

The Imperial Family



Chapter Three:
"The Secret Code"

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Chapter Three: The Secret Code

“Lost causes are the only ones worth fighting for,” - Clarence Darrow.

Buying the silence of a man who is better known for his silence will not cost one a dime. His value lies not in the words he keeps to himself, but in the ones he chooses to share - for when he opens his mouth, many are keen to lend him a listening ear. What secrets is he about to reveal? They'll wonder.

Buying the silence of a man better known for his voice will cost one a dime and a half. His value lies not in the words he speaks, but in the ones he chooses to keep to himself - for when he keeps mum about a thing, the world hungers for it even more. What will it take to buy his silence, and what will it take to buy his voice? A dime and a half.

Infiltrating the notorious Imperial Club would require The Sanctuary Team to wrestle both types of men. It was a battle they had been preparing for years.

Nanny Carol, as she was popularly called by the learners at Brownstone Academy watched from her storeroom window the fleet of luxury cars drive around the Vaillancourt-inspired fountain majestically standing at the centre of the elite school. After ten years of working as a housekeeper at the school, she still couldn't resist watching the elaborate show of immaculately dressed chauffeurs moving in animated fashion as they helped the little heirs out of their cars.

Anyone new to the school would assume this show was mere protocol, but she knew better than anyone the extent the parents went to ensure that their drivers represented the value of their employers, not just in dress, but in manners too. There was nothing 'protocol' about that circus. It was a war of prestige and vanity. And Nanny Carol drank it all in every school morning...but not for the obvious reasons.

Brownstone Academy was the leading pre and primary school where Zambia's one-percenters sent their children under the age of thirteen. The school was highly regarded, not just for its obvious elitism and high-quality education, but also for its security. Parents who couldn't afford to get their kids in called it the 'Juvenile Prison' for having more security features and personnel than the prisons of Zambia, put together.

Nanny Carol checked her wristwatch for the umpteenth time since appearing at the window. She keenly watched the hands of time as they moved before starting the countdown to 8 o'clock.

“One, two, three, four, five.” She lifted her gaze and watched as a slick blue limousine pulled up from the other side of the fountain and parked in the front. The Imperial Family heirs.

A tuxedo-clad heavyweight stepped down from the vehicle and opened the door. As one kid after another disembarked, Nanny Carol waited for the one kid she had been waiting for; seven-year-old Mapalo Nkole.

She waited until all the kids from the Nkole household had safely passed through the metal detectors and security check before leaving the storage room.

It was time.

Nanny Carol waited for all the kids in Class 2 to settle down before collecting their lunch packs for refrigeration. As usual, she chatted with a few kids as she made the round, placing one impeccably packed lunchbox into the trolley after another.

Finally, she was by Mapalo's desk, the beautiful and ever-smiling princess with an obsession for doves and the colour blue, royal blue to be specific. The thought of such an angelic girl being born into such an atrocious family broke Nanny Carol's heart.

"Nanny Carol!" The seven-year-old cheerfully greeted the housekeeper. "Did you see me waving at you when you were by the window? I told Stan that you always stand there on Wednesdays to watch the cars." She handed her lunch box to the elderly lady.

Nanny Carol surreptitiously separated the lunchbox from the rest.

"Oh, you did?" The forty-five-year-old said, gently running her hand through the little girl's freshly done French braids. "Did he believe you?"

She pouted as she shook her head. "He said it was too far to see but I saw the blue dress and I knew it was you. You're the only one here who likes blue as much as I do."

Oh baby, but I only like blue because YOU like it, Nanny Carol thought.

The Captain's words echoed through her head. "Make her your best friend."

Once she had collected all the lunch packs for Class 2, Nanny Carol wheeled the trolley through the hallway and into the high-tech modern kitchen. She sneakily looked in the direction of the cameras as she entered and confirmed that Big Brother was watching as usual. She placed Mapalo's pack on a thick blue tray on the counter - the colours blending perfectly.

She placed the rest of the packs in the fridge.

Heaving a sigh of relief, she closed the fridge after neatly organizing the well-labelled lunch boxes. Finally, she turned her attention to Mapalo's pack. She opened the box to reveal a delicious-looking cheesecake. She gently pulled the top layer of the box out and placed it on the other side of the tray.

Just then, another member of the housekeeping team walked in and came to stand next to her. "The usual routine, huh?" The apron-clad woman by the name of Sandra remarked.

Nanny Carol chuckled as she lifted the lid off of the three-portioned bottom tier that contained some macaroni and cheese, avocado, and some egg toast.

"The kid knows how she likes her cheesecake. Don't judge Sandra," Nanny Carol laughed. She placed the lid on the cheesecake box and placed it in the freezer.

"These rich people amaze me," Sandra said. "The school has one of THE best cafeterias in the world yet they insist on packing food for their minions. See, all of this is served in the cafeteria," she pointed at the food.

Nanny Carol covered the rest of the food and placed it in the fridge. "How else are you going to know they have chefs at home who cater to the special, very specific tastes of their spoiled children?" She tore off a piece of paper towel and methodically placed it where the lunchbox had been. She pressed her hands down on it gently as if to soak the moisture or any liquids off the tray.

"You always do this," Sandra said, watching Nanny Carol carefully fold the towel and place it in the plastic bag containing other folded towels she had accumulated that week.

"What, you want me to just squash them and throw them away?" Nanny Carol asked. "These little things have saved me. To these people, it's just used paper but to me, it's one less roll of tissue I have to buy for my family of twenty! It's not even dirty!"

"I forgot about the in-laws."

"Yeah."

They both laughed.

Nanny Carol removed the plastic bag from the hook and brought it to her chest like it was a special treasure. "I'll put these in my bag in the dressing room and join you on the other side."

Sandra patted her colleague on the shoulder and they walked out together.

Fortunately for Nanny Carol, the housekeeper's locker room was unoccupied. She picked out the paper towel on top, placed the rest in her handbag and walked into one of the stalls. Upon locking the door, she unfolded the paper and held it against the light on the side of the mirror.

The words 'LAUNCH OTIF' glowed in blue against the light.

Her pulse quickened and her eyes radiated with wild fear. It took a moment for her to snap back to her senses. She squashed the piece of paper and flashed it in the toilet.

It's time, she thought.

She was at the checkpoint at exactly 6 pm, ready to log out. "Mr Mwape," she cheerily greeted the officer and caught his wink just before he busied himself pushing two tote trays in front of her.

Nanny Carol blushed. "You'll never change," she said, smiling from ear to ear. She knew all too well the ways of the flirtatious security guard. The number of housekeeping staff whose internal organs he had realigned exceeded those he hadn't. All it would take for him to cross that line with her was a bit more encouragement from her that went beyond a mere blush.

In your dreams mate, she thought. If it wasn't for the mission, I wouldn't even look in your direction, swine.

The problem with Mwape, everyone at Brownstone agreed, was that he assumed that the guns around his waist somehow turned his severe-looking face pleasant. He was just way too confident for someone whose facial features were three times the size of the average human.

But then again, Nanny Carol allowed her mind to wonder, if the anomaly extended to other parts of his body, then the man did indeed have a valid reason to be so full of himself.

She placed her phone and house keys in the small tote tray and her handbag in the bigger tray and let it through the metal detectors.

"Even before checking, I know what's in there," said Officer Phiri, scanning through the monitor.

"Give a girl a break Phiri," Nanny Carol said and walked through the detectors without trouble.

She had just picked up her items and was ready to go when someone called her name. It was Sandra, in the company of her married lover Davies the maintenance guy.

Nanny Carol hated everything about the man, not because he was a philanderer - God knows she had her share of sins. Davies Nawa was an insufferable human being who did not discriminate against the age of the females he bedded. In another life, Nanny

Carol imagined settling scores for the little girls who had suffered at his hands.

"Leave it be Caroline," The captain had sternly warned her. "Don't blow your cover and ruin a perfectly set plan. Stick to the cause and let me handle the rest."

Lucky bastard, she thought as she looked at the bastard. But was he, really? Knowing The Captain and her handy works, the bastard was surely out of luck come to think of it.

Nanny Carol smirked.

Out loud she said, "Hey guys. I have to pass through somewhere and pick up something for my mother-in-law. I'll use the bus. I'm sure the two of you won't miss me." She looked specifically at Sandra as she said the last part. Sandra was

head-over-heels in love with the man while he was cooking up ways to dump her without creating an awkward situation in the workplace before moving to his next target.

Nanny Carol opened an old message from someone she had saved as The Captain.

"ADH 1126, BLUE," the message read.

She ignored six angry calls from bus conductors to board their buses before her target arrived. She knew that even if the bus was full, there would be one seat reserved for her.

There were three empty seats this time. She walked past the first two seats and took the one next to the tall athletic-looking woman wearing a cap that covered half of her face.

The woman did not look up even as Nanny Carol sat next to her.

“Housekeeping could be your true calling Nanny C,” the mysterious woman said, still not looking at her.

“After ten years, it would be a tragedy if I didn’t perfect my role,” she retorted. “And do you always have to wear such gloomy clothes?” She was looking at the grey t-shirt tucked in high-waist bush-green cargo pants, tucked into black combat boots.

“Message,” the woman commanded, completely ignoring the jab on her fashion sense.

“Launch OTIF,” Nanny Carol whispered.

For the first time since Nanny Carol’s arrival on the bus, their eyes met.

Nanny Carol looked into deep fiercely set brown eyes on a surprisingly beautiful pear-shaped face.

“I know,” Nanny Carol said.

“So this is what it feels like before Armageddon,” the woman said. She had turned her gaze down again.

“Scared Captain?” Nanny Carol teased despite the gnawing feeling in her gut.

Tough times ahead awaited The Sanctuary.

“I was born for this,”

The Captain said, lifting her gaze towards the conductor standing near the door counting banknotes in his hands. “Ba conductor, nisala!” She yelled.

It was not a designated stop but neither the conductor nor the driver protested when the former banged on the roof of the bus three times to signal the latter to stop.

The driver turned his hazards on and slowed down the vehicle in the middle of the highway on Great East Road.

Turning back to Nanny Carol, “I’ll brief the team tonight. You come to the headquarters Sunday. I have a new assignment for you.”

She was up before the bus came to a complete stop.

“Aye captain,” Nanny Carol said without looking up.

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