

# The Imperial Family



"Chapter Two:  
Stolen Innocence"

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## Chapter Two: Stolen Innocence

*"Innocence once lost cannot be regained. Darkness, once gazed upon, can never be lost." - John Milton.*

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### **Lusaka, Zambia; 2004**

Trinah was thirteen years old when she moved to Lusaka. In more ways than one, she was like cinderella, but without the horse and the prince. Just like Bina Mwanza had said, the new family welcomed her with open arms and treated her like she was one of their own. Her new guardians instructed her to address them as Uncle Venon and Aunt Cathy. Their children, eighteen-year-old Mark, fifteen-year-old Chiza, and three-month-old Isaiah became her cousins.

On the first Sunday since her arrival, Trinah was paraded in front of a fully-packed United in Christ Assemblies Church to give testimony about how blessed she was to have been adopted by the pastor's family. The reverence bestowed on the Chaile family could only rival that reserved for the gods.

Perhaps they were indeed gods after all.

No sooner had Trinah resigned herself to the promising colourful life than her dreams were irrevocably shattered. Barely two weeks in the house, cousin Mark had sneaked into her bedroom in the middle of the night and ripped her innocence from the very core of her being.

"Scream and I'll have my mother send you back to that lay-by village she dug you from," he whispered in her ear.

A week later, uncle Venon would use a spare key to let himself in and repeat the sins of his son. Like a tag team, the two Chaile men would alternate and violate her every night for four straight months.

Unable to take the pain and humiliation anymore, Trinah confided in cousin Chiza who took the news to her mother. To Trinah's surprise, she quickly learnt that unlike what she thought and felt, she was the villain in the horror stories she had shared with people she thought would be her last line of defence. Aunt Cathy and cousin Chiza locked her bedroom and whipped her till the brown belts they had picked as their weapons of choice dripped in red.

"How dare you accuse my husband, an anointed man of God of such vile acts?" Said Aunt Cathy when she took a break from the whipping to catch her breath whilst her daughter stayed committed to the task. "And my son, ooh my poor Mark, my precious boy," the pastor's wife wept. "He has been nothing but kind to you! I begged him to focus on his studies but he insisted on always helping you. 'I'm like her big brother', he would tell."

"I never needed his help!" Trinah cried but no one was listening to her.

“He had been a caring brother to you yet you harboured such evil thoughts for him,” Aunt Cathy said. She picked up the belt and resumed whipping. “I shall not let you ruin my boy’s future you filthy thing.”

It took the mother and daughter pair a while to realize that Trinah had stopped protesting and crying.

Chiza held back her mother’s hand in mid-air. “Mum, she’s not moving.”

Aunt Cathy turned Trinah’s blood-soaked body around and placed a finger under her nose. “I don’t feel anything.”

“Did we kill her?” Chiza started crying.

“Don’t be silly,” Aunt Cathy said, not quite believing her own words. “Run, go and bring some water!”

“I knew she was going to be a problem the moment I laid my eyes on her,” Aunt Cathy muttered to herself, gently kicking Trinah to check if she would respond. “I allowed God to use me to take care of the orphan but look what she had turned out to be. A witch trying to destroy my family.”

Chiza appeared with a container of water and emptied it on Trinah. When she came to, Trinah found her clothes and books bundled up in a chitenge on the floor next to her.

“If you know what’s good for you, you will quietly leave my house and never speak of this to anyone. Go, now!” Aunt Cathy yelled.

Contrary to her aunt’s advice, Trinah went straight to the nearest police station and reported the abuse she had suffered at the hands of the Chaile family to the male police officer who was the first to notice her when she stood at the entrance of the packed reception.

“Jesus Christ, what happened to you, young lady?” The officer asked, taking her arm and helping her to a bench at the far end of the room where it was less crowded.

“For the past four months, two men have been raping me. I told my aunt and she beat me before kicking me out of the house.”

“Let me find you the best person to speak to.”

The officer approached one of the two female officers behind the counter spiritedly attending to the crowd. He said something to her and pointed in Trinah’s direction. The plump officer lifted her gaze and followed the direction of the officer’s outstretched hand. Without saying a word, she got up and headed her way.

“Tell me what happened?” The officer said as she joined Trinah on the bench.

Trinah turned glaring dark eyes towards the officer. “Aren’t you going to write?” She had neither pen nor writing pad in hand.

“I need to hear your story first before I can decide if it’s what you think it is. Most of you girls like getting yourselves in trouble and then you come here to waste our time when things don’t go your way.”

“I was just assaulted by my aunt and cousin after they learnt that my uncle and cousin have been raping me repeatedly for the past four months.”

“What are the names of your uncle and cousin who raped you?”

“Pastor Venon Chaile and his son Mark Chaile.”

The plump officer slid from the bench like jelly and landed flat on her bottom with a heavy and loud thud. Fortunately for her, the station was abuzz with activity that no one except Trinah who was staring at her in incredulity noticed her fall from grace. Borrowing the grace of a wounded buffalo, the officer attempted to gather the scattered pieces of her dignity in one swift scoop off the ground, only to plummet back down with the staggering velocity that defied all three of Newton’s laws of motion.

Trinah made no attempt to help the officer. Instead, the darkness behind her incredulous gaze intensified.

“It’s a good thing you have neither pen nor paper in your hands. You can put your weight in your hands by grabbing onto the bench and lifting yourself up,” Trinah advised in a flat tone.

Using a few pieces of her tattered pride, the officer followed the advice and won her battle against gravity. “You wait here,” she said without looking at her.

Trinah watched the officer walk all the way to the far end of the hallway and knock on a door. She disappeared for a few seconds only to reappear in the company of a huge severe looking officer. The man took one sweeping look at Trinah from where he was standing and motioned for me to go to them.

“I’ll leave it to you then Chief,” Officer McGravity said to the pudgy man before walking away.

The police chief held the door open for Trinah and she stepped into a meticulously decorated, air-conditioned room, a far cry from the armageddon-like chaos at the reception.

“Sit down,” he pointed to one of the fancy leather chairs in front of his expansive mahogany desk. “See that thing that you told my officers out there,” he said the moment Trinah was seated. “If you want to live long enough to get married and have children, never repeat those words.”

In the space of an hour, Trinah’s realization that Lusaka was nothing like the paradise she had envisaged came full circle.

“Huh?” It was the only word she could conjure out given her state of sudden mind paralysis.

"I'm just trying to protect you, young lady. You're almost the same age as my daughter. How old are you?"

She told him.

"I was right," he said. "I'll be honest with you. You're not the first girl to come here and accuse the pastor of such a thing. I understand you're young and you came here thinking we would solve all your problems. We solve a lot of problems here except anything to do with the Imperial Club."

"What is the Imperial Club?" Trinhah asked.

"You don't know the imperial family?" He was looking at her like she had suddenly developed fur on her skin.

"I have only been in Lusaka for four months."

"That explains it. Where are you from?"

"Mazabuka."

"Ah, the land of sugar and honey. No wonder the man of God couldn't resist you."

Trinah gave him her signature intense gaze. She finally understood how futile her efforts to get justice for the abuse she had suffered were. There was no one willing to listen to her or help her. There was no one she knew or trusted in the entire world. She was all alone.

The few times Trinhah had attempted to confide in Bina Mwanza over the landline had not gone according to plan. Trinhah learnt just how far the woman's extremism ran - it was not just limited to religion. Bina Mwanza was extreme in her love for her sister whom she regarded as the epitome of success for having married such an influential man, and she was extreme in her devotion and trust of her brother-in-law - a man she perceived to be as close to perfection as God himself. In her eyes and heart, the Chaile family could never do wrong.

There was only one thing left for Trinhah to do. "Tell me about the Imperial Club."

"To understand the Imperial Club, you must first know who the Imperial Family is," the Chief said.

"Who are they?" Trinhah asked.

"It is the family that owns this country," and leaning towards her from across the table, he added in a whisper, "including the president."

The Chief's comment triggered a memory in Trinhah's mind. It was something she had heard at school when her classmates found out she had been adopted by the Chaile family.

“So how many times does the president eat dinner at your place?” One classmate had asked.

Before Trinhah could ask her what he meant by his question, another had said, “Oh please, what does she know? I heard she is just a maid. If she was one of them, she would be at LIS like all their children. What is she doing here?”

I need to understand what you mean to feel insulted, Trinhah thought.

And so she had brushed them off. She had known that the Chailes were no ordinary family when they picked her up in their huge car at Intercity. And when the maroon gates automatically opened, she was convinced she was about to step into Paradise even before their mansion came into view. The president had not visited their home in the four months she had been there. What was even more surprising to her was how people seemed to think the family was close to him given the things she had heard Uncle Venon and Aunt Cathy say about him.

What was that they called him? “Puppet.”

“Huh?”

“What?” Trinhah asked the policeman who was looking at her with a puzzled expression. Had she spoken out loud? Whatever the case was, Trinhah was intelligent enough to surmise that the world in which the Chaile’s existed was not one she could conquer. Thus, when the police chief offered to drive her to a ‘safe place’ where they wouldn’t find her, she understood that her suffering was far from over.

Only this time, she had a gun pointed at her head during the assault.

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Trinhah had been on the streets for two weeks before Uncle Venom found her.

She had thought the likes of him would want nothing to do with a high-density area like Mtendere, but how wrong she was.

How did he find me? She wondered.

“I’ve been searching for you everywhere Trinhah,” he said through the rolled-down window of his Mercedes Benz.

As she took in the attention both the driver and the car were receiving in the middle of Mtendere Market, Trinhah recalled how she had felt like a princess every time he dropped her off and picked her up from school. She had seen the envy in the eyes of other pupils. Never in her wildest dreams had she pictured herself being the envy of others. For the first time, she felt like she was someone special.

“Is it true all his cars are bulletproof?” A classmate had once asked.

Trinhah had thought, why would a man of God need a bulletproof car? Now she knew.



Eight times, Trinah clenched her fingers. That was the number of times he had sex with her in that car.

She grabbed the bucket of fritters she had been selling on behalf of an aged marketeer who had taken a leap of faith and trusted her despite knowing nothing about her. And ran.

Two weeks was enough for her to master the ins and outs of the market and she soldiered through the human traffic with the swiftness of George of the Jungle. She won that round, but only for so long.

Pastor Venon Chaile found her two days later.

“Are you going to give up on school just like that?” He asked through the tinted window of the salon car.

He knew how passionate about school Trinah was. He had been rightly informed about the academic waves the teenager had made at her new school within the four months of attendance,

That fateful encounter led to Trinah having her own apartment at the age of thirteen.

“You get what you want and I’ll get what I want,” became the mantra Trinah chanted in-between sobs whilst vigorously washing off any trace of the pastor on her body.

On the other side of town, Pastor Venon was waiting for the gate to fully open before driving in when he heard a spark in the bonnet which was immediately followed by raging flames. His first instinct was to escape rather than attempt to stop the fire. He tried to unfasten his seatbelt but it would not respond. He reached for the door but it would not unlock. He stretched out the seatbelt till he was able to pull it over his head.

He then reached under his seat for his pistol and aimed the barrel at the passenger-side window. Tilting his head to the side, he fired, only to violently fall backwards as he tried to dodge the ricocheted bullet that had missed the window altogether and hit...something else. He searched for the area of impact but saw nothing in sight. Panicking, he dropped the gun to the floor of the vehicle.

He was trapped.

Desperate, he lunged for the wine opener that he had carelessly thrown on the passenger seat after leaving Trinah’s apartment and started hitting it against the window. It was an effort in futility. He could feel the heat from the flames getting closer, and he was running out of air. He tried the hooter and to his surprise, it worked. He banged on it over and over again until he got the attention of his wife who had been leisurely pruning her roses in the front garden.

Livid with irritation at the incessant hooting, Aunt Catherine rushed towards the gate, ready to give her piece of mind to whichever ill-bred human was screaming for attention. No one ever hooted at their gate. All their guests were expected and they were all privy to how to gain access without alerting the whole neighbourhood.

Aunt Catherine stopped dead in her tracks when she reached the driveway and came in view of her husband's blazing car.

"Simon!" She called out for the caretaker but he was nowhere in sight.

"Mark!" She tried for her son as she started running towards the car. As she neared the gate, she realized she could not go any further. The flames had grown more violent as the roof of the bonnet flew off.

Mark and Chiza appeared behind their mother, just in time to see the whole car burst in flames, sending the three of them flying back into the air before landing a few feet from the flames.

Trinah turned off the light in her room and got into bed. "And then there were fourteen," she said.

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