mother is right, maybe the two of them were meant to be. I was simply a detour along the road.”

“Don’t say that,” Andre said.

“All this feels so surreal,” she said.

“It’ll all be over soon, I promise,” Andre said.

Later that evening, while Andre and Katrina lay in bed relaxing, Katrina’s phone rang. It was her mother.

“Katrina, where are you?” She asked.

“What’s wrong mum? You don’t sound-“

“The police are here at our house,” her mother said.

Katrina sat right up. “What do you mean the police?” She asked.

“These people are saying that you shot your husband and then set your house on fire.”

“Mum, what are you talking about?”

“What’s wrong?” Andre asked.

Katrina couldn't answer. She just started crying. Andre took the phone from her.

"It's Andre," he said. "Did something happen?"

"What did you make my daughter do?" The woman sobbed.

"Please repeat what you said earlier."

"The police are looking for the two of you," she said. "They're saying that the fire brigade found the body of your father in the house when they went to put out the fire. They found a gun in the house and they're saying that they have evidence of Katrina and you having an affair. They think that the fire was set to hide evidence of the murder. They're threatening to take us in for questioning."

"Which police station are they-"

"I don't know. There are four uniformed police officers but the two men questioning us don't look anything like the usual cops. They look like they're the bosses in the police force."

"Then tell them that we're coming there right away." He cut the call.

"I knew it," Katrina said. "He would rather kill himself and frame us for his death than face the world with the embarrassment of all this."

"Stay here," Andre said.

"No, am going with you!" Katrina said.

"Katrina!" Andre yelled.

Katrina flinched in fear.

"Listen to me, just this once, please," Andre said in a much calmer tone. "Let me handle this, okay? I am begging you, please. Don't do anything. I promised to protect my family no matter what, give me a chance to do that."

“Okay,” Katrina said. She went over to him and put her arms around him. “If I don’t hear from you in the next two hours, am coming after you.”

“No,” he said. “Do you have any idea what will happen if they have us both? What happens to our kids?”

“I didn’t think-“

“It’s okay,” he said. “I am going to talk to Mubita, give me your phone. I broke mine.” She handed him the phone. “Just in case things get rough and the lawyers can’t get me out of this mess right away, do everything that Mubita is going to ask you. Are we on the same page?”

“What if they do something to you?” Katrina cried.

Andre pulled her into his arms. “You know, for a woman that hid her tears so well all these years, you’ve been crying a lot lately. I feel like I have brought you more pain than anything.”

Katrina tightened her arms around him. “I have never felt so loved and so alive in my life,” she said. “After my parents, you’re the best thing that ever happened to me.”

“And here I thought I was the first,” he laughed.

“Because they saved my life first.” She said. “And you just saved me now.”

“That sounds like you’re telling me that you trust me.” He pulled her slightly away from him so he could look at her face.

Katrina nodded. “I trust you, and I love you.”

Andre kissed her on the lips. “Wait for me.” he said.

He kissed her again, this time on the forehead and he left the room without looking back.

Outside, Andre placed a call to Mubita.

“Get her out of here, right now,” he said and cut the line. He then dropped the phone to the ground and hit it with his foot repeatedly until it was crushed beyond repair.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Andre's initial interrogation went on for hours on end. Not a single part of his body was spared from the kicks and punches the police officers showered him.

"Tell us where she is?" Sergeant Mwabi asked for the umpteenth time.

"I have told you already, you would have to kill me first before I can tell you where she is," Andre said.

He was about to punch him again when his captain summoned him outside.

"Keep at it until he tells you the truth," the sergeant instructed the detective before heading out.

A few seconds later, the sergeant returned. "Leave," he said to the detective who was now in the middle of restructuring Andre's already restructured ribs. He hunched down to come face to face with Andre. "If you tell me where the boy Kumbi is, I can arrange for a way to keep you alive," he added.

Andre laughed in his face and was rewarded with an echoing punch that sent him straight to the floor. The sergeant picked him up by the shoulders and forced him back on the chair.

Andre raised his head up to give him a menacing look. "I want you to tell my father this; if he wants his kid back, he will have to face me like a man. I did not expect him to act like a coward and hire goons to take care of his problems. How much is he paying you? Huh? Do you think he has no enemies that are way more powerful than the biggest fish in your chain of command here? Tell my father, Arthur Ng'andu that he only has two option; kill me now, or face me like a man."

The sergeant was about to show him the back of his hand when someone knocked at the door. The sergeant walked out, leaving Andre alone for the first time

since they cuffed him at the home of Katrina's parents and brought him into the interrogation room.

Unwittingly, the officers had confirmed his suspicions; that his father was still alive. Perhaps it had not been such a bad idea to take Kumbi with them. It was the best of two evils they had to choose from. It was either he remained with his father and be raised by a vindictive man than would make him pay for his mother's sins, or be raised by a mother that would deprive him of his biological father's love. Technically speaking, the choice was more on Andre's side than on Katrina's who only had one option - not to leave any child behind.

In the end, Andre's choice was motivated by reasons far beyond parentage: it was leverage. He knew a time would come when his father would want to strike back but Arthur being Arthur, he would demand to have his offspring back. At his age, the only thing guaranteed to carry his legacy was the child that had not betrayed him. He needed Kumbi not just for his business, for his own self-preservation.

"The reason you are here is because you killed your father," the sergeant said.

"Yeah, I killed JF Kennedy too, kill me already," Andre retorted.

"You think this is a joke don't you?" The sergeant asked. "Do you think there's anywhere in the world your lover can hide that we will not find her? What do you imagine is happening to Katrina's parents right now in the other room?"

"I am not worried about them," Andre said. "My soon to be mother in-law once introduced me to this dude named Jesus. I can assure you that he has them covered. However, just in case my pal Jesus is occupied, tell my old man that I know another dude with The David File and a fast internet connection. I dare you to touch even a single hair on them. I will drag all of us to hell faster than the devil can say 'temptation,'. In case I was clear before, let me repeat," Andre said. "Tell my father that if he wants his son back, he should face me like a man."

"Like you did when you nailed his wife behind his back?" The sergeant said.

"You need to get your facts right, I started nailing her when I was just a little boy," Andre said. "These days I make love to her."

"You're a son of a bitch you know that?"

Andre laughed. "My father would agree with you. Me? I'm still on the fence. She is my mother after all."

"Why are you making this so complicated for yourself? Do you have any idea which people you've pissed off?"

Careful now, you're going to tell on yourself."

"If I walk out that door without a name or location, the blood of your lover's parents will be on your hands," the sergeant said.

"The David Files," Andre said.

"Have it your way then," the sergeant said and left the room.

The sergeant walked to the far end of the hallway, took the stairs up and finally knocked at the door of the chief's office.

"Come in," the police chief said.

"Chief--"

"We heard everything already," the Chief said, turning his chair around to face a male figure standing by the window, his back to them. "It appears your son has leverage," the chief added.

Arthur slowly turned around. "He is my son after all," he said, almost with a tinge of pride laced in his voice.

"So what are you going to do?" The chief asked.

“Did you touch the-“

“We sent them home a long time ago,” the chief answered before Arthur could finish his question. “Those two run one of the biggest churches in the country. The last thing we both want is their followers raising fire all over the media. We agreed we would do this quietly. As it happens, your son appears to have more dirt on you than you do on him. What’s this David file he keeps mentioning?”

Arthur looked at the sergeant in response.

“You can excuse us,” the chief said to his subordinate.

“Release him,” Arthur instructed the sergeant.

“Yes sir!” The sergeant said.

“David is my cleaner,” Arthur said once they were alone.

“Oh,” the chief said. “How much damage are we looking at here?”

“Enough to kill me twice.”

“How much do you think your son knows? What if he’s bluffing?”

“I wouldn’t know,” Arthur said. “I never imagined he would one day steal my whole family, but here we are.”

“You’re in quite a pickle my friend,” Chief Hanjili said.

“You must think me a fool right?”

“What you are is a man who’s been thoroughly betrayed,” the chief said. “It could happen to any of us.”

“Well, I better go and count my losses now,” Arthur said.

When the interrogation room opened again, Andre saw his freedom written on the sergeant’s face even before he removed his handcuffs.

"Where is he?" Andre asked.

"You'll find out soon," the sergeant said.

The sergeant escorted Andre out. There was a car waiting for them in the front. Andre recognized it right away. Chuckling, he opened the back door and sat down.

"Hey Paps," he greeted his father who was seated on the other end.

"Let's go Sam," Arthur said to the driver.

"What happened to your usual driver?" Andre asked.

"This is a special assignment," Arthur said. "The David Files huh?"

"Yeah," Andre said.

"How long have you known?"

"Does it matter?" Andre asked. "Let's negotiate."

"Give me my son. It's the least you can do. You've won."

"It is not up to me to decide whether you get him or not," Andre said.

"Katrina," Arthur said.

"Yep," Andre replied.

"What does she want in exchange?"

Andre laughed. "You really don't know your wife do you?" He said. "She'll never give her son up."

"Then why are we having this conversation? I might be a terrible father and husband, but I am your father whether you like it or not. I am also the father of her first child. You have taken everything from me already. All am asking is that you--"

"School holidays," Andre said.

“What?”

“You can have him during school holidays.”

Arthur thought about the offer for a moment. “Fine,” he said. “I was-”

The rest of Arthur’s sentence was swallowed by the sound of metal hitting against metal. They were at an intersection when a car rammed into theirs on the side where Andre was sitting. It was 3 in the morning. There were no other cars on the highway except for the two.

When their car finally came to a stop, Arthur turned towards his son after recovering from the initial shock of the hit.

“Andre!” Arthur cried out, checking his severely injured son for any signs of life.

Before Arthur could feel his son’s pulse, the door opened behind him. Arthur turned to find a young man not older than Andre leaning in.

“Young man, help us, please,” Arthur pleaded.

“You don’t know who I am do you?” The man said.

“My son has been badly-”

“Do I look like a care about your son?” The stranger asked, reaching for his gun from behind and pointing it at Arthur.

“Who are you?” Arthur asked, unfazed by the gun in his face.

“Get out,” the young man stepped aside to let Arthur out.”

Arthur first looked over at his unconscious son bleeding to death and then at Sam in the front for backup but the poor man had hid his head hard against the dashboard and was completely knocked out.

“Get out now!” The stranger yelled.

Arthur stepped out of the vehicle. "If you're going to kill me, the least you can do is tell me who you are," he said.

"Let me see your hands," the man commanded.

Arthur raised his hands up.

"I am the brother of the man you murdered eleven years ago," the stranger said. "Ring any bells?"

"You are one hell of a perfect timer," Arthur said sarcastically. "However, I'm afraid you have the wrong man," he nonchalantly added.

The young man covered the short distance between them and kicked Arthur hard in the sheen. "I hope that'll help jog your memory," he said.

Arthur whimpered in pain for a while before standing up straight to face his enemy.

"I am not the man you're looking for, but I know the man you should be looking for," Arthur said.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

-ELEVEN YEARS AGO -

Dan's animosity towards the Ng'andu's was one born out of an insatiable thirst for revenge.

He was only 23-years-old and in his final year at the University of Zambia studying Economics when he lost his brother Nsofwa. His brother's words, spoken on his dying bed had conjured up memories of the day Dan had first discovered just how much trouble his brother had found himself.

Hoping to surprise his brother, Dan had left school one Friday evening and took a bus home. He was about to open the living room door when he heard voices coming from inside. He walked to the other side of the house and entered through the kitchen door instead. It was there that he overheard a conversation that would turn his simple quiet life upside down.

"What did you expect would happen when you ran away with all my money and turned yourself into a *self-made millionaire*?" Said the woman Dan would later come to learn was Yvonne, Arthur Ng'andu's first wife.

"I promised to pay you back everything," Nsofwa said. "I begged your husband to give me time to secure the money. You of all people know that I'm the breadwinner of my family. I have five siblings and an ailing mother. I can't just come up with that kind of money at once."

"What did you do with all that money you stole from me?" The woman asked.

"I was in a rush to get rid of it," he said. "I made some bad investments here and there but there were good ones too. The hardware store and garage are doing very well. If you can just ask him to give me more time. I can't pay him back his money if my shops are closed."

“You should have thought of that before playing a fast one on me.”

Nsofwa went down on his knees and cried. “You have to help me out Yvonne,” the young man begged. “He has threatened to kill me if I don’t pay him back in ten days. Where am I going to find that kind of money in such a short time? My brother is going to be graduating soon. He only has one semester to go. If he can wait, my brother will get a job and between him and me, we will raise the money together in no time.”

Yvonne laughed. “You don’t know my husband *you*,” she said. “You’ll be lucky if your brother makes it through this very semester. Arthur has friends everywhere. Just find his money...which is technically mine but we both know it’s his because it came from him in the first place. He is just making you pay for it because you hurt his pride when you stole me from him.

“Do whatever you can to find the money, sell your kidneys if you must. Either way, Arthur will get his revenge. If you must know, I am no different from you. I am also paying for betraying him and pressuring you like this is one of the ways I can make up for the mistakes I made against him.”

“By selling me out?” Dan asked, looking up at her with teary eyes.

“You sold me out first when you ran away with all my settlement money and left me with nothing,” Yvonne said.

“You are just like him you know that?” Nsofwa spat at her feet and stood up. “Get out of my house.”

“Ah, that’s another thing I forgot to mention,” she said. “This house is in my name, remember? I want it back, or rather, he wants it back.”

“You gotto be kidding me,” Nsofwa said.

“Don’t hate the player baby, hate the game,” Yvonne chuckled.

Nsofwa grabbed her hand in anger, dragged her out of the house, and slammed the door behind her.

“Ten days lover boy!” Yvonne shouted from outside, laughing at the top of her voice.

“Bloody Jezebel,” Nsofwa cursed, both his hands clenched into fists.

“Who was that?” Dan appeared in the room.

Nsofwa was visibly taken aback by his young brother’s presence in the house. The last thing he needed was his little brother learning about the things he had to do to put a roof over their head and food on the table. It was not a lifestyle he was proud of. As far as his family was concerned, he was a hardworking businessman who labored day and night to take care of his family and send all his siblings to school.

“What are you doing here?” Nsofwa asked.

“Answer my question first,” Dan retorted.

“It’s none of your business. I get to ask the questions around here,” Nsofwa fired back and started walking towards his room.

Dan was right on his tail. “That woman made threats about me,” he said. “I deserve to know what this is about.” When his brother ignored him and kept walking, Dan added, “Or maybe am better off talking to mum about this, huh?”

The trick seemed to work. Nsofwa stopped dead in his tracks.

Dan walked back into the living room, knowing very well that his brother would follow him.

“I owe some people a lot of money,” Nsofwa finally confessed.

“Which people and how much?” Dan asked.

“Some very powerful people. Over 100 thousand.”

“Are you crazy!?”

“You’re the one that wanted to know, now you know,” Nsofwa said.

“Are you a gigolo?” Dan asked.

“Watch yourself Dan,” Nsofwa warned.

“I am sorry but I heard enough of that conversation to draw certain conclusions,” Dan said. “You slept with her and you stole money from her. Clearly, you were not with her for love. Now she and her husband, ex-husband...whatever he is are coming after you for the money. How am I doing so far?”

“If I didn’t steal that money, you wouldn’t be in school right now!” Nsofwa said.

“We didn’t ask you to go and steal or sleep around with rich women!”

“I didn’t sleep around! She was just one woman. I saw an opportunity and I took it. I am only 25 years old but I have been acting as both mother and father to five children. Do you think I have the luxury to uphold moral standards set by a God that has forsaken us for this long?”

Dan had no reply. His brother’s words tore at him because he had felt the same so many times since their father’s death. When things had started to brighten up thanks to Nsofwa, Dan had thought God had finally come through for them. Clearly he had been wrong, so how could he dare place judgement on a man who had sacrificed his soul for the sake of his family? He had no right whatsoever.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t know things were this bad. I simply assumed-“

“You assumed you serve a living God didn’t you?” Nsofwa said sarcastically. “The truth is all those blessings you and mum celebrated had nothing to do with God. I had to sleep with a married woman, get her to trust me so she could lower her guard enough for me to steal her fortune. Oh yeah, I also convinced her to divorce her husband. I hear God hates that very much.”

“I understand your frustrations bro, but talking about God in such a manner isn’t-“

“Isn’t what?” Nsofwa asked. “It’s too late for me to care about what’s wrong or right.”

“No it’s not,” Dan said.

“What are you doing home anyway?”

“I came to see you.”

“Well, now that you have, I think it’s better if you went back to school.”

“What are you going to do about those people?”

“The rich bastards?” Nsofwa chuckled. “I’ll give them exactly what they’re after.”

“And what’s that?”

“My blood,” he said.

“What do you mean your blood?” Dan asked.

“I mean exactly that,” Nsofwa said, getting up from the couch. “Don’t look at me like that,” he said upon seeing the perturbed look on his kid brother’s face. “I’ll be fine. It’s okay for them to do to me whatever they want. But there’s no way in hell am letting them touch any of you.”

“What can I do?” Dan asked, forcing back his tears.

“Just stay in school and concentrate on graduating with honors,” his brother said.

Before saying goodbye, Dan lingered by the door and watched his brother pace to and from.

"Nsofwa," he called out to him.

Nsofwa stopped pacing and looked at him. "You're still here?" He asked.

"Just promise me one thing," Dan said.

"What?"

"Don't do anything stupid."

Nsofwa laughed. "I promise," he said.

Those were the last words Dan was to hear from his brother. Three days later, he received a call from his mother informing him of his brother's passing.

"He was attacked by a group of men and they beat him so badly he bled to death right in front of his shop," his mother cried.

"They killed him!" Dan cried, banging his fist against the desk. "Those bastards killed him!"

"The police are saying they were robbers--"

"The police are wrong mum. I know exactly who killed my brother and I will make each one of them pay for this," Dan said.

"My son--"

"I'm on my way home right now. Have you informed the others already?"

"No, I called you first."

"I'll call them," Dan said. "I'll see you shortly mum."

- PRESENT DAY -

Dan took in the scene before him like an addict getting his full dose of heroin without consequence. Three men sat hopelessly in each corner of the dark room he had

specifically picked for such a gruesome experience. With their hands and feet bound, and with the only form of light in the room being the one candle Dan had placed in the center of the room, it was hard to miss the deafening air of death looming over them.

In one corner, an almost lifeless Andre whimpered in pain from the wounds dealt to him by fate. It had only been fifteen minutes since he had regained consciousness. In another corner was his father Arthur. There was neither fear nor anger in his eyes. Of the few things Andre could conjure up from the little light in the room and whatever power was left of his mind, he was sure he could see glints of regret in the eyes of the man he had come to hate with such passion. On the far side of the room was Sam the driver, shaking in fear like a leaf on the verge of collapse.

“Let me at least put a cloth over my son’s injury before-“

Before Arthur could finish his sentence, Dan kicked him hard in the side. “Worry about yourself because whether you like it or not, none of you is walking out of here alive,” he said. “Besides, why do you care about a man that’s been chowing your wife right under your nose, for years?”

Both Andre and Arthur looked at him in shock.

Dan laughed. “Do you think that I just woke up this morning and decided *oh, am going to avenge my brother this fine day?* Do you think I am here by coincidence, right when all your lives are tumbling down like a house of cards? No, I’ve always had a helper. And it is someone that will shock the both of you.”

“Is it Mubita?” Andre asked.

“I know about your errand boy Mubita, but he is not my guy,” Dan said.

“Jenna?” Arthur asked.

Dan turned to Sam. “Would you also like to give it a guess?” He asked the driver.

Arthur and Andre gave each other knowing looks.

“No! It’s not me, I swear to you!” The driver cried.

Dan cackled out of control. “You should see yourselves, like fools,” he said, pointing his gun from one to the other. “Let me tell you a bit about my brother before he became a gigolo,” Dan added. “He was in-love with this pretty little number that once came to this warehouse where he worked. Back then my brother was a nobody, just a dirty mechanic manning other people’s fancy vehicles. But this girl, this girl treated him like a human being. She was like an angel in everything she did.

“One day my brother billed her father extra because he was trying to raise money to take my mother to the hospital. Her father found out and came to the store blazing fire and had my brother fired. The girl must have heard about the incident because one day she appeared at our doorstep. Even though she had this innocence about her, she was also brazen in her actions. My mother was around but she went straight to my brother and asked him why he stole the money. Nsofwa naturally said, *why do you care?* She looked at him in his eyes and said; *because people don’t just become bad. I want to know your reason so I can know if you’re worth helping or not.*

“*How can you help me?* My brother asked her. She said, *tell me the truth first and then I’ll tell you.* So he tells her and she says, *I knew you were not a bad one.* She reached into her pocket, removed this tiny-tiny purse and took out some notes and handed them to my brother. Of course Nsofwa threw the money back at her. We might have been poor but we were not a charity case.”

“But you were okay with stealing huh?” Arthur murmured under his breath.

Dan sent a reprobative look his direction. “I’m going to pretend that I didn’t hear you,” he said and continued his story as if he had not been disturbed. “That girl said she was hiring my brother to do some field work at her school for her. Turned out she had gotten herself in trouble at school and she was punished to clear a whole field for the term. Before my brother could accept, she picked up the money from the ground,

placed it in his hands and left. It was hard to return the money after that point because whether we liked it or not, we needed every bit of it.

“Soon enough, my brother and the girl were hanging out. It was love at first sight for my brother but it took a while for her to realize her feelings until it was too late. Our situation at home became dire and to take care of us, my brother started to change. He thought falling in-love was a luxury he could not afford. He wanted to work hard until he became the type of man she could present to her parents as her boyfriend...and that’s how he ended up getting entangled with your family. When she heard that Nsofwa had ran away with a married woman, she was devastated. She only came to know the truth when Nsofwa finally returned, after stealing money from your wife. Not long after, you sent your goons to murder him.”

“I told you, I had nothing to do with your brother’s murder,” Arthur said. “You might succeed in killing me today but rest assured, the real culprit is free out there.”

Dan walked over to Arthur and pointed his gun at Arthur’s forehead. “Not that I believe you, but give me a name anyway,” he said.

“I will if you tell me the name of the person that’s been helping you,” Arthur said.

“What makes you think you have the right to negotiate with me right now?”

“I have nothing to lose,” Arthur said. “Whether I die or live, I have already lost everything I care about. You can kill me right now if you like. I don’t care.”

“Katrina,” Dan offered the name without further prompting.

“What!?” Father and son chorused.

“Don’t you dare bring Katrina into this wicked plan of yours,” Andre said.

Dan laughed. “You really fell in-love with her didn’t you?”

“Katrina has nothing to do with this,” Arthur said. “I am the one that went to her to begin with. I found her and things just happened after that. I know what you’re trying to do right now by bringing her into all this but-“

“They say hell hath no fury than a woman scorned,” Dan cut him off. “What they don’t know is that hell hath no fury than a women deprived of the love of her life right when she had only learnt she was truly in-love. More than me, Katrina wanted blood. She orchestrated the whole thing. You should know her both of you,” he looked from Arthur to Andre. “She is the most vindictive woman you’ll ever meet. She is an angel when not provoked. Touch her and she will drag you down with her to the very narrow end of the abyss in her wrath. She hates just as much as she loves, and perhaps that’s her biggest flaw.”

“I know Katrina,” Andre said. “I don’t care what you say because I believe beyond reasonable doubt that she loves me.”

“How does it feel to be betrayed by the woman that came to you to heal from your own father’s betrayal?” Dan asked Andre.

“Shut the fuck up!” Andre almost drove himself into shock from his aggressiveness.

Dan relished in his victory. He had them right where he wanted them.

“I have both bad news and good news for you,” Dan said to Andre. “The bad news is that Katrina came into your family to wreak havoc and avenge her boyfriend’s death. She made your father fall in-love with her and later she made you fall in-love with her. It was a game from the beginning. Your mother stole her man from her and because of her actions he was killed. The good news for you is that somewhere along the way, Katrina changed the script and truly fell in-love with you. I trusted her to exert revenge on our behalf but she betrayed me. And when that happened, I had to take matters in my own hands. So here we are.”

I am only using you!

Katrina's words echoed through Andre's head. How many times had she told him that every time he confronted her about their relationship? There was not a day he had begged for her affection that she did not use those words. All this while Andre had thought her words were mere threats to keep him at bay, but that was her being as truthful to him as she could possibly be. She had kept her love at bay all those years, not because of fear of what people would say, but because it was the only way of protecting him from the dangerous game she had so articulately orchestrated.

"I can tell that we're on the same page finally," Dan said, visibly busking in his triumph.

"Isn't it pitiful?" Arthur said. "Going through all this trouble for nothing. You must feel like the biggest fool in the whole world."

"Give me the name now!" Dan yelled and shot into the wall next to Arthur.

Right then, someone kicked in the door and sent it flying off its hinges. It was Mubita, and right behind him was Katrina, both with their guns ready.

"Katrina?" Andre said and attracted the attention of Dan who quickly ran to him and forced him up as his hostage.

"Let him go Danny or I swear to you this will end badly for the people you hold dearly," Katrina said.

"Are you threatening my family? You, Katrina?" Dan asked.

"You threatened mine first," Katrina said.

"What do you think Nsofwa would say if he saw you pointing a gun at me right now?" Dan asked.

"I loved your brother and I did what I could to make them pay for his death," Katrina said. "But I am done Dan. I am tired of living my life like that. I just want to

love and rest. I deserve that. I never thought I could ever love anyone as much as I loved your brother but I was naïve. I am in love with Andre more than I love myself or anyone else in this world.”

“Who gave you permission to forget about my brother just like that?” Dan cried. “Don’t you know that you’re partly to blame for him wanting to succeed so badly and so dangerously?”

“I never asked him to be anything more than what he was,” Katrina said. “It was him that wanted to prove himself to me and to his family. I did everything I could to lessen his burden but in the end he chose the path he took on his own.”

“I did not have Nsofwa killed,” Arthur said.

“If it wasn’t you, then who killed him?” Katrina asked.

“Nsofwa owed money to a lot of people,” Arthur explained. “I wasn’t the only one he owed. If anything, I should have been the least of his worries. Yvonne exaggerated things when she spoke to him about owing me. I wasn’t even interested in the money. I simply wanted to scare him a little.”

“So else did he owe?” Katrina asked.

“Yvonne’s parents, Andre’s grandparents,” Arthur said.

“What?” Katrina said.

“The two had been facing some financial problems and struggling to save their business for a long time. It was my money that kept their business afloat but once I was out of the picture, there was nothing more to hold on to. Fearing that it might be the end of them, my in-laws looked for a few way to raise money to save their business and somehow ended up at the mercy of Nsofwa. He knew about their troubles so he set a trap for them. He wanted to use their money to pay off his debts and he succeeded. When the in-laws discovered the truth, they sent people after him, but only to scare him into paying them back their money.

“Unfortunately, the guys they sent got too excited...and the worst happened. The funny part is, my in-laws didn’t know anything about his death until the police came knocking at the door. Of course they denied any association to the murder and with the reputation that your brother had, the police quickly wrapped the case up. If you don’t believe me, you can call them and ask, especially my former father in-law. He’s been hanging by a thread lately and all he wants is to come clean about this heavy burden he has carried for so many years.”

Dan broke down in tears. Mubita took advantage of his moment of weakness and grabbed the gun from him. Dan easily surrendered himself to the ground, sobbing. “What have I done?” I kept hitting his head.

Katrina went to him and pulled him into her arms while Mubita rushed to attend to his bleeding boss.

“It’s okay Dee, it’s all over now. It’s over.” Katrina said.

Dan stopped crying and looked up at her. “It’s not over,” he said, shaking his head. “You don’t understand. I already did something terrible.”

“What did you do Dee?” Katrina asked.

“I shot her,” Dan cried. “I killed that woman Yvonne.”

“You did what!?” Arthur lunged at him. “Get these off me!” He shouted at Mubita who was still attending to Andre.

“Go to him. I’ll look after Andre myself,” Katrina instructed Mubita as she went over to Andre’s side.

“I do not like you very much right now,” Andre said to her.

“I know,” she said. “I promise to make it up to you for the rest of my life...however long that will be,” she added as she looked at the potential threats around her.

The moment Arthur was untied, he grabbed the gun from Mubita and pointed it at Dan. "Give me one damn good reason why I shouldn't pop your head right now?" He said.

"I don't care, just do it," Dan cried.

Arthur placed his hand on the trigger and looked about ready to fire. Everyone and everything in the room froze in time except for Arthur's shaking hand itching to pull the trigger.

"Dad, don't," Andre was the first to dare to speak.

"What makes you think I would listen to you of all people?" Arthur asked his son.

"Because I think I got you wrong all these years," Arthur said. He motioned for Katrina to help him to his feet and against her advice, she helped him limp his way towards his father. "I know it's too late to say this but, I was wrong. This is all my fault. I shouldn't have expected you to have acted like a perfect man when I was busy being all-out imperfect towards you, towards mum, and even towards Katrina. I thought I was making you pay for the things you did and said in anger, but I was only depriving myself of a chance to get to know you. You might be a ruthless business man, and maybe even a reckless lover and father, but you are not a killer."

"I don't even know who I am anymore," Arthur said. "I have lived all these years trying to be someone I thought I needed to be that I missed all the important things that were happening right under my nose. Maybe I deserve everything that's happened to me. Maybe I should just kill all of us in this room and bring an end to all our misery ah?"

The moment Mubita heard the words *kill all of us*, he pointed the gun at the back of Arthur's head.

"Why's your gun down?" Arthur asked Katrina.

“Because I think I’ve caused you enough harm already,” she said. “I have no right to get in your way of revenge. If I were to ask for one thing, it would be that you take me instead of Andre. We might be foolish parents, all of us, but our kids deserve a chance at a better life. More than me or you, they stand a better chance with Andre.” She then moved to stand in front of Andre who tried to push her away but was no match for her determination in his state.

Watching the two, Arthur laughed. “I have all the money in the world,” he said. “I have more than what I can spend in this lifetime, and maybe even the next. So why do I feel like I have lost everything?”

To everyone’s surprise, Arthur held the gun up to his head and pulled the trigger before any of them could react. Despite her horror, Katrina had enough sense to throw caution to the wind about her own safety and threw her body where Arthur’s was to land. Everything happened so fast that it took a few more minutes for everyone in the room to grasp what had just transpired.

Despite Katrina cushioning his fall, there was no hope for Arthur.

Two hours later, Katrina was in an ambulance accompanying Andre to the hospital while Mubita and Sam sat in the back of a police van with Arthur’s body at their center. On the other side, two police men stood on either side of a handcuffed Dan.

“Do you think we’ll ever be happy after everything that’s happened?” Katrina asked Andre.

“I would hope so, otherwise all these mistakes and sacrifices would be for nothing,” Andre answered.

“My parents, how do I face them?” She said.

“I think we’re alive today because of their prayers,” Andre said. “Just give them some time. If I have learnt anything today, it is that parents love their children no matter how undeserving of their love they might be.”

“What are we going to tell the kids Andre?” Katrina cried.

“You’re worrying too much babe. Let’s take one day at a time, okay?” He took her hand.

“One day at a time,” she repeated his words, more to herself than to him.

“I love you my crazy woman,” Andre said, lifting her hand and kissing it.

“And I love you too trouble maker,” she said.

THE END.

Thank you for reading and sharing my story.

ABOUT ANISHA NAMUTOWE

Anisha is a huge fan of drama, romance, comedy, and some action. She enjoys writing both fiction and non-fiction. When she is not writing or working, she enjoys reading, listening to music, binge-watching crime shows, taking long walks, and/or picnicking. Anisha is the author of **Echoes of Betrayal**, an inspirational fictional drama about life, love, and betrayal.

You can find her book [Echoes of Betrayal](#) on Amazon on the following links:

Kindle: <https://amzn.to/30AdRBw>

Paperback: <https://amzn.to/2EnPSw4>

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