

The Imperial Family



CHAPTER FOUR: "When Duty Calls"

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Chapter Four: When Duty Calls

Burna Boy's 'Last Last' blasted through the car as the Captain drove her black Jeep towards Club Mercury in Salama Park where she worked as the Club Manager. At 7 pm, the traffic leading to the club had already intensified. The Captain abandoned her lane and got onto the right one intended for cars heading in the opposite direction. She powered through the lane before oncoming vehicles came into sight and managed to make it to the gate reserved for staff without incident.

She turned down the volume on the radio and rolled down the window to speak to the uniformed armed guard who approached the car.

"Good evening madam," the guard happily greeted her in a heavy Tonga accent.

"Good evening Mr Wilson," she returned.

The guard handed her a gadget that looked like a digital signing pad and wished her luck as she waited for the automated gate to fully open.

"Have a good night Mr Wilson!" She waved at the man through the window as she drove off, the gate instantly closing behind her.

She noted the number of cars parked in the staff car park. "It's a full house," she muttered. She drove straight towards the first empty slot on the left marked with her name and parked. Stepping out of the car, she gave herself a sweeping look and noting that everything was in place, she grabbed her handbag and headed towards the club.

She had abandoned her cap for an elegant slicked-back tight and neat high-bun hairdo and replaced the military ensemble with a white blouse tucked into light-grey high-waist ankle trousers on cuffed black high-heeled sandals. Her tall, slender frame, matched with high-confident strides made her a sight to behold, especially for the much-inebriated crowd she had to walk past on her way to her office.

As she passed the bar, she signalled a 'do not disturb' secret code to one of the three bartenders behind the counter who nodded in return. Safely in her office, she took out a gadget that looked almost similar to the one the guard had handed her at the gate. She pointed it at the wall behind her desk whilst pressing numbers on the screen.

And waited.

The wall slowly split into two, revealing a dimly lit narrow and hollowed passageway. She picked up her handbag from the desk and stepped through. The space immediately closed behind her. At the far end of the passageway was a lift that descended to the headquarters of the sanctuary, situated at the base of the Club Mercury.

After what felt like forever, the lift finally came to a stop. The Captain stepped out and walked towards a black metal door. Yet again, she pointed the gadget at the door and pressed some numbers on the screen that opened the door to The Sanctuary's control room where the team held all its meetings.

The Sanctuary's control room had a futuristic look and feel to it, except for the St Paul's Cathedral-themed quire ceiling that gave one the feeling of having stepped into forbidden territory. Unlike the colourful and elaborate mosaic-covered ceiling, the high walls were plain and grey, perhaps reminiscent of the paths all the members of the Sanctuary took before finding their destinies.

One common trait shared by all members of the Sanctuary was their poor social background. In one way or another, each of them had faced challenges that tested their resilience and will to live. They were recruited because they survived and were determined to keep fighting for a better world for all. And for ten years, they underwent training in particular skills that would help advance The Sanctuary's mission.

The front wall to the left was adorned with a string of supersized hi-tech monitors that curved at the ends to command the attention of anyone who entered the room. The words 'The Sanctuary' scrolled across the screens in a Casa Stencil regular font.

The Captain's commanding presence, manner of dress, and grim expression as she stood in the front, glancing across the room was enough to win the attention of everyone scattered across the expansive room. They all stopped whatever they had been doing and gathered in front.

"We have been activated for official duty," the Captain announced without preamble.

A pregnant silence fell upon the room that had been abuzz with chatter only moments ago. Terrified faces gazed back at the Captain...well, except for twenty-five-year-old Patrick Mondo, the latest addition to the team who appeared lost and confused.

"What do you mean activated for duty?" Patrick asked. "What have we been doing all along?"

While in awe of the kid's computer skills, the Captain was not so much a fan of his people skills...or lack thereof. Patrick's inability to read social cues and behave like a human being with basic level training in human decency was astounding. She had to contend with the fact that the boy had been trained and sent to the team by the Anchor and since she had absolute faith and trust in them, she never questioned or doubted the boy's presence in the team. As long as Patrick remained behind the scenes, the Captain reasoned that any potential damage he would cause would be minimised.

"How is it possible for anyone to have your level of intelligence and still be so-so very dumb at the same time?" Eric Musamba - who preferred to be called 'the Original Tech Guy' used his inner voice out, causing his teammates to laugh in hushed tones.

It was no secret that the two men weren't the best of friends. For a long time, twenty-eight-year-old Eric had been the youngest and the most intelligent in the group, until Patrick arrived. In the Sanctuary, everyone had a unique role to play, and Eric's was being 'the tech guy'. The arrival of the new kid meant he had to share his throne, even though Patrick's area of expertise was hacking and his was general computer engineering.

When it came to leadership, fixing, and muscle, there was the Captain. If anyone needed saving from a situation, she was the first to be called to the scene and save the day. For anything involving construction, deconstructing or solving complex puzzles, thirty-year-old engineer Miyoba Hangala was the man. Thirty-two-year-old Martha Nanyagwe took care of the legal matter, thirty-two-year-old Chisha Kakoma was the media specialist, thirty-five-year-old Mary Mukuka was the psychologist, and twenty-nine-year-old Alexa Wright was the stylist.

At fifty-three years old, the group's financial expert Slyvia Tembo was the oldest, followed by the shifter, Nanny Carol - a woman skilled in the art of disguise. Complementing the group of experts was the thirty-seven-year-old American-Zambian Deon Curtis who was in charge of another specialized brand of the Sanctuary - Curtis Security. He was a sniper.

The mission of the Sanctuary was to liberate the country from the nefarious claws of the Imperial Family and its club. The Sanctuary was created by the mastermind known simply as the Anchor. None of the founding members had ever met the mastermind. Ten of them had been headhunted by the Captain who reported directly to the Anchor but without physical contact. Unbeknownst to the Sanctuary members, except the Captain, the Anchor was a member of the Imperial Family, whom they knew only as 'the informant'.

For years, the Captain had studied the family inside-out trying to figure out who the Anchor might be but to no avail. Even a language analysis from the codes they used to communicate wasn't enough to reveal their gender. Whoever was behind the Sanctuary was a very skilled and highly intelligent individual with the ability to hide in plain sight for years without detection. If someone like the Captain who was trained in hunting targets could not uncover her identity for so long, she doubted anyone else ever would.

Eventually, she gave up trying to solve the puzzle. However, everytime she came across the Imperial Family on television, she couldn't help but say, "it could be any one of them."

"For the sake of our special lastborn, I'll bring us all up to speed," the Captain said. "Even though the Sanctuary was established twelve years ago, what we've been doing all along was merely setting the foundation for the official mission which is - Operation Takedown The Imperial Family, known simply as OTIF."

"Isn't the work we've been doing running the Eye about taking down those Imperialists?" Patrick asked.

"Captain, can I take this?" Asked Chisha Kakoma, the Managing Director of the Sanctuary's media arm - The Eye.

"Yes, sure, only you can best explain this to our young friend here," the Captain said.

"Zambia right now is in a utopian state," Chisha explained. "To the average Zambian, we live in an ideally perfect world where reality is irrelevant and the appearance of it is all that matters. To them, the economy is booming, we are enjoying peace, and we live in a democracy. Sounds perfect, right? Even I would want to live in

such a country. However, most of us in this room know that all of that is just an illusion.”

“I also know it’s an illusion, just FYI,” intervened Patrick who felt targeted by the last remark. “I know most of you don’t know my story and I’m like the outcast here but, the Anchor picked me for a reason. I believe in everything that the Sanctuary stands for. If Eric here could just grow up and start acting his age, he would realize that I am not here to take his place. We are supposed to be partners. If one of us is in the field, the other is in the control room backing the whole programme. Don’t you get it?”

The look on Eric’s face indicated that he had ‘just gotten it’ even though he remained quiet.

“Thank you for that Pat,” the Captain said, surprised by the boy’s maturity. “All of us are here because we believe in the Sanctuary. We all deserve our spot in the team and we are all committed to working for the greater good. Please continue Chisha.”

“Thank you, Captain,” the media specialist said. “The truth is, the country is in a dire situation. Think of it this way, if you were stuck in the desert for weeks without food or water, then one day you come across a bucket of dirty water. How valuable do you think that water will be to you in your moment of need? Highly valuable, not so?”

“It would be an act of God, a miracle!” said Aunt Slyvia, as she was called by everyone given her seniority in the group.

“Exactly!” Chisha said. “You would say it came from God and I wouldn’t blame you for thinking like that.”

“Never mind that it’s dirty, I would drink the hell out of that water!” Alexa chipped in.

“And drink it you must because that’s the difference between life and death,” Chisha agreed. “That is the situation we have been in for the past ten years, maybe even longer. Things were at their worst before the TPP came into power. And when they did, we became like that person in the desert. They threw us bread crumbs and we called them gods. We removed one evil and replaced it with another. We thought we were getting rid of them forever, not knowing that they would return, only this time, with a brand new face, name, and an even more nefarious agenda. The Eye is the only media that’s not state-controlled, and we all know why.” He looked at Eric and Patrick to recognize their contributions that allowed the Eye to still be in business. Their technological gymnastics had allowed them to remain under the radar for two years.

The team shared a round of applause for the two.

Deon raised his hand. “Is it still considered abuse of power if the victims don’t know that they’re being abused?” He asked.

With her hands tucked in the pockets of her sweatpants, Alexa walked over to Deon and stopped just a breath away from him. “Tell me something Dee,” she said. “If you had a special pair of cufflinks that you rarely wear because they were a special gift from your parents, and someone stole them. Because you only wear them on special

occasions, it takes a while for you to notice they're missing. Does that mean they weren't stolen just because you don't know they are?"

"Wow, so you do make sense sometimes," Deon teased.

Alexa tried to thump her foot over his but the former marine was too quick for her.

"I always make sense," she defended herself. "It's you guys who think people who work in fashion aren't smart. In case you didn't know, creativity is a high form of intelligence." She smirked at him and bounced back to her position.

"Alexa is right," Chisha said. "But you see, it isn't that people aren't aware. It is that they find it much easier and bearable to pretend that there's no darkness looming behind the light. Remember, they cried for this change and they voted for it. How were they to know that they were being played? The FDP knew there were done. The world was watching and they wanted nothing to do with them anymore. What did they do? They rebranded and for a while, gave the people what they wanted, that bucket of dirty water in the desert."

"That's the water everyone is now fixated on because their standards have dropped so low they'll worship anyone willing to throw a few crumbs their way," he continued. "In reality, the economy is screwed, the cost of living is high, the people have no voice, the rich keep getting richer and no one cares about the poor. Everyone knows that the person in power isn't the one wielding the power. Don't you wonder why no one is doing anything about it?"

"Plausible deniability," Martha said.

"What's that?" Memory asked.

"It's when powerful people or organizations commit atrocities but manipulate things so that it appears someone else unrelated to them did those things," Martha explained. "With the TPP, it usually happens when it becomes apparent that they have failed in something. When that happens, they always blame the FDP. But we know that they're the same people except, we can't prove it. With the Imperial Club, notice how whenever a member is involved in an irrefutable scandal, they'll release a statement that says something like...as far as the club is aware, no such activity took place, or that is not a member of our club. And they get away with it and remain the bright shining light they pretend to be. No one can condemn them because - even though we know they're guilty, we have no proof."

"I didn't know there was a phrase for that," Memory said.

"So what did the Captain mean when she said we've been activated for duty?" Patrick asked.

"It means now that we have opened the people's eyes through the media, it is time to move to the next phase," Miyoba said.

"Miyoba is right," the Captain said. "As you know, they've been hunting us down since we launched the Eye. We are still standing because we are good at what we do and we are digital. It would be a different story if they had our physical address. Like Deon said earlier, what is the point of fighting for the rights of people who do not

know or understand that their rights have been violated? You'll be merely setting yourself up as public enemy number one. That's how effective the TPP's propaganda has been, and for years they used the media as their tool of choice until we came along. Now that we've shaken things up, people are starting to have the conversations they need to be having. They're finally asking the right questions and the TPP and their backers - the Imperial Family through the club are getting restless."

"Two key things are coming up that are forcing us into action," the Captain continued. "The censorship bill which will be under debate in a few weeks, and the 2024 general elections. Right now they're pushing for the bill and if we don't move fast, that bill will be pushed through and it'll be the end of the Eye and consequently, the Sanctuary. We need more support from the people to achieve our goals otherwise none of this will make sense. Our first OTIF challenge is to attack the Imperialists' reputation which is their topmost source of confidence and propaganda. As things stand, they're in control of the political arena, and the economy through mining, agriculture, transportation and real estate. They also control the church and the justice system. So we start with the media and slowly work our way through the rest."

Eric picked up his iPad and connected it to the monitors for everyone's attention. "Our entry point is Alfred Simataa, the Head of ZAMI." A picture of Alfred Simataa filled the centre screen, and another of him with his family filled the next monitor. "This man is responsible for 100% per cent of the garbage we see in the news. Behind him of course is Situmbeko Nkole, the Imperial family's third daughter who happens to be an astute media strategist. She develops the strategies and Simataa implements them."

"If she wasn't part of that wicked family, she would be an admirable woman," Chisha muttered.

"I agree," said Alexa.

The Captain arched her brows at the two of them and signalled for Eric to continue. "The plan is to use their own media to incriminate them, leaving the public so outraged that they will fight to stop the censorship bill for us."

"How do we do that?" Madam Slyvia asked.

"That's where I come in," Chisha said. "Eric and Patrick, first get me everything you can on the Imperial Family, the imperial Club, and specifically, Situmbeko Nkole and Alfred Simataa. I want to know everything, how they make their money, where they keep their money, their tax records, who they're sleeping with and who they've slept with, their favourite food-"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, we know the drill mate," Patrick patted his shoulder.

"Good," Chisha said. "And while we are at it, let's plant a seed of discord in the empire," he winked at Patrick.

The hacker grinned at him, happy to have a reason to get lost in his cyber world. "You got it boss!"

"While we are waiting for the tech team to give us the information, I shall refresh our minds and bring everyone to speed on who we are really dealing with

here,” the Captain said. Turning to Eric, she added, “Take us to the Imperial family profiles.”

Eric typed something on the iPad and the screen filled with collages of information on the Imperial Family. “There,” he said.

“Richard Nkole, the patriarch of the Imperial Family,” the Captain said as a picture of a grey-haired man with well-trimmed side-beards that delicately matured into a full-blown beard under his chin appeared on the screen.

At age fifty-six, Richard was a portrait of a well-groomed man who looked exactly as he felt, young. His hair, though grey appeared more like a fashion statement than a testament to the years lived. Like a double-edged sword, his features, though pleasing to the eye felt almost...threatening.

His bright piercing eyes warned of an intelligence capable of unearthing one’s deepest, darkest secrets, and for the female species, the same gaze - when it lingered longer than three seconds, was a promise of something good...well, until it lasted that is. His full lips oozed danger in all its sinful forms, leaving both allies and enemies at the mercy of each breath he took and every word he uttered.

Richard Nkole was a force to be reckoned with, and he dressed and looked the part.

“A man known to be as wicked as he is has no business looking this good, especially for his age,” Alexa remarked as she shamelessly drooled over the man. “I’ll tell y’all this though, full disclosure!” She held her arms up. “Don’t put me in the same room with this man and expect me to do my job. I’ll be coming out of that room pregnant with triplets. My mother had terrible taste in men. She should see my father. My mother swears I take after her. I’m just saying.” She nonchalantly swayed her shoulders.

“The devil was a beautiful man and look where he landed us all,” Aunt Sylvia said.

“Lucifer didn’t put those apples in the garden Aunt Sylvia,” Patrick countered.

“Guys, focus!” Martha yelled.

The Captain shook her head in amusement. She found no offence in Alexa’s careless speech because she understood more than anyone else in the room why the girl was a devoted member of the Sanctuary. Given the right tools and the right time, Alexa would not hesitate to bring an end to the life of the man she was drooling over like a dog on heat.

Her personality was perhaps her greatest armour and weapon of choice.

“Just hearing you guys speak is enough testimony of the kind of power this man yields by simply existing,” the Captain continued. “Before becoming a billionaire,

Richard used to be a farmer. He entered the world of politics at the age of twenty-one and became an area councillor the first time he stood. Since then, he moved up the ranks of the FDP before realizing that the most profitable side of politics was not the front line. After securing major government contracts, he expanded his farming business and later ventured into mining, construction, transportation, and real estate. He's been unstoppable since. On to his precious family now."

Eric zoomed in on two images. The image on the left was in black and white and showed a young Richard posing with a woman and two children - a boy and a girl. In the other picture was Richard with a different woman, surrounded by five - three boys and two girls.

"As you can see, on the left is Richard with his first wife...late first wife with their two children Dave and Leah," the Captain explained. "The picture on the right is Richard with his current wife Inonge Mubita Nkole and their children, starting with the oldest, the fraternal twins Pumulo, Derrick, Namakau, Situmbeko and Akende the youngest. Rumour has it that Akende is actually not Inonge's biological son. It is believed he was born from an affair and the couple agreed to raise the child as their own after completely cutting off the mother. So, in total, there are seven children born of Richard Nkole, at least those that we know of. Eric, Patrick, find out more."

"Yes Captain," the tech team chorused.

"Inonge Mubita Nkole is fifty-eight years old," the Captain said.

"She's older than him?" Miyoba asked.

Alexa gave him an 'are-you-kidding-me look'. "Is something wrong with your eyes?" She asked. "The woman looks thirty years older than him, look at her!" She pointed to the picture on focus on the monitor. "This woman looks perpetually constipated, like she swallowed two raw guavas at the tender age of twelve and they stuck where they shouldn't since. And look at those lines on her face," she pointed. "I bet each line represents the tears of all those innocent women she forces her husband's side chicks and her sons' girlfriends and mistresses to abort. How did a scrumptious-looking man like him," she pointed to a picture of Richard, "end up with this shrek?" She pointed at Inonge.

"Kindred spirits I guess?" Memory suggested.

"Speaking of mistresses," the Captain intervened. "Inonge was actually Richard's mistress while he was married to his late wife. Rumour has it that the first wife committed suicide when she learnt that her husband was not only having an affair, but he had twins with his mistress. The boys were just a year younger than her son Dave. To this day, the two children from the first wife do not get along with their stepmother, even though they've lived together since the death of their mother. Richard prefers to raise his family, including his grandchildren and great-grandchildren in one place, the Imperial Palace." She pointed to the latest image in focus, a picture of a modern-style elaborate mansion. "A mansion built in a city within a city," she added. "I'll let Patrick take us on a tour of the place once I'm done."

“Could one of the children, well, maybe even both from the first wife be our informants?” Martha asked.

“Honestly, it could be any one of them,” the Captain said. “The thing is, with this family, the closer you zoom in on each of them, the more suspicious you’ll find them to be. There was a time I even suspected the great matriarch herself, but you’ll see as time goes by that it’s almost impossible to settle on anyone. They all have something to hate about the family and they all have plenty to gain from it.”

“Before I move to the firstborn and first son of the family,” the Captain continued. “Let me add that Inonge played a key role in establishing Richard Nkole as the man he is today. Some might even argue that she is actually the power behind the power but the jury is still out on that one. Inonge used to be a nurse when she first met Richard. Her parents owned a mining company in the Copperbelt that Richard wanted to buy. Her father invited him home for dinner one evening and the two lovebirds locked eyes and fell in love, as the story goes. She knew from the moment she met him that she wanted to be his wife. That’s how she ended up pursuing a business degree so she could help him run his businesses, something that his very conservative housewife could not do for -” She was interrupted by the ringing of her phone.

She took it out from her handbag and checked the caller id. It was Nanny Carol. “I have to take this,” she told the group. “Chisha, pick it up from here.” She handed her handbag to Aunt Sylvia who was standing closest to her before leaving the room.

“Alright team,” Chisha clapped his hands. “We move on to one Dave Nkole, aka the first son and most eligible heir to the throne. Now bear in mind that the thirty-six-year-old has great competition in the form of; his half-brother, thirty-five-year-old Pumulo who happens to be the first son of the second and current wife, his half-sisters, thirty-year-old Namakau, and twenty-eight-year-old Situmbeko.”

Eric displaced pictures of the four on screen.

Dave appeared to share the same fashion sense as his father. He was a good-looking and well-put-together man with a gaze that evoked confidence but at the same time left one wondering where they stood with him. Unlike his father, he was clean-shaven, distant and reserved. Dave was straight-cut in his speech and had made it clear to everyone in the family where he stood and how deep his ambitions ran. His ever-stoic demeanour coupled with his elegant business style made him a constant target of women, especially those after a slice of the empire. He was a hard man to get and that made the chase even more appealing for the determined woman.

In the public eye, Dave was best known as the ‘Faithful Nkole Brother’ for his lack of scandals with women. He was married to a lawyer, a sharp-looking woman by the name of Lister Chirwa. Together, they had two children; a fifteen-year-old boy named Andrew and a thirteen-year-old girl called Chipasha.

Pumulo was an easily forgettable man. He was the sort of man to look at once because you had no choice, only to completely forget about his existence the next minute. He had a look of surprise about him, which in itself wasn't surprising considering the very irony of his birth. He was an unnecessarily tall and incredibly thin man with a questionable relationship with gravity. His collar bones stuck out in the most peculiar fashion when he walked, giving the appearance of someone being held steady by the invisible hands of heaven.

Despite his promising career and obvious ambition, the same could not be said of his love life. He was divorced three times and on his fourth wife. He had five children from his ex-wives, four girls and one boy yet struggled to have children with his latest wife Chiza Chaile. Despite his scrawny looks, Pumulo was physically and verbally abusive towards his wives and children. He was rumoured to have killed his first wife who disappeared under suspicious circumstances.

Namakau was the second daughter and fifth born in the family. She was a geologist and economist who enjoyed competing with her siblings for sport. She had an insatiable hunger for power and she pursued all of her goals and ambitions with relentless passion. She was neither beautiful nor ugly. Her best feature can be said to have been her face as it was the only thing that distinguished her from her male counterparts. And it was all thanks to her long silky hair which she wore as her crown of femininity. As the latest bride in the family, she was yet to have kids with her twenty-eight-year-old husband and media professional, Kalenga Chisenga.

Volatile is the word that best described the Imperial Family's third daughter and second-last born Situmbeko. She was a woman who instantly deactivated people's ability to think positive thoughts in her presence or at the mention of her name. In short, she was not a pleasant human being. And yet she had the sort of beauty that held men captive and turned women into instant villains. It is almost unfair to imagine God using such a supreme coat of flesh to cover such a flawed soul. Was God doing himself or her a favour?

Where darkness filled in patches parts of Situmbeko's soul, she made up for it by being good at her job as the family's reputation manager. She was a strong-willed and spoiled twenty-eight-year-old who believed that her birth and privilege made her a superior human being. And for the believers, it was easier to assume that the universe had evened the scores when they sent her a man by the name of Anthony Haimbe who married her solely for her money despite her deep infatuation with him. Situmbeko's desire to possess Antony for herself had driven her to torment his previous wife and mother of his first child until divorce was the safest and only option for her. She shared two children with her husband, nine-year-old Stan and seven-year-old Mapalo.

"Does this mean the others aren't interested in taking over from their dad?" Miyoba asked.

"It might seem so, but who knows with these people," Chisha said. "So far, these four are the only ones openly fighting for the throne. Of the remaining three, Leah the first daughter and second born of the family does not appear interested in the family businesses. She is also the black sheep of the family. She has three particular interests; fame, money and investigating her mother's death. At thirty-three

years old, she hasn't achieved much for herself except for her large following on social media and the son she had out of wedlock when she was twenty-six. As most of you know, she became infamous after she shot her baby daddy point-blank and claimed self-defence. She branded herself an activist of gender-based violence as she strongly believes herself a survivor."

"Leah takes her status as the daughter of the first wife very seriously. She considers herself and her brother Dave the true and original Nkole children," Chisha continued. "She refers to herself and Dave as the 'pure breeds' and publicly refers to her stepmother as 'the side hen'. She resents her father for having married the woman who broke their home and allegedly murdered her mother. She is also known for her public meltdowns and scandals that force her half-sister Situmbeko to clean after her. Her nickname and username on social media of course is 'bosslady_original princess'. Nothing surprising there," he laughed. "That leaves us with two more siblings; the least popular and the most famous."

Derrick was the complete opposite of his fraternal twin Pumulo. He was almost an exact replica of his father in appearance. Women aptly nicknamed him 'eye candy'.

Derrick had no soul, at least that's how his mother often described him. "If you had half the ambition of your twin brother, you could almost be a decent human," she would often say to him. Where many would have been insulted by such a remark, Derrick always managed to see the humour in it. She said the exact thing to Pumulo, but in reference to his looks.

"How many more years do you think it'll take for my mother to realize that she once had the opportunity to have the perfect son but decided to split them into twins?" Derrick laughed with his wife. "Had we stayed in one body, we would have been the perfect package!"

Derrick had zero ambition. He was content with his career in information technology, and was most certainly pleased with his wife of eight years Towela Malama with whom he shared a child, six-year-old Nadia. Believing himself to be not as ambitious or intelligent as his siblings, Derrick settled for a life of leisure with his quiet and reserved wife who had been a teacher of English before she quit to become a housewife. Derrick appreciated the fact that his wife never nagged him about fighting for the throne as his sisters and brothers-in-law did with his siblings.

"As a stay-at-home wife, Towela's life revolves around her husband and child and Derrick would not have it any other way," Chisha said.

"It is usually the quiet ones who are dangerous," Deon mused.

"I know right!" Alexa agreed. "But, do you mean Derrick or Towela? I'm leaning towards Towela as our informant because she is not a biological member of the family. She is a stay-at-home mum, meaning she has all the time in the world to spy on these people."

"There are people who are naturally boring in this world. They take pleasure in regular things and act like they don't need much to survive. What they don't know is,

it is their privilege that allows them the luxury to say no to certain things that regular folk would kill to have,” Memory said.

“I agree,” Chisha said. “Let’s move on to the last born now, Akende Nkole. I don’t need to say much about this since the Captain already mentioned some of it.”

“I actually think he’s the most interesting of the bunch,” Memory said.

“Please, we all know about your obsession with broken men. You’re a fixer Memory. Leave the bad men for Alexa,” Martha said, “She’s the one with the natural bad taste in men,” she laughed.

“He is definitely my style,” Alexa agreed, studying the image of Akende on the monitor. “And he is definitely his father’s son. Look at that smirk and those lips. I’ll take a good-looking bad boy with a poor character any day! This kind doesn’t bring much to the table so they won’t expect much from me. Except...our bad boy here comes with the face, the bo-dy, and the mulla. Hallelujah!” She threw her hands in the air and wiggled her waist in an animated fashion.

“Ladies, can we focus, please,” Eric cautioned the two but scowled more intensely at Alexa who happened to be his secret crush.

Having developed an immunity to the girl’s never-ending banter about men, Chisha powered on with his presentation. “Akende is currently pursuing his fourth degree, in three years. He roped the first three in the first year of study. He appears not to be decided on which career path to pursue. He is well known for his playboy ways and he is the weakest link in the family because of his lack of ambition, skills, and womanising ways. During our surveillance, we happened upon a discovery that shocked us. Mr hotshot here has a thing for his sister-in-law, Towela.”

Eric flashed a series of images showing Akende stealing glances at Towela during public events.

“Towela, her husband and the rest of the family appear oblivious to the situation. It’s either they truly don’t know or they don’t think much of the crush given Akende’s reputation,” Chisha said.

“That is the look of a man deeply in love if you ask me,” Aunt Sylvia said.

“I’m tempted to agree,” Chisha said. “Towela appears to be the most uninteresting member of this family but as Deon said, it’s usually the quiet ones....”

Following Chisha’s remarks, Eric further zoomed in on a portrait of Towela. Her smooth and clear light skin glistened against the flash of the camera. She had the most unassuming beauty among the women of the Imperial Family. She had calm eyes that almost veered towards vacant if not for the slight glint of light in them.

“Do we know who she was looking at in this picture?” Memory asked.

“Don’t tell me you’ve seen some psychology-thingy in her eye that all of us can’t,” Patrick said.

Memory moved closer to the monitor with the image while Eric searched through the gallery for images captured within the time frame.

“There is more to this woman than meets the eye,” Memory said. “Her lips say she’s smiling out of courtesy because the smile is reluctant and barely reaches the eyes. But her eyes...they’re saying something completely different. Look here,” she pointed to her pupils. “You look at this and you immediately think the flash is responsible for the glint in her eyes. It’s not. That glint is there because her eyes are moistened. Look at her pupils, dilated. Whatever or whoever this woman is looking at, she likes what she is seeing, very very much.”

“And we know that it is not her husband because here,” Eric flashed a picture of Derrick standing a few feet behind his wife. “He is not in her line of vision. But here,” a series of images shot within seconds of each other appeared on the screen. “She is looking at loverboy, one Akende Nkole.”

“So she is aware of his affections after all,” Chisha said.

“I would say she is more than aware, going by what the good doc said,” Alexa said.

And the question is, what is Akende doing about his feelings and what is Towela’s response?” The Captain said when she rejoined the group. “Simply liking what you see does not mean you possess that thing. Chisha, get your team to work on that and provide feedback as soon as yesterday. The more we know about this family, the more leverage we’ll have for the next stage.”

- ❖ Chapter Five will be published on Sunday, as scheduled.
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