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Stolen Moments by Letlojane-Sibande

Ntombie

Chapter One

“Stop what you are doing Asante you will get hurt.”

I was not shouting as I was agitated. The call was taking longer. I wanted to go back to work but Joseph was not keen. Things were not going well as his mother has also overstayed her welcome. She was not showing any signs of going at that moment. I was not even eager to know what she was discussing with the family as they were in the meeting.

“Mayamiko, I am very careful so do not worry.”

She called me by my name always when she came from her mother's place. My friend Mphatso thought I was mad to have forgiven him and continued with the traditional wedding. It had been two years of marriage and still, I didn't have kids from my womb but Asante was my daughter only when she was with us

not when she came back from her mother. She was doing Standard 3 at the time and she understood right from wrong but she chose her more.

Blood is always thicker than water so what can one do? She was born from an affair my husband had while we were still together. For some strange reasons, my mother-in-law loved Asante and Tawona who was the baby mama. She was forthcoming about it she didn't even hide it. That name I never liked well who was I to judge, what had they seen. I laughed at the thought.

"Sir, I am still doing fine and the zoom meetings are going well because I managed to close the deal you wanted so badly. Now I am waiting for your word with the Zomba deal it might be tricky."

"Miss, I want you in the office now to encourage these lazy people," we laughed as I checked on Asante who was jumping up and down in the kitchen. "How is the network these days?"

There was always an issue at home to the point where I bought my router that also caused some issues. How I spent his money was questioned until I stopped and used mine only which was a problem too.

“I am not complaining hence I managed to finish with the proposals you wanted and the deal went through these meetings.”

“I am also happy. We are hoping for a good year again this coming one. We....”

There was a thump that was so hard it pierced my heart. I rushed to Asante and she was unconscious on the floor bleeding.

“Asante, no do not do this to me, my baby.....”

I was sweating and crying.

“Hello, Miss Nyirenda, are you still there. What was that?”

The sound of the phone irritated me so much that I cut the call as I didn't have much to say. I called my husband who ignored it at first. The second time he just dropped it.

I knew he was in that family meeting but I was also his family and he knew I never called unless there was an emergency. He never learnt, no matter how much I complained to him it fell on deaf ears.

I didn't want to call my mother-in-law but I had to. I was checking up on Asante who had a faint pulse.

My mother-in-law wasted no time as she dropped it before it went to the third ring. I went back to my baby. "Asante baby, I love you please do not do this to me."

She was not mine but I loved her too much for her to go through this. I didn't have a car so I didn't know what I was going to do.

"Please God do not do this to me. I am praying she is just a child."

I was thinking about her mother who was so vile and I was even imagining all the Chichewa insults she was going to throw at me. She was the one who had wronged me but she was always bitter toward me.

Joseph didn't even have the guts to defend me. I loved him as soft as he was but at some point, it was not noble. We lived with Asante, I raised her as the mother thought she was going to be married but he chose me. She dumped the baby with us and never looked back. Well

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it was only for a little while as she came crying and my soft husband believed her. He didn't know she was always pushing my buttons and I didn't want to sound like a whining wife.

I was not going to call her mother but the ignored calls pushed me to call her. She didn't answer and it was nothing new. I

called my friend Mphatso who had been my pillar since we were growing up.

“Mnzanga, muli bwanji? (My friend, how are you?)”

I cried hysterically hearing her voice. I was not going to call my father because He was going to rebuke me for staying with the same man he warned me about.

“Shhhhhhh, talk to me, Maya.”

That is how she shortened my name but my parents used Miko.

“She is lying in the pool of blood and I just looked aside for a second. I do not know what to do.”

“Maya, just breath and tell me what the problem is and we will take it from there.”

Like a little child given instructions, I told her everything.

“I am far in Karonga on business so just take her gentle I have called my husband for you already. I sent a message he is on his way. Please do not panic because you will make mistakes. Remember this is not your child and you know what will happen when something worse happens.”

“Ye...esss. I will try to be calm. Thank you very much. Just like your name you are my gift indeed.”

“Do not forget that. Zikomo kwambiri.”

I was not shaking much. When I was leaving our neighbour saw us and I informed her of what was going on. She was going to help me by informing the rest of the family.

“Thank you for taking me.”

I was thanking Mr. Soko who was also an angel as my friend. I wondered why I was so unlucky, as my husband was never there for my friends or family when I needed him the most. He was always there for me though.

He carried lifeless Asante through the doors of Blantyre Adventist Hospital shouting for help. It was the nearest I could think of. It was very expensive but I was going to cover the costs. I was not going to let her die. If she was going to die I was going to follow her as I knew my life was going to be miserable. I loved her like my own.

They rushed to us asking questions as they attended to her. They rushed her to the ER but we were left at the reception filling in the forms. As I was checking the information on the phone the sound I hated irritated my ears. I didn't charge the phone. I was going to be in trouble. Tears fell uninvited.

“Please, do not cry as it will make it worse for the child,” Mr. Soko said patting my back.

We were still there without any feedback whatsoever. I was waiting for anyone to show up and help as my battery had died.

After what seemed like a lifetime and my tears were dried out the doctor came we both stood up.

“Please tell me, what is going on?” I was shaking as his facial expression said it all.

“Are you the parents?”

“No, but I am the.....”

Before I could answer my mother-in-law and husband came rushing.

“What is going on here?”

From her voice, I could tell that I was going to be in trouble. I was glad that the baby mama was not with them.

Well, I spoke too soon. She rushed in fuming.

“What is happening with my child?”

There was a commotion as they wanted to get the answers at the same time. I was defeated I only sat on the bench with my hands on my face also blocking their voices. After a while, there was silence until I opened my eyes to all eyes on me waiting for answers. I didn't even hear the question so how was I going to answer.

“You see. She is not even sorry for trying to kill my child.”

“Are we not exaggerating a little.” Said Mr. Soko. “It was an accident and if it was deliberate then she was not going to worry, call my wife and pay for all the expenses.”

They all turned toward him.

“Who are you and what are you doing here?” My mother-in-law asked.

“He brought me here as Mrs. Soko my friend asked him to bring me.”

“So you can talk. We are asking you about the child and you are quiet only to defend your boyfriend.”

The baby mama was angry.

“There is no need for fighting here and we need to find a solution. I need medical records as the child has slipped into a coma.”

The baby mama screams and rests her head over my husband’s shoulders. I don’t have time to fight her.

“There is more.”

What the.....

2

I was shaking because I wanted this nightmare to end. I was not ready for more aggravation.

“We cannot see clearly in the scan but there is something wrong inside her Cerebellum. Although we can’t pinpoint it now because of the scar and the swelling, it showed slightly when we took a scan.”

“Swelling and scaring. What did you do to my child?”

I had never seen Joseph so angry it scared me. I was forced to explain to everyone what happened.

“For now we need to monitor her and see how this goes. We are not promising anything as the swelling is not showing any signs of subsiding now.”

“Can we at least see her?”

I looked at the doctor with pleading eyes and he assumed I was the mother.

“Yes but only you and the father.”

They all look at me as if they will consume me with the flames in their eyes. They all looked back at the doctor. Mr. Soko just brushed my shoulder apologetic as if he was the one who had wronged me.

“Why would she come in when I almost lost my daughter because of her? Please do not even think about coming near my child again.”

“I am sorry I just assumed that when she brought her she.....”

He never got to finish that when my husband interjected.

“Next time do not assume. May we go in now?”

“Of course follow me.”

The way he said it and did not even defend me or say something to assure me everything was fine, hurt me. I sighed and sank onto the chair. I just watched them going in the direction the doctor was leading them, without an apology or even looking at me. My father only agreed to this marriage because my mother begged him but he always reminded me from time to time that the marriage was doomed. He loved me regardless. The hurt I was feeling surpassed the hurt I felt when the child was born. I was feeling as if I was punished for disobeying my father. I was left with a strange look from my mother-in-law.

“So you are not ashamed that you cannot give my son children but you want to kill his only child that might be the only one till his dying day? I knew you were not good for him but he didn’t listen to me.”

“Mayi, mukudziwa zoti ndimamukonda mwana wangayu kwambiri. (Mama you know I love my daughter too much.)”

I tried to be as humble as possible.

“Do not even say that she is your daughter.”

She was shouting and I was forced to just keep quiet. Mr. Soko felt awkward I could tell so I asked him to be excused.

“Thank you for bringing me here I will be fine. Please thank Mphatso for me and I will call her once my phone is charged.”

He didn’t dispute because I knew he was disgusted by their behaviour. I was not going to subject him to further humiliation so I let him be.

“Please make sure you will update her because I know she is so worried where she is. I will try to fill her in with what I know so far.”

“Thank you very much. I will update you. God bless you.”

He involuntarily hugged me and I hugged him back. I thanked him once more and sat back on that cold bench. I didn’t care anymore that my mother-in-law was looking at me weirdly. If she thought I was dating Mr. Soko then she was misguided as I loved him like a brother and I was not a cheating type worse with my friend’s husband.

I felt a chill after what she was thinking and I knew I was in trouble. When I was stressed I always got menstruation. I quickly stood up, which was done late because I had already messed myself up.

“This is a sign that you will not give my son a child.”

She was angry at my blood also as if I killed someone. I saw the nurse coming and I motioned her to get closer. She saw my begging eyes and never asked again. After explaining to her she helped me and asked the cleaner to help also. I refused and cleaned my blood myself. It was not much so I took the pads and rushed to the bathroom after cleaning the bench. I was so embarrassed, I always carried emergency pads but when I left home it was hastened.

When I got to the bathroom I got the time to reflect and cry. I was a strong person but sometimes strong people break at some point. I went back to the events and reflected on how I could have changed things but nothing came up. After breaking down I left the bathroom.

My husband was out waiting with his mother in the foyer.

“We are waiting for mama Asante then we will leave.”

He was not friendly at all I just nodded. When she got out we went to the car. Tawona rushed to the front and I wanted to see what they were going to say when I was fighting her. They

did well by not entertaining her. I was tired and I wanted to see if they were ready for my fights as I was tired of their treatments.

“You know my wife sits here or my mother, so do not even think about it.”

I was glad he stood up for me on that one. Even his mother knew that when we travelled together I was the one allowed to sit in front.

When I got inside I charged my phone and switched it on. I let the data off. My boss called the moment I switched it on. I looked at my husband who pretended to ignore me. I let it ring. After some time it rang again.

“Just answer the stupid phone as it will continue to irritate us.”

The way he barked I almost jumped from the seat I was in, to the next car going the other direction.

“Hello.”

“Miss Nyirenda

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are you okay?”

I saw my husband looking at me at the 'Miss' part. He was calling everyone like that even the married old women in the company.

"I will send the report tomorrow sir but my daughter had an accident and I am coming from the hospital."

I was avoiding so many questions and he realised that.

"No problem I will make sure I will send the flowers to the little princess and the family. You can rest for this week and attend to the email we were talking about then. Thank you."

"Thank you, sir."

I dropped the call and closed my eyes as I was ready for one of them to talk.

"This phone call thing is not stopping as you almost killed my granddaughter because of it?"

My husband just shook his head. I knew that for this household to look intact it was because I was helping financially. His salary alone was not going to sustain us hence the reason I took the job in the first place.

He promised to provide but he was always complaining even about the little things bought in the house. My job was well paying and he was not complaining as I was the one buying

most of the things. My job became demanding and he complained about eating late as I came late home.

I was about to quit when my boss came up with a plan for me to only come in when it was necessary. I think it was working as clients were also happy and I always got a fat bonus which he was glad on spending. I am glad the cheating incident only happened once and he had been faithful but his weakness was his mother, daughter, and baby mama. I would have loved it if I was his weakness at least at some point. Being strong is a disadvantage at some point as people expect you to always be strong.

The distance going back home seemed too long as I was listening to my mother-in-law talking to her 'daughter-in-law' about how she will take care of the child once she comes out of the hospital. She was even offering to visit frequently so that she can help. I was excluded from the plans and there I was worried for nothing as I was not the mother of the child.

"Please from now on stop calling my daughter your daughter telling people as if you gave birth to her. I am the mother; I was alone when I gave birth although I was with your 'husband' when making her. If you were a real mother you were not going to neglect her and hurt her. I am considering taking her from you two."

I was shocked to answer but I knew she was not going to do that she was threatening only but my mother-in-law and husband bought it. When I was still in shock and awe, my phone rang startling me. It was my father.

“Adada (father),” I answered it. We were not Chewas my mother was Chewa but my dad was Tumbuka so we were speaking Tumbuka at home. Chichewa was the main language I was comfortable with it as well.

“How can I hear from your friend about your predicament?”

“I am so sorry, my battery died and I only charged it now when we were leaving the hospital.”

My mother-in-law and husband were afraid of my father so they were not going to comment while I was on the phone with him. Fortunately enough we had arrived I didn't wait for them to say or do anything I just opened the car door and went inside the house. I was glad the phone had charged a little. There was still blood in the kitchen. I panicked again looking at a large amount of blood.

I cleaned while I was on the phone with my father. That way I knew no one was going to come to the kitchen.

“I know what you said Adada but I am trying and I love him. Today I was hurt because I didn't do it deliberately but I take the blame as the child was under my care.”

“Accidents do happen, do not even blame yourself. Even if you were not alone in the house it might have happened.”

“Why do I feel like this is my fault?”

“You feel that way as people who were supposed to understand what happened only pushed the blame on you.”

“This accident opened my eyes. We will talk when I came home next month for the wedding.”

My little sister was getting married then moving away from Lilongwe so it was going to be a wedding and a farewell the following day.

“Alright, my love. We will talk when you are calm as I can hear from your voice that you are agitated.”

My father knew us very well and it was so amazing but a disadvantage at some point. I finished cleaning and switched on the stove to cook. I was surprised to hear the voice of the baby mama when I thought she went home. I quickly went for a shower after switching on the stove. I wanted to quickly clean up and cook before they complained again.

When I was done bathing my husband was sitting awkwardly on our bed.

“Please tell me this was not deliberate.”

I was beyond shocked as I didn't expect this from him. I expected that from the other two in the sitting room.

“How can you even ask that?”

“Please come we need to talk.”

I nodded and quickly changed to more comfortable clothes. I was already bleeding so I had to look for the pads. He left me while I cleared the room.

When I entered the sitting room I was not expecting that, then boooommm.....

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When I entered the sitting room I was not expecting that, then boooommm.....

I looked at them all were eyes on me. I was calm right as I knew that the storm that was coming was going to be stronger than any storm I faced.

“Mayamiko, sit down we need to ask you questions.”

She never called me with my surname like they do to any married women. At least my boss called me Miss Nyirenda.

“Nyamunyirenda, we want to understand here.”

At least my husband respected me that much. I sat down on a single couch while they both share the double and husband was sitting on the armrest side of his mother.

He cleared his voice and started. “We want to know what truly happened here, and please do not leave anything behind.”

The way he said it hit me hard. He even said ‘we’ as an indication that they discussed that prior maybe when I was busy bathing. A part of me died that day. The little love I was left for him shifted. His voice had that thing I cannot describe. He was supposed to be my knight and shining amour but he was there crucifying me. I was there when the child was

brought to us a sickling who was not taken care of. She was wearing short clothes that had lost colour.

I had stayed at night with him when the child was sick. I was the first one to notice that she was being bullied at school and I took it upon myself to deal with the matter. I was there when we had to change our diet as the child was malnourished.

The child was always with me more than the father who barely knew what her favourite colour was and her fears. I was the only one who even cared about her grades. We had to have extra lessons, as she was slow at school. I had to take her to the most expensive school in Blantyre, Michiru View Private School which dedicated a specialist for her so that she could improve at school.

All those I did it for him and with him. I thought it would have proven to him I would not harm his child deliberately, but no he was hell burnt that I was on a witch hunt to kill his little girl.

“I was checking my emails with her next to me. We were supposed to go shopping after I was done with work. She wanted a winter uniform. When I was almost done, my boss called, when I answered the call I instructed Asante to sit down. She was jumping up and down next to me. I was about to end the call when I heard a thumb. I think she wanted to get the chocolates I hid in the cardboard. I had promised to give them

to her after lunch. The call took less than five minutes; I do not know why she was so fast.”

“Are you seriously blaming the child that she was faster?”

So after all, I said she only heard that she was fast. I didn’t have energy left with me.

“No, I am not blaming the child. I explain it was at the speed of light.”

“Was the call that necessary?” Joseph asked.

I didn’t have an answer for that, as I was going to sound rude to him. I didn’t want to answer to anything. I wanted to be alone and pray to God to heal my girl so that things were going to go back to normal again.

“He asked a question. Was the call so important? Sometimes you need to listen to your husband. He asked you not to work. This is one thing we discussed at the family meeting yesterday. You seem to wear pants in this house. You pray the child wakes up because if not, you will follow her thereafter.”

I was there, thinking about the ungratefulness of a human being. The money we were sending to her was all because of me. I would not remind her about that.

“I am so sorry.”

That is the only thing I managed utter. I would not bother arguing. I think in my heart I didn't care anymore.

"I want one thing from you. Do not visit my daughter and to stay the hell out of my daughter's life. Once she recovers, then I will see what to do."

"But, I....."

"I do not want to agree. You have done enough."

I looked at my husband who just looked aside. I looked at my mother-in-law who didn't even care.

"I am so sorry again for the trouble I caused you. I will excuse myself now."

I bowed and excused myself. No matter how angry I was, I would not throw away my father's teachings. We were taught to be humble and respect our elders and people around us. We were taught to love as it was a weapon to build, not destroy, as opposed to war. I would not stoop to the baby mama's level. My mother-in-law only needed redemption, so I would not count her. Joseph needed to move out of the petticoat government and I would not do that for a grown man. He needs to do that on his own, as he was a father. I was so glad that he had a girl child. Not that I was cruel, but I was hoping for him to live longer and for God to give her a husband like her father. I then understood what my father once said.

I was not in the mood to cook and I would not sit around and cook for hypocrites. I would not hear from about seeing Asante. I was going to see her without their knowledge.

I took the car keys after switching the stove I drove to town to eat. I was going to treat myself to a three course meal dinner. I went to the Bombay Palace Restaurant. It was still closed as it opened at 18:00 hours. I sat in the car and reflected. The car was mine also, we bought when I got the bonus the first year we were married. But as it was I barely used it as I was working at home and he was the one using it to travel to and fro work.

He also helped with groceries, as I hated shopping. I visited the shops when it was necessary. I was not dressed for the restaurant so I went to buy something comfortable to kill time. I was ready to forget my predicament for a while. The advantage was the fact that I left the phone at home. My cards were with me. He was considerate to always keep my things safe in the car and not allow every jack and Jill inside our car.

Strangely, I felt so happy at that moment. Looking good and waiting to have dinner for one. I didn't even remember the last time I went out. I had neglected myself so much that it hurt. When they opened, I was the first one. I knew I was hungry but their meals were appetising that I ordered almost everything. I wanted to forget my troubles and be myself for a while. I was going to think about other people and the consequences later.

When it was already late, I thought of going to the hospital I knew it was not visiting hours but I needed a nurse or a doctor to give me some information.

“I do not know how to help you but I may not let you inside the hospital this late.”

I was still at the gate when the security guy didn't want to let me in. “But Asir it will only be for a moment.”

Before he could answer, I saw the nurse who helped me when I had messed up the bench and the doctor who helped me. I rushed to the other gate to their car. “Excuse me.”

They were both surprised. “I need your help with my daughter.” “It's okay love. I helped her in the afternoon.”

They were both wearing rings, and I looked at both of them.

“This is my wife and yes we work together but on different floors. She has been waiting for me to knock off.”

Although it was unnecessary for me to explain I just looked aside and felt bad for assuming they were both married but having an affair.

“Even if it's minute information, to give me hope.”

“I may not tell you anything but I saw what happened in the afternoon. She is stable for now. Do not stress too much but I

am worried about what we saw on her Cerebrum it might be dangerous for her recovery.”

“Was it caused by the fall?”

“It is hard to tell as the swelling is going up, not down. Pray harder my dear, because this will not be over soon. She might take longer to recover.”

“Do not worry you can come and pray with me during my lunch prayer and I will help you see her as long as you will not make me lose my job.” The wife said with a broad smile. I thanked them and went to thank the guard as well.

When I got to the car, I was tired, but I was dreading to go home. I wanted to catch them in the morning when I was well rested. I was going to sleep on the couch so as not to murder Joseph.

At home it was dark I was glad but when I switch on the lights Joseph was sitting waiting for me.

“Where the hell have you been?”

“Please lower your voice. I am tired I do not want to argue.”

“So we don’t talk about things and you just leave without even saying anything.”

“I said I do not want to say anything because I do not want to fight with you.”

“Where did you get this dress? Are you having an affair?”

“Wow, that is so rich coming from you. I bought this dress today and you can check my bank statement as you normally do without my concern.”

He was shocked, but I knew he checked my statements from time to time. Even my phone records I discovered that, but I took it lightly as I knew I was not promiscuous.

“I am exhausted. I will sleep in Asante’s room. I am sorry about your daughter.”

I didn’t want his response I just left him standing there. They cooked I could see the plates and pots that were left me. I was hoping and praying that ‘devil’ didn’t cook in my kitchen using my utensils.

The week that followed was stressful. I couldn’t even talk to anyone. I was talking to my friend and family. I let them vent at me without answering.

They had their routine, and I had mine with the nurse. She was Mrs. Phiri who was God sent. I could see little improvement with Asante. She was moving her limbs from time to time. I had hope that she will wake up.

The treatment I got from home was so horrible it made me question my life.

“She will wake up. We have prayed enough now God is at work. Leave it to Him.” “For now, I want a miracle.”

She hugged me as I was going home. When I got home, I was surprised to find Mphatso there. You know I cried on her shoulder, removing all the pain and hurt I had bottled. I was so happy to see her.

“You look so thin. For just a week and you have changed.”

I wiped my tears and sat with her. We were in the kitchen; I was being an excellent host. “What do you want? Tea, coffee or hot chocolate?”

I was avoiding the question. She saw that and just chose coffee. It was a little chilly. Winter was fast approaching hence I wanted to buy a winter uniform for Asante. I thought she was my daughter but their words reminded me I was only a child minder.

“So tell me again, what is going on?”

I related everything to her. She was angry.

“When are you leaving this sham of a marriage, by the way?”

I was surprised. “Why would you say that?”

“I am just asking. I will not support you in this. Leave this man. He might love you but he doesn’t have what it takes to be a family man. A man always supports his family. I was facing my

children's aunts and my mother-in-law and husband helped me put them in their place. Who is helping you in this house? Life is all about give and take. You cannot give always without taking because your cup will be empty while you fill other people's cups." "I love him and he loves me."

"After this incident, are you still singing the same tune?"

I paused a slightly. She was right there was no love lost. I was only holding on the fact that I once loved him. He was a caring man once upon a time but there was no passion at all from my side. He lost my respect and once the respect was gone love faded diminutive.

When I was about to answer, a phone came through. It was my husband. We both looked at each other.

"Hello."

I listened to what he was saying and quickly stood.

"We need to go. Please drive me." I said, dropping the call and pulling her by her hand.

"What the....."

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“We need to go Please drive me.” I said, dropping the call and pulling her by her hand.

“What the.....”

I pulled her towards the door. I didn't have a car so I was banking on her.

“What is going on, Maya?” she asked opening the car as I opened my side as well.

“Asante is up and she was asking for me.”

“I bet it is a bitter pill to swallow after making sure you didn't get to see her.”

We both laughed but my mind was with Asante. I was worried if she was fine or not.

“But it won't matter.”

“What do you mean?”

“Nothing to worry about friend just shush up and drive.”

We both laughed as she played that song by Rihanna that she loved so much. I was silently praying for Ashante to be well so that she cannot hate me as well.

“We are here so worry not.” She was already parking not so far from the door. I waited for her as she locked the car.

“Please relax. I can feel your tension from miles away. Do not show them your weakness please because I will be forced to be rude to them.”

She was right it was time for me to relax and stop stressing. For me it was easier said than done. When we got in it was at the nick of time as the doctor was also approaching them.

“Good day family. I am glad we are all here as I want to learn something. Who was taking care of the child from birth till she could walk?”

I saw panic on Tawona’s eyes. I was not following why the doctor was asking that entire question and why at that particular time.

“Why are you asking that, is that a true question?”

She sounded so irritated but I was still not following. She stalled again a little to a point where Mphantso interjected.

“Answer the question, not ask your silly questions without an answer.”

She was angry but I elbowed her and she just clicked her tongue.

“I was taking care of her myself on my own without any help.”

She said that proudly and I rolled my eyes as the attitude accompanying the answer bored me to death.

“I guess you should have told these people including myself about her condition before we even treated her. She was going to recover fast.

There was commotion but I was shocked and standing there like a statue.

“What do you mean? What did you do to my daughter?”

Joseph was getting angry looking at her. Or how fast the wheel turned as I was waiting for my mother-in-law to comment but the comment never came through.

“What is going on doctor? Please tell us what is going on as we are in the dark.”

He cleared his throat and looked at us without blinking. “The child has ‘Baby Shaking Syndrome’ she was diagnosed a few years ago and was taking some medication for it but she stopped when she got better. She was supposed to go back for follow up checkups and any possible medication. The dot on her Cerebrum

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the one I first suspected was from the fall was from this.”

I was not a doctor and I was not even sure I understood what he was saying. Was she shaking as a baby or what? Tawona was flushed and shaking.

“Please say it in layman’s terms because we are lost at this moment. What shook who and when?”

I was not trying to be funny but I was agitated to hear the whole thing.

“It is an illness that affects the brain mostly. It happens when a baby or toddler is forcefully shaken. This happens when a parent or caregiver severely shakes a child in frustration or anger, often because a child won’t stop crying. Permanent brain damage or death may result.”

When he finished I was shaken. So I was blamed for something I never had control over when the mother had abused the child when she was young.

“What did you do to the child?”

I asked outraged even though I wanted to let it go. Everyone looked at her.

“She was crying too much when she was young and I was alone and clueless when she cried.”

“That is an excuse there are hospitals around here to help you realise what was wrong with the child.” I was beyond angry.

“You are talking from the chair of privilege as you had everything handed to you by your daddy dearest. I was not privileged enough. I had to work hard for all these things. I

didn't even have money for clinic or the transport. The time I got some information was when my mother's friend told me she had colic and it was too late.

She is the one who took her to the hospital for further examinations and that was discovered. I was all alone and no one told me I was going to have a child with colic.

Judge me or shoot me but I did what I needed to do at that time. At least she stopped crying when I shook her up."

I was not going to argue with an arrogant good for nothing excuse of a human being who gave every excuse in the book for her bad action. I was angry at the fact that I was the devil in the picture but if the accident had not happened then they were never going to find out about the issue.

I was done asking questions and reasoning with these people. I left them there arguing and took to my prayer partner's room. She took me to the ward where she was moved to as she was out of the comma.

"Thank you for the prayers; you have been a good friend to me."

I hugged her as I walked toward Asante. She smiled at me as I rushed to hug her and kiss her forehead.

"You worried me; please do not do that again. How are you?"

She smiled. "I heard you crying and I was not going to leave you like this."

I laughed and playfully pinched her. She kept laughing.

"Why did you cry because I was just resting? Did you think I was going to die?"

"I will not entertain you young lady. I am happy that you are well and rested then. I love you and I will never hurt you on purpose."

"You never hurt me though. I wanted to apologies for not listening to you. You told me that it was dangerous and I was naughty."

I was so relieved to hear that as she was the only person who mattered from this equation. "I am happy you are well. Do not worry about the past but never do that again. Anyone who is older than you when they warn you of danger do not turn a blind eye. Your parents were hurt and sad at the same time."

"You are my parent also and you are not hurt. Did I do something to you?"

"No my princess I am not angry at you because you appologised I am happy you woke up and you are fine. Now things changed and"

“There you are. Let us go before I kill someone and go to jail for nonsense.”

Mphatso said coming to Asante’s room. She softened when she saw her. She smiled and hugged her. She was not going to take out her anger on an innocent child that I was sure of.

“My fighter, look at that smile. Thank God you came back and my friend is now happy. How was it there? Did you go to heaven or hell? You are a naughty child I bet you went to hell. What did Satan say to you?”

I was laughing at Asante who was laughing uncontrollably. She had a beautiful smile like her father. I think that was the reason I love her so much.

“No aunty I didn’t go to hell.”

“Tell the truth before I tickle you. I bet the devil said ‘no child you are too cute for hell but at the same breathe you are too naughty for heaven so go and apologies to earth and live happily ever after.’ I know you are going to tell me stories about your adventure.”

She wiped her tears and smiled. “I was not in hell or heaven I was here resting.”

“Okay princess rest is over I am busting you out of this hell hole. We will go through that window so that no one will have an idea where we went.”

She laughed again. “Okay let us chase mama first she will tell on us.”

I was jealous of their conversation but I was scared that I was not going to be able to..... Let me not go there.

“I will be the first one to tell the police your secrets so you are right your secrets are not safe with me.”

We all laughed which was short-lived as they all came in. I stood up and looked at my mother-in-law and Joseph. “I am sorry for disobeying your order as you didn’t want me in this room but I just wanted to make sure that she was doing fine. I will take my leave.”

Asante gasped but I didn’t give them time to respond I took Mphatso’s hand and we left.

“What was that all about?” she asked looking surprised.

“I do not want to face these people I am still digesting what I heard.”

We saw baby mama approaching and I looked aside and quickened my steps. Mphatso didn't have a choice but run after me.

“Wait a minute; I am not equipped for a marathon.”

I was forced into a halt by laughter.

“I wanted to rush you were not obliged to follow me. I knew you have the guts to face her as I am not in the mood to face her. I do not think I will ever be in the mood to face her.”

“All will be well. It shall soon pass. I know you love that child as your own but it is time you put your needs first. No running away.”

“I was not running. I was going to kill someone too if I stayed.”

We both laughed when we got into the car. She dropped me off home after I bought some take away food. I was not going to cook I was tired so cooking angry was going to make me cook bad food.

I went to Asante’s room to change the bedding. I was not sure when she was going to come back home but this needed to be done ASAP.

I was done clearing and dishing up when my mother-in-law came with my husband.

“May I dish up for everyone or you will bath first?”

I was very polite and smiling just a little. They both looked surprised. I think they expected me to throw a tantrum after what I heard from the hospital.”

“I will go and bath first.” My husband said

“I will eat first.” Followed my mother in law after her son.

“Alright, I will dish up for you, mayi.”

I didn't even want to ask if Asante was coming home or not. I dished up my plate also and sat opposite my mother-in-law who was surprised. She kept on stealing glances at me. I pretended to be watching the comedy and softly laughed when they did.

When I was done I thanked her and went with the dishes to the kitchen. My husband came took his food and joined his mother. I heard whispers which didn't move me. When I was done even clearing his dished I was asked to the sitting room.

“Nyamunyirenda, I would like to apologise for what has been happening and to accuse you of what happened.”

The sentence was vague to me but I listened. He cleared his throat and continued.

“I was wrong to not listen to your side of the story. I was supposed to know that you were not going to hurt Asante on purpose.”

He looked at his mother for support which he never got and then he looked at me.

“Okay.”

That is all I said and I smiled a sarcastic one which surprised them.

"I...."

"Good night mother and my husband."

I left them there with their mouths hanging. I was done with pretense. I was going to bed to rest.....

No electricity since last week Friday I know some saw the news and I am afraid no electricity even now. Yesterday I had to charge at a food outlet because Maya was calling me I had to walk Kilometres as roads are closed and no movement. Will try to keep up once we are sorted.

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“Good night, mother and my husband.”

I left them there with their mouths hanging. I was done with pretense. I was going to bed to rest.

I went to Asante’s room and locked the door. Joseph was looking so hot and yummy but I was going to choose my dignity over my desire. I loved him but I would not be the last choice for someone who loved other people more than he loved me.

I heard a soft knock when I was drifting to sleep. I remembered where I was then I pulled my blanket over my head irritated. I was disturbed from my almost beautiful dream. I finally fell asleep and drifted into a beautiful dream.

I was glad when no one asked me about the previous night. Joseph had gone to work and my mother-in-law was in the kitchen humming.

“Good morning Nyamunyirenda. How are you? I made breakfast for you.”

It was the first time she was so polite to me since I was with her son. I smiled and greeted them back.

“I am afraid I will miss breakfast, as I have too much work to do. I was not working all these days, and it is catching up with me.”

“It is okay I will put it in the warmer when you are ready you will eat.”

I thanked her and left her to go to the bedroom. Even if I was hungry, I would not eat her food. I would rather wait for her son so that we could both die if she was trying to kill me.

I was truly behind with work it was so tiring. I didn't even know where to begin. I had to send over a dozen emails some were overdue and I think the boss was lenient because of Asante. Before I knew it, lunchtime had approached and Joseph was home for lunch which was odd. I loved that when we first got married but things changed when his mother visited frequently. I never questioned that.

“I heard you skipped breakfast. You can take a few minutes and we can eat together I brought your favourite from the market.”

I smiled back and got relieved as I was going to eat the breakfast plate with him.

“Okay, I will make this thing sleep so that it cannot mess up my work. I am almost done, though.”

“Okay, I will dish up in the meantime.”

He smiled going to the kitchen. If there was no mother-in-law and the baby mama, our marriage was going to be perfect and a love story like no other. I would not fool myself because that

was going to be the first of many episodes I was going to have to endure with that family.

We had breakfast and lunch talking about general things. He informed me that Asante was coming back home. I was over the moon and happy that I was ready for the next chapter of my life though it scared me.

“Will you come with me?”

“No, I want to finish work so that when she comes home everything will be ready for her. I will also change her bedding.”

“Thank you.”

He didn't want to ask about the previous night too so I would not stress myself about it. I quickly cleared the dishes and didn't bother to ask about his mother. When I was done with work, I cleaned Asante's room.

When I got to our bedroom, I cleared the laundry. I was so happy that my work was still safe and that most emails were responded to. I cooked her favourite meal. My Mother-in-law came from church later that evening. I had forgotten it was a Thursday. She didn't stay long as she walked to her friend's house to give her information, seeing that she didn't attend the church that particular day.

When they came back home Asante hugged me and smiled. It was a propitious time for the family. Her mother didn't stay

long as she was still ashamed of her actions. I was nottold going to crucify her since I knew I was never going to get an apology.

It was exactly five days after she came back home when I told them about my decision and my new chapter. I remember when I was young, my dad used to tell me stories that captured my mind. The one that stuck with me was about an axe and a tree.

“Long ago, before human beings came into the picture, the axe and the tree were good friends. They used to spend summers together planning their future and talking about their dreams. They used to plan about their kids on how they will stay together and let no one separate them. Then one day a human being came to stay in their village. The tree had grown so fast and had kids mushrooming on the side and the axe was still small and short. The human being told axe he can’t be friends with someone who is growing and leave him as short as ever.

The human being had a solution to grow the axe’s family, but it meant he was supposed to cut down the tree. Axe hesitated as he saw that tree can grow back again when the rain comes. He didn’t even think of their friendship or the summers they spent.

When the human had gotten what he wanted, he left the axe there to deal with the angry tree. Humans also took some of the tree’s body to warm selves. Axe had forgotten the cruel deed by him and human to his friend but the tree was still

bleeding when the axe came to play. 'You might be happy now and forget what you did to me but I will never forget as the pain was infected to me'. That is when the animosity came to be because axe was happy to inflict pain on the tree but he forgot that the tree had scars to show that their friendship was destroyed by a human."

That was my situation at that time. They were happy that I was happy Asante was home. At that point in life, their actions hurt me beyond words can say. So when we were all at a happy place I announced my plans.

"I would like to tell you how happy I am that Asante is well and we are a happy family."

I clear my throat and the look on Joseph's face tells me he knows what is coming. Nevertheless, I bravely state my case.

"There are some of the hurtful things that happened which cannot be overlooked. I am grateful to have been part of this family but I think my time has ended. I have spoken to my family about this decision and they told me the decision is mine. I was told that the formalities will be done but the elders as it was done at the time I was brought to this family. I am not going with a heavy heart as I had some happy times and I do not regret marrying you, Joseph.

To me, you were my forever, and the fairytale is still with me as you will be the man I love till my last days. I love Asante with all my being and thought she was mine, but this accident taught me I will only be a caregiver no matter how hard I love her or how deeply I care for her.

“When I came to this family in my mind, I was going to die in this family and be buried in the ancestral home

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but some things are better left in the dream as reality brings us a different version of the future we envisioned.”

No one moved Asante was looking at me as if I was abandoning her but it had to be done. Sometimes one needs to choose peace and happiness.

“My child I know living with me is not pleasant. I had planned on leaving once Asante was well and I was going to tell you that the day when she got out of the hospital. I know I have mingled in your life for so long.”

“Amayi, this is not your fault and it can't be fixed, as it is a chain of events that we could have dealt with but were overlooked. For my peace, I will have to step back and let people live their lives as they please. Not in a bad way, but sometimes for people we love to be happy we need to make sure to watch them from a distance.”

I look at them as they didn't say anything I had to excuse myself.

"I will go and start packing. I will need the car so that I can travel."

I didn't wait for them to respond I just left. I was packing when Joseph came in, I could see that he was angry but he didn't want to say.

"My love, can we at least talk?"

I almost fainted at those words I last heard when we were dating.

"The problem is that you do not understand the position I am in. You can get another wife even if it's tomorrow but you will never get another mother or daughter. I love you and I will always do but I will never make you choose. Asante is not even a problem because she listens to adults and she listens to my teachings. I will never involve her in this, as I know she knows her wrongs, mostly."

"So you are going to leave her just like that?"

"Do not even use her like that. You know I will choose her over my life. I do not want to fight with you. I need my rest and I will think properly maybe after that."

"You are not taking the car."

What was he on about? That was my car.

“I bought it with my money, I would not say that but you are pushing me.”

“I have said my peace.”

If he thought that was going to stop me, then he thought wrong. I called my dad, explaining that I needed his help. I was lucky, as my brother was around on business. His car was not that comfortable, but it was better than a bus. I was going to get my car one way or the other.

When I was still packing, Asante came crying.

“Hay, hay big girl what is happening?”

She had hiccups I had to hug and console her.

“I am so sorry that I caused trouble for you. It was not my intention. Even the doctor told them it was a good thing I had the accident now they can give me medication for my head injury.”

“Please do not blame yourself for this. You are my little girl and you will always be my girl no matter what.”

“You are leaving me. How will I survive without you? I know you will be far because I know Agogo stays far. We visited him remember?”

She was talking about her grandfather who was in Lilongwe where I partly grew up.

“You know it is not about the distance. You are here in my heart and I am here in your heart.”

I said, putting her small hand on my heart and placing mine on her.

“You can hear the heartbeat. This heart is beating for you only. You will always be my little girl. I will always welcome you with open arms in my life. When you are old enough to decide, you can come and stay with me in the big city.”

I saw a smile on her at least she was lightening up.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, once you have finished high school, I can stay with you we will go on vacations today and no boyfriends till you are a granny.”

She laughed, “Eew boys have lice.”

I laughed as well. “Do not let your father hear that.”

I heard shuffling, and I knew that someone was spying on us.

“Will you answer my calls when I want to call you and if I ask my parents will I come and stay with you?”

“You know I will answer you any day, anytime. I love you and I will always do. Your parents will have to decide before you turn eighteen after that you can make your decisions and I will be there for you.”

“You promise.”

“Yes, I promise.

She took my pinky and linked it with mine. Kissed them and placed her other hand on my heart. I look my other hand and did that as well.

“I will always be here as much as you will always be here.”

I gave her a bone-crushing hug as I tried to stop the tears. They didn't stop she also ran to her room, I bet to cry alone there.

I finished packing and then went to the kitchen to have some water.

“I will not lose her because I love her.” Joseph was angry.

“You can always marry Asante's mother.”

Oh, so she was not even sorry. I was glad for my decision as it was going to help the people involved in this decision.

“I will never marry that woman. She almost killed my child and she cannot hold a home as my wife does.”

“Did is the proper word as she is leaving.”

“You will never.....”

I didn't get the rest as I rushed to the bedroom. I was lucky because my brother called me the moment I got there.

It was time I started on a new leaf, although I didn't even know where I was going to begin.”

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“You need to buy a new car this car will not get you laid.”

I said, leaving with my bother. He didn't even enter as he was afraid of starting a fight with my h..... or he was Joseph only. It felt strange not calling him my love or my husband.

“You will not believe how many women want to just ride both the car and the driver.”

Eew, this is going to traumatize your little sister.”

He laughed at me. He was still not married, but he had two children with his baby mama who loved him dearly. I felt sorry for her as I knew she was a good person. I had ignored it for so long that I needed to voice my opinion.

“Sungani, you know one day that woman will be done with you and move on. You will be surprised when you are left to marry someone like Asante's mother.”

“That will not happen she was not groomed like that.”

“Sometimes we tire of being second best. Take it from me. She is with you not because she is desperate but because she loves you and at some point that will be in the past. Do you think I didn't love Joseph? Heck, I am still in love with him but love is not enough.”

The problem with men from our country was some were too relaxed and thought love was not worth fighting for. My brother was one of them who were the opposite of my father. Adada was a loving and caring man who knew my mother was worth fighting for. I would have fought for her too if I were a man.

“Please do not whisper that to her, as I do not want to lose her.”

“Then appreciate her and marry her. You have money and you have a steady life. Those women will never give you a stable home, but who am I to judge?”

“You are scaring me now.”

“Stop being a coward and stop fooling around you will get married when you are old and grey. I don't mean to scare you but as much as you dislike what was done to me by Joseph and his family, so goes her family they will end up not approving. Remember flowers bloom for a certain time and season? So are the women. Our anatomy is too different from man's. We will wake up one day old and not worthy of anything and you will move on to a younger and fresh person. I bet if she goes on the market today someone will snatch her before the end of business hours.”

I could tell he was scared, but I was done allowing men to use women around them. If I got the chance, I was going to tell them all how bad it was to mislead us and leave us. I was not an advocate for women; I would not start a movement, though. I laughed at the thought.

My brother was quiet for a while and I knew he was digesting. There was no way those words could have entered the left ear to the right one without diverting. I would not stay longer in Lilongwe. I wanted to regroup and organise my life. It was on a Sunday so my discovery journey was going to start the following day. I was not even going to tell my father what I had planned for the following day. From then I was going to go home to the village. It was not a place we frequented, but from time to time when we needed some rest.

I was not going to my father's place but to my mother's maternal village, Kambaju Village in Mzimba. My father's family neglected the home so even his livestock was with my uncle. The bride price cows, I believe were also there. At first, I thought my dad was mad to keep them separated and well-fed. I understood at that moment as they were going to return the cows. That was going to be the sign that our marriage never existed. I was not with the child so it was easy. It was going to be difficult if I had conceived as it was going to cause

permanency in my life where Joseph would be in it for life. Some cows were going to be left for the child I bet.

I was surprised by my brother shaking me. My trail of thought had led me to dreamland. Poor Sungani, he had to drive by himself while I was daydreaming. “Why didn’t you wake me up?”

He laughed at me. “You wanted me to die. You were busy laughing and smiling in your dream. I bet it was about a boy. I only hope that boy was not Joseph.”

I was so embarrassed, but I knew the moments he twitched his upper lip that he was pulling my leg. “You are so mean. Your car is so uncomfortable, so do not blame me.”

“One will never sleep in an uncomfortable car. I know this because I have been in worse cars.”

“You need to change your car, though. Are you working stones? If I were your lover, I would not enter that car.”

“Eew that is gross you will never be my love.”

“Figurative language, you moron.”

I pinched him as I walked into the house, leaving him alone to deal with my language. I was still laughing when I got into the house, thinking my parents were not home.

“You are so happy for someone who lost the love of her life and is about to move back home.”

I laughed at my mother hugging her, then my father after.

“Parents, how are you. How does it feel to have a returned soldier of a daughter?”

My dad was not happy with that comment but I knew it was because he wanted to say.....

“I told you so. If you had listened to me and not have married him you would be far in life?”

See before I even finished my line. Well, it was what it is, and he was going to deal with that. As for moving back home, it would not happen. I would not raise it then but I wanted to raise it once I got back from the village.

“I am back now

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so do not stress. I know you told me so but if I didn't try I was going to blame you for the rest of my life. This gave me a chance to fail that way I will blame no one as I tried my best to keep that marriage alive.”

“She is right; you did the right thing to trust her to make these decisions now you are happy and sure that even if we are gone, she can take care of herself without our help.”

“You are busy babying her when I am busy with the bags.” My brother was sulking.

“Do not be a crybaby. I will help you.” My father followed him outside.

“Come to the kitchen and help me cook.”

I was not even home for a minute and I was being dragged to the kitchen. See what was going to make me move out. I wouldn't dare say that in their faces. I had to say it to myself. I helped her with the vegetables and dishes while she asked me questions.

“Are you happy, though?”

She had a concerned look on her face. “I am not sure how I feel for now. But the moment the car left there was a tremendous weight lifted from my shoulders and I sighed in relief as if I had been holding my breath for the duration of the marriage.”

I was being honest as I looked at her pitiful eyes. If I wasn't honest with my family then who was I going to be honest with? My dad though, I was not sure how I was going to approach him. I was grateful I had a mother who always listened and judged not.

“Sometimes the roads travelled are tough, but a necessity. If we had shielded you, we would not get a strong woman.”

“I know but sometimes I feel like women are forced to endure. They are encouraged by society to stay even when the going gets tough. I wanted to leave for a while but I felt like I was going to be judged harshly. I feared for your reputation also as I knew that was going to come to you as irresponsible parents who couldn’t teach their child.”

“I know and already I heard a mouthful from your aunt who told me as a mother I was supposed to tell you that you belonged with your husband and he was supposed to get a housewife, not a working wife.”

We both laughed with my mother. We knew my aunt had an unhappy marriage, but she fixed her husband by going to a healer. Malawi was known for its potent medicine and healers. I was not doing it to get a puppet of a husband because I believed a woman should stay no matter what.

“She wants me to visit witches at my age? I will not do that to Joseph. As much as he hurt me, I still love him so I wish him well in life.”

“Do not let your father hear us talking about his beloved sister.”

We laughed and changed the topic swiftly. She was happy that I was going home. She wanted to send things to her brother. When I was about to finish cooking, a call came through and it was my dear friend.

“Mphatso, I was about to call you.”

“Do not lie to me, as we both know you arrived home a long time ago.”

We both laughed at least she wasn't angry at me.

“I would not sleep before updating you. So which part do you need to hear first?”

I laughed at her when she said 'everything'. I indicated to my mother that I was going to take the call in my room. She knew I was going to take longer, so I bet she was going to finish with the pots.

“I think that will be the best. You need to wake up early in the morning to do that. He is mad, he thinks which world are we living in when you get things and give them away to useless men.”

I laughed at her shouting as if she was the wronged party.

“I am going to be fine and I will never let them walk all over me. I wish them goodwill, though.”

“I wish them karma only.”

I even reprimanded her. “You don't wish people bad things as they are also human. Remember my daughter still lives with them.”

“Alright for Asante I will take my words back and swallow them.”

I smiled as it warmed my heart that she cared so much about Asante. It was strange how we loved this child without reservations. To me, she was going to be my child no matter what. I had also wondered if I would ever carry my child one day.

“So tell me are we still on for that vacation we planned for couples?”

I laughed.

“Who am I going to go with? Let us cancel or make it the two of us. I do not want to tag and become a third wheel. I am fond of your husband, but not that fond so let us pass.”

“I will ask him to spare me then. If not, I guess we will have to plan ours.”

“You are damn right we need to bond.”

We laughed.

“Miko, food is ready.” My mother shouted from my bedroom door. I was lying on my bed while I was talking to my friend. It had been cleaned and painted with an extra coat. I loved the colour and the smell.

“I am coming, mother.” I was not shouting, but it was clear enough she heard.

“I need to go my love. You know I am a child back to being summoned anyhow.”

“As if you were not summoned as a wife from where you are coming from.” Sarcasm was written all over her voice I just laughed and said my goodbyes.

We were watching the news, so no eating far from each other. I wonder in a technologically advance world why he would be stuck to news and newspapers.

I gave my mother a death stare when I saw my aunt. She should have warned me. I softened as I looked at my aunt.

“Ankazi, muli uli? (Aunty, how are you)” I faked a smile.

“Nili makola, kwali Imwe? (I am good and you)”

“Makola.”

I concentrated on my food while they continued with their conversations. I knew it was not a social visit, so I was ready for her insults.

My brother had done back to his place as they informed me he had a piece job to take care of. I knew I was going to see him frequently even my sister who was a judge in Lilongwe. She was not a family person, as she had a fallout with my parents. She

told them she was never getting married. My parents saw their mistakes and apologised but she was already a one-man-gang living her life.

She was anti-social, but very good at her job.

“Are you listening Mayamiko?”

I knew they had asked a question while I was busy in my world. I had to ask, as I didn't hear a thing.

“Your aunt was talking to you.”

My mother said while my dad was looking uninterested in the conversation that was taking place.

“I didn't hear I was listening to the news. What was the question?”

“Are you ready to go with us this weekend when we take you back to your in-laws because you are too young to leave the marriage and come and sit at home? No man will marry a woman who is coming from another homestead.”

What the.....

“Are you ready to go with us this weekend when we take you back to your in-laws because you are too young to leave the marriage and come and sit at home? No man will marry a woman who is coming from another homestead.”

What the? I would not be rude I promised that inner voice inside but I was boiling. Father set up straight looking at us. I knew when he was looking like that at us that the results would not be pleasant. He was not as impulsive as the rest of his family.

“I do not understand your point, ankazi. Please clarify.”

That was as calm as I could get. My mother just shook her head and looked at her.

“You can’t expect that all those cows which had calves, and some calves had calves also to go back. Besides the humiliation, my brother’s riches will vanish.”

“I am the wife and I am not complaining about the vanishing riches. What will be the use of having riches when one can never enjoy with their children? Those cows were not even part of our herd. We are fine we will not get hungry soon.”

My mother was about to lose her calm. “I thought you came to enjoy a meal with us, as you have stated. You haven’t seen her since last year but the first thing you do is pick a fight with her.”

I wanted to laugh at my mother but that was going to anger my aunt.

“Ankazi, I am not going back to my husband. It will never happen even if you plan on taking me there I will not even entertain it.”

“Usebere makora, wapurika? You must be careful do you hear me?”

She was getting waked up as if she was the one who was going to go to Joseph. She looked at my father for some backup but he had gone back to watching his news. I think he didn't want to be rude to his sister, as he loved her.

“So you are going to encourage your child to be the talk of the town?”

“People will talk. You do good they will talk, you do bad they will add some spices. You help them they will complain you don't help they will feel entitled. I will never worry about what people are saying. When I raised Asante, they thought I was a fool you included aunty. Now you are the one at the entourage's forefront, sending me to a useless husband you once said he is. I still love him but I will not stand the fact that I am always the last priority in my life.

For once I am thinking about choosing my happiness. Instead of asking me why I left, you are sending me back to people who

almost killed me because the child had an accident. They crucified me for a mistake even a biological mother could have done. I am not a 'working wife', as you claim I am. I am just a money-making machine. I have been taking care of that family since I said 'I do' but I was not complaining. Those are material things I will not talk about it I will talk about how depressed I have been as I never mentioned it. His mother stayed with us more than she stayed with her family. She found faults in everything I was doing even though I was trying my best.

She loved the baby mama more than me the actual daughter-in-law. I was even told in my face how useless I was for not giving Joseph children. It was worse because the person who was supposed to protect me was so weak to do so and cared less. Is it a crime to care about myself for one? I have been in a relationship with Joseph since college and I missed my youth but I didn't live my young life in my marriage. So now is it too much to ask for if I want some happiness and peace. I want to go to work like any normal person and go grocery shopping. I want to take a day off just to read or watch television. Is that too much to ask for?"

I didn't realise that I was crying. I guess the pains of all those years of abuse were coming back to me. I wiped my tears and left them there. I had lost my appetite. My aunt had her eyes popping from their sockets. I was glad I said all those things in

front of my parents which meant I was never talking about it again. My brother and sister would never ask me. They worried about making money and I was happy about it. When one is hurting, it helps to talk about something other than depressing stuff.

When I was about to go and bathe, my father knocked and came in. He was looking depressed, and I hated it as it was because of my depressing life.

“Mayamiko, you are my daughter and I love you. I will never send you back to that hellhole. Your aunt is so traditional you know that but we cannot let culture and all those things affect our future. I love you and I will never get bored with taking care of you my children. As long as your decision is final, then you will say the word so that I can send back their cows.”

He was serious, and I knew it was time to send them back. They were going to think things are back to normal as long as the cows were at home.

“I am glad you understand. I spoke to my mother when I got here. I am not going back there. I am starting afresh. If I am an outcast so be it. I was losing myself every passing day.”

“We are here for you to start afresh. Even if it means killing people who are troubling you.”

We both laughed. “Even my aunt, your favourite sister?”

“Yes, even my sister will face me.”

“I am glad I have your support, then. Let me go and bath.”

He nodded and left my room. I was relieved, as I was uncertain of his decision when my aunt was busy with me.

It was the first time I rested since the Asante fiasco. I had switched off my phone as Joseph kept on calling and sending messages. I would not deal with him. When I woke up in the morning, my parents had left to their different commitments. It didn't matter where you were born but the early rising was a normal thing in our community.

I was stressed because I was not used to Lilongwe at that time but I was going to navigate it. I called Streetwaves Taxi Services when I was done. I didn't want to use public transportation as I was going to use it for a while.

When I got to Lilongwe police station I was helped with no time. I went to Bwandilo Market. I knew they sold a variety of vegetables. I loved cooking with vegetables as I loved healthy eating. At first, it was to conceive, but I ended up enjoying eating healthy food. I was not a cook but cooking was instilled in most African women as they were expected to take care of their families. I would not make that mistake again. Once I was done mopping around, I was going to look for a hunk that was

going to treasure me and help me cook some meals for my family.

I laughed at the thought and shook my head. As usual

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the place was full and some women working with their children on their backs. Women were born to suffer, I thought to myself. It felt so good to do things by myself without worrying about a call from my husband.

When my parents got home, I was almost done cooking.

“It smells divine in here. Did you go to the market?”

“Yes, I did. I passed there from the police station.

“Police station!” they both exclaimed.

“Yes, I opened a case for Joseph, as he doesn’t want with my car. I also do not want him to trouble me when I go and pick up my things from the house.”

“You did a good job. At least there is a brain in that head after all. I was worrying if I paid fees for nothing.”

I laughed, hiding my face. My mom was worried but dad showed her how important and necessary. My brother joined us for dinner but he was extremely quiet. I thought one of his girlfriends was giving him trouble.

“Family, I wanted to inform you I will be travelling to Mzimba tomorrow.”

“When are you coming back?” My mother was surprised.

“I am going to come back when I am feeling emotionally better to integrate.”

My brother laughed. “You sound like an addict who is going to rehab in some rehabilitation centre in the wild. You watch too many movies, my little sister.”

Instead of being angry at him, I laughed along with the family.

“So you know, I was addicted to misery so I need to remove that from my system. I told the police to contact you regarding the car and my furniture. It is not much but I need it. When I come back, I will look for a rental place. I want to start on a new leaf so that I see where I went wrong,”

There is quiet for some time when my brother asked.

“Are you going to rent when there is too much space here?”

“I am not doing it for fun. If you want to know, I will be here daily like you are doing now.”

“I give you my blessing. Safe travels and we will talk about your move when you are coming back.” my father said.

“Do not forget to go with your uncle’s goods. I hope there will be a car waiting for you there in Chatheroma. I hate when one had to wait for a car that is going inside.”

“I wish I thought about calling him earlier. I know his phone is off. Before you offer to take me, I would love to travel by bus.”

“I hope I am not on the list of people who were going to take you there.” my brother protested.

We laughed and enjoyed our food. It was as if the past years never happened. I was going to change my sim card as Joseph was troubling me.

The following morning, my boss called me. I was surprised, and I was scared he was going to fire me.

“Miss Nyirenda, how are you doing? I cannot ask you how you are holding up.”

I smiled and replied. “I am trying as for holding up I am not sure as I am yet to process all this.”

“If you need time to process, I do not mind at all. Take all the time you need, I will push the deadlines to the next month or two.”

“Are you serious? So you are not firing me?”

He laughed at me. “You want my wife to divorce me for firing her star employee? I will never fire you. I was only calling to ask

if you can move to the main branch in Lilongwe. I know it will be a big ask to leave your family and

I cut him before he could finish. "I would love to do so, sir. My family is in Lilongwe and I have moved back home. I am travelling to the village though for some air."

"Some are travelling to the beautiful places to relax and your holiday destination is the rural areas where you will wake up at the crack of dawn and come back darker than the colour black."

I couldn't stop myself from laughing. That man had a dry sense of humour. I was dark already so what was he implying.

"I am okay sir, I just need to regroup. It is not a holiday. I have one request, though."

There was a smile in her voice. "I am listening and please do not ask for a promotion because I already have a trustworthy manager on this site."

I laughed again as his tone had mockery glanced at it. "I will never ask for a promotion. I was asking if I can stop working from home and do the normal hours like any other person around."

"Music to my ears, young lady." That 'young lady' with an 'r' sound made me laugh.

"Thank you, sir I was not sure if you will agree."

“So you were testing the waters. Well, I am glad to have you full-time at the office. Maybe you will show these youngsters at the office how it is done.”

I laughed and hung up after we completed my date for coming back to work. I was smiling from ear to ear as my journey was starting on the right foot. My brother took me to the station. I hated that part of each area in the country. Those places show how unfair our world is.

I always left a bitter taste in my mouth. What could I have done only to accept and move on? The five-hour bus trip was not as tiring but from the road to Kambaju village was tiring as I had to wait for a car.

The air and atmosphere were inviting, and I was happy to be home for the first time without my family.

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My stay with my uncle and his family was very pleasant. They managed to wake me up at reasonable times but just before the break of the day.

“Why is he distant these days?”

I was asking his wife. You know when we talked about the obedient wife from the bible we talked about her. She never questioned or it was because my uncle led by example. She loved her husband with her might and cared for him. My uncle had been distant leading to the week of my departure.

“He is worried about you. You know that he dreams sometimes.”

I was confused. “Dreams, about what?”

“About the future, the good and the bad part of it. But he just goes to the wild and prays about it as he cannot change the future but pray for it to be pleasant no matter how bad the situation might seem.”

“I do not understand.”

“For instance, if he dreams about things that will lead to the death of a loved one or something along those lines. He doesn’t pray for the death to stop as we know when the time comes we can never run away from fate. He prays that the affected may

find peace during the storm and not concentrate on the pain. If it is something that can be prevented then he prays for the prevention or the cure.”

I was shocked to hear that. We often do not take the time to learn about our relatives. I bet people who saw my uncle in the wild thought he was mentally disturbed while he would be busy taking care of his loved one. I vowed to visit my relatives frequently and to learn about their problems as well as celebrate their achievements.

“So is it bad or good?”

“What is bad or good?”

I laughed at her question. “I mean what he saw about me.”

“He didn’t say much but he says the city was never good for you he would have loved for you to grow in a different environment.”

I was imagining my life in the rural areas and saw no possibilities there but I was not going to voice that out as it was going to offend her. Sometimes being polite is better than causing havoc.

“Do you think my life is in danger?”

“I am not sure but I doubt. He loves you so deeply. He doesn’t say much but you are his favourite niece and he always worries about you.”

“I was scared it might be something bad.”

“Your heart is open to people who are not good. Please be careful as not everyone in your life comes with good intentions. I love your friend because just like her name she is a gift to you that should be treasured. You can depend on them with her partner as they also have pure heart.”

My heart was filled with joy as I knew from the begin Mphatso was good for my soul and when her husband joined our study group because of her I knew those souls were meant to be today and to help me.

“Thank you for your words aunty I will make it a point that I am careful next time when I meet people. Today I am cooking dinner as my gratitude for your hospitality.”

She smiled. I knew it was going to be an uphill task. We never had just one relish for the meals. So I had to plan my relish properly. When we finished our conversations I took the kids to Kabwandili. This is a place where traders come from time to time to sell their merchandise and it is cheaper than the ordinary market.

It was far but worth the trip. I got the fish; remember Malawi is a home for fish. I was not going to make a complicated meal I just took Chambo fish. To cook it I took herbs, lemon, and spices. I bought tomatoes for my soup. What is a good fish without soup or gravy? I bought beans not just any but my uncle's favourite, butter beans. Not forgetting the staple food rice and cassava. Cassava was my father's favourite serving of food.

I also took my aunt's favourite, green peas. Sweet potatoes were my favourite. When we left the market I was carrying a lot of things on my head and I also bought a Chitenge to carry something on my back as if I was carrying a baby. I laughed at myself. When I watched some movies I found it funny how they carried babies at the back. With us, it was always safe as the baby will never fall there. Mothers sometimes went to the market and river to get water with babies on their backs.

When I got home I was tired, dirty, sweaty, and probably very black from the scorching sun. I was thinking about my boss who predicted that I was going to be the darker shed of black. I laughed wiping my feet then I slept for a rest. I set an alarm. My phone was not working much as I had changed my sim card. I moved completely from TNM to Airtel I wanted to check how their services were.

When the alarm woke me I was still tired but determined. They had gone to the fields while I was left with the kids. Lucky I had started on the beans. Meals from back home always felt like we were western the only difference was the fact that we didn't use dining tables in rural areas. Eating near the fire also gave one that rural experience.

I was proud of myself as the meals in front of us were close to ten. We had to dish for ourselves. That way it saves food as well as one will only take a portion they will eat and finish. I was no qualified chef but when I looked at the meals I felt like entering the cook completion. Please do not let my family hear that. Cassava was not pounded but stripped cleaned and steamed. There were numerous ways to steam in the rural areas without using a modern electric steamer.

“You outdid yourself with the meal and I wish you cooked the food like this for the duration of your stay.”

My uncle said wiping his mouth and his face showing how much he in actual fact enjoyed the meal.

“You are right my husband. I think we should call the boss to extend her leave days.”

I laughed at them. “Look at you keeping me to yourselves because of my cooking. I would love to stay but life had to go on.”

My uncle shook his head in approval. "You are right but please be careful of people who will come into your life when you go back there."

I felt the shiver down my spine. Was his wife telling the truth in the morning? My uncle saw panic written in bold letters on my face and he lightened. "There is no danger ahead. Your marriage made me sad."

It was the first time we talked about my marriage with my uncle since I arrived.

"I know I should have listened to my father when he warned me."

"You can never blame yourself for someone else's mistakes. I love the fact that you chose to do your best and be the best wife regardless of the situation. You are one strong lady."

I blushed.

"Thank you very much

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uncle."

"You will find a family that will value you. You are still young. I never understood why your father separated his cows from the bride price cows. Now I understand. Do not underestimate him he knows the future somehow."

My aunt was not contributing but listening attentively. I loved their communication skills as I knew she was going to have the last say.

“I will not rush into life and marriage again.”

“We are also not saying die alone.”

“Yes, my husband is right. We love you and we do not want you to think those people out there can love you more than we do.”

See what I told you. I smiled; those two were cut from the same textile. I thanked them again for their hospitality the following day as I was leaving.

Surprisingly in the morning when we woke up my father was there eating breakfast.

“Staying in the rural areas has made you lazy. Look at you waking up when we are already eating lunch.”

I laughed covering my face.

“You always have bad timing. I was an early riser ask my uncle. I woke up late because of you. You were over my shoulders lowering me down. Anyway, what are you doing here? Did you fight with your bed and it kicked you out?”

We laughed at him

“Look at the ‘thank you’ I get. I should have let her take the public transport.”

“You see he finally admits I am his favourite daughter.”

“I hate to burst your bubble but I came here are the bride price cows issue.”

“You truly know how to burst people’s bubbles but I am grateful I will not take public transport.”

“After we finalise here we will be leaving.”

I was grateful indeed. My stay had made me so fresh I was not ready for public transport. Look at the almighty calling their phones when they didn’t have units. I laughed at the thought. My packing was done the previous night so it was easy for me to finish on time.

Their discussion took longer but I was not complaining as I was not using public transportation. They concluded on the date to take the cows back. I was caught in between, not that I wanted to go back but because it sounded rude to take back the cows. It was funny like what would people think. But I consoled myself about the years of ill-treatment and the undermining.

My trip back was pleasant. My father was a good company I didn’t even feel any sleep when I was with him. Sometimes parents become scary that we find it difficult to approach them.

Some very traditional fathers didn't find it necessary to talk to their children, especially the female children.

My sister called me when I got home. It was the first time she called ever. I didn't even mind as I knew she loved me dear only that she preferred cases and her company.

"Judge Nyirenda, to what do I owe this pleasant surprise?"

She laughed. Her laugh always reminded me of our granny. I think she took after her even her character. But the sad part was my granny didn't like people at all and she said it to their faces. At least she was married hence we existed. Things I thought about though.

"I was going to call you but you changed the phone. I had to hunt for your family to get it."

I laughed hard. "We are your family, you moron."

"If you say so, I am sorry, baby, about the whole fiasco but can we go out, my treat so we can just middle in the crowd and get some germs."

I was forced to laugh. See to her it was torture but when she sacrificed like that it was out of love.

"I am free anytime any day."

"I am glad. I will come to pick you up as you are broke and careless."

“You are determined that I am destitute. You will be surprised that I still look hot, young, and beautiful. Did I mention hot like a heater?”

We both laughed. Our relationship was funny but my parents still didn't understand why she never wanted kids and a husband. We ended the call as I joined the rest of the family. My brother was there of course. I was wondering why he moved out. I was reprimanding myself for not becoming him as it will be wasting money.

“We have a surprise for you.”

That was unexpected and woow.....

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“We have a surprise for you.”

That was unexpected and woow.....

My brother was the first one to toss the keys toward me. I was so happy that he managed to get the car and the other property that belonged to me. I didn't dare ask the family what they did to get the things.

In my mind I knew that my brother and my father went together. Knowing my in-laws were scared of father, I was not surprised they were given all my things.

I was so happy I had the family to deal with my in-laws as I didn't want to meet them so soon.

"This is the best present ever guys thank you so much. I am glad I went to the village because if I didn't I was not going to receive all this care and loving. I was also debating whether you will agree for me to move out or not."

They all laughed at me, they knew it was inevitable that I was going to move out. I was old enough to stay on my own so they were not going to force me to stay at home. I needed my space so that I can grow and heal the way I wanted to heal.

My father didn't want to let me go, mother was the one who encouraged him to let go because I was not little anymore. My

mother knew that if I wanted to move out I saw it fit that I needed healing and some privacy. I heard that later when my brother told me how the debate went.

"I never expected you to agree on my move. I thought you were going to say I was still young and needed to come back home."

I wasn't even trying to hide how shocked I was of the news. My parents were shocking me from day to day they were becoming soft on us compared to when we were growing up, where they were too strict they never allowed us to do certain things. I think they were letting us go as they knew that they will not change that we are grown and we were never going back to being young again.

"Events that happened changed you, you are now soft and allowing us to do as we please I think we should get into trouble more often because you come through for us."

"Maya, don't you dare make me change my mind because I can change it right now and take back everything I am promising to do. Listen as a father it is not simple to see your children breaking and there's nothing you can do so if there is little that I can do I'll have to do it for you so, that you won't suffer. There are times when I won't be around in the future. Your mother won't be around as well and then you won't have anyone who can help you. This is my time now to help you this is my time to prove that I brought you to this world and I want the best out

of you. I want the best because I know you can produce the best I love you my children."

It was an emotional moment for all of us because as I looked at my brother he had tears. I know he was not going to admit it, but I saw a little bit of tears in his eyes.

There was something weird and different about my brother. I wanted to ask him but I forgot I was going to ask him because he was not the same I wonder what had happened. I was worried that maybe he fought with his baby mama. I was going to fight with him too because that lady was a lady and a half, she was a force to be reckoned with. She was hard-working, smart she had all her life figured out. I think if my brother messed up I was going to look for a handsome hunk to take care of her she was going to be snatched within minutes. Look at me betting for the opposite team while my brother was hurting. No, I was not going to do him like that but I wanted him to wake up and smell the coffee so that he won't lose the love of his life. Deep down I knew that he loved his baby mama or his fiancée or whatever he called her at that moment.

"I think this recovery is going to be easier than I thought I also have news. I was also called back at work I'll be working here in Lilongwe. I will be working 8-5 like anyone else. So it will be a good recovery journey for me because I'll be occupied, I know it's something that I'm not used to but I know I can up my

game. I am also glad that my boss trust me enough to give me an office and also to groom the young minds. I am glad that I'll be moving up the ladder if I planned my career path properly. I know it's going to be a long journey but I am willing to take one step at a time and to do whatever it takes for me to get back on my feet again. Thank you for being my family and thank you for your support."

"If we can't do it for you who can we do it for?" said my mother hugging me

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I was so ecstatic.

"So when are we going for the house hunting? Are we going to be buying a house or we are renting a house or we are just renting a room?" he even had a smirk on his face. I didn't know whatever he wanted whether it was to sabotage me or was to know where I stayed so that I could give him food every time.

"I am definitely going alone for that house hunting. I am not sure as yet I want to be sure once my things are here and all the things that I'm missing replaced. I want to buy a new bed. I am thinking of renting as I'm not ready to buy a house it will be too much as I will be staying alone I also want something small so that I won't feel so alone. I need to settle in at work first I need to know what tasks I'm going to be dealing with. I also need to

know which team will be delegated to me. If ever I am going to start working and the team is convenient or is working as much as I think then I'll make sure to get a small place because I'll be spending time at work more than at home. I was also thinking of furthering my education so that at least I get a promotion one day. I want to be a manager who knows it may come sooner than I thought, I had given up on that dream but now I have reconsidered I need to work harder."

My mother was ululating as if I had won lottery, it was lottery to her as she wanted her children to go further and be independent she was the first woman to want that for her children. Most women didn't give much attention to that as long as their children survived and they got what they wanted. Most of the mothers encourage their children to have a husband settle down have kids and be a family person. My mother didn't see that as an achievement.

As a working mother herself she enjoyed her time at home and also at the office. That was what I liked about my mother was the fact that she took care of her household and took care of her work the same. They were both given the same priority.

I looked at my father who looked like he wanted to cry although he was hiding it he was not doing a great job by doing that because I could see a tear dropping and he looked aside so that we cannot see that.

I was not going to go back to being dependent on somebody else. I wanted to create my happiness I wanted to make sure that I occupied myself with so many things I had neglected myself for so long it was now time for me to move on and take care of the things that were important, my happiness came first my family came second the rest came after.

The following morning I was surprised when I got a call from my brother's girlfriend. She wanted to meet with me in town I was so surprised because she hardly came home or she hardly talked to me unless she came to bring the children.

She was just somebody who was not all over the place. She was well groomed she was so respectful she only answered when talked to. I was wondering what we were going to talk about because we hardly had things to talk about. I loved her, I love her composure, I loved her silence, it spoke volumes and I loved her for my brother because my brother was too much she was going to groom him. She was going to make sure that my brother doesn't go wild.

It had been too long since I had taken care of myself I was even doubting that I would ever go out without thinking of Asante or without thinking about my husband.

I had even forgotten how it felt like to bath and dress up just to be on a date with yourself or just to go out with ladies. Or just go out by myself I wanted to rekindle that lost love I wanted to

love myself. I want to go out there and make sure that I lived I live for myself and not for anyone else.

The funny part was that I missed Asante, in everything that she did when she came back from her mother. I loved her because I knew that some of the things she was not doing them deliberately she was pushed by adult who had been using her to fight their battles she was an adorable child she was the only thing that I missed in the marriage. Funny enough I never missed my husband and I wondered if I loved him or it was infatuation that leads to our marriage.

“Sorry I am late I didn’t know what to wear. I am not used to public appearances anymore.”

She smiled at me and looked down. Her smile was beautiful and I loved it.

“You look stunning I now wish I also tried to put some effort.”

“Do not be silly, you have a man and I do not want competition. So if there was anyone who needed to look stunning it was going to be me and me alone.”

We both laughed.

“Have you ordered?” I asked her looking at the menu. It felt so good to be out and about. Funny how I neglected myself because of love or the idea of being in love. I was not going to do that ever.

“I was waiting for you. I am so sorry about your marriage I had hoped that one day we will attend your wedding. I had an outfit in mind ready.”

I laughed as I knew that she was genuine she was not being sarcastic.

“I stopped hoping the first year. Somehow it was a blessing in disguise as I was not going to stay in that hellhole forever.”

“Was it that bad?”

“Let us not spoil the day. You sounded excited on the phone what’s up.”

I placed the drink that I had ordered as we waited for our order.

“I want to thank you for whatever you said to your brother. It worked.”

Okay I was lost when she flashed her left finger in front of me.

“Is this what I think it is?”

I was happy as if it was me. I held her hand and looked at her happy face. She was genuinely happy and I wanted all the details.

“Tell me more.”

“I do not know where to begin but after your talk with him he came to my place the following morning and asked my mother

to talk to me. I was surprised as he is afraid of her. He started asking questions about how I feel about him. He was disturbed asking if I ever feel trapped and want to be with other men. He asked if I feel burdened looking after his children.”

“He asked all those questions?”

“Yes, he even asked if I feel trapped and would love to be free. After sometime of confusion I finally asked what that was all about and he told me about your talk. He said he wanted to marry me and stop pretending as if we are not getting younger. I imagined he was just saying to make you happy only to give me this ring and break down. He felt bad for not marrying me when we had the first child. Thank you for talking to him because I love your brother but I was starting to feel as if he doesn’t love me.”

"Belive you me, he loves you and he loves his children so much. I am happy for you and I am glad my talk worked. I was talking out of anger but amazingly it changed your lives.”

“Thank you again.”

We ate our food chatting. I dropped her home. I had my car back so it felt good. When I got home it was already late I cooked dinner. I was not going to talk about the engagement as it was not my place but I needed to offload which I did with my friend Mphatso.

My week was hectic as I was moving and the peace I got was beyond compare. Before I knew it, it was time to go to work. When I stepped in the foyer of the building I was greeted by a friendly lady.

“You must be Miss Nyirenda.”

“Thank you, yes that is me.”

“I am glad. I.....”

The paragraphs that followed I couldn't even stomach the girl was a chatter box. How was I going to survive this?

"Oh by the way my name is Samantha, I forgot to tell you as it slipped my mind because I have so many things to tell you. This company is my passion and I love working here. I've been working in here since I left college and everything is so cooooool."

I looked at her lips which were always moving without stopping, she talked a lot she didn't have a full stop. She just didn't know how to pause. Even though she talked too much I liked her. The passion that she had for this company drove me to know more about it. I had been working from home and I didn't have much time to research I didn't have time to interact with the people that I was working with. We only had two meetings and we had two conferences once again where we never had to sit down and discuss anything about the company.

"Samantha I love your enthusiasm I think I will enjoy working with you. The passion that you have for this company is making me jealous I am even cursing myself for why I didn't do the 8 to 5 from the start. I was enjoying working from home although it had its disadvantages I like it now here I hope they won't give me problems."

"Believe you me there is drama here you will see as time goes on. There are people here who don't want to see their people in positions that they don't like, there are people who just want

to stay in trouble for the sake of it so I know you are going to enjoy the drama if you like drama like me."

Her excitement was for days it reminded me of the first time when I left college I had so much enthusiasm I could move mountains.

I was curious to find out who was who, who was friends with who, and who was not doing the job because she seemed like she knew everyone's life.

What I liked about her was that she smiled a lot which gave the company name a good reputation because in the foyer in the reception area you need somebody friendly, who is always smiling regardless of the situation that they are facing at work or home.

I was worried about her knowing so many things about people's lives. We entered the offices only to find out when we enter the open space in the office. People turned their heads in the offices, there were some of the officers that were divided into cubicles they were offices at the sides surrounding the cubicles those officers surrounding the cubicles had glass all over them. The person inside the office could see what was happening outside I wondered if people outside could see what was happening inside I wanted to find out. I was crossing my fingers that I had my office, not the cubicles I hated them I never liked them.

“Some of the people you will know as you go, some of them are pretending to be from high class, most of them you'll be working with in some of the projects you know the boss like to delegate. so I think he will be one of the people we have had so much about you.

“Okay there is our manager, Mr. Jere, this man is always serious he always has his poker face on there it is that face he always has. All the time don't look, don't look, now but he's looking our way. He is a very private man no one has seen people around him. No one has seen his family he's always at work this serious. He has never smiled at anyone but he's a good person to work with he is fair and he always makes sure that we get enough time to rest. As for money, he fights for us to get raises always. When we go for private functions for fun he never participates in that I wonder why people never bother to invite him anymore. I wonder what type of people lives around him.”

After she said all that Mr. Manager approached us with a smile. I was surprised Samantha looked at me with a shocked face. I guess she was so shocked to see him smiling.

"You must be Maya, the president told us so much about you. We've been waiting for you, thank you for coming and joining us this side."

Samantha was still in shock she was looking at me, at the manager, at me, then at the manager again.

"I am glad to be joining the team this side I hope I will adjust fast because I was used to working from home. I'm not used to this environment hope I'll pick up fast."

He smiled at me again shocking the heck out of Samantha. His smile was not a handsome smile but a beautiful smile with his white teeth that were aligned as if were aligned by a machine. His posture had this command I wondered if I would manage to work with the person. I knew my boss was strict but he had a weird smile and a crooked sense of humour.

"I will leave you two to know each other." Samantha was even stuttering I think it was from the shock she left us rushing to the foyer where her desk was positioned.

When someone that left us his Poker Face Came Back in Action I was wondering if he was smiling at Samantha only or if it was just a welcome smile for me.

We were back to the business, and he took me to my office which I loved the instant I walked into. He didn't even show me where his office was he didn't give me a tour at least Samantha was giving me a tour.

I was not complaining because I knew what was expected from me when I got to work I sent him away with a "Thank you" then went straight to my desk he left after some time he stared at me weirdly then asked to be excused.

My boss called the moment I switched on my laptop. His video call was to give me instructions about the zoom meeting I guess work had started already without any delay.

“They liked the pitch you sent to them. I am so happy you're going to be there meeting up with them face-to-face. They are willing to work with you on this project. Thank you very much for accepting this post because I was starting to crack my head and panic. I didn't know who to put in that position I do not trust anyone with such pitches and I don't trust anyone with such big clients who need to be taken care of. I trust you and I hope you won't disappoint me as usual.

We're still looking at our budget as we promised last time that we are going to cover your fees for your studies. We need people like you who are well driven and who are focused so that the company will go further. The company is going to take care of some of your expenses so worry not.”

I was so emotional all these opportunities were not coming because of the people that I was staying with and because of my working conditions if I was working normally like normal people working normal hours they were going to take me on a full scholarship a long time ago, now I don't regret leaving my marriage. I was mentally thinking about the wasted years I spent dealing with that family that was so ungrateful what

pissed me off was that Joseph didn't even have the courage and the heart to fight for me or to fight for our marriage.

“Thank you very much

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sir, I will not disappoint. I'll make sure that all the contracts come home and seal the deal so that we can get millions.”

The last part about the millions was said with a smile on my voice I knew that he was going to be happy about that word he loved making money but above all, he loved making us happy as his workers.

“I am glad that you speak my language because you know where there's money I mark myself present, I don't need anyone to mark that register because they would delay me. Let me leave you to work then thank you very much and enjoy your first day of the week. Your package is coming that is your complimentary package and your welcome gift from the company. Every worker from the company gets it when they're starting for the first time. Well, technically you are not new but I want to do it for you.”

I said my final goodbyes. I was wondering what a complimentary gift contained. My boss was somebody who had class and who always showed off, I knew it was going to be a big gift. I was smiling to myself when I was checking my

presentations because I wanted to impress the investors I also wanted to make sure that the clients were happy with the pitch that I was working on. My life was beginning it was as if it was my first day ever working. I was so happy nothing was going to move me. I worked, I didn't even see what time it was up until I heard somebody clearing their throat.

It was Samantha standing by the door smiling she was carrying a complimentary gift and the lunch on the other hand.

"Do not tell me that I didn't even go for lunch, what time it is anyway? I was busy with this pitch I didn't even see where the time flew to."

"It is past lunchtime, I saw that you didn't even leave your office and I'm bringing lunch for you. Please don't get used to it because this is a once-off thing because it's your first day and you missed your lunch date."

"Lunch date did I even miss a lunch date that I didn't know about?"

She laughed at me going inside placing everything on top of the table. As I suspected, as a complimentary gift it was an office stand where I needed to put my laptop, my coffee mug, and my lunch on the same board.

It was too fancy and made of a Mukwa tree and Mukwa was so expensive. I wonder how much it cost but I was not going to

ask. I smiled at someone who was also curious to see what the other gift was wrapped was.

"Thank you very much for the lunch I will not miss lunch again and thank you for the compliment that a gift. I know you are curious but I'm not going to give you the other gift. I was going to come with prepaid lunch but I was so late in the morning. I'm not used to working in the office I'm used to waking up late and then starting my day with taking my....."

I didn't want to finish the sentence as I didn't want people to know about my past life only my boss knew about my life and what happened he only knew when I told him what I wanted to tell him. I loved my life private, I loved my privacy because it never exposed me to prying eyes.

"My morning walks I always walked in the morning before I started my work. I am not used to coming into the office the way I did this morning. I'll make sure that I set the alarm and start the new routine."

"Do not worry it was my pleasure helping you. I hope you will join me on a weekend of fun, we have an office weekend of fun this weekend."

"What will be happening on these weekends of fun? I haven't been to one."

"Mainly it's competition, it's teamwork sometimes, competing in pair as well. I do not know what is going to happen this weekend because this weekend is a surprise. The organisers wanted us to have fun without knowing what is going to be, spontaneous they say. What I know is that is going to be in pairs I do not have a pair..."

She paused and we both laughed she was not supposed to say she wanted to say 'I do not have a pair' when she was supposed to say I do not have a partner to participate with.

"Exactly what I wanted to say, I do not have a partner because my partner is on maternity leave she's going to be joining us after three months."

"It will also be my pleasure to repay my debt although I'm not that competitive I hope I won't make you lose your prize I am always on the losing team."

We both laughed at that statement I was not lying I was not good at sports I was so hoping that it was something to do with the brain, not the physic.

"There's a first time for everything, it is better to compete than to sit this one out because not competing will make me lose more marks than competing and getting a few marks. Those points are added to the end of the year point for the individuals or that pair with so many points wins the employee of the year

in sports, of course, some are given to the employees of the Year according to your work and according to the contract that you manage to get I am just at the reception I never signed any contracts but I love these competitions because I always win I always play to win."

Her enthusiasm was always top-notch I wondered if there was something that she was not enthusiastic about.

"Count me in then, I love myself some competition. I hope I will be physically ready for the competitions thank you very much for the lunch enjoy the rest of the day please just in case I do not know the time again remind me when it's time to knockoff. I don't want to be left alone in the office, this office I bet it's scary during the night."

"It will be fun for you to be left alone here and sleep here. You will tell us the stories about the ghosts that were roaming around there so I can just imagine."

She laughed at me going outside. I was even imagining myself here sitting a lot with ghosts and no one to helping me.

The pitch was coming up perfectly so I didn't want to mess it up. I was going to open the rest of the gift at home I didn't mind going home with the gift and then coming back with then because I wanted some privacy. I wanted to finish up with the

pitch that was left with a few loose ends and a few touch-ups I was almost done.

When I was about to leave I saw Mr. Jere looking at my office. So the glasses were transparent on both sides? He shyly smiled and looked aside. I was not going to deduct anything from the smiling as I was new and coming from a divorce.

“How was work on your first day?” I laughed at her. Her enthusiasm made me smile.

Yes, just like my brother I found myself parked in front of my parent’s house. I had laughed at my brother and before I even left the car, I laughed at myself for being my brother unwillingly.

“It was fun, although my head is buzzing Samantha’s voice.”

“Who is Samantha?”

She asked, instructing me to sit while I watched her cook. It was in our African blood to cook and take care of our families no matter how busy our days had been.

“The lady at the reception and the face of the company, she can sell a stone to you wrapped in a ribbon and believe it or not you will buy it because of her personality.”

We both laughed. My dad came in holding a glass I think he wanted some water but joined us in the kitchen.

“Mwatandala uli? (How had your day been?)” I asked my dad.

“Natandara makora, kwali imwe? (I had a fine day, how about you?)” He replied.

“As I was saying Samantha speaks so well about the company and it’s heart-warming. She is a chatterbox, but she is an asset to that company that one I am sure of. In a moment she had filled me in with all the important information and with passion and enthusiasm.”

My father laughed at me, as he knew I hated too much talk. “I am glad you have something good to talk about. This is going to lift a burden from your shoulders.”

“I am glad I chose this as I am enjoying. I even got a complementary gift.”

They were both curious to see the gift I was talking about. I would not show them before I even opened the rest myself.

“I think you two need to come back home, as you love my wife’s cooking more than you love everything.”

My father said that with sarcasm written on his voice. I was so surprised he even knew his wife’s food tasted delicious.

“You are the fine one to talk when you said we do not know how to cook, as you are the only perfect cook in this house.”

We both laughed at him. “I am only here to congratulate my sister on her successful first day of work.”

My brother said, approaching mother for a hug and a kiss on the cheek. He was so affectionate I envied his wife to be.

“You both have your places to stay.”

“We are both in our father’s house at the same breathe.”

We looked at him and laughed at him.

“Leave my husband alone you two. When I am left here with the grumpy man, I will send him to you.”

“Sorry mother.”

We were not sorry because father was even showing us faces to indicate that he always wins.

“I came with some news. They set the date for us to bring back the cows for the bride price. I am told that Mayamiko needs to be present as well.

‘Kill me now!’ I was cursing in my mind.

“Why do I need to be there?”

“We need to respect their wishes my child but we will allow no one to mistreat you again no matter what. We will be there as a family remember, even your uncles will be there.”

My mother comforted me and I knew she was right. She was talking about my uncles from my father’s side. They were hush and never took nonsense from anyone. My father’s family was not a walkover family only my aunt who liked to be relevant in unnecessary things.

“I will be fine. So will we be going this weekend or the next, as I have a commitment this coming week?”

“Already you have commitments? That was fast.”

My brother laughed at me and I pinched him.

“Not like that, you moron. I am going for a work function they have these team building competitions so that people will not only use their brain but their bodies as well.”

“I love your work place; can I quit my job and join you?”

I laughed at my brother, as I knew he loved sports when we were growing up. The disadvantages of growing up in a community that did not value sports that much. He was discouraged when he was picked for the team, then later on the entire team dropped as of lack of funding. He never wanted to pursue that again.

“You will never survive the office part and it’s the major set up than the sports part so stay where you are, soldier.”

We laughed as I stood up to help mother with the dishes to dish up. When she was cooking, she wanted no help, so I helped when it was time to dish up only. We were the same, as I never wanted some help when preparing meals.

“I will make sure they agree to the other weekend.”

My dad said that leaving for the sitting room. He was going for the news, so I was not even going to bother eating with them there. I was going to dish up and eat at my place.

“Do not take another plate to your house Miko because if I allow it my house will be empty.”

‘How did this woman know’ I was laughing at myself.

“No, mother, I am not taking your plate.”

“She is lying she is already closing your favourite dish mother with your favourite spoon. The ones you only use when it’s special occasions.”

I hit him with a dish towel.

“You are so mean.”

It was a whisper so that my mother won’t hear me. He laughed at me chewing his food directing me to a seat. He wanted me to eat with him.

“I will beat you till you forget your name and ask me which train hit you when you wake up. You will even ask for a DNA test to make sure I am your mother and I never adopted you.”

My brother was laughing with tears in his eyes. The traitor, I would not give him the satisfaction.

“Mother, you cannot beat a grown woman like me. And when I lose the memory, I will get to choose another mother.”

My father laughed at her which made her shout more. It was not a home without a little shouting from a mother. I missed all that

and it felt like the home I grew up in.

“You will tell your new mother that I want all my money back from the labour pain to this day.”

I laughed going out.

“She is going, mother.” My bother shouted.

“I love you all.” I shouted as well.

I was going to make a mental note to bring back all the dishes before I was taken to the hospital. I was glad I moved back home, as I was feeling like myself again. We lose ourselves loving people who sometimes do not even care about our feeling. I believed if you loved someone your actions should speak first then your words.

I was still debating about buying a house or a plot to build something. My ideal house was not built yet, so I wanted to be the first in Lilongwe to own such a masterpiece.

Surprisingly, I was looking forward to work; I had even brought some home-baked cookies for my chatterbox.

“Are you sure these are all mine?”

“If you don’t quiet following me and questioning, I will give some to Mr. Manager.”

She smiled from ear to ear.

“Speaking of Mr. Manager tell me more. Why was he smiling at you?”

“There is nothing there to talk about just like the boss did with my present his smile was a welcome smile.”

“I know but.....”

“I am taking the cookies then.”

She laughed, hiding them. She knew I was pulling her leg.

“I will not share my cookies. Thank you, Maya, it is as if you knew how much I loved these. Are you the one who baked, or you bought them before coming to work?”

Her curiosity amused me. I used to bake when I was not feeling sleepy and the previous night was no different which made me eager to thank my chatter box. I was going to tell her one day that I was calling her by that name.

“Before you even paint me with that brush I baked them especially for you. But I left some for me.”

“You are cheating, if you baked for me you better come with the rest tomorrow. Do not even think about eating them because they will speak in tongues there in your stomach.”

She had a poker face on; I just laughed, imagining cookies speaking different languages in my stomach.

“I already ate them.”

“Greedy woman,”

I laughed at her faking a sulk. I waved her off as she was then standing in my office. She smiled, going out holding her cookies as if she was holding a treasure. No one taught me on how to bake. One day I was tired of bread and I took a cook book my mother always had in her trunk among other books. When I perused through it, I found some baking recipes that I loved in an instant and my passion started there.

I was lazy to bake hence it was a destruction when I could not sleep. I was early for work but I would not lazy around. I wanted to make sure by the end of the week I didn't get to stay behind because of work.

Mr. Jere came in and went straight to his office. His office was the only that was not made of glass. I guess being a manager came with packs. I was still looking at my new laptop that came as my welcoming gift when I heard someone clear their throat. When I looked up, he had his beautiful smile plastered on his

face. Was I hallucinating or what? I was told this person never smiled but here we were with me confused on how to react.

“You are bright and early.”

His voice sounded like a melody to my ears. Why was I even thinking about that? Instead, I smiled back and cleared my throat. I had to clear it as some saliva was stuck up there from shock.

“Yes, sir, I am behind on some pitches and presentations. I was supposed to finish them before I started working full time but I had to take a holiday.”

I didn't even know why I was explaining myself to him. I was not sure if what I said was wrong as he was staring at me as if I had something on my face to a point where I asked him.

“Do I have something on my face?”

He laughed at me and shook his head.

“I was just checking on you. Please inform me once you encounter any challenges my office is open for you.”

There it was a smile again. I was confused, but I didn't want to show it. I smiled back and shook my head in agreement.

“Yes, sir, I will definitely come.”

“Do not call me sir it will make me look older. Like those old people called ‘asir’ and they have lived a life, they are even grannies.”

I laughed at him even if I didn’t want to. He was too handsome to be old.

“Sorry Mr. Jere,”

He laughed going to his office with his hands in both his pockets which made his butt stand out and looks firm.

‘Stop it Mayamiko a man got you into this mess and you are looking at another man who is your superior for that matter. The devil was supposed to leave my world, as I was not supposed to get into such temptations.

I was done with everything and the meeting with the investors went extremely well. It was more than good, as it was promising. I was also prepared for a Saturday of fun. When I went to bed on Friday, I was relieved it was not a surprised that I slept the moment my head hit the pillow. I was disturbed from my dream by a strange phone call.

“Hello,”

I was answering from my sleep and still sleepy. When I heard who was on the other end, I cursed.

What the.....

12

"Samantha, are you out of your mind? Do you know what time it is, why are you calling me in the middle of the night?"

I was furious at her for waking me up in the middle of the night.

"This better be good Samantha, because you cannot be waking me in the middle of the night for nothing. What is it? Is your house on fire, are you dying? Why are you calling me at this hour? Anyway, where did you get my number I didn't give you my number?"

"Maya, you don't understand this is a disaster, this can't be happening, not before we go for our big day tomorrow. Come on, remember we need to win this."

The drama was written in her voice, I couldn't even stay angry at her she looked as if she was panicking I wonder what was going on in her mind.

"Well, you didn't check the time before you called me technically it's today but fun games are today so what is it you want because you have disturbed my sleep we are going to lose as I won't be well rested."

I did that deliberately to her she was panicking more than the word panic.

"Please do not do this to me I am in trouble I cannot find my sports bra, how am I going to jump up and down without my sports bra?"

I was even shocked to laugh this girl woke me up for a sports bra, a sports bra, a mere sports bra?

I sighed before answering her I was defeated.

"Does that particular sports bra give you wings to fly and win the competitions?"

She gasped as she was serious on the other hand I was annoyed. I was not a morning person and waking me up that early was at your risk, not mine.

"You do not know that Mr. Hillary is going to be there and I need to look the part."

I didn't even know who that person was so why was I forced out of sleep for a person who was not on my contact list.

Samantha, I am sleepy and you are not making sense. What are you talking about? Besides, I asked you a question. Who gave you my numbers?"

"That is not important Maya, I have everyone's numbers and addresses, so do not trouble yourself about that. Now, can we go back to the disaster?"

“I asked you a question you never answered. What is so special about this sports bra?”

She sighed defeated and I can say I felt sorry for her.

“You will not understand.”

“I am now up, please explain to me.”

“I need to look the part. I can’t find my sports bra that will show off my body. We need to pass by the shops in the morning and you know I am not driving, I can’t even afford a bicycle imagine.”

I was forced to laugh. I was thinking this child was born in Malawi by mistake because she acted like someone from a foreign place. But she was not lying about her body she was beautiful.

“I will take you to the shops in the morning and I hope you won’t force me to pay for it as well.”

“Nope, what do you take me for? I do not work stones I work for money.”

“Aren’t you the one who said you are broke?”

“Please sleep because you sound sleepy. Nawonga chomene (I thank you)”

I would not be angry at her because she needed some prayers more than anything else. I went back to sleep with ease. I was forced to set an alarm as I knew my disturbed sleep was going to lead to late morning.

Before I even finished what I was doing, Samantha was already knocking. I would not be subjected to shouting hence I left everything. She was smiling as if she never lost some sleep over a simple sports bra.

“Can one unknow someone?”

I was asking, looking at her from the corner of my eye while I was driving.

“There is no such word but why are you asking?”

“I want to Google ‘How to unknow Samantha’, now you get where my question is going?”

She looked at me with a wicked eye. “Not funny at all, I will Google ‘How to make Maya disappear’; you know where this is going, right?”

I laughed at her since she was serious. At least we didn’t take long at the shops as she wanted to ‘impress’ a particular Mr. Hillary so I would not debate with her.

She was right, the event was not anything small. It was well organised, and it had direction. A certain Mr. Hillary was

standing there tall, and he stood out. His pose screamed discipline and command. I got why Samantha was smitten but she never even got closer to him. Mr. Jere was not there as Samantha had initially informed me.

Mostly we did indigenous games. They said the plan was to make sure they never got distinct, as we would pass them to our children. I chose to compete in chingengele.

Chingengele is a game in which you take a tire and just run with it. There are several variations to the game such as should you use a stick or your hand to move the tire along.

Samantha took part in mila. Mila is a game children play in which they stack bricks up and either try to pelt the bricks or one another.

It was so clear to me why Samantha was so invested in sports. She was so good at what she was doing and she did it with care and precision. I was proud of her. At least I got her some points, and we won. It was a day filled with fun and laughter. We got to relax, and I got to know more about some of my colleagues.

“Go and talk to him.”

“Huh?” She thought I was not looking at her while she was looking at Mr. Hillary. “I do not know what you are talking about.”

“We both know that you are into this guy.”

“That will never happen. We were taught to let the man approach you so I will not act slutty or else my mother will turn from her grave.”

That was the first time I learnt about her mother. We spoke about her family then. After a day of fun, we drove home. I was so ecstatic but tired that I went straight to my place and slept. I went to my parents’ house the following day. Before I could even enter

a call came through, it was my friend Mphatso.

“How can I hear from the streets that you are going back to that hellhole?”

She was angry, and I knew I was in trouble.

“In my defence, I was giving you time to finish your project. By the way, how did that go?”

There was a smile in her voice when she heard me asking about her project.

“It went better than we thought. We secured a plot of land to farm our tobacco so we will be starting our project soon.”

“Where did you get the land?”

I was genuinely happy for her, as it was her dream to have a plot to farm. I was not a farming material.

“We will be moving to Kasungu this coming month, my husband wanted to leave work, but I discouraged the move as we are not sure how it will go. I can stay at home and raise the kids while we are trying to make this work.”

I was so happy that they finally got what they had been working hard for. It was heart-warming, and they deserved it.

“I think that is a better idea but I know you will pick up before you even notice. Was this plot already functional?”

“Yes, it was, the owner only moved to a unique area, and he left us with the potential buyers’ contact details as well.”

“This calls for celebrations. I will come there once you guys are settled.”

“Not a bad idea but why are you avoiding my question? I am coming to Blantyre with you this weekend. We are not arguing about that, as I know that your in-laws will walk all over you and you will allow it.”

I was emotional. It was heart-warming to know that I had so many people rallying behind me. I would not be alone on this journey.

“I would love to go with you so I will gladly accept. I am not scared, imagine, I am only concerned that my aunt would want to go with us, and if she does there will be a disaster because you know her.”

She laughed at me because she knew what she did the previous time.

“Do you think she will win against us?”

“She might not but it will cause some tension, which I do not want and need at the moment. Before you ask, my work is great and I have Samantha to keep me busy with her runny mouth.”

We both laughed as I filled her in about my life at work; ironically, she liked Samantha before even meeting her. We talked about the weekend arrangements. I knew her husband was going to take her to Blantyre, so I wasn't worried.

My heart sank when I heard my aunt's voice upon entering my parents' house. I was crossing my fingers she would not trouble us about going.

“You are not going there. I am not taking you there.”

My father was shouting at the top of his voice.

“I can use the public transportation. You are not the only one with a car in this world. The garages are selling cars for everyone.”

“Please calm down you two.”

My mother was used to these sibling fights. I was wondering if that was going to be my brother and I in a few years to come. I

cleared my throat and greeted them. They stopped arguing and greeted me back. I was glad they stopped their argument.

My aunt left the moment I got there, but she didn't show any anger toward me. I was glad she left, as I didn't want any stress. We had dinner with my parents asking me about the fun day. They were laughing at the stories I was telling them.

I spoke to my brother regarding telling my parents about his engagement. He was scared as dad was going to ask him about the bride price and all the wedding necessities. He promised to tell them after my fiasco was gone, though. One thing at a time was a good idea.

When I do to work the following day, I was surprised when everyone was already there congratulating Samantha and I.

"I didn't know you were so competitive that much."

A lady commented, petting her back. Samantha was only happy as her points were going up, raising her chances of getting that prize at the end of the year.

Mr. Manager approached us with a smile that confused Samantha yet again. He congratulated us and left when the others left as well.

"So Mr. Jere can smile?"

Samantha was looking at me. I didn't even dare tell her about the other encounters.

"I bet he was surprised we won. I was doubting you prior to the games but boy, oh boy don't you bring your A game."

"I told you I play to win. I was surprised you said you were not that competitive."

"I am truly not, it was by chance but I loved it. I hope you will consider me again for our next games."

"If my partner is not here yet yes, I will consider you."

"You are wicked. So you will kick me out."

We both laughed, as I knew she was not serious. It was what it was I was going to accept that. It was back to business, and it was a wonderful week for me as it started with a crucial phone call.

"Miss Nyirenda, I have the best news ever. You impressed the investors, so we got the contract. I am proud of you and thank you for your hard work. You are getting a bonus and keep those applications going for your further studies."

Okay, the way I was so excited I almost screamed, then I remembered I was talking to my boss. I thanked him after he gave me instructions on which documents to request from the manager for the contract.

I was going to work with Mr. Jere as he was the manager and he knew the ins and outs of the company. My journey to a better life was beginning, and no one was going to stop me. When I was about to leave for the day, I received an unexpected visitor.....

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"Ankazi what are you doing here? Who showed you where I was working? No one knows where I am working even my brother doesn't know my workplace, how did you find out where I was working this is creepy."

I held my mouth after saying that last word, it was disrespectful of me to say that to her and it was not allowed in our culture, I don't know how that word left my mouth.

"I am so sorry, I am so sorry for saying that I didn't mean to say it out loud, please forgive me, please come this side."

There was no use in me throwing her out she was already there. I might as well listen to what she wanted to say.

I directed her to the kitchen where I asked her to sit down. I knew visitors were not allowed and that was the first policy that was read to me by the manager when I started working there. So I was crossing my fingers that no one saw her and no one saw me taking her to a kitchen.

I have already removed the idea of taking her to my office because it had classes all over. So somebody was bound to find out. If we were in the kitchen they were not going to find out quickly as it was not lunch time yet.

" I come in peace and I'm sorry to disturb you at work. I know it's rude of me but there was no way I could have talked to you

without our families hovering. I know you are at work so I'll be quick about this. I want to ask you if you are really sure about what you are doing I know it might sound like I'm pushing you towards your husband but I want you to be sure that this is what you want with your life and you will not regret it in future.

Sometimes we make quick decisions that we do not realise our future lies in our hands. There was a man who wanted to marry me just because my father said that he didn't have enough cows to pay for me. My father was a wealthy man so he wanted to keep his wealth to his children and he wanted to keep it going. I was young and naive I didn't even think twice I let him go that is when I met my current husband. I was so happy at first he had money he had everything we lived happily. I didn't go to school most of the people our age never had a chance to go to school like boy children. We were discouraged to go to school but my father made sure that your fathers went to school so that they can be educated.

That man changed on me he didn't want me to say anything in our marriage I was at the back of the marriage looking at what was going on. I didn't want to do anything I was so sad all the time up until I met a friend who told me to go to a traditional healer. It was only meant for him to recognise me as his wife but I guess some of the medication I put way too strong for his body to take I didn't mean to do what I did but it happened his

family never even liked me so they found an excuse to distance themselves from us. I am not a witch as people assume I was only trying to fix my marriage because it was hard for me. I wish I can go back to my young age and get married to the person who loved me the most because I know it might sound like we don't have love within us old people but we do love and we do love deeply.

Society might seem as if they are supporting you in your decisions but at some point, they will leave you and go against you as they please. So be careful of what you choose, it better be coming from you not from what people are saying around you."

"I am so sorry, ankazi, about this I didn't know this happened to you I will not judge next time before I hear the other side of the story."

"It is ok I have learnt to be immune to those comments because I know where I was coming from I am asking you again for one last time is this what you want, is this what you are planning to do with your life, you will not regret it."

"Yes, auntie this is what I wanted the decision was not made for me by anyone else. All I need from you is your support and guidance. When I married Joseph I knew that I wanted to love him forever but I don't know what he wanted. He is not sure what he wants in life so I would rather live alone than live with

somebody who doesn't know what he wants in life. I will not be with a man who disregards my feelings and who disrespects me in front of his family. I am leaving not because I do not love him but because I need to be sure that in future he will not disregard my feelings. I still love him if he loved me he would have run after me, where is he now? He can't even come and stand up for me so do you want me to be with a man who is like that who will never choose me I will always be at the back of his mind."

"If you put it like that my child I understand you very well I will not force you to be unhappy because I know what unhappiness in a marriage feels like."

"Thank you for understanding and I hope I am not going to hear about this in future. I want to move on it's difficult for me also to move on when I am reminded that I left my husband please you are my family you need to be on my side. If the world is against me and you as my family against me I will not survive. I need to survive, I need your support to survive."

She waved to the little tears that she had, my aunt was not a passionate person but she stood up from the chair and came to me. She hugged me so tight it was my first time feeling my aunt's hug in years.

If it's your choice then I promise to support you in everything that you are doing I promise not to judge you I won't be the

person who will be in the judgement line. I have made mistakes in the past and I will continue to make mistakes in future, so let not be me who throws the first stone at you. I am happy if you're happy and we will bury this issue now."

I also wiped the tears that I didn't know were coming out up until I felt my cheek going warm.

"I love you so much you are my family and thank you for your support. I am going this weekend because I want this to end officially so that I can move on. I will always love Joseph, he was my husband I do not know whether I will get married in future but he will always be my first husband even though we didn't sign."

"Let me go before your boss find me here. I know that visitors are not allowed, the lady at the reception told me that I will see you weekend when we are going."

"If they beat you for trespassing I will help them because you were supposed to call me before coming here I was going to meet you outside."

We both laughed, I showed her the back door which they claimed is usually used for the dirt.

Somehow I was grateful that she came to my workplace because I understood her past and I was going to make sure that my future was not miserable I was not going to overlook

any red flags. I was going to check them before I settled down in future.

Sometimes it is easier to judge from a high and Mighty chair we do not know what people are feeling and we do not know what people have been through, but we merely judged for what they did without finding the truth. Somehow I felt sorry for my aunt, I was so grateful that my father was not like my grandfather who had to make her choose between the love of her life and cows.

I was so relieved that weekend that everything was going to be finalized and I was going to move on with my life amicable. Before the knock off time Mr. Manager came to my office carrying a set of papers.

"I am glad you are here I came to give you these. Please go through them and make sure that you sign on the dotted line after you understand them it seems we are going to be working together on this project I'm glad you came into this team because the boss is happy and I am happy."

I didn't look at his face I was so excited I looked at the papers I was going to take them home and fine but won't talk when I realised that the contract and also I was going to be paid extra for that contract I was so happy my life was going to start on a good note.

"Thank you very much, sir....oh thank you very much Mr. Jere I will look at them and come back to you."

He thanked me and was about to leave but looked back and said, "We start working on the contract next week, so this week we are finalizing everything. By Friday if you would have looked through those documents sign them so that we email them to the investor."

"I will do that so that we start on this contract. I am so excited I hope Mr. boss will be happy with the outcome."

It was funny how I never used my boss's surname no matter what. I always called him Mr. boss it was high time I used his surname as we were going to be working hand-in-hand and most of the contracts he directed them from the head office which is where I was working at the moment.

Mr. Jere left me to my work I was determined, I wanted to prove the world wrong that even if you left a husband at an early age there was life out there. There was work, there was family and there were friends out there so life didn't stop when the marriage has stopped.

I went through the contracts, both of them, I was happy with them. I wanted to sign them as quickly as possible but I had to show them to my sister as I was meeting her on Wednesday

that week we had postponed for so long but she was free on that particular Wednesday I was meeting her at her office.

"Look at you

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you also brought lunch. I bought lunch already where did you get the money, are you working now?"

I laughed at her, my sister thought she was the only one who had money in our family. She thought the jobs that we were doing were useless. She didn't know that I had just signed a multimillion-dollar contract with the company so I was going to get a little pie as well. The Malawian Kwacha was not even up in the market or down in the market it was somewhere there doing its thing. Still not being recognised but the money was good, what I was earning was more than enough to sustain me.

"My job pays too don't think I'm working stone, I'm working for money. They pay me at the end of the month so stop acting as if we are paid nothing, you are not paid in dollars but you also paid in kwacha."

If you could have seen my face when I was using Samantha's statement on her I laughed at myself, at least my sister didn't see that.

"Your job counts when I'm not around, the moment I appear in your space then you seize to exist."

She was laughing at me and I wasn't going to be angry at her because she was joking she had a dry sense of humour just like my boss. I invited myself to the seat then I asked her about her life she was not that busy so we had a little chat before I indulged in my business.

She read both the contracts also she was not concentrated on them she was perusing them then she looked at me.

"You know that I'm not a lawyer, I'm only a judge but so far when I'm reading this it's legit. What is it, are you going to sign this contract, if you are going to sign this contract it is good and fair from my point."

"Thank you very much. I need to sign it this week, I will be starting on this project next week and I am hoping to get another investor so I can try to go back to school."

"This is good my little sister. I know it will be hard but I'm glad that you left that marriage and you're concentrating on school. I know you will get married one day because it is your dream but at least if you have something to fall back on, something that will make you happy and I am also happy for you. We have to be grateful for the opportunities that we get, you know from our background that not all girl children are taken to school. We need to be grateful that our parents are taking us to school and are allowing us to choose what we want to choose. The only fight that I'm fighting now is for my parents to let me

choose the life that I want to choose. I do not want to get married, I do not want to have children, I know it is going to be hard because I feel like mum has hope that one day I'm going to get married I hope she will understand because this is the life I have chosen. I want to be a judge and I want to study further who knows maybe I want to be far away from this place."

"The world is changing people are starting to embrace the changes that we are facing. The future is inevitable the things that we have to face are different. The challenges that we need to overcome are different. I support you, I know you do not want a family as well, I love you like you are the only thing in the world. Please do not tell your brother he will kill me."

We laughed and she looked at me with a different tenderness and pity.

"Jokes aside, how are you feeling and how are things going I know you didn't plan this to happen yet. Your life was in Blantyre and you planned to stay there and do whatever you want to do there. With me you know you cannot pretend, so tell me how is everything how are you feeling?"

I cleared my throat, I knew she knew more about me than the rest of the family.

"I try to get to work and be destructed. Samantha is helping also as she is keeping me on my toes but when I am alone I

blame myself sometimes. I feel like I was this naive when Asante came along to keep the relationship going. I feel like a fool to keep on staying while I was mistreated."

"Do not blame yourself. Some paths are worth travelling alone even when the family can travel with you it will be unfair to take you all the way. Now it's your time to choose whether to stay in the past or move on. It's not easy I know they say that but I am glad you got this contract it will keep you busier. It was not a mistake but it was a learning curve learn from it and move on my little sister. I know you are strong, stronger than all of us combined so keep on keeping on and I'm behind you always. You know that you owe me that vacation that you promised me. You said once you get married and settle down we will go on a vacation just the two of us. So I am banking on you taking me on that vacation before you get married again, oh yes, I know you will get married again."

She laughed at me on the last part I was not sure if I was going to get married again but I was not going to shut my heart from love. I was going to fall in love some other time but for that moment I wanted to focus on my work and studies.

"That vacation will be sooner than you think once I get my bonus we are going out of the country don't worry about that I'm planning at the beach there in Mozambique what do you think?"

She was smiling from ear-to-ear. I knew that she loved the beach and she had been planning that for years but she wouldn't have the guts to go alone so I was going to go with her. She didn't have so many friends she didn't have friends at all she only had colleagues.

"See, now we are talking, you have become my favourite person then after your parents of course. Don't be surprised I love them more than you know, I love them more than you think. They are my world, they are no parents like ours, but please don't tell them because they will have big heads and they will think that I can't live without them."

My sister was the weirdo of the family but she was fun if she wanted to be funny. I knew I was going to enjoy that vacation it was high time I also took myself out I needed that time out to cleanse the bad spirits from that evil family that I had been staying with.

The weekend came faster than I thought my aunt went with us and she was on her good behaviour I was surprised and she was loving and caring.

When we got there she didn't even say anything she was there she talked about how she was not happy that her niece was treated the way she was treated.

I listened to them talking about the mumbo jumbo. I was sitting there not sure what to do or what to say. I didn't know whether to reply but I only know that when I was asked I never opened my mouth.

After some time we were excused as women, and men were left in the house talking we didn't know what they were talking about I doubt they were going to tell us what they were talking about.

My mother and my aunt didn't even want to go to the kitchen she said we must go to the car because their mother was giving us an attitude, so my mother was saying what if they poisoned our food my aunt was the first one to comment that they might have poisoned our food.

That was not the case though when the men were finished with their meeting and whatever conclusion they had we were asked to come in and eat.

When we were done everything and we were about to leave I was surprised when Joseph raised his hand. It was funny because he looked like a school child with the teacher in front of the class.

"I am very sorry my elders may I please speak to my wife."

What the.....

I looked at the man who was calling me his wife when all the cows have been returned to his home. I didn't want to be disrespectful so I excused myself as he followed me outside but inside I was boiling, I was angry. My aunt gave me a death stare I think she was saying in her mind that 'if ever you go back to that man I am going to kill you'. She had been amazed by the mother's rudeness and she was even asking me in the car why I stayed so long in that marriage. I just looked at both her and my mother apologetically because I didn't know what to do I didn't want them to think I was being rude to Joseph and his family.

"I am so amazed that you still call me your wife when everything has been said and done and we are not married anymore traditionally we are done."

"I know that the odds are against me but I wanted to tell you that Asante misses you and I miss you too. It may seem like I don't care but I do care I wanted to give you space so that you can breathe and come back to us."

"What is so funny is that you let your mother mistreat me in front of your eyes. Now, what will change because she was there in the meeting and she was still controlling the men from your family in the meeting. So tell me what will change when I come back to you?"

"I'll make sure she stays in her house and we need you with Asante and I can't carry on without you."

"But Asante is not my child and you know that the mother will do anything to make sure that she comes back to your life. You even made sure that you gave her more powers than I have in this marriage as your wife."

"I will try my best, please let us work together so that we can try to fix this marriage."

"This marriage died way before Asante's accident. I tried talking to you so many times, telling you how I don't like the way things were but you tucked it under the carpet. You thought I was overreacting, I am tired of asking for the same things and there's no chance you can talk and promise me heaven on earth but I know when it comes to implementing it you will never implement it. You love your mother so much, more than you love me, you love Asante's mother more than you love me."

"That is not true, if I loved her I would have married her not you."

"Oh, please don't make it as if you did me a favour by marrying me. You were subjecting me to abuse every day so what do you say? You say you love me but you don't protect me, you protect the other people that you love. Love is not only about what you

say it is about your actions, your actions right now spoke to me louder than your words. I've heard your words so many years but your actions spoke differently."

"I seriously do not want to lose you I can even move to Lilongwe with you."

I looked at him in shock because I had suggested we moved to another city or another town a long time ago but I was met by hostility when I suggested that. I didn't want to listen to his lies because he was going to tell me that it was taking longer for him to transfer from Blantyre to Lilongwe. Why was I even thinking about that? Why was I sad thinking about him I had forgiven him already but I was not going to take him back into my, life that was not going to happen in this lifetime?

Joseph, I loved you so much part of me still loves you. You were my husband

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and you will always be my first husband but our past ends here, we cannot go any further because we want different things in life. I know some of the things might have been caused by your mother and the baby mama but there are things that you didn't want to change as my husband there are things that you chose to do not your mother or your baby mama. Remember issues that are not resolved and I swept under the carpet always

caused havoc in the future and now people think I'm overreacting. But you were supposed to sit down as a man and solve those problems before they became mountains they were small hummocks but they became mountains because you didn't want to deal with them at the moment. I am telling you because I know in the future you will get married your mother will not let you stay without a wife that much I know. So once you get married, make sure that you put your wife first you put your mother and your baby mama last, unless if you're marrying your baby mama then it's fine she is selfish you are selfish you will work hand in hand."

"You are hurting me so much Maya, I am not selfish, I am not I was never selfish."

"Most of the time we cannot see what we are doing to people until it is done to us so you will never see your selfish ways until the same thing is done to you then you will realise that I was doing the same thing to the other person."

"If I hurt you this much I am so sorry I hope you find it in your heart to forgive me."

"You see you will never admit that you have hurt me when you are using the word 'if' I'm telling you that you hurt me but you are saying if I hurt you were supposed to say I am sorry I hurt you and it will never happen again but now it just because you

used the word if it shows you never admit you're wrong and I will never be okay with this marriage going forward."

"I am sorry, I loved you and I will continue to love you please forgive me please forgive me."

When he said the last part he was very sincere there was no need for me to be angry at him I was not going to be living with him anymore so I chose to forgive him and move on I was not going to forget what they did to me hence I was excusing myself from that family so that I can heal.

"It's ok Joseph I already forgive you I am forgiving you now I choose to forgive you because I loved you."

Surprisingly he came in for a hug, he hugged me so tired I was even regretting my decision, not too much just a little.

"I wish you all the best in life."

His mouth said those words but his actions said otherwise he was angry from his facial expression I could tell that he was angry and he was hurt but I was not going to entertain him. I was moving on with my life and I was 13 afraid there was a time when I would have forgiven him and forgot about everything but it is just so I was not a forgiving person I wanted to choose myself and choose me.

When we went in back inside they were weirdly looking at us but I just sat down next to my mum and look down Joseph told

his family that he is letting go he is glad that he married me and you would love for him not to be reminded of his mistakes you would love to move on and he excused himself after saying that.

There was no need for us to stay longer we went to the cars and drove back home.

There was silence in the car but inside I was relieved I was thanking God that nothing sinister happened and it was over but in my deep feelings I felt like Joseph had not let me go. I was not going to be bothered by a grown-up man I was going to concentrate on my work. I had a smile when I thought of work I was going to nail every contract so that I get what I wanted and wait for people to give it to me.

I was also mentally planning our vacation with my sister a long overdue one.

The vacation was more for me than my sister I need it the most I realised on that day that I needed a vacation.

Mphatso didn't make it as there was an emergency at work. She was about to resign so she needed a good word to leave peacefully. We were going to meet for the celebration in Lilongwe over the weekend.

When we got home we were all tired my father said my mother should not cook my mother loved cooking but she was also

tired. He was going to pass by the market and buy something already made. He was taking my aunt to her place because it was becoming late and the transport was a problem to her place.

"How are you feeling now that everything is put to rest?"

My mother asked where you were sitting waiting for my father.

"I do not know how I feel it hasn't sunk in yet but what I know is that I am not going back there I might miss my life because we can't overlook the fact that I stayed with him all these years and I was living with him permanently for the past two years. It is not easy I still love him at some point I thought that he was going to come burging here begging me to come back and sort out our life but the fact that he didn't come showed me that it is not worth it.

I am looking at my brother's life, I am hoping and praying that he is not going to go the same path. I do not like men who take advantage of women I know women are supposed to take care of everything but they are also human beings they need to be heard they need to have a life also."

"Not on my watch, my son will not tend to be like that and I will not allow it not in a million years. I will never visit my son's house unnecessarily. I will visit when it's necessary and when there is a need. My son also will not come here as he pleases

once he's married, he will come here with his family or not come at all or I will drive him back to his house myself."

My mother was telling the truth marriage is for two people but people around them need to work together so that they won't make the marriage go down. We are the pushing and pulling factors that are affecting other people around our lives.

"Your brother finally told us what you talked about and he is happy that you talked to him. You are so clever even if you are younger than them, thank you for talking sense into him now we will have a daughter-in-law. He is excited but scared of preparing the wedding. I think he is scared that if you failed he is going to fail too but please assure him that life is not like that. Life happens the way it wants to happen to different people the way it's supposed to happen."

"He mustn't worry that much he is a passionate person he will make mistakes. I'm not saying I'm not saying he is perfect but when he makes mistakes and admits them to the next person everything will be well. I do not like it when people have that little pride in them not to admit their mistakes this is what led to my marriage's fall. Let's not talk about marriage today, I am tired I want to eat and sleep. I'm sleeping in my old room today I'm not going to my place."

We both laughed and talked about something else everything was forgotten I was looking forward to my weekend with my friend.

Above all I was excited about Monday, I knew we were starting on the contract so I was going to keep myself busy at work and forget about my failed marriage.

It was exciting and scary at the same time because I was going to work with my boss who I looked up to and I was going to work with Mr. Manager who I was scared of.

Although I was scared and excited at the same time it was a walk in the park because I did my research it was not child's play because we had to work overtime which I didn't mind at all because I was going to be lonely at home.

When Friday came I was so excited as I was going to wait for Mphatso.

I was packing and humming a song when I heard somebody clear their throat.

"May I please see you in my office?"

What the....

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It was Mr. Manager, standing by the door. I looked at my manager and I was scared the way he was so serious I thought I messed up something, I was shaking but I didn't want to show that I was shaking.

"Alright, Mr. Jere, I will come to your office right now, let me finish packing."

He looked at me and flashed me his smile again I was so confused and hoping it was nothing big.

I knocked once and he opened as if he was waiting for me.

"May you please sit down. Please do not panic it's not work related I am sorry to bring you to my office I needed this."

Okay, I was confused about what was not work-related and why would he haul me to his office for that.

"Maya, I do not know how to say this but is it possible if we have lunch or dinner and discuss maybe this contract or maybe something else."

He was even stumbling it was funny, I would have laughed at him if not because of the shock that had rendered my body malfunction.

I looked at him thinking that he was joking but he wasn't he was serious and was even shaking. I was speechless because he

was sweating a little, he was serious about what he said. I tried to act normal as if I was not shocked.

"Are you asking me on a date because there's nothing wrong with the contact? Besides, if you are discussing the contract why would it be the two of us not with the boss involved as we are working with him?"

He was biting his fingers it was the first time I saw him that shaken. What was going on with him?

"No, it's fine, forget that I asked I'm so sorry for wasting your time."

I felt sorry for him because he was sure he didn't know what to say afterward. I would not do this so soon I would never heal if I just jumped from one relationship to another.

"I do not know what your intentions were Mr. Jere, but I am not ready for any relationship I am coming from a very serious relationship which took a part of me, so I'm still healing from it." "I am so sorry about that forget I said anything."

The way he was so polite and so humble made me feel so bad but there was nothing I could do because I was not ready for a relationship I was going to be bad in that relationship.

Sometimes we leave relationships and rush into other relationships when we are not healed. Then we take our frustrations from the other relationship to our new

relationship, and some relationships never even last longer because of the hurt that we felt in the previous relationship. The vendetta that you are caring over as you were still hurting. I knew it because when I looked at Joseph, I felt like I wasted those years with him and his family, so I felt like I needed to compensate myself for those wasted years.

In my mind, I would not be ready for a relationship all I wanted was to travel with my sister and get to bond with her. Also to know my friend very well and help her on a project again. I wanted to further my education so with my hands full I would not concentrate on the relationship.

"I am so sorry it's not you, it's me."

He laughed, showing me his beautiful teeth and his beautiful smile I was surprised and I loved it surprisingly.

"Please do not say those words. I've heard them in so many movies when somebody says that it's a break-up line and they don't want to be mean to the next person. So it's like we are breaking up now, we are not breaking up because we are not even dating so it was just a lunch or dinner date."

"I am laughing at the fact that you say you watch so many movies, what movies do you watch? Well, that was a lame line to use, I'm sorry about that."

"I watch to see many movies, I watch whatever I feel like watching at the moment so I don't have a specific genre of movies that I watch. Besides, I know you don't love the movies that I watch half of the time, so don't worry about asking me about the movies. It's fine not a train smash, and as long as you continue working together, everything's fine thank you for not being rude to me and for turning me down gently."

After saying those words, I in fact felt bad but there was nothing I could have done to change the past because I was going to heal fast and then think about the future. I was rushing to meet my friend because it was our weekend Mphatso hated to be kept waiting.

When I was leaving work that particular day I felt a nostalgic moment, I felt like I wasted my time with Joseph, I felt like I was so naïve and everyone was telling me against it. I looked at the surrounding people happy and singing some of them had little to write home about but they were happy. Was I that miserable and unaware of my situation because of the glimpse of happiness I felt like I was in a bottle for years?

Mphatso was going to be at my place for the weekend so it was going to be a ladies' weekend. I passed by the market because I knew she loved home-cooked meals more than takeaways.

A message came through I read it, it said 'weekend out at LWC'. There was nothing written thereafter.

I sent a message back to her and asked what that meant and where is that place.

She laughed at me and said I must come and open the gate for her. She was by the gate I think her husband was dropping me off and he was going away with his friend.

I rushed to the gate with the excitement of a teenager who had their first freedom when their parents were away on their long awaited vacation.

"Where is your husband he didn't even stay to say hello, not even for every cup of tea?"

She smiled, hugging me.

"He is driving back alone his friend is not home we thought he will spend the weekend with him and drive back home with me."

"Too many trips, I am sorry. So what is it you're saying you have planned for us for the weekend I didn't understand your message?"

"Come on, keep up we are going to Lilongwe Wildlife Centre. I booked at Maravi Gardens café, remember it only opens a few hours on a Saturday so tomorrow we will be there. I didn't want us to miss this point, remember we are supposed to catch up I need to hear everything about what was going on. All the things that you've been telling me over the phone and some of

them we skipped remember. I was always busy or you will be busy so I need all the information ."

I loved her excitement because I was as excited as she was. We were going to catch up, and we were going to enjoy ourselves for old times' sake. When we were at college and when we were at school when we used to do things together.

"I cannot wait and I think we need to talk about so many things. I can't believe that I let life pass us by, I wish I had not been distant and I wish I had not listened to Joseph we wouldn't have all these last years in between us."

"We will not look back at the past remember."

I wiped the little tears that were forming in my eyes.

"Yes, we do not need to be distance because of the surrounding people, they need to know that we have been friends for so long so we'll keep on being friends till the end of our days."

"That is the plan my love, don't worry we will keep in touch and you know my husband is not a strict person, so we can always plan our getaways that would be every two to three months we meet so that we won't be distant again."

I finished cooking while we were catching up on fun things that were happening on her side as she was moving to another town where they will start farming.

The way she was so happy and she was talking about her new life and how supportive her husband was, I was so happy for her I didn't even wish it was me I wished it for her because she was a good person she deserved it. I was hoping I would get a husband who would understand me the way her husband understood her.

I laughed at myself for turning down Mr. Jere, remember for me to get a husband I needed to go out there in the saddle and start again.

I didn't want to spoil my evening, so I stopped thinking about that and I never told her about my encounter with my manager.

We had fun catching up and talking about our college years and the things that we never liked but found funny when we were grown.

Before going to bed I called my parents telling them not to worry about me I knew they were going to worry if I didn't turn up because every weekend we went there to eat brunch together. So I told them I had a visitor they were not supposed to expect me the entire weekend so that I catch up with my friend.

My mother was the happiest as she knew I needed to go out there and forget about my married life. She even complained

previous times that I needed to make more friends so that I will stop whining about the life that I should have had.

My phone was off for that weekend so I wasn't worried about Samantha calling me. I knew she was going to call me for something or whatever she was calling about. I loved the way she used to worry about me as if I didn't have a life before I came to the company.

Going to Lilongwe Wildlife Centre was the best thing ever because it refreshed me and we had fun it was so funny that I didn't know about such a beautiful place in the backyard of our house when they were so many people coming from other countries enjoying the scenario.

Sometimes we grow up in beautiful places but we do not realise how beautiful the places are because we keep on whining and saying we do not have money to do those things. I was kicking myself for thinking that Malawi was so down at the bottom of the chain when we had so many beautiful places and beautiful people.

"Next time I should stop holding back in life because there are so many things that I should be enjoying in my beautiful country but I was busy taking care of people who didn't care about me. This place is beautiful how did you know about this place?"

"Don't worry if you need a weekend away just tell me, I will organise it for you because you have a smartphone but you do not know how to use it, you can even go to Google. Google will show you which places to visit in your country."

The cafe was beautiful and had beautiful food as if it was not cooked in Africa. As if they had hired an international chef. We also had time to sit down and chat, catching up on the lost time. That is when I told her about my encounter with Mr. Manager.

"Don't look now but behind you, there is somebody who is looking at us, they have been looking at us since we sat here."

I don't need to tell you, you know what they say about curiosity. It got the better of me and I looked back I was shocked what the...

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"You are stubborn Maya I told you not to look back now. Look all of them are looking at us; I think they were talking about us like we're talking about them."

"Sorry, mother I didn't know that we were talking about, with people you know curiosity always leads them, I included."

"I will beat you now, do you think you have a hot mother like me. How can I mother a stubborn child like you? I can't mother a stubborn child because I'm not stubborn."

We both laughed at that statement I was not sure why Mr. Jere was there.

I think I watched too many movies but the last time I watched the movie was when I was at college so why would I think that he was stalking me? What do stalker tendencies look like and does it happens in movies only? By the way, he said he loved movies maybe he was stalking me how did he know that I was there?

"Please do not look at again do not embarrass me. Two are coming toward us; if you look this time around I'm going to kill you."

I laughed at her serious face because she looked as if she meant it. I just looked at my ice cream and concentrated on what she was saying although the concentration was not much at all.

"Did you hear what I said? Oh no, they are already here."

I didn't even have time to tell Mphatso who he was I knew she was going to be surprised as well.

"Hello, Maya fancy seeing you here are you stalking me or what?" I laughed sarcastically.

"The funny part is I was thinking the same thing from the conversation we had yesterday and surprisingly you are where I am today in this place that I didn't even plan to come at. This was planned by my friend here."

Mphatso was picking up on the conversation she picked up that was the manager as I talked about the previous day's incident.

"So this is.... ohhh...oh... okay."

Mr. Jere and his friend just looked at her surprised. I winked at Mphatso to not say anything further.

"Unfortunate my darling I am not stalking you we do have our things every month with my boys this was planned last month we paid last month already. Let me show you my ticket if you don't believe me."

The way he said 'my darling' made me not hear any of the words that he said after that. I only woke up when he showed me the ticket and true to his word it dated back to last month. So what was fate doing to me what was it planning for me?

Why was fate throwing so many unpleasant surprises at me? I was not ready for a relationship but what was happening to me? Why did I keep on meeting this man and why did I keep on thinking that the things he said were cute?

"This is indeed a pleasant surprise, I am Mphatso so may you please introduce yourself and why did you leave your other friends there by the table? They are still looking at us and grinning."

"The other guy looked back at the table and laughed waved at them and looked back at us and looked back at us.

"They are not important, I will introduce myself I am Jerry Banda and you know this person who he is."

His friend said that looking at me.

"Helloooo, funny enough I am the one who asked for introductions but you are looking at Mayamiko. Why are you looking at her because I am the one who asked for introductions? I don't know him so please introduce him to me."

I wished the earth could open and swallow me I knew my friend was forward but I didn't expect that from her. They both looked at her and smiled when I looked back at her she just shrugged.

"Hey beautiful ladies, this is me Jerry Banda and this is my friend Chisomo Jere, introduction please."

It was my first time hearing about this name and it was a beautiful name 'Grace' is the meaning. It was a really beautiful name.

"Okay, it's a pleasure to meet you I don't know how to introduce I think Maya needs to do the honours."

I was going to divorce this friend because she was throwing me under the bus. I wanted to Google how to divorce a friend I think I was going to go to court and ask my sister how I was going to go about divorcing this friend.

"I am Mayamiko Nyirenda and this is my dear friend Mphatso Soko who I am about to divorce for being too forward."

Surprisingly they laughed and I was looking at Jere the smile was so attractive. I kicked myself for thinking about that. Why was I thinking about that all the time, I think I needed to surround myself with different people so that I would be delivered from temptations?

"It was a pleasure meeting you ladies let's continue with our tour, oh see you some other time. I hope to we will see each other in the future."

Jerry said holding both his hand out for both of us to take I took his hand and hoped that his friend was not going to ask as well because I didn't trust myself to not shake or to not do something silly about that handshake. Luck was on my side

because he didn't stretch his he just smiled and left with his friends going back to their table.

"Did you omit deliberately or you missed the point that he is so hot and the looker?"

I pinched her because they were not that far from us so they had over they never turned their head.

"This is because there is nothing that is going to go on and there is nothing that is going to happen so do not get your hopes high."

"I am not getting my hopes high I am just keeping the possibilities open."

"Possibilities for whom? The last time I checked you had a husband so why would you want the possibilities line to be opened."

She looked at me with a death stare and shook her head.

"Possibilities for you because who knows you might find love. On this trip, you need to keep your line open because you never know, not all men are like Joseph you know."

"For now I still need to heal so do not even put ideas in my head let us put a PIN on it."

"Okay, whatever you say I will follow. We will put a PIN on it but that butt, did you see it?"

I threw a soviet at her and laughed, why would she think about his butt but anyway as I said he liked to put his hands in his pocket exposing his firm butt.

We stopped talking about him and started to catch up again we went back to our original conversation. The conversations were always flowing when I was with her. We didn't need to talk about foolish things we had so much to talk about; we talked about anything from the weather, to politics, to love and family. So we had a day full of fun we even forgot about Mr. Manager.

Unfortunately, time flies when you're having fun. We were having fun and we forgot that Monday was going to come. Before we knew it her husband was driving through the gate to pick her up.

I was also getting ready for work, at least they didn't pick her up on Sunday because we were not going to finish our conversations there were so many of them but we even slept late that day.

I was dreading going to the office because I didn't know what I was going to say to Mr. Jere.

I had to be strong and soldier on because there was nothing I could have done to change the situation I was willing to work and get over him.

Surprisingly when I got to work he was just a normal guy as normal as ever because the boss was there. He was his old self he would smile here and there but as normal as possible.

Working with these men was so refreshing and I learnt a lot they never treated me like a woman. They treated me like their equal because the ideas that I sent forward they scrutinized and if they worked then they took them.

It was moving as fast as possible I was even amazed myself. I was enjoying the work environment not forgetting Samantha who was always keeping me busy and on my toes.

"So you are serious about leaving me? I can be your sister where can I go and change I want your surname and I will be your sister? Why would you leave me when you're going to Mozambique imagine? I have a passport you know."

Samantha had become a very important part of my life even my parents knew about her. They knew about the problem with people who bring drama, I didn't like so much drama and talking. But with Samantha, I was stuck with her as she stuck to me like glue.

"You know you were supposed to apply for leave days on time? That is beside the point, I want to go with my sister so that we can bond it has been a long time since we took an outing and we need to reconnect."

"It doesn't change the fact that I'm angry at you." I laughed at her. "At least Alfredo is coming back to work."

Alfredo was her partner in sports so I was going to be left without one. I felt sad but I was going to see what to do.

"See there's always a silver lining."

"All the best I wish you could take so many pictures so that I could brag and Photoshop myself there."

With her, anything was possible, I didn't want to laugh. She will do it in a heartbeat I knew about that. I was going to take her on vacation somewhere as I knew my sister was not going to cope with her chatterbox tendencies.

"Do not forget to submit these files remember they need them by Monday and I'm not going to be back up until Wednesday."

"I will not forget, remember this is my job I do it every morning so what will I be doing if I forget simple things such as files?"

Samantha was telling the truth she was very competent in what she was doing. She never missed anything as simple as a file her work didn't even has a typo.

"I trust you my firecracker, I was just reminding you so please behave while I'm gone."

I laughed at her going out. I worked late but I had submitted the forms for the other contract so I was hoping the meeting was going to be held after my trip.

I met with Mr. Manager when I was leaving the building.

"I am running late sir; I'll see you next week because I'm going to be on leave up until Wednesday."

"Yes I filed your leave forms, please enjoy Mozambique.

"How did you even know that I was going to Mozambique because in my leave forms it was not specified?"

I didn't even hide the shock in my face and my voice.

"Do not think I'm snoop, when you tell Samantha your things know that you've told everyone in the office."

We both burst out into laughter because it was the truth Samantha never stopped talking so I knew that everyone in the office knew about my travels.

"It is okay, it was not a secret anyway, so enjoy your weekend as I enjoy mine."

"Safe travels and come back in one piece please; we still care even if you do not care about some of us."

I didn't even want to reply to that I only waved and went to my car.

I drove straight to my parents' house because we were going to leave from there. My brother was going to take us to the bus station we were not going to use our cars because we didn't want to drive, we wanted to rest.

I had spent the previous night and had left some of my things at my parents' place; travelling light was not my thing. I knew my sister was going to complain but she was not going to carry my bags. There were people designated to carry people's bags so why was I going to let her carry my bags?

I had planned to buy a few accessories and clothes in Mozambique so how was going to come back with more bags. Talking to me about it was going to be at your own risk because I was going to shut down your idea before you finished questioning me.

"Remember that you left the family behind do you stay there longer."

My mother was so dramatic but I bet she also wanted to go with us she was sad a little. We were not going to go with our mother because we wanted to go wild; we wanted to experience life without our parents.

It was the first time we went outside the country the two of us without any parental guidance or our hovering brother.

"Did you bring the extra power banks and the laptop, remember we are going to be on the road for 31 hours?" my sister asked me.

"Did you have to remind me how long it will take for us to be on the road? Travelling by public transport was the better option if we were driving I was going to be tired you as well were going to be tired, I know you are a lazy driver."

"I stay close to my workplace because I hate driving. I would rather take public transportation and drive on occasions, so please do not blame me. I don't like driving but anyway this bus is comfortable and we are going to enjoy ourselves. We will have so much entertainment remember this bus has its entertainment. When we are tired then we'll sleep, I don't want anyone to trouble me."

I laughed at her as she loved sleeping more than anything.

"Your mother was asking me about my boyfriend. I lied and said he is also a judge."

The way she was so pissed made me laugh at her. One day our parents were going to understand her and embrace her lifestyle. "That will get her off your back for a while at least."

We spoke about different things from then up until we didn't have much to talk about. We ended up putting our earphones on when we were listening to different things. She loved

movies I was questioning myself whether I loved them or not, but I wanted to watch them so that at least I would have something to talk about with Mr. Manager.

I smiled at the thought of trying to impress him because I was not going to be in a relationship with him or was I the liar because of the little things that he did around me. Or the little things that he said always kept me on my toes and left me blushing secretly.

He was too much of a gentleman the opposite of Joseph so I didn't know my type anymore I thought my type was the Joseph type who was outgoing and all the things like that but then I'd never had to experience so many relationships.

I only had the chance to experience love with Joseph and I thought our love will not die; nothing was going to destroy it. I thought we were going to conquer the world but I was fooling myself because it ended the way it ended.

Travelling by road was risky but it has a risk worth taking because after the border we had so much to look forward to so many things so many different scenes that we didn't know existed in our world.

"Aside from my job I now know what I want to do."

What did she mean?.....

“You know I felt so hurt when we were at the border and those little girls were busy selling instead of going to school, so I know what I want to do when I get back home. I want to start an organisation for the orphans. I know people have different purposes. I think this is my purpose whenever I go to court and there are some kids involved in some disputes or there are kids that are selling outside or that are not going to school I feel like our country is failing us so I want to start an orphanage.”

I do not want to lie I had tears in my eyes. Sometimes we feel like people's purpose is supposed to be attached to the family. People's purposes are not supposed to be aligned with what society thinks. My sister was thinking out of the box, I had never thought of orphans in my life because I had everything going on growing up, so it was selfish of me and it was selfless of her I envied her. The envy was in a good way it was coming from a good place because I felt like my sister had a heart that could change the world. She didn't need a man to change that, she didn't need to have a boyfriend to change that. She didn't need to get married to change the world. She was going to change the world all by herself; I was so happy I felt like I was privileged to have her as my sister.

"When we were growing up I knew that there was something different from us. Where you grew up, the way you handled

yourself, the way you were so calm and collected. I know what some people might think but you are going to kill it in this. I know you do not have much money I know you do not have a clue on how to start but I know it's going to be a success. You also have the privilege to work with people from different walks of life, so it's going to be easy do not even doubt yourself. It's going to be a success, I hope one day you will be successful and you will be a mother of the entire nation."

"Thank you very much for the vote of confidence. I hope my parents are going to accept that the way you accepted it I am crossing my fingers."

"If they distribute this and they do not want to allow you to do what you want to do then I'm in. I'm supporting you all the way I will recruit my brother and his wife-to-be."

We both laughed but I knew they were going to allow her as we knew that our parents were so open-minded it was going to be an uphill task but with the help of the family, I think she was going to conquer the world she was going to go places.

"I love kids but I do not want to have kids of my own. I want to be the mother of all the kids that are motherless so that at least I know that in this world there's something that I did that was worth living for."

"Okay, stop chopping onions in this bus now look at what they're doing to my eyes."

She laughed at me helping me wipe the tears that had built up so much they couldn't be helped by the eyelids.

"I am so proud of you big sis you're going to nail this and you know if you need a babysitter for the weekend I'll be there because I might not have kids of my own who knows."

"Do not look down upon yourself, I think you can conceive who knows maybe Joseph is the one who couldn't conceive and I doubt that Asante is his child."

She gave me something to think about. I thought about that all those years but, no, it was impossible because Asante looked like her father. Maybe by some miracle, the gods didn't want me to have a child with him or the universe thought of a different purpose for me.

"Asante looks like the father do not worry she is his. Surprisingly I am not even worried about having kids, I know kids will come at their own time but even if I don't get them it's not a train smash I'll still live my life to the fullest."

"That's the spirit we need to look forward to life not to live according to societal rules. I know it's hard especially when we are coming from our background."

"Why did you choose a faraway place we should be there by now and why didn't you say we should fly."

The bus trip was truly tiring because we couldn't stop and rest as we pleased. We only stopped when the bus drivers thought they wanted to stop.

"Ponta do Ouro is a very beautiful place you will see it when we reach there. Now you have spoilt my surprise here are the tickets, we are flying back home I booked us on the first class."

"Oh, now you're talking, packs of having a judge as a sister. I am so thrilled I hope this place is as beautiful as you say it is."

To her expectations as per the brochure, the place was really beautiful; it was beyond this world I was so glad that we took time out to spend it outside of our comfort zone.

She had booked us in a hotel opposite the beach which was beautiful. I wish that I came with my family

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'look at me wishing for my family to be there when it was time for us to relax and bond' I rebuked myself.

We didn't even have time to unpack we just dropped ourselves on top of our beds and slept I think we slept for more than 24 hours because we were tired and when I woke up it was almost Thursday.

Ponta do Ouro was such a beautiful place when we woke up we couldn't stop admiring it and there was so much to do.

We were far from Maputo but we heard from the hotel staff that we were near the South African border. So we had changed from Malawian Kwacha to U.S. dollars and Rands because those were accepted on both sides of the border. We went to the Dolphins show and then we went offshore diving it was the order of the day for our first day it was so beautiful. From that day I respected the dolphins because it seemed like the dolphins were the most obedient sea creatures some of them I didn't trust. I didn't want to go inside the water as I didn't know if they were sharks or not.

Going to the beach was the most wonderful experience I have ever known I had seen it on television in the movies people seem to run on the beach wearing their sun hats. I did the same I went to the beach and I was running with my shawl flying that I had put over my bikini.

I felt so relaxed I was so surprised when my sister was busy with some guy by the beach pitching umbrellas with those beach chairs.

I was playing with the water splashing I didn't want to go deeper into the ocean because I wanted to be sure that sharks were not going to kill me if I wanted to go home and tell my family about my experience.

"Where did you get these and this handsome guy?"

The man just smiled it off and left my sister, she sat down next to me.

"There is nothing that money cannot buy so do not worry I paid for these."

"I do not regret staying in the past of the world longer because this place is heaven. Next time we come here we should come as a family so that at least we enjoy the family time. Or we can even give it to my brother for his honeymoon, I know they have kids and all but they do deserve a honeymoon."

"That will be the best present ever; I am in, let's save for them. Even if it means taking a loan I will do that for them, please do not tell them I know you have a big mouth and you're always with your brother I do not see him always I only see him on occasions so please shut your big mouth."

"You are so mean, I do not have a big mouth but I hope it won't slip up."

She hit me with the sand and then I hit her back we started running around like kids it was fun I wish it never ended. The following day we went to town to view their culture and all the different things, that place was so heavenly I kept on repeating that word because I didn't have a better word to explain the place it was fun I had to buy my accessories finally.

The following day I asked her to go to a club with me and she didn't want that but she had to do so to please me. We were not allowed to drink but I wanted to try something I wanted to be free for once in my life.

We went to Fernandos, Mozambican men were so handsome, some of them were not handsome but beautiful I was even smitten.

The nightclub we went to was full of coloureds I wondered why but some of them didn't speak English but Portuguese I was like 'kidnap me Portugal men'. I laughed at the thought my sister laughed at me as well.

"Ladies, can I please join you? Or should I ask my friend or some more?"

The guy was so tall and handsome; he had a smile that reminded me of Joseph. I rebuked myself for thinking about my past I think I should have asked someone to make me vomit the dirty things I ate from that marriage.

"Yes, you may, me more the merrier." My sister replied before I could even reply.

"She is right. You can make our time here pleasant."

I was scared that they might be scammers as they saw that we were foreigners in their country but oh boy did they know how to party. They were perfect gentlemen who even took us to our

hotel room when we were drunk. We were not going to show people those pictures we took when we were intoxicated.

There was a knock in the morning after the partying and I was surprised to see the crew from the previous night.

“You are still sleeping? This here is a good friend of mine who is in the Scuba Diving team so go and prepare for it and surfing.”

They were so casual as if we had known each other for years.

“Dude, stop shouting we are still sleeping.” My sister got out of bed to go to the bathroom. They laughed at her.

“Wakey, wakey, you can’t waste your money on sleep, you have to enjoy it. We will be downstairs while you get ready. There is a beach bar as well so after the activities we can go there.”

They smiled going out. I laughed at us going wild. To my surprise, we enjoyed their company and Mozambique more than expected. They were so open and free, party animals who loved fun. They showed us places we never thought we will see. We didn’t even have to know their names and they didn’t know ours we had to call them ‘amigo’ as they called us ‘amiga’.

Fun was all we had. It was sad when they took us to the airport for our flight back home. My sister was the one heartbroken as she loved the place more than I did.

“I will miss you amigos and this place.”

They laughed hugging us. Their English was not that good but we could hear each other when communicating. We were Africans so we were bound to hear each other somehow.

“Please visit again. You know where to find us.”

“Yes, we will definitely visit again.”

That place was worth a second or even more visits. When we got home our family was waiting for us. They listened to our stories from the airport to the house.

After a weekend of resting and separating the presents I brought for my family it was time I went back to my place. I took Mphatso’s present with me as I was going to see her after work on Monday. When I got to work Samantha was the first one to attack me with a hug. I gave her a ‘huge’ present as well. This lady was looking at me weirdly.

“Oh, Maya this is Alfredo, she is back from maternity leave. Friend this is the lady I have been telling you about Mayamiko.”

I smiled stretching my hand only to get a cold shoulder.

What the.....

It was good to be back at work because the second contract was on its way and I was ready to be keeping myself busy.

There was something offish about Alfredo. I don't even know if I using the correct word but that was better describing her attitude. I didn't want to put it into my mind and heart because I didn't know her so I didn't want to judge her but Samantha was her old self she wanted to hear all the details about the trip. She was even asking for photos so that she can post I laughed at her and left at that.

"When I'm looking at you and these handsome men I want your life, can I please go to Mozambique and meet such beautiful creatures?"

"I will go with you next time, do not worry and you will enjoy this. At least I have their contact so if you want a boyfriend don't worry I will hook you up."

She seemed so excited she was even sharing the pictures on her status I laughed at her because I didn't want to stop her. She was so excited she even shouted for Mr. Manager to come and view some pictures.

"Samantha, you can't do that, remember there are some pictures that I do not want people to see, even my parents. I didn't see them I can sell them why are you calling him?"

How was I going to take my phone from her and protest any further when Mr. Manager was entering my office with a smile?

"Oh, so you are back. How was your trip, you look so happy?"

"You don't even need to ask how the trip was, come come, come and see these pictures. I know you're a busy man but you love these pictures. Look at these; look at how beautiful the way she looked? Look at her sister she is beautiful it seems as if she's coming from a magazine."

I wanted to protest, but I was so shocked that Samantha was speaking to the manager as if she was talking to a friend this girl was so free to everyone it scared me but I am with her I was not that open to anyone I was reserved when it came to other people in my life. I wanted the earth to open up and hide me. Not even hide me but swallow me follow me dead.

"These are beautiful it seems you enjoyed your time at least you didn't go there to be miserable. I would love to see all these but not now I need to get back to work."

His expression had changed he was not smiling anymore and I think it was because of some pictures that he saw when we were busy drinking with those Mozambican guys.

I would not worry about his feelings as I had work to do, I was planning on submitting the second contract proposal before the

end of the week. I knew it wasn't possible but I need that this and I needed to work extra hard for the following week.

I was worried about this Alfredo person. I thought maybe I was imagining things on my first day when I met her, but when I met her again in the times that followed, it was the same attitude I was wondering what I had done to her.

"I do not want to put Samantha in a difficult position because she is friendly when we are together with Samantha she looks okay but to me, she has that energy and that negativity that comes with her. I do not know how or what to pinpoint in here but she has an attitude towards me I don't know why and I don't know what I'm supposed to do with that."

I was talking to my friend when she visited so that she can pick up her present. She was not staying long though, it was for a few hours as they were going back home with a husband. They came to Lilongwe to buy a few things for their farm.

"If you want my input on this, I would say please ask her, be upfront with her and tell her you dislike the attitude that she's portraying when you are alone not when you are with Samantha. If you just feel like ignoring it just ignore it don't worry yourself because you didn't go to work to make friends you only went there to work for your money and have a beautiful future."

This is what I liked about Mphatso she always had something to cheer me up with. She always had wise words to keep me going all to avoid stress in my life, she was right I needed to focus on my work because Mr. Manager was not troubling me he was so friendly.

I didn't need to be in the same space with Alfredo because we were working in different departments so it was easy to avoid her until we had meetings and a fun day.

"So what are you going to do tomorrow because my partner is back, are you coming or you are staying behind?"

"Samantha, do not be silly, don't worry about me I am still coming I'll see what to do I might only take part in individual games. I cannot miss a fun day it's been the busiest two weeks of my life. Imagine, after a beautiful holiday, I had to come to the most difficult contract I have ever met but I'm about to finish everything so I'm happy about it."

"It's cool then so I don't need to worry about you, what are you bringing for me tomorrow because you know I am broke?"

I was not even surprised by what came out of her mouth. I was used to expecting the unexpected from her.

"Do not even insult me, listen am I picking you up or we are meeting at the venue tomorrow?"

"Why would you ask me such a question? You know I do not have a car and Alfredo is going there with some of her colleagues because she's staying on the other side of town. Yes, you may come and pick me up."

I had to ask because I didn't want to fight with Samantha fighting with Samantha will be calling a day of shouting, she was going to shout at me the whole day so I didn't want to subject myself to that.

My excitement for this tournament was not that good because I was expected to have a partner but I didn't have one, so I was going to just look at others competing in pairs.

"I need to pay you for being my designated driver."

I knew she was going to say something, but I never thought she was going to say that I just laughed at her.

"Do you ever run out of things to say or do you have a power bank full of things to say?"

It was her turn to laugh at me.

"I do not run out of things to say. I used to hear my parents say that I was early to talk than when I was doing anything else."

"Alright, it now makes sense."

She playfully hit me. It would not be a journey without her playing music. She played Leslie Moyo her favourite. I wasn't a

music person but her songs made me fall in love with her as Samantha always sang along to her songs. She has an angelic voice.

"There are too many people today where are these people coming from what is happening or are we at the wrong venue?"

Samantha beat me to it

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I was about to say the same thing maybe we were at the wrong place. Before she could even say a word I saw Mr. Manager.

"Oh shiz niz, we are in the right place look at Mr. Jere."

I said shocked.

"This is the first, wonders never cease. You know, since you started working with us this person has been acting weird are you the one who asked him to come?"

"Come on babe, I am as clueless as you are, and don't start imagining things here. Your imagination is always running wild, so control it." She laughed without looking at me, but at the crowd. I guess she was looking for Mr. Hillary.

I parked where others had parked and we joined the rest of the teams. Mr. Manager came to me smiling I was shocked.

"I heard you do not have a partner, so I came to your rescue."

He flashed me his handsome smile and I couldn't even answer him. I looked at him as if he had horns. He cleared his throat with his smile still plastered on his face.

"This is the part where you are supposed to say thank you, you helped me I was going to be lonely."

I didn't want to even laugh but the way he tried to imitate my voice was so funny I laughed hard. His sense of humour never left the dryness in it.

"I do not even speak like that, why are you imitating my voice so ugly."

"I tried, so what do you say new partner? I know most of the people are shocked that I'm here but I want to make sure that by the end of the year we win this thing together partner, what do you say?"

I was so sure that I had become mute that I just shook my head in agreement. I would not be alone because the competition was stiff, and I knew Samantha was going to say something about it because she was so competitive.

I asked to be excused as I rushed to the female bathroom because I didn't know what to say to him when I was about to go out Samantha came to me running.

"Please tell me everything, I saw you guys standing there for quite a long time. Do not even leave any details because I

counted the seconds you spent with him, they were more than expected."

I was even wondering who was going to kill me first Samantha or the manager. They were making me get grey hair.

"There's nothing much to tell except that I have a new partner and brace yourself you have competition in your hands."

I expected someone that will be angry or throw a tantrum I was so surprised when she jumped up and down screaming her lungs out.

"You see, I told you the Ice King was into something I can't name. Look at him now coming for competitions all because of you to just become your partner, you changed him please give me what you're using please, please, please, please."

From that day and in the future, I concluded Samantha was one unique person no one could change or no one can live up to.

"I give up on you I expected you to be angry that you have competition in your hands."

"Love or sports, I would rather choose love."

"Stop daydreaming, there's no love lost here. Let us go before they send a search party for us."

I laughed, pulling her out of the bathroom and going to the fields where everyone had gathered.

To my surprise, I enjoy the day and Chisomo was so competitive. For your safety please do not ask me when we graduated from Mr. Manager and Mr. Jere to Chisomo.

We might have lost two games, but we were competitive and we had fun more than expected. I saw the side of him I didn't know existed he was so fun he smiled a lot even people from the office commented that he was smiling.

When I got to the office on Monday everyone was talking about the weekend, people were so perplexed. Questions going around the office were that 'they couldn't even ask Chisomo in person whether he was going to continue coming to the events or it was just a once-off thing.

I didn't even want to ask him I avoided him because the contract had not started it was easy to do so.

Over the weekend, my sister was going to come home to discuss a decision for the orphanage. She was so scared to tell the parents, and I said I was going to help her with that. I was in the kitchen warming my food and making tea when a voice came through.

"So, you think you're better than all of us here?"

What the...

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"Excuse me, what did you just say please say it again I didn't hear you clearly."

That was a total lie I had heard her clearly and then I just wanted her to repeat so that I can breathe and gather my thoughts to answer her.

"I'm saying who do you think you are? You come here you, find everything intact but you change people and you change how things have been done before."

"Listen, Alfred please do not test me, I"

"My name is Alfredo, not Alfred."

"It doesn't matter to me I don't care what your name is, it might as well be afraid. I am doing what I am paid to do here. I do not know what you are talking about, what do you want specifically from me? So that at least I can answer you clearly what do you say you want from me?"

I didn't want to be rude I was not a rude person but something inside me was eating me alive I was boiling I could even smell the heat emanating from my intestines coming out to boil her too.

She hesitated before answering me.

"Samantha is my friend, and we had been friends forever so now I am surprised that every time she talks about you, Maya this Maya that."

"Be my guest, I didn't come here to take anyone's friend, if you haven't noticed Samantha love and talks to everyone is Samantha's friend so I do not know that someone that is supposed to be designated to you only. Now that you've mentioned it I will stay away from your Samantha and do my job as I am employed here to do my job."

"You are here, I was looking for you everywhere Maya. You have mail they want an urgent reply."

Entered Samantha in the kitchen as vibrant as she always was. I looked at her and I felt sorry for her she didn't know anything and she was going to be caught in between.

"Ok my darling I am going there but before I go please get this. Alfredo is saying you mustn't talk to me so I do not know what is your take on that. She said you are friends and I'm not supposed to be your friend I do not know I thought everyone talked to everyone here. It is what I do every day."

She was surprised I think if she was light in complexion we were going to see veins popping out and that colour changing from her forehead and her cheeks.

"I didn't say that I was just..."

She couldn't even go further we were both looking at her waiting for answers I would not budge I wanted her to clarify that and we get over it once and for all.

"Alfredo, what is going on? I thought you were through about these petty issues, I thought you know me better. I do not even have a best friend everyone in this office is my friend, so why would you want me to fight with other people I work with?"

Oh, so that was not the first time she was doing this. I was surprised I would not keep her as a friend or as close. So I was going to cut her off my life because I didn't want drama but Samantha being Samantha, was a sweet soul she could not carry or she didn't have it in her to cut people off much I knew about her and I admired her for that.

"I am so sorry about that I was just asking her and it will not happen again, I'm so sorry."

She was like a chicken that was hit by a storm, not even a storm, but a tornado. I just looked up and turned, going back to the offices. I looked at Samantha and just took my food and went outside I look back and said my apologies to her and moved to my office.

I didn't see Samantha for the rest of the week I did not see her past or talk there because I was busy but she was still the same old Samantha.

I was anxious about the weekend with my sister, she called me before coming to my place she wanted me to go with her because she was nervous.

"Please do not be nervous, you worry too much this day is going to be a success if they do not understand, for now, we leave them to think about it. Once they have thought about it, then we will call back again and ask for their permission.

Remember, right now you are informing them after informing them, then you wait for their response. After their response and then you ask for their permission to do this once you ask for their permission they will feel involved. On the other hand, you do not seem to disrespect them when you are including them in your plan, which is very good because they will feel important and appreciated that you included them in your plans."

"I feel better already that I'm going with you. I know I spoke to my brother during the week he was reluctant to accept the idea but he told me he was proud that I'm thinking of such an idea."

"You see, not all is lost, and besides people are reluctant to change this is unusual because usually the society will expect you to have your kids and husband then you live happily ever after. They do not think about other families what they are doing what they're going through, if they are coping, if the children that have Education, have food

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you think beyond the box."

"Ok let us go let us do this thing."

To tell the truth, I was also nervous because this was a huge mountain to climb and I wasn't even sure what she was going to use whether she was going to use a hand to climb around or she was going to use the climbing tools or she was just going to look at the mountain and pray for it to move on its own.

I laughed at myself thinking of the impossible and thinking of the things that will never happen in real life but I was glad that my sister was going to do this and I was going to be living in an era where people were thinking about other people, not themselves only.

"So you will not get married, you want to have your children through other people's children."

We looked at each other as we both didn't expect that from my father, from my mother yes we expected something like that.

"Adada, I love children but I cannot have someone with anyone. I am planning this so I can work hard, I want to help as many children as possible. The moment I have biological children it will be difficult for me to start this organisation and it will be difficult for me to juggle. I am so sorry if I'm a disappointment

to you but it is a path that God has chosen for me. I am planning on following it and I need you to understand me."

"Let us discuss this later on."

"Amama, nkhukhumba kuti mundovwire, yowoyani na dada. (Mother, please I need your help, talk to father.)"

"Please let your father think about this do not pressurise him. I know he's going to come around. I know I was against the idea of you not getting married, but what you want to do is a good initiative. I am now warming up to the idea of you having this orphanage, rather than you going to get married. Do not pressure your father I will talk to him."

My father had gone to the bathroom, so we didn't know whether he was going to think about it or he just wanted to dismiss us. If we were looking at him, at least to see his facial expression. I felt sorry for my sister but I would not let this one lay unsolved. I was going to come back and talk to my father.

"Thank you, mother for this I hope you will get through to him as I need this so much."

She said, excusing herself and going to the car.

"Alright mother, I'll see you when I come back. I'm going to come back and talk to him on her behalf because this is a good initiative and if she misses this opportunity, she will not be happy. Are you going to be happy when she's not happy?"

I know it sounded like blackmail but I wanted to make sure that my mother talked to my father. She was the one who had the power to change his mind. My sister had gone ahead, and she was already in the car. Mother took my hands in hers and looked at me.

"I will try, please take care of her. I know she worries sometimes. She is my daughter, although she doesn't want to ask for help. She will need your help, please protect her as much as you protect your brother."

Mother was right she worried too much.

"Do not worry I will come and talk to Adada and at least as our mother you are on our side so I will try to relax and beg father on her behalf."

"Okay, go well my children, and worry less."

I said my goodbyes and went to the car.

"All will be well do not worry too much. Soon things will fall into place you will see. Change is hard to embrace so we need to be patient with people who are reluctant to change."

"Surprisingly, I'm not even mad, I expected that. I don't know maybe I felt it in my blood that way this was going to be hard for people to discuss. I expected people to receive it with hostility because it's new and it's impossible to think of."

"It is not possible to take it to people. It's just that some people still think about the backward way of life and they don't want to embrace change. Remember, some celebrities come to Malawi to adopt children. What did they say, some people were talking bad about it they said that those kids are going to be cut and killed. They said those kids were going to be used for rituals look now they're living their lives in different countries."

She looked at me and smiled even though the smile was not as wide as I expected it will be.

"Thank you for the talk I'm not giving up and I will never give up I will try until they give me the blessings and then I will open that orphanage."

I was already planning on confronting my father. Not confronting but at least speaking to him and encouraging him to see through our eyes.

Alfredo did not say anything after that day. I do not know, maybe they talked with Samantha. I think they might have talked because after some time she came and apologised. After a while, things settle down I didn't care about her she didn't care about me. We moved on but from time to time we could talk. Samantha was caught in between but she knew how to juggle.

Let me say we were civil towards each other we didn't have scribbles but I didn't ask her. At one time, I made Samantha aware that I did not trust her friend she just laughed it off and said I am being petty. I didn't want to pursue it because I would not fight with Samantha over that.

One cold afternoon we were eating, so she brought tea for Samantha and I. Samantha, being forward took my teacup and thought it was bigger than hers.

After two sips, Alfredo got back and looked like she has seen a ghost. We just saw the cup from her had hit the ground so fast.

“No, do not. That is not your tea, Samantha. What have you done?”

What the...

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Samantha started coughing I stopped looking at Alfredo and looked at the coughing Samantha.

"What is going on Samantha please breathe, please breathe."

I didn't even want to put two and two together. All I knew was something was amiss. I just went to the manager's office.

"Chisomo, please come and help us around, something is wrong with Samantha, please help me. I want to take her to the hospital, I think Alfredo did something to the tea that was meant for me. Come quickly, please stop what you doing we do not have time."

I didn't even want to put a full stop to my sentences. I just wanted him to help me I look at him and I thought he was being slow for me I pushed him crying but he was shocked to see tears that were gushing out without stopping.

"What is going on Mayamiko, please breathe?"

"I do not have time to breathe why are you telling me to breathe just run and come after me. We cannot wait for help we need to rush, please come with me if you can drive I will be happy."

When I go to the kitchen Alfredo was kneeling next to Samantha, she was crying I just pushed her.

"Stop pretending and leave us, why are you doing this? Why did you have to do this to an innocent person? Please, leave don't pretend, and stop crying. You are not crying those are crocodile tears, you're not crying you're just pretending."

I was pushing her so hard that Mr. Jere was surprised. I didn't have time to explain.

"Please carry her," I said to Chisomo with begging eyes.

He quickly lifted Samantha who was drifting on and off consciousness.

"You cannot drive in your state, please go back and sit with her while I drive. Where are we taking her?"

"Just drive to the nearest hospital I do not care which hospital as long as she gets some help because we cannot be too late."

"Tell me what happened?"

I couldn't even think or talk, I had mucus coming from my nose, tears gushing out as if they opened the taps of Heaven. He just passed his handkerchief to me I took it and wiped the tears, it smelt so good.

Before I knew it we were in front of Kamuzu Central Hospital. I liked the way the hospital workers rushed to you in the ER when you are in a crisis this is how they did the flocking to us because I was crying and Chisomo was shouting.

They helped us while asking some questions about what took place. Some answers I didn't have but some I could answer. I think her family was going to answer about her medical history as they were on their way to the hospital. The manager had called our boss on our way to the hospital to tell her family about the predicament.

They left us in the reception area while they went to attend to her.

I was taken back to Asante's situation. I think it was safe to say from that day going forward I hated hospitals. I didn't want to come back to any hospital for any other reason.

I sat down on the bench, and the bench was so cold but it didn't matter. People look at us when we got in because of the drama but I didn't care about them I only cared about Samantha.

"Please do not blame yourself, this is not your fault. Samantha is going to be okay the doctors are working on her now."

He knelt in front of me and wiped my tears. I felt some rush down my spine.

"But this is all my fault that tea was meant for me and Samantha took the cup."

"Alfredo wanted to cause harm to you so it was diverted to Samantha it is not your fault. It is her fault. Hey, hey, look at me, look at me dammit, do not blame yourself okay."

The command in his voice made me look up. He cupped my face with both his hand and drew my face to his and look me in the eye. I couldn't even look aside as my face was cupped. He had passion in his eyes and I was drawn to his eyes, his lips came crashing into mine and I was thrown into a world that I'd never known before. Never in my life was I kissed like that, I thought I had felt all my feelings with Joseph but this was different this was beyond my imagination.

After what seemed like a lifetime and I was floating between heaven and earth, he stopped the kiss and looked at me.

"I am so sorry about that I just wanted you to stop blaming yourself and stop panicking."

Apologising to me meant that it was a mistake but to me, it felt like it was not a mistake at all. I did something that I thought I will never do in my life. I never thought I'll throw myself at him but those lips were so good I had to taste them again. It was my turn to cup his face and kiss him back.

The anger and the frustration in the kiss were so much that I didn't even know where to hide after that.

"I need the eeerrr, no I need the bathroom."

I ran towards the sign of the bathrooms

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I didn't want to look back because I was going to make a mistake and go back to kiss him again.

I rebuked myself for feeling that way when Samantha was lying in a hospital bed. When I got into the bathroom I looked at myself in the mirror and smile it had been a long since I felt like that in a matter of fact I had never felt that way before. I splashed myself with water then I used his handkerchief, I held onto it as if my life depended on it.

When I went back to where I was I had already calmed down and he was up pacing.

"Any word from the doctor?"

I avoided eye contact but as he came closer to me, he made sure that I'm looking into his eyes.

"Please don't stress because when you are stressing too much like this I am stressing as well. I do not want to see you getting old because of things you didn't do."

He said it's so free it hit my heart I was scared.

"Darling, look at me please."

He said 'darling and please' which melted my heart he was the man after my dreams. I cursed for thinking that.

Before I could say anything the doctor came to us carrying a file.

"Samantha's family, are you her family."

"Please doctor, tell us the most important things the family is coming but she was poisoned at work we are her co-worker. The poison was meant for me but she ingested it."

"Are you sure it was poison because we cannot see it so which means if it's poison it is untraceable but she is showing signs of stroke?"

"Oh my God."

"But now that we know there was poison in her food, we will try by all means to sewer whatever fluids are in her body. Thank you very much, for now, she is in a critical condition we do not know whether she will come out of the coma or not."

"Coma, oh my Lord."

That word again I think was going to haunt me for the rest of my life. Why were people that I loved forever in a coma? I looked at Chisomo with tears running down my cheeks I just went to his chest and cried.

"Okay if you'll excuse me, I am going to run some tests. I will tell the family the rest of the news because they need to know her condition."

"Thank you very much doctor for now what should we do, should we wait or should we go?"

Mr. Jerry was the only one who was talking because I was very shaken.

As I was standing there my uncle's words came to life. I should have listened to him when he told me that people are not supposed to be trusted around me. I let my guard down and look what Alfredo did and imagine if Samantha didn't take my cup? What was going to happen, I was going to be dead. I don't think that they would have noticed I was poisoned. I thought quickly when I saw her pale and shouting at Samantha.

"I think we need to go back to work or else they will send a search party for us."

"I do not think I will manage to go back to work I'm not feeling well now."

"Do not blame yourself for this can we go to the office and solve this because I think the boss is there already I called him remember he said to call and check on the things at work."

His concern moved me he was so soft spoken it was so heartwarming to me.

"I'll go to work take my things then check on the situation but I doubt that I will manage to carry myself through. I was hoping you will take me home and then bring my car later or send somebody to bring it."

He smiled a little and looked at me.

"Do you trust me with your car? You don't think I will steal it or something?"

I laughed at him at least he gave me something to laugh about I was so tense.

"We work together remember so if you steal it I'm going to find you and catch you, so don't worry."

"I am going to steal it then because you are going to come to my place looking for me then you will find out where I'm staying."

I laughed at this man who wanted to lure me to his place. I was not going to go there I just pinched him and left for the car.

"I know your type you want me to come to your place so you will take advantage of me that is not going to happen."

"Why did you pinch me, it's so sore I think I need a doctor, where's the doctor?"

"What are you going to tell the doctor because I just pinched you a little?"

"I will tell the doctor that I was abused by a tiny woman."

I looked at him and burst out with laughter.

"Please take me home I just want to bath and sleep I want to remove this nightmare from my mind."

"Yes ma'am,"

The drive to my place was silent I was busy thinking in my mind and busy trying to piece the puzzle of the day. I was even scared to go back to work I didn't know how to handle the situation I think I needed to take a few days off work.

I was going to go home and tell my parents whatever happened because they were going to learn about it sooner or later.

The only person I was thinking of was my friend I wanted to call her after calling her I was going to call my uncle.

I didn't want him to know my place but then I didn't have any choice he had to take me home. I didn't have anyone to take me home. I would have called my mother but she was at work even my father was at work.

"Here we go, I think I did my job diligently I need to be rewarded handsomely."

I had that upsetting feeling in my stomach, it was not upsetting of feeling sick, it was upsetting filled with butterflies.

"You will call me when you need help you won't hesitate won't you?"

I looked at him and his eyes were full of passion. I didn't know what to say or what to do with myself because these feelings were so foreign that I had never felt with Joseph. You know

that feeling when you feel like you're going to feel a feeling that you feel like you've never felt that feeling before? I know I'm not making sense but it was making sense to me I had that feeling in my stomach.

"Thank you for bringing me home you will let me know when you're bringing my car so that at least I'll be awake by then."

"Come here," I didn't need to be asked twice I went into his arms and I rested there.

"Do not stress too much because it is not good for your health."

After saying those words, he brushed my hair and I look up at him without warning his lips smashed on mine again. This time I was the first one to withdraw, I looked at him and thanked him then I left him in the car.

I always had a spare key under the flowerpot. When I got into the house, I locked it and sat down on the floor.

"What are you doing Maya because this is dangerous what you are doing now is going to lead to heartbreak?"

"Miko, I need to live a little, I lived my life for one man who didn't appreciate me so why are you questioning Maya?"

If my parents saw me talking to myself they were going to take me to an asylum because I sounded like a fool. I laughed at

myself because I was not going to think about that I was only worried about Samantha.

I took a bath and slept I didn't want to dream I just wanted to close out all my dreams. I wanted to be free and forget about the horror that happened that day.

It was going to be impossible to call as I left my phone in my bag at the office.

I knew Chisomo was going to bring my things, so I was not worried. I just got inside the blankets and slept.

I woke up when there was a banging on the door, as if the person on the other side was impatient. I was expecting Chisomo, so I opened expecting him.

When I opened the door, then boooom...

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"Officers, how may I help you."

To say I was shaken would be an understatement. I have never seen the police in my house in my life. Worse, I was renting, so I was wondering how my landlord was going to feel about that. What did they want?

"Are you Mayamiko Nyirenda?"

"Yes, officer, that is me."

The other officers looked at me with so much hate, I was wondering what was going on I was shaking in my boots.

"Madam Nyirenda, you are under arrest for the assault of Miss Alfredo who laid the charges. I would like to take you to the police station so that we get your statement you have the right to remain silent....."

I didn't hear the rest it was like I was in the movie. I had seen that happening in movies I didn't think that it was going to happen to me worse in Africa. I thought in Africa they just take you and throw you into jail they didn't read your rights for you.

What have I done to this girl for her to hate me so much she's the one who wanted to poison me and then she went ahead to the cops and opened a case of assault against me?

"Officer, I didn't touch her she was the one who tried to kill me by putting poison in my tea unfortunately that tea was drunk by Samantha, who I was protecting. I didn't even touch her I only pushed her."

"So you admit to the assault once you push her it means that you assaulted her?"

Why did I even open my mouth? Can you just imagine the nerve of that girl, what did she want from me. I was shaking I didn't know what to do I didn't even have my phone to call my family.

"But I"

"Let us go, madam."

The gentleman who said that was so calm and he didn't want to cuff me but the other one looked at me and removed his cuffs.

I was renting in somebody's yard so there were other rooms there with other tenants. At least they allowed me to lock my door, although I was not worried because it was safe where I was staying. When we were leaving the compound, I saw Chisomo coming.

He just parked behind their cars and came running to me. I had tears in my eyes I just said, "please call my parents and follow me to the police station."

"What is happening officer what is going on, asir, please talk to me?"

Worry was also written all over his voice I could see that he didn't know what to do or what to say.

"Just call my parents and come with them, please. Call my sister as well its writer 'big sis'; don't call my brother he will panic."

I said in a begging tone, I didn't know what to do, I didn't know what to say I was just praying and hoping that I was going to be fine.

"Okay, I am right behind you."

I didn't want to argue, I just got inside the police car it was my first time in a police car.

While in the car, I was retracing my step, trying to find out what I did wrong, what I did to offend Alfredo. I'd never seen somebody who would just hate you for being you and for existing. I was supposed to remove myself from that naive world that I was living in because I knew my former mother-in-law hated me for being me. I was still debating I didn't even realise that the car had come to a halt.

"Come madam, let's go."

I could hear them talking about me but I didn't want to pay much attention because people were entitled to their opinion. I

would not talk back at them because they had their opinion based on what Alfredo told them. Sometimes our side of the story is not needed because people had concluded that once you try to express your feelings and try to tell them who you are and what your character tells, the more they don't believe you. After all, they are thinking you are trying to cover up for something. I would not tell them while they were going to hear from my lawyer because I was crossing my fingers that my sister called a lawyer for me.

I was taken into an interrogation room it was my first time there but not that bad.

"Good evening madam how are you? My name is detective Kennedy...."

I didn't hear the rest I was looking at him, like, this was real they were detectives in Malawi I thought those things happened in movies and series, was I dreaming? Besides, did I do a big crime that needed a detective?

"Sorry detective, did you know I didn't do anything, and it is not like it's so big that it will need a detective?"

"I am so sorry ma'am but my job description requires me to handle each case the same way when I'm called to check on something. I do as I am told if we take some cases lightly and some cases seriously then it would be unfair. The law requires

us to be fair and just. Remember, everyone pays taxes so when you pay taxes and reported a crime, then they don't take it seriously how are you going to feel?"

He was so calm, and it made me feel bad for asking something like that. He was telling the truth because Alfredo had opened the case so it was my duty to tell the side of the story so that they will complete the investigation.

"Okay thank you, sir, I hear you, so"

Before I could finish my line of questioning, that door opened, and they entered my sister with a gentleman behind her.

"Detective Kennedy, we meet again. I hope you are not interrogating my sister without a lawyer."

I was so surprised he looked from me to my sister and then back at me again. His face turned pale as if he had seen a ghost.

"Judge Nyirenda, I didn't know that this is your sister."

"Even if this was not my sister, you may not interrogate somebody without a lawyer you should know better by now."

"I haven't even started interrogating her, you can ask her. Did I interrogate you, miss?"

He was a nice guy

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and I didn't want to get him into trouble because of the look on his face and I didn't want anything to happen to him.

Call me naive but I didn't want to be like Alfredo and put people who were innocent into unnecessary trouble so I shook my head 'no'.

"Thank you for professionalism because I was going to put you in trouble for what you had done so now can I speak to my sister with her lawyer present?"

"Of course, not a problem at all we will be watching from the other side you know the drill."

"I wouldn't expect less from you, thank you very much you can now excuse us."

At least they had removed my handcuffs, so I stood went to my sister's embrace and cried.

"What is going on?"

I sat down and told her everything. The lawyer had introduced himself. He was jotting down every detail.

"I don't think there's much of a case here, I can get this case thrown out this is not even a case. What we can do is counter sue. We open a case so that they investigate the poisoning case, I hope the doctor finds traces of the poison and I hope cup is still in the office."

"I hope so too because we do not have a cleaner for this coming weeks, she is on leave we are cleaning our dishes ourselves, I hope she didn't clean that cup."

"Is there anyone who you can check for you in the meantime so that at least we have the evidence ready?"

"That won't be a problem the manager can do that and he was supposed to bring my car."

"Yes, he did, he picked me up from my place. I had to drop him off at work so that he picks up his car, then I drove your car to this place because I'm going to be driving you back home."

"Thank you very much I will call him. Are you sure that I will not sleep in jail today?"

"No, you will not sleep here, and please believe me. This Alfredo person we are opening a case and we are going through with this case. I hope she has a wonderful lawyer, a damn good lawyer and I hope they will not put your case in my courtroom because I'm going to crush her till she remembers who she messed up with. She messed with the wrong family and for the wrong reasons. I do not know what her reasons are and I do not know what the endgame is, I do not care, what I want is for her to stop messing with the wrong people."

My sister was so angry I didn't even want to say anything I would not stop her from doing what she was going to do

because I was tired of that woman. She said something to the lawyer they were talking about the legal terms I didn't know and I just wanted to go to my bed and sleep. I had flashbacks of the police coming to pick me up I was not going back to my place. I was going to go to my mother's place and stay there until I was okay, or until the case was over so that I had people I love around me.

"I'll be going out now, so please give the detective all the information that he needs, everything out of your chest. We are going to fix your paperwork, then we're going home."

They left and while I was waiting for the detective to come back, I was wondering what was going to happen if I didn't have a family that was so supportive or if I was just clueless about the law with no inside help. Legal terms they were using, and they knew I didn't even know how I was going to get out of that. I hated Alfredo I know hate was a strong word that is how I felt at that moment.

After they went out, the detective came and took my statement and everything I said was written. Then I went to the front desk and join my family I was so emotional. I went into my mother's arms.

From there, no one talked we drove home, my parents took their car and my brother was there too I was surprised I told

him not to call him. Or maybe Chisomo told them but they didn't listen.

The following day I called the manager, telling him I would not come to the office. I wanted to spend the day at my mother's house and not go to my place.

My boss called and gave me a few days off so I was off. When I got back to work, I was still traumatized, but I did some work.

Alfredo was not there, and I didn't even want to find out what happened to her.

Samantha was getting better there was so much improvement. The lab results came, and they found the traces of poison which she thought were untraceable. When we told the doctor, he had to look for a better way to test the blood. I think she had somebody in the medical field who told them that the blood work can sometimes hide the poison.

Unfortunately for her, every year or every time improved ways in our health system and education system were discovered. She didn't know about the new technology where they could separate the blood from other fluids and then test them separately.

The manager was not around as well he had gone for a meeting so I was in my office the whole time.

"Oh, so this is where you are hiding I thought you didn't come to work today, how are you?"

I almost jumped from my chair because of fright. I held my chest as it was tightening up.

"Hey, hey, I am so sorry I didn't want to scare you. Come here," he quickly approached me.

"I know you're still traumatized, but it's just me I was wondering why you're still here because knock-off time was 30 minutes ago everyone is gone."

"I am so sorry I bet I still don't know how to react, this thing has been traumatic to me but I'll get there."

"Come here, I do not want to see you like this, I mean, to see you vulnerable."

He cupped my face and before I knew it his lips were on mine, I didn't want to resist this felt so, good yet it was wrong at the same time way in the office and my office was filled with glass.

"Wait what we are doing is so wrong we are just reacting to a traumatic event that we are going through these feelings are not real."

I tried to push him away from me but he resisted and looked deep into my eyes, his eyes were filled with passion and I know he could not fake that.

"These feelings have been with me since the day I first met you, there are not fake feelings. These are my feelings and are going to be my feelings for years to come, I love you Mayamiko."

I coughed because I didn't know what to say this was news to me. I knew he might have been telling the truth but there was something that made me not believe him I do not know why or was it because of the relationship that I had with Joseph that made me so sceptical.

"I know you don't believe me, but please give me a chance to show you I can show you easily."

"I....."

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"I am coming from a broken relationship, a broken marriage; I don't think I am ready for any relationship right now."

I was being honest because I knew I would not be ready for any relationship soon. I was so emotional, I was traumatized because of Alfredo, my mind, my feelings and my state of being were in different places at the same time.

"Okay, I have an idea let us not call it a relationship or give it a name."

I looked at him confused and he was serious he smiled. His smile always made me feel some things in my stomach; I wondered why he didn't smile often because I was going to be a cheerful person.

"I do not know what you're going to say but I'm listening, please enlighten me."

"Let us just go with the flow and call it our 'Stolen Moments', on these stolen moments we should get to know each other even if it's not deep just the little things you want to throw in the conversation so that I know you. We will get there, I mean to the bigger things later on. I'm open to telling you about my life if you don't want to know about my love for you then it's fine we can just have a list of things to talk about and have fun."

I looked outside and smiled, I didn't want him to see how excited I was I had tried nothing fun in my life. I never had such a feeling in my life, I just wanted to feel or have such a relationship that was just going nowhere lots of fun. It was not a bad idea to get to know each other. With Joseph and my marriage, there was no fun, and it ended badly.

"Let me think about it or let me say when Samantha wakes up and this traumatic event is behind us I will think about it. We will come back to the drawing board and see if we can carry on or not because now I'm filled with emotions that I cannot control and emotions that I don't think are good for my decision-making. I dislike deciding under pressure because they turn out to be the worst. "

"Fair enough, at least you're not dismissing the whole idea, so I am game. To be clear about something, I'm not a man who plays games. I am clear about my intentions, remember the last time when I wanted to take you for lunch or dinner I wanted to make my intentions known but I felt like it was prematurely and I didn't pursue it I knew you would not believe me."

I should have known because I feel like a bad person in his eyes but it was all in the past I was going to look forward to the future. While I was sitting in there, a phone call came through I took it quickly because it was the hospital they told me to come because they couldn't reach the family. My number was down

there because I am the one who took her to the hospital and I filled in the paperwork.

"What is wrong, who was that on the phone?"

"The hospital just called I need to run to the hospital now."

"I am right behind you. I'm coming with you, we need to find out what is going on. Let's hope it's not bad news."

I didn't have time to reply to his statement, what I did was, I just continued and took my things, and rushed to the car. He knew where the hospital was then he knew where to find me.

On my way to the hospital, I was worried I was thinking it was bad news or maybe something had happened to Samantha, I was panicking.

When I got there, the doctor greeted me with a smile which only meant good news.

"I was called by the hospital, they said I must come so I wanted to ask what is going on? What is going on with Samantha?"

"You can relax now, come. Follow me, let's go to her room."

I was happily following him when Chisomo came through running. He held my hand and squeezed it as a sign to keep me calm.

"Maya, is everything okay, what is going on? I also tried to reach her family but they are unreachable let's hope we can pass by the house when we are done here."

He said it in a whisper so that the doctor could not hear.

"Thank you very much let's just follow the doctor and see what is happening."

I whispered back. We followed the doctor to her room, it was scary, but I was relieved that it was not bad news at last.

When we got into Samantha's room, she was sitting up straight, smiling alone on her phone.

I wondered who brought her phone to the hospital. Then I remembered her parents were always there with her little brother.

"Are you in a hospital or you're on your holiday? Look at you glowing as if you are coming from a holiday resort."

I said, rushing to her as she stopped what she was doing and smile. I went for an embrace.

"For someone who's coming from the dead, you look so lovely and so rested."

Chisomo said, going to the other side of the bed and fixing the blankets. He had a caring nature that I discovered and I wanted to know him better and I thought I would want to.

"It is good to see you two, at least a face that I know. I was tired of hearing my mother's voice telling me to wake up, I could hear it from a distance."

"So you were going to the other side, please tell me how did it feel? I want to be prepared just in case I go there as well."

I asked because I always heard stories about seeing the light when you are going to the other side

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or seeing your life flash before your eyes. Looking at what was happening when you were younger so I wanted to hear from her. Chisomo gave me a death stare but I ignored him as I was joking with Samantha.

"Do not get carried away, I know what you're asking. I don't know what happened I only felt the pain I was in. I was in so much pain that I didn't even think about that then it was light out. I only woke up and when I heard my mother's voice speaking to me, I was up but I couldn't open my eyes so hence I am saying I don't know what happened between the time I was poisoned and the day my mother's voice woke me up. So please tell me what is going on why am I in the hospital, why was I poisoned?"

The sadness in her voice made me feel sorry for her because I knew she was feeling bad about allowing Alfredo into her life. I didn't want her to beat herself up for someone else's sins.

"The important part of this is that you're still alive and fresh, please let's not talk about depressing news right now. We will have time to sit down and talk about it later on when you are out of this place. All I know is that it was meant for me and you took my tea so I'm the one who is supposed to be laying there or I was going to be dead, who knows."

"Maya is right, please let us focus on your recovery, and the rest we'll see later. So what is the doctor saying when are you leaving this place I bet your parents are missing you? I know this because the office is not the same without you."

Chisomo said to her, smiling.

"Talking about missing me, I think they miss me more than I thought they would because they're gone already to prepare my room."

She laughed, looking at her phone and then back at us.

"We missed you as well, work was not the same without you so you better get out of here and come and join us at work so that we can talk."

Chisomo was busy on his phone I think he was giving us girls time to catch up.

"Sorry to ask you this, I know it's sensitive but is Alfredo at work I want to ask her something, there are so many answers that I need from her."

"I do not know, I only came back today at work so I will be lying if I say anything. I didn't even ask anyone because I was buried in my office because of paperwork. I was given a week off, but I asked for another week as I was still unwell."

"And I don't know why she did it I hope I'll get the answers, okay let's not talk about this, please tell me what is happening between you and...."

She asked, stretching her eyes and her forehead, pointing at Chisomo who was busy on his phone.

"Please do not have any ideas yet again, concentrate on getting better and we'll talk. Do not even ask me questions I do not have answers to."

"Yes, yes, I knew it, that smile says it all, I knew it."

"What are you talking about, you knew what? What is going on?"

"Nothing, Mr. Jere, we were only talking about girl stuff, you don't need to worry yourself about anything continue with your phone there and talk to you ladies."

Samantha said that casually and joking but Mr. Jere looked at her and had a frown because he was scared I would think that he had ladies on the phone. Even if he was talking to ladies on the phone, whose business was it? To me, it was his business somehow I didn't have the right to say anything, but I laughed at her statement.

"I'm not talking to ladies on my phone and I do not have ladies' numbers on my phone."

He said defensively, and I laughed.

"Do not be defensive I am just kidding, besides you are allowed to have female friends we all have friends from different colours and different sex so what is wrong with that."

Chisomo needed to know Samantha very well by now. She was never serious so to her, it was just a joke but he took it seriously and I think he was defensive because he thought he was going to lose a chance of me going out with him.

"I will leave you two ladies to it then so that you won't be offended by my behaviour on the phone while I am here with you."

He left without waiting for our reply I laughed when he was gone I looked at Samantha and shook my head.

"I'm not staying long as well, remember it's not visiting hours it's late already the doctor was just doing me a favour because I had asked him to update me as soon as you woke up."

"I know, thank you for coming, and thank you for being there for me. I think I will be out of here before you know it."

We said our goodbyes then I went out I was surprised to find that Chisomo was still there.

"What are you still doing here? I thought you had left?"

"I was waiting for you. I wanted to be sure you are safe so I will drive behind you to be sure.

These streets are not safe for a beautiful lady."

I was touched by his concern I just thanked him and went to my car. When I got inside, I just looked at him and admired his gentlemanly nature. It was admirable, he cared, and I blushed after saying that.

True to his word he drove off when I was closing the gate. I was smiling like a retard when I opened the door. The shadow that appeared in front of me scared the hell out of me.

What the

"Come on, you just scared me to death what type of brother are you how did you get inside my house, anyway?"

My brother just laughed at me, dangling the keys in my face.

"I knew you were going to follow in your father and mother's footsteps of leaving the keys under the pot flower. These old habits never die, they are passed from generation to generation. I already have a clue that your kids are going to be leaving the keys under the mat as well. Even your grandkids are going to do that and are going to pass it on to their grandkids, come on it's an old habit that is in our family it will never die. So what's up?"

My brother spoke too casually as if he didn't just scared me to death I was shaking I even almost peed on my pants.

I was so angry that I even hit him playfully on his head.

"Please do not do that you know Samantha is in the hospital and you almost sent me to the same hospital by your scare tactics."

"Sorry I wasn't trying to scare you, I wanted to talk to you and you were taking so long. I had to look for the keys and wait for you inside, I didn't switch on the lights because I thought you were going to be scared and run away before you even come inside the house. Where are you coming from this late I've been

waiting for you for so long I know what time you knock off from work?"

"Oh, so now you are monitoring my movements? That's creepy, find a wife or a girlfriend. When are you getting married? If you marry your wife, at least you have things to do than follow other people's wives."

He laughed at me but I just kept a straight face alone looking at him I saw concern on his eyes.

"Even if I get married, I will not stop being concerned about you. You are the last born, an apple of my parents eyes so to me you are the apple of my eye as well, I need to protect you all the time. You might as well stop saying that you are somebody's wife, you're not married anymore you were married before but you are not married anymore. It was customarily as well you did not even sign at court "

I pinched him and laughed, preparing a meal because I was tired and hungry.

"Are you going to stay for supper because I am hungry and I do not want to eat alone?"

"Yes, please I will stay for dinner and I also wanted to discuss my wedding. I am planning to have a wedding but I don't need a wedding planner because I have two sisters who can sit down with my wife and help her. She wants to do it herself but I want

you to help her, I do not want her to be overwhelmed. I do not want her to overwork and I need the best for her, please do not dispute whatever she wants help her and I know I will pay."

"My brother has money, okay thank you for trusting us with this we will do our best and I will also include Samantha if you do not mind."

"You are including Samantha again, that case is pending, and you were almost killed because of jealousy."

"I will not abandon people I love because of people who are jealousy. I am going to include her and I am also going to include Mphatso."

"Suit yourself then as long as my wife gets what she wants. I let this go for long so I want her to have the best day of her life and I feel ashamed of myself that I let her have two kids while she was staying at home. I am ashamed to be called and man."

I felt sorry for him and I was so touched

"It doesn't matter how many mistakes we make, what matters is what we do after making those mistakes. You manned up and owned up to your mistakes and now what is left is for you to take care of her for the rest of your life. Cherish her as well, she's a good person she deserves to be loved, you are also good to her. You are also a good brother so I wish you all the best, I wish you could love each other till eternity."

"Thank you very much I accept your blessings even if you're not saying that you're giving me your blessing I know you were going to give me your blessings, so thank you very much now let us eat where is the food."

"Come on, I just got home. Start chopping the vegetables for me so that at least I can do it faster."

The room that I was renting was so spacious hence all my things that I got from Blantyre could feed so I didn't even have to separate the anything because I was staying alone that bathroom and the toilet outside.

"I am only helping you to cook because I want to hear what is going on with Samantha and that lady that wanted to kill you. I will not dispute I will help you because I want to hear if there is progress.

"You mean Alfredo

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she made the biggest mistake of her life by opening a case. I think she had a friend there inside the police station who thought that they were going to fake some documentation and then I'll go to jail. Unfortunately for them, they didn't know that technology developed and there are so many things that can be done to separate blood from poison or to separate poisons from blood something like that. I asked the doctor to explain to

me in the layman's term but he couldn't even reach to my understanding lobe."

"Oh, so you have an understanding lobe?"

"You know what I mean, my English bundles just got depleted so I couldn't find a proper word or a proper phrase to use there so yeah this is how that case is going but she messed with the wrong person. I think judge Nyirenda is waiting for her. Even if this case is not going to her courtroom, I think she has friends around who can make things hard for her. I am feeling sorry for her because she had a baby recently. I do not know what she wants her child to think or to grow up like because she cannot go to prison with the child."

"I know you are going to think of dropping the charges for the sake of the child but she didn't think about you. Did she even think about your family how we were going to feel? Did she even think about the surrounding people how they were going to feel at all? Even your boss, did she even think about your boss because it's not about finding a qualified person for the job. It's about finding somebody you can trust, somebody who can carry on the duties brilliantly. Do you know how long it takes for somebody to be trusted in a company and for them to produce results that you have produced for the past years? So she didn't even think about your boss she didn't even think about people around you who loved you, not forgetting my

parents who were going to be heartbroken once you went to prison or once you died."

My brother was getting worked up, and I was scared because he was getting angrier by the minute. I could understand his frustration when he laid it out like that I also thought about it and I realised Alfredo was so selfish because of a simple friendship. Some people created you're so selfish I even don't talk what my aunty said not everyone has good intentions in life so I was going to stay away from people who wanted to harm me how could I have known that Alfredo was that petty.

We stopped talking about Alfredo because I did not want my brother to be angry we started talking about his wedding what he wanted. As much as we were helping his wife, he also needed to be involved in the wedding and he also wanted to do what he loved not what people wanted or what the community wanted.

Before he went to his place, my parents called, and they requested us to be home over the weekend. I was worried that maybe they wanted something serious.

I didn't want to think about it so I rested in the morning I drove to the hospital first before I went to the office.

Mr. Jere summoned me to his office the moment I got to work.

The moment he closed the door behind him he attacked me with a passionate kiss and I was left breathless.

"What is....?"

"Do not think too much, do not talk we said these are stolen moments. I just felt like kissing in the morning. I missed you and do not even say anything I know you are going to dispute this but I missed you. How are you today?"

I was rendered speechless because I was not used to this passionate person. I was used to the one-sided love of my husband. When I said I love you and he will say I love you too, but he never showed affection even when alone he will just hold me and kiss me here and there but not as passionate as Chisomo did.

I looked aside and blushed I wanted to dispute but it felt good and I felt like trying these stolen moments and I was ready to go on the journey although I didn't want to share it with anyone else so that it would last forever.

"You can go back to work and don't forget that the boss is coming today we wanted to learn about the incident and he wanted to know what we need to do as a company because now the case is under investigation. There is nothing he can do from his side except to decide once the police are done with investigation."

"I do not know what they are going to do or say but what I know is that detective Kennedy said we must brace ourselves because it is difficult to prove poisoning but now that she opened the case before I did then things are going to be complicated. I am banking on the lawyer my sister hired and I'm banking on my sister."

"This is a closed and shut case do not worry you didn't do anything you are going to be acquitted."

"I will be beside you all the way, I know you do not want me to show my affection in front of people but I can do it any other way you want it. I want to do this for you I want to be with you even if I have to wait for so long I can wait a lifetime for you."

I didn't know how to reply him I just blushed and looked down there were things I couldn't express myself on. I was still scared at the same time I didn't want to embrace this change but I was thinking of taking it one step at a time it was going to be fine.

I looked at him one last time, then I went to my office. I was blushing all the way to my office.

It was like his kiss was an antidote because I worked so hard that I didn't even see the tea time and lunch time. I had sworn in my life that I would not have in a relationship at work but when I saw Chisomo was serious and he was making me feel young again I thought about it in a different light.

On that particular day before I even went home, he took me into his arms again and gave me a passionate kiss. I had to let go of my fears and allow him to love me the way I was supposed to be loved, so I let it be. The feeling that was over my body was so amazing I would not let that amazing feeling pass me by.

The following morning, I went to the bathroom first because I wanted to compose myself. I wanted to feel loved again, but I was scared so when I went to the bathroom I was gathering my strength up. To at least kiss him back and do something about it. I was inexperienced, but

I knew I could do something about it. To my surprise when I left the bathroom trying to strengthen my skirt a hand pulled me to a handicap bathroom. I was scared at first but when his lips landed on to mine, I felt electric shock, this was a surprise and it was a good surprise never in my life would I thought I will have a passionate kiss in the bathroom or feel so romantic. I was lucky because he had pulled me to the handicap bathroom they where hardly used. They where only use them when we had visitors who were handicap.

"You are making me lose myself you're making me let my guard down."

I was being honest because it was making me experience things that I had never experienced before, I was feeling like my world

was starting and the rest of the life that I have lived it was just a nightmare that had ended.

"You are the one who is rendering me helpless look at what you are doing to me I have never felt like this in so many years you are the first female ever to

... never mind."

I wanted to ask him what he meant, but I didn't get the chance because he kissed me and kiss my forehead afterwards.

"You can go ahead I just want to fix myself."

When I looked at the badge on his trousers, I didn't even look back I was embarrassed but I was excited at the same time. Outside I greeting the cleaner who I just saw coning my direction.

Luck was on my side because she didn't realise what was happening she just rushed to the kitchen to clean.

It was like Chisomo's kisses were urging me to work harder than I was hard-working before. From the time we started these stolen moments I always was looking forward to go to work I was eager for the day because he waited for me either in the parking lot or in the bathroom or in his office he was so spontaneous it made my heart skip a beat.

The way I was glowing even people at work they would ask me what was going on with my life. I will just smile and say I love my job at home I hid it very well because I knew my parents would not allow me to have a relationship not disagree per se but they were going to be worried.

The weekend came, and we went home my sister was the one who drove us because I was at her place on that particular Friday.

On Saturday we woke up early in the morning tired from the all-night movie that she was forcing me to watch. I was glad that we were getting along with my sister, moving to Blantyre had caused a rift between us. I would not do that again I wanted to make sure that my relationship with my sister, my brother and the rest of the family was good because people were unpredictable but family was going to be there forever.

She was more worried about my case than anything else so it was a mission to cheer me up and not think about going to jail. The accusations were so serious hence I needed a lawyer because I didn't know what she was going to bring on the table. I needed to be serious about the case. I needed to brace myself and I needed to be prepared more than ever.

Thank you for the messages I am feeling better. Only waiting for the appointment for the operation.

"You took your precious time coming here and let your mother cook the meals alone. You were supposed to come early in the morning like good women then cook a homely meal so that at least we sit down and devour it."

My dad said that the moment we got inside the house. He was not angry he just smiled at us, we knew that mother loved cooking so we didn't even bother coming early. The other thing was because we were tired from the long night that we had of; movie after movie.

"Unfortunately we didn't take after our parents. I think we were exchanged at the hospital, that we must investigate, please go investigate."

My sister had so many peculiar moments, she took after our father and I looked exactly like our parents somehow. So there was no way that we were switched at the hospital.

Nevertheless, we all laughed at the thought of an insatiable hospital, at least it was smelling delicious in the kitchen.

"Your wife can cook, as much as you can cook at least you chose well. I hope when I get married one day I'll marry a guy who'll know how to cook and he'll teach me how to cook as my parents failed me."

My sister was pulling my dad's leg but he had some glimmer of hope in his eyes thinking that she will get married one day. I knew that he was not going to get his hopes high. He was just smiling for the sake of smiling. We laughed and sat down.

My mother came from the kitchen wiping her hands with her apron, her smile was so wide it could light up the whole of Lilongwe with it.

"You are here, you came, I was thinking that you are not going to come you young people are always all over the place your weekends are filled with so many activities I wonder why we could not do those things we always stayed at home and followed our mother's instructions."

"We cannot blame you mother you grew up in a stone age were not in the Stone Ages anymore so we would rather get takeaways and what your mum is cooking while we go to work."

I said that when I stood up to go and hug her I was the last born of the family so most of the time I was always the first one to rush to my I know it was childish but I needed my mother more than anyone else.

"Maya you are not a baby anymore so you must stop running to your mother all the time. You must go to the kitchen and dish up the food for us."

My brother said sitting close to my father.

"Leave my daughter alone she's coming to her mother you don't like your mother so zip it. Where is your wife to dish up for you and stop abusing my baby?"

I took out my tongue at his for that. We were busy chatting and talking about different things then I helped my mother dish up our lunch.

It was great to be home, that feeling never got old even if we visited countless times it always felt like the time we were growing up but the difference was it was nicer when we visited from time to time.

After our lunch, we had to go outside and sit under our mango tree.

"I called you today because I realise that life is too short. I do not want you to go to jail and I do not want to hold your sister back from her dreams."

We all stared at each other then we looked from mother to father with the thought that maybe he was joking, but he was not joking so from where, I was sitting I could see my sister's reaction. She was as shocked as I was my brother just smiled.

"Nthanda my daughter, this is what we called you when you were young because we knew that you were going to change the world. Please, wherever you go represent our family, do

not let us down. I am letting you know because I know you can do this but if you need any help we are here as your family. Do not hesitate we are going to hold your hand all the way. Your mother convinced me that if we do not support you then who is going to support you. Outsiders are not going to take this thing well but if we support you as a family you are going to manage to go through these tribulations. With your loved one's support, you're going to manage to overcome all obstacles no matter how big they are."

My father was telling the truth we needed to unite as a family so that the outsiders were not going to get into our unified family.

I was the first one to ululate. I know it was not my project but I felt like my parents were supportive and I was glad that they did that for my sister I was over the moon I was even blissful that we could sit down and discuss it further and see how we could help her vision was so deep I didn't know how deep it went up until we sat down as a family it was so huge that I felt proud oozing out of my pores of the body.

"Thank you so much for the support, you are the best father any children could have asked for, I do not know what to do or what I would've done without you. I know my sister doesn't want to talk right now because she's overwhelmed but I'll speak

on her behalf. I know that she is happy and I know that she is already planning on starting as soon as possible."

When I said that, I looked at my brother who was smiling from ear to ear.

"You took the words out of my mouth thank you very much, Adada." My sister said wiping her tears.

"Thank you very much to both of you my parents. I wouldn't have done this without you and because of your guidance and the way we grew up we can manage to do these things all because you gave us the freedom to choose what we wanted to do. I know it was difficult for you to decide to let me do this but I promise that I will see this through and I will not let you down."

We talked about a few things then we moved to the next thing on the agenda I think my brother knew that he needed to sit down with us and we discuss his wedding formally as he was supposed to in the first place. As the date was nearing he needed us to be a united front and plan the wedding.

"While we are on that I would love us to sit down and talk about my wedding I know there are so many things and so many formalities. I left everything to you, father, to take care of everything. I was thinking my sisters with the help of their female friends can help my wife-to-be to plan the wedding.

Remember the brighter colours are the best. I will pitch in here and there and see what I need and what the groomsmen need. I am telling you this that I need your blessings to place this responsibility into their hands."

When he said that he was looking directly at my parents.

"This is a good idea it's going to save you money, besides saving your money you are going to get close because you are going to fight over decisions and you're going to bond over decisions as well. I like this, this is a good initiative thank you very much."

My father had a very wide smile on his face. I loved it when he smiled a lot because he showed so many features and he smiled a lot when he was happy.

"Your father is right you need to bond as siblings

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fighting is inevitable there's nothing you can do, remember even if you're coming from the same parents you fight sometimes. If that is going to strengthen your bond and as people, we are not going to see eye-to-eye sometimes. So please whatever you do, do not spare each other's feelings because good answers spare others' feelings. This is not going to be as you want it to be because you be sparing people's feelings say it as it is and make sure that this wedding is a success."

"We are grateful that our brother saw it fit to help him, he's going to get the best wedding ever. A lawyer that I once worked with told me that they have a magazine in their family so I'll ask him to also help us make it to the cover of the magazine."

I was so surprised that my sister could think about such an idea, that was beautiful it was going to be the wedding of the century. I smiled thinking of the coverage and that this was going to go off the hook. At some point before that my sister was always against love but what she was doing for my brother was beyond our imaginations.

We spent the day with our parents, talking about different things. I didn't even feel the urge to think about the case, I was concerned at first but I knew that whatever was going to happen to me, my family was going to be with me.

Sometimes it doesn't matter how big or how small your family is what matters is the support that you get when you're in trouble and you're happy. I heard some of the families do not get the help they need. They only want to support you when it's happier times when it's sad times they disappear and you are left alone to deal with the things that you need to face.

I didn't go to my place I sleep at my mother's house, I didn't want to go home alone it was so boring but I was not going to stay at home forever. Staying at home didn't give me that sense

of privacy sometimes. I only went on days that I was not feeling like being alone for a certain period.

The following day I woke up and went to church with my mother at least my brother's fiancé was there as well, she had a beautiful smile, and I liked her meek character.

"Sungani told me that you agreed to help me with the wedding planning. I am so grateful I do not have anyone with the style I like from a family."

She took me to the side so we were busy gossiping and laughing.

"I know right, if you have people who do not understand you it's always good to go with the other people. I understand you, we are not living in the Stone Age, I know they would want you to have a traditional wedding but just make it two in one. Make sure that your wedding is what you want and dreamed of, I think mixing the wedding and the wedding style is the most beautiful thing these days."

She smiled at me and said, "It's like you read my mind, you know what I want and I agree wholeheartedly. I didn't even know that he was going to ask you I only hinted at it, I was afraid to approach you."

"I am going to be your sister-in-law, you are going to be my sister-in-law, so we must help each other in times of need so

anything that you want please tell me and if you don't want something say it again because this is your wedding. Remember you can only get married once. Unless you are planning of having many weddings and you want to get married again."

We both laughed I was kidding because I knew that she was not going to get married again she loved my brother hence she waited for him for so long. If she was someone who was like that she would have gotten married a long time ago and left my brother high and dry, she was so beautiful so any man could have taken her as a wife.

On Monday when I got to work as expected Chisomo was there waiting for me by the parking lot. The funny part was that I had expected that and I had been missing him the whole weekend so somehow we were getting close and I was starting to have some feelings for him.

"Today I'm knocking off late so will you wait for me while I'm working or do you have somewhere you have to be."

The way he said it was so seductive. I couldn't even say no I felt my whole body vibrating as if I was going to die from the shock. I smiled at him and just nodded because I was not trusting my voice I couldn't say anything I knew that my saliva had stuck on my throat I was going to cough or spill it out once I spoke.

"Thank you so much my darling, my weekend was so boring without you, and you kept on ignoring my calls and my messages, why were you doing that?"

I looked down and smiled I knew that I had avoided his calls because I was with my family. I didn't want to give away and when I was at church he called again. I didn't want to disrupt my worship time. So I kept on ignoring him even while I was sleeping I slept very late and woke up very late as well.

"I am so sorry I was at home there was a pressing matter that we needed to attend to. I didn't want them to suspect anything remember we said these are our 'stolen moments' so I do not want to spoil them."

He smiled and brought me to his chest I just smiled then we went inside our workplace.

While I was working the lawyer came through I was shaking I thought maybe I was going to go to jail but then I laughed at myself because if I was going to jail then there was supposed to be a police officer accompanying him.

"Miss Nyirenda I see from your facial expression that you are scared, please do not be scared. I came here to take your statement, remember when we were in the police station there were so many questions that I asked but now I want to take an official statement of the event so that at least I get a hang of

what is happening I am going to defend you so you need to be honest with me do not leave anything out say everything as it is so that I will know how to defend you in the court of law."

I breathed a sigh of relief.

Once he was done talking I could relax my shoulders and my facial expressions changed I was relieved that it was not going to be something hectic. I was shaking I even cursed Alfredo for putting me in such a position in my life I had never been caught off guard or caught on the wrong side of the law. I always respected my parents, I always respected the law and I always lived by the Bible so she was making me a murderer from where I was standing I was thinking bad thoughts about her. I was even thinking that if she can be hit by a truck or if she can fall into a ditch somewhere.

"Okay, you are right I was very scared. I am scared of going to jail I do not know why this lady is doing this to me but I will be as honest as one can be under the circumstances. I will tell you everything I will never leave anything behind. I want this case to go away so that I can live my life."

He just smiled nervously and sat down, we discussed the case in detail. He coached me on how to say some things and what not to say and how to answer questions in front of the judge so that I won't incriminate myself. I was so scared at first but when I realised that this case was not as huge as I thought it was initially. I started to relax and mastered what he was teaching me I knew it was a long shot but I was willing to do anything for me to be acquitted. It was not easy to relax as I

knew that any mistake was going to send me to prison for something I didn't do.

When he left I saw a strange look on Chisomo's face but I assured him that there was nothing wrong and I was fine he just smiled at me and went back to his office. People around me were scared as well. Only my sister was confident enough, I guess it was the fact that she was a judge and she knew the cases well. Chisomo was scared as well although he hid it so well.

Before I knew it was knock-off time and other people had gone home. I was left alone in the office when I remembered that Chisomo was also working late. I logged out on my computer tidied up then went to his office.

I just did that only because I didn't want to startle him at the same time, I was scared. I had never done the sneaking around before, I was trying to be calm. I was trying to ignore the edging feeling but the more I tried the more nervous I was. I was going to allow myself to go with the flow.

After a little while when there was no response I just opened and entered when he heard the door opening he lifted his face and smiled. He was still busy with the pile of files in front of him and the opened laptop.

"My darling you are still here I thought you were not going to listen to me, please come, come come come here."

The way he was so excited made me feel excited as well. The way he said 'come' so many times even made me want to burst out with laughter. He was beckoning me to go and sit on his lap. I was blushing but I wanted this as much as he wanted, so the excitement was there I had to rush to his lap and sat down. I was not used to an open man like this. Growing up in a strict community resulted in such as talking about intimacy issues was taboo.

He lifted my face from the chin with his index finger and then looked deep into my eyes I felt butterflies in my stomach. I haven't felt them in a while, I think it was the first time feeling the way I was feeling. Was a person supposed to love once or it was just the same as a person doesn't love once. I loved Joseph but the feeling I was feeling with Chisomo was different.

He didn't give me a chance to look to the side when I look down deep into his eyes I felt at home I felt like my world was spinning in the right direction. Then while I was busy admiring him he just attacked me with a kiss, at first it was filled with hunger but as he proceeded it felt so passionate but I could not stop myself. I put my hands over his shoulders and I brought him closer to me.

While doing that I felt the warm hand go under my blouse I didn't want to stop him the feeling was so good. We were so engaged in each other that I didn't even know how to respond anymore. I just wanted also to put my hands on something but I was so scared. I was never open to these things and I wished to change it. I wanted to unbutton his shirt but he stopped me he looked into my eyes.

“I know you might say this is prematurely but I love you, Maya, I love you so much and I do not want to do this yet but I can't stop myself the only thing that is stopping me is because we do not have protection.”

The way he was passionately looking at me and the way he said it assured me that at least he cared about me. Wait a minute what if he thought that I was sick because or something. I was married before so he didn't trust me to be clean. Was I clean to begin with as I didn't even know if Joseph had been faithful to our marriage? I didn't want to go crazy from all those unpleasant thoughts.

“Do you think that I am sick that's why you are stopping and talking about protection?”

I said that softly and shyly but he looked me right into the eyes again.

“Look at me now, I'm not saying that we are sick not at all. I want you to put it to you in a simple way so that you will not feel offended. I want to protect you from any other things as well. I am not saying I sleep around but we need to be safe. Please

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please do not think that I want it because of you, do you know we have to protect ourselves also from pregnancies.”

I felt so ashamed to even accuse him of that. I was offended a little when he talked about the protection or it's because I was naive as I had been with one partner since I was born and I had never even used protection when he cheated. We went to test in the clinic and when we got the results we never even got to the part of using protection.

“Do not feel bad I know how you are feeling right now but I need to protect you. I am the man in this relationship I need to make sure that you're ok so that at least you have a healthy relationship. You are coming from a difficult marriage we need to enjoy this relationship before there is a child involved. I want to spoil you and take you to places you love so that you will see that I am not here to play games but for us to live together in the future.”

“Thank you very much and I hope that this relationship will make both of us happy. I know it's going to take time for me to adjust but I'm trying to adjust. Please be patient with me and don't lose faith in me, I will try my best to adjust.”

“Take your time my love, take your precious time. What I know is that this feeling that I have is not going anywhere and I want to explore it with you. I do not want to rush your healing process as well. I know you had a life before we met so I don't expect you to just forget about the life you had before.”

After saying that he kissed me again this time there was a hunger in both of us. I was so going to put my feelings out there for me to try this so I had to ask.

“Wait, do you have a wife?”

He shook his head and stopped a little looking at me.

“No, I do not have a wife.”

I knew he wanted an explanation for my question but I didn't have time to explain and I was never going to explain as I had my reasons for asking. "Alright, an overbearing mother or sister?"

I knew he thought I was mad but I was doing it for my heart before I got in too deep. "No, I do not have a mother or sister."

He looked at me worried then he took a deep breath.

“My baby, look at me, I am not here to play games I'm here for you I'm here for the long run so please relax I know a way of making you feel good without even doing anything. I do not know why you are asking me these questions but my body doesn't allow me to follow through as I am looking at you as well. I want to make you happy don't you want that?”

I just nodded and looked at him. He looked back into my eyes and started kissing me. I knew it was too soon but my body was betraying me so what should I have done? Besides, it had been long since I had been intimate.

His hands were full and they were working with his tongue on my body. Before I knew it his finger was on my honey pot. It was weird and scary at the same time. If my parents could see their daughter doing that. My mind jerked when the pleasure kicked in.

I even reprimanded myself for saying that office romance was bull.

I was feeling sweet but feeling so good that I didn't want him to stop. The sensation was so good that my whole body was trembling so I just look at him for some mercy. Did he even give me some mercy? He just looked at me with eyes filled with lust and my heart skipped. When someone told me that 'you only live once' they had lied to me. That moment was my rebirth, I

was not even sure how I have lived all those years without such goodness in my life. I laughed at myself inwardly.

“Please tell me if you're uncomfortable. I just don't want to make you uncomfortable.”

His voice was not normal anymore it was so deep and seductive and it had some traces of passion in it. His eyes were so bloodshot and made him look extremely handsome or I was thinking with the lower part of my body?

“No please don't stop I'm comfortable, it doesn't matter where I will do it today or if we do it the other days. Even if it's two years from now it won't change who I am because I love you. I know my feelings for you will never change I know I know I shouldn't take it slow but I feel something for you hence I am saying it's fine.”

I saw the smile creeping on his face, my heart was beating so fast just kissed me again. I was supposed to feel ashamed for what I was doing but surprisingly I was okay with it and I felt like I had wasted my time with Joseph for nothing. Well, I was not going to think about another man while I was with my man at the.....

There was a loud knock at the door that brought us both back to reality followed by a female voice.

What the.....

We both looked at each other, from inside we could hear that it was Alfredo's voice but we were surprised about what she was doing that late in the office and what did she want with Chisomo.

“Do not say anything; I do not want to attend to her because I do not want her to disturb me.”

I just nodded as I was shown the ‘shush’ sign.

I got down from where I was sitting and tidy myself up I was blushing and I was ashamed of what just happened, I didn't know how to react.

He cleared his throat while he was fixing himself, then he asked Alfredo.

“How can I help you? It’s late why are you still here? I have confidential documents here so I cannot let you in what is the problem?”

I was even surprised at how calm he was because he didn't even giveaway he had somebody in the office. Was it his habit of his or was I just imagining things and being paranoid?

I knew Alfredo would not come inside because once he talked about ‘confidential documents’ we could not go inside the office. Once there was a sign that there were confidential

documents, it was the policy of the office. The manager was the only one who could check some confidential documents, so I knew she would not come in.

“I wanted your help, you know that we’ve been working together for quite a while, and now that Mayamiko just came in between our good working conditions. It’s destroying our working relationship with the other people; I know you have noticed as well.”

I was beyond shocked whose relationship was I ruining and why was she coming to the manager to do that. What did she want from the manager? I was cracking my head, and I was sweating at the same time because this lady was becoming a problem now and she was not showing any signs of remorse. This meant that whatever she did she did it deliberately, and she was not sorry about it.

“Can we talk about this tomorrow because at the moment I'm so hungry, I need to finish this and go home. I'm exhausted, I cannot do this now, and the boss wants these documents by tomorrow morning can you let me rest for today. Once I have rested, I will have a chance to think about your matter. All I think about now is the fact that these documents are due tomorrow morning.”

His voice was even showing a hint of irritation. I think he just wanted to dismiss her so it was going to be impossible because the lady from the other side seemed to be impatient as well.

“Are you sure that you're not dismissing me for the sake of dismissing me? Are you truly going to help me because I cannot go to jail and this total stranger lies about me so what should I do when she's counter-suing me?”

Chisomo looked at me because he saw I was irritated as well. I didn't say anything because it was between him and his colleague, so what I did was just stand there by the window and look outside. Even if I had some remorse towards Alfredo, it went through the window at that moment because I was so irritated and I felt like she was doing this deliberately. She wanted to see me out of the company I wanted to know why she wanted to see me out of the company and why she had a vendetta against me.

“I promise to listen to your grievance tomorrow when I'm sober and when I'm thinking rational because as we speak I'm frustrated work is above my shoulders how am I supposed to think rationally with this lot of work.”

The way he was so calm made me fall in love with him at that moment. As I thought I would not talk to her in such a rational manner. I was going to be angry, and I was going to be frustrated but he kept his calm and he made sure that he

answered correctly. I think the other thing was he didn't want Alfredo to suspect that there was somebody in the office, so he made sure that he covered that up well. He did a good job because she didn't suspect anything she just said her thank you and left the office.

“Is there something going on between you and Alfredo why does she want your help?”

I don't even know why I asked that question it's only that I was frustrated, and I didn't know what to think. This girl was getting on my nerves and I wanted this to end once and for all. I was thinking of calling my sister to pressurise the lawyers and the courts to have this thing over and done with. It was getting tiring to be moving to the same place leading no way. I hope I made sense.

“No, my love, this is nothing. I've never had a relationship in this office and I didn't think of having a relationship until I met you. Please come here, do not compare yourself to Alfredo, you will never put yourself down like this. You will never be compared to any female that works here with us you are different you are my woman now and you need to bear that in mind, that you are the only person in my heart as we speak and forever. Here feel this.”

He placed my hand over his heart and I could feel his heartbeat. His warm hand over mine made me feel some warmth and

love. His tone and the way he said it without hesitation assured me that there was nothing dodgy going on between him and Alfredo. But I felt like maybe Alfredo wanted something to go on between them why was she jealous of me or was she jealous of our friendship with Samantha.

Our stolen moments were already interrupted, and I was not in the mood to continue so he just kissed me passionately and told me how much he loved me and then I went home. At least he put a smile on my face because I never stopped smiling until I finish taking my bath I couldn't even keep calm, there I was thinking of the stolen moments we had.

I would not keep calm because these moments were hitting on my chest so I had to call my friend Mphatso.

“Some of us are married and you are disturbing our evening meal, if you know what I mean our bedroom meal.”

She said that and then laughed at me. I was not even angry at her I was blushing thinking of what I would be doing with Chisomo.

“Do not be a party-pooper I know that I'm single and you do not have to brush it on to my bruised ego.”

We both laughed, I had missed her so much because most of the time she had been busy and there will be busy on the farm but at least we had time to talk later when she was not busy.

On days when the network was a nightmare, we only send messages and slept.

“How are you my poppy? I missed you so much. I am sorry I had been busy on the farm but I know once everything is set we will have time. How is Samantha doing?”

“One question at a time, please.”

We both laughed again.

“I am not complaining and Samantha is doing well she will be coming back to work next month. The boss didn't want to hear anything from her when she wanted to come immediately. It seems she has some leave days as well accumulated so she can still use them. The temp they hired is happy

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I am happy as well it will give her time to recover well without pressure. I am also doing fine under these circumstances.”

"This will is much better, so how is the case going? I hate this Alfredo person before I even meet her. What is wrong with her? Samantha is such a bubbly and friendly person I do not want anything to happen to her how can she do that to my Samantha?"

I was shocked at the fact that she was her Samantha. I wanted to laugh, but I restrained myself. Those are the comments that

would drive Alfredo to kill people because she didn't want to share Samantha with outsiders.

"For now, I only spoke to the lawyer, and he said he will tell me the court date. Imagine she came and disturbed Chisomo and me in the office. She even....."

"Say what? Please go back, go back, rewind, please, you're going too fast for me. What is going on with Chisomo and you or what is going on there? You are now losing me or I have been missing in action for so long. Do not be like that, friend."

I laughed at her and myself for forgetting that I wanted to tell her about us first. I was a little nervous, as I didn't know how she was going to react.

"Chisomo decided, no let me rephrase that, we decided to have soothing that we call 'stolen moments', I fear a relationship because I do not trust myself to be in a relationship right now. I"

Then she screamed into my ears. My poor eardrums were absolutely abused on that day. I heard her husband asking what was wrong, but he was gently dismissed and he just laughed at the wife. My weird friend would kill her husband from stress.

"Finally, you must totally forget about Joseph, as he is not as handsome as Mr. Tight-bum."

I was shocked by her comment. Wasn't her husband there next to her when she was talking like that?

"I will tell your husband you have time to admire another man's butt."

"He knows I do that from time to time as long as he knows that my hands only touch his bum only. Beside an eye is a thief and a wh....."

"Don't even finish that sentence. Poor husband, I will give him away to Alfredo."

"If you want to die, you can tell me now so I can take a policy with your name."

We both laughed. Their marriage always made me envious, they each other's best friends, so they got along so well. I was hoping to have such a relationship with Chisomo. He was not a stuck up like my ex-husband so I hopeful. I told her about the whole thing and my fears.

"My opinion is, just go with the flow. You cannot live your life in the box because you are afraid of what might happen to you. No one knows the future and no one will ever know it even if they tried. Happiness is for you to grab, so chose what you want to choose. Even if he hurt you, so what? You will pick up the remaining pierces and move on dear. There is no guarantee

in life. Who knew that Joseph will hurt you? So just go for it and the future will reveal itself.”

I was glad that I spoke to her. I was feeling better I was not even feeling ashamed of having such a relationship. The only thing I would not do was to tell my family. I was not ready for them know about it.

He called after I spoke to Mphatso we were on the phone till midnight. I was enjoying those little things that he was doing and I hoped he will not change in the long run.

In the morning, I called my sister before I went to work. She listened to me and assured me she was going to speed up the case. I was happy that my things were going well not realising that it was going to change.

When I got to work, Chisomo was there waiting for me as usual. Then I went to my office a cheerful person. There was too much work, so

I was not even prepared to leave my station for breakfast. I was going to have lunch instead.

Before I could even finish a report, there was commotion, then I heard my name being called.

“Who are you? She is my wife.”

When I got outside I was shocked by that statement, but what hurt me was Chisomo's face when those words hit everyone's ears.

"Mayamiko where is our daughter?"

What the.....

What did these pests want from me? I couldn't say they were people as people were reasonable but these people around me needed pesticides to be eradicated. If it was not Alfredo, then it was my ex-husband who claimed I was his wife.

“What is going on Maya?”

Chisomo asked me with begging eyes I just shrugged as I didn't know what to say. What was I going to say when I was as clueless as anyone else. I went to where Joseph was standing and looked at him. He seemed to have aged in those few months I had left. He had even lost weight, the cheeks seemed to go deep down as if they were looking for balance.

“Joseph, what is going on?”

I was as surprised to see him but he looked as if I knew why he was there.

“You are telling me you do not know why I am here? Our daughter ran away from home and left a note saying she wants to come and live with you, as I do not give her what she wants.”

People were looking at us. Chisomo just looked hurt and left for his office. I wanted to follow him but Asante was the most important person to me as well. I might have left them but the love I had for her was no other. I had raised her as my own and she had imprinted herself in my heart day by day.

“I do not know what you are talking about but when did she leave home? Did she take warm clothes and did she have money to eat?”

I asked without even looking at him, but going to my office to get my phone. I didn't know detective Kennedy so well but I needed his help. I didn't want them to blame me for her disappearance but above all, I didn't want anything to happen to her as she was my daughter by fate.

“Are you sure she didn't come to you?”

“Why would I hide her? Besides, I changed my number even if she wanted to communicate with me it would have been impossible. I was not using it for data anymore so it was useless to keep two numbers hence I changed. So when last did you see her?”

I saw him changing his rude expression to a worried one. I guess he came prepared for a fight as he thought I was aware of Asante's whereabouts. He took out a piece of paper from his pocket and gave it to me. I took my handbag and left with him following on my tail. I didn't want people from the office to keep looking at us. I was going to explain everything to Chisomo when I came back.

I called my father on my way to the parking lot. I knew he was going to come and help me. He knew how much I loved Asante.

When I got to the car, I felt like the air was leaving my lungs. I stopped and read the note.

Note:

Daddy

I love you but I want to stay with mommy. She loved me and bot good thing for me. You do not. I love you and I will veset wen I werk for money.

Love

Asante

There was a heart in front of the word love. I was in tears but I laughed at the spelling mistakes and even imagined her facial expression as she wrote that note. She had an attitude for days so I knew that attitude was poured into that note. When I was about to talk to joseph detective Kennedy called me.

“Please come to the office I think there is a child who was found today in the morning but we are not sure.”

“Is she okay?”

“Please come quickly.”

I was panicking as he was not forthcoming in my mind it clicked that she might have been dea..... I didn't want to finish that sentence as it was going to torture me.

‘Hold on little Asante for mommy.’

I said that and prayed a little in my heart. I didn’t want anything to happen to my little girl. She was the only thing I care about in my previous life. I even forgot I was with the father in the car I remembered when he questioned me.

“Are you happy here? Can we start over once we find Asante?”

I almost laughed it was like moving from eating pizza to eat cassava. Not in a bad way though but once one moved to better things, going back to their roots will be a downgrade, and I was not ready for that.

“Surprisingly, I am thrilled here and do not wish to go back to the life I had. I am free and think little compared to when I was married.”

“I can see you are glowing. Was I a bad husband?”

I wanted to feel sorry for him, as his voice had traces of hurt written all over it. Then I remembered the life I lived, and I thought otherwise.

“You were not a bad husband at first but all the hurt came from you not having a backbone or the guts to stand up for me. You loved me once but as time went by, you just felt like life was just normal. There were no anticipations or surprises, just us living like roommates and you treating me like a babysitter and maid.”

I knew it hurt, but I needed to be honest so that he knew what went wrong. It was as if he had amnesia hence he didn't even recall why I left. I think he was still thinking I left because I wanted attention. That ship had sailed, so I would spare no one's feelings as I was not spared of heart aches.

"I am sorry."

He said it in a low tone but I was not buying his sympathy I just wanted to find Asante and move on. His sorry was a little too late. I didn't even have time to respond as I parked at the police headquarters. Mr. Kennedy was already waiting for me.

"Madam, that was so fast."

He showed me his brightest teeth, and I returned the favour. Joseph looked at me weirdly as if he was accusing me of cheating on him. I just laughed at the thought and looked at the detective who was coming toward us for the greetings.

"I was already on my way when I called you. So, what do you have for me?"

"Come this way, please."

He led us to his office. I was aware of the setup, as I had been there for the interrogation. Joseph looked at me again but I just ignored him this time around. I even made it obvious to him I was surely avoiding him. When we got to his office, he offered us the chairs to sit on.

“I am sorry for not telling you this over the phone but the bus company called us in the morning about a little girl who was found in their bus which was coming from Blantyre. We are waiting for the officers who went there to check it out. When you called me, I immediately told them to hurry back with her so that we can take it from there. Remember, we are not sure if it’s her

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so keep an open mind if it’s not her who comes through that door.”

I didn’t want to think much about that I only nodded praying it was her. Before long, my father called informing me he was outside, and I informed him to wait for me there as I didn’t want us to crowd the detective. Before long, Asante walked through the door and my instincts just propelled me to her. I knelt at her level and hugged her with tears flowing without caring about taking care of them.

“Mommy, I miss you and I want to live with you.”

She burst out in tears and my chest was heavy even if I didn’t want to react I was forced to as she was not the way I saw her when I left Blantyre. She was clean of course but her skin was not as nourished as before. Her years were not as sparkling as they were.

“I know and I miss you as well but can we talk about you running away from home. It will put both of us in trouble. Remember, I am not your biological mother so it will be difficult to take you to come and live here with me.”

“I know but dad made us move we are now staying at a smaller place and the school I am attending now is very crowded with fewer chairs. I do not even have the food I love for lunch.”

She even had hiccups, and it was difficult for me to digest that. I had saved money for her education I bet it was diverted for their gain. I was heartbroken, as I knew how hard it was for the child to adjust. They said divorce always affects the kids I never knew until I was there in a difficult position. I wished she was mine so I could fight for custody but she was not mine so it was difficult. Joseph had bowed to conceal his hurt but Mr. Kennedy couldn't hide his disappointment. I just took my eyes back to the innocent child.

“Let us make a promise. Remember what I promised you when I left you back home?”

She just nodded.

“The promise is still on. I will always be your mother no matter what. I will always be on standby so that you will depend on me.”

“You changed your number and I couldn't reach you.”

“I am sorry my love I will give you my number. When you need me, I am a phone call away but once you come out of age, you can come and live with me. You will always be my first born no matter what. Even if I have children in the future, they will never replace you in my heart. Even if you change schools, it will not hinder you from producing excellent results for mommy. Study hard and prove to me you can be as strong as mommy.”

She smiled, with tears still streaming down her cheeks.

“I promise as long as I can stay with you in the future.”

We hugged again, but she was shaking and her heart was beating fast.

“How about I take you out for lunch with grandpa and buy anything you like before going back with daddy?”

She jumped up and down and it was all I needed. For her, I was going to face it all.

“I would love to speak to her father you may go out in the meantime.”

It was okay with me I didn't want to be involved so I thanked the detective and left. When I got to my father, I explained everything.

“Asante, my baby, life will throw us in the deep end but it will be up to us if we swim, float, or drown.”

She laughed at my father and just said; “I do not understand you but I will never run away again.”

We laughed and waited for Joseph to come to us. When he came, it was as if he was a chicken caught by a heavy storm he was even afraid to look at my father. They spoke, though, after it was decided that I will take Asante for a while and then drive her to the bus station where he will be waiting for her.

My father went back to work when he saw I was okay. We ate lunch with him, assuring Asante that life was not as difficult as she thought it was. When he told her the conditions he had to endure in the rural areas to obtain an education, she then lightened up. Life was never a bed of roses it was up to us to embrace everything as it was given.

I was not in the mood to go back to the office when I was done shopping for Asante. I even gave her a bank card she promised to keep safe. I instructed her to use it only in emergencies. It had little, but it was going to ease her burden. Children were not supposed to carry their parents’ burdens. I knew if they found it they were going to take it but it was a risk I was willing to take for my baby girl. I was going to keep in touch, as I didn’t want her to run away from home again.

I didn't even want anyone to talk to me on that particular day I was very depressed so I switched off my phone and went to bed straight from the bus station. I was awakened by a knock at the door which I had intended to ignore to no avail so I was doomed....

“Okay, okay, I am coming there is no need to break my door at this hour.”

I really didn't want to wake up. When I checked the time it was already late and I haven't eaten dinner. I was grumpy when I opened the door only to be attacked by a warm hug.

“Do not ever do this to me. I have been calling and worried sick about you.”

The warmth I felt was overwhelming me I couldn't even hide my gratitude for him to come to my doorstep. This made me love him more. Well, yes, I said love as I was feeling the love flowing undeniably so to my heart from his actions.

“I am so sorry I had a day from hell, so please do not be angry at me.”

He hugged me tightly again and kissed the top of my head.

“I do not want to add stress to your stressful day. I just wanted to find out if you were okay. You need to communicate with me. I am not a monster so I would not let you deal with whatever you were dealing with alone.”

I felt so bad for not calling him but I was not in a pleasant space. I didn't even call my parents. I knew my mother was

worried sick at home but I wanted to be a little selfish and sulk alone at home. Was that too much to ask for?

“Thank you for understanding. I just wanted to digest what happened. I will talk about it when I am in the right space. That was not my husband but my ex-husband, so do not worry that you are doing something with a married woman.”

I was unvaryingly ashamed to say it loud as I looked down. He just came closer and looked me straight into the depth of my eyes.

“Everyone has a past, who am I to judge you because of your past. Can you do me a favour, though? May you please tell me what you are going through. Make sure you are not suffering alone. I am here for the long run, for the good and the bad so involve me even if it’s the bad part of your life.”

You know when one is used to a one-sided relationship when they enter a different one they do not even know how to react. That is how I was feeling when I was with Chisomo. When I expected him to behave in a certain way, I always got the opposite of my expectations.

“Thank you for loving me with my imperfections. I know it is not what you signed up for but I promise you to try harder to not bring the past too much into the present.”

“As long as you are still not involved with your husband, then I am good.”

“Ex-husband, you mean.”

We both laughed.

“You know what I meant. Now come and give me some sugar before I let you rest.”

I was blushing, but I felt loved for someone to just come and kiss my sorrows away and kiss me goodnight.

“You are not coming in?”

I was fishing I knew, but I wanted to spend some time with him. I hope it was not too much to ask for. The air was stagnant between us as if he was thinking about staying over only to turn me down.

“We do not make rational decisions when we are emotionally unstable. I came because I missed you and I was worried not because I needed something from you. Remember, a relationship is about to give and take. Now it's my time to give you my shoulder and my understanding as your partner. What kind of man will I be if I take advantage of you while you are this vulnerable.”

I accurately had found a gold mine. I had tears threatening to come, but I would not do that. I was going to embrace the love and the present and treasure them.

“I will let you go now as you have paralysed me with your words.”

He laughed, drawing closer to me and kissing me passionately afterward. I was out of breath and I wanted more but he would not give me more. I just settled for that and hugged him tightly.

“I love you and thank you for caring.”

Surprisingly, those words were not even forced they just came out naturally. He was surprised, and I had surprised myself as well. The smile that followed the surprised look was priceless.

“I love you more.”

He kissed me goodnight and before I could respond I was looking at his tightly firm butt and I laughed at myself. I was still on cloud nine when I went to bed on that particular day. I had to wake up early so I could pass by my parents' house to update them. There was no harm done and my mother felt sorry for Asante, but what could we have done? Sometimes children had to pay for their parents' sins.

The following weeks were busy, and I was glad Samantha was back. She was back to her usual self.

“So you ignore me to where I am forced to do the squeezing of the information out of your system?”

I looked at her, surprised.

“What do you mean?”

“Do not act surprised, Maya. I heard everything about your husband and the fact that Mr. Manager was all gloomy because you are married now Alfredo is saying how corny you are.”

I laughed at her, as she didn't know the entire story.

“You listen to gossip too much. If you want the truth, please come to the owner of the plot and setting with the themes of the book.”

We both laughed as she sat down comfortably to hear more.

“Now I am ready for action 3,2,1 ACTION!”

I had never laughed in my life as I laughed on that particular day. Samantha deserved to be in the entertainment industry.

“I can't even concentrate on my storytelling as you are busy with me. Okay, jokes aside. That was my ex-husband, and he came for his child who had run away from home to stay with me. I went with him to the police station and we were lucky to get her so they went home. Chisomo is not angry as he knows that I have a past so it won't affect our relationship.”

“Okay, you are a poor storyteller. I give you 1/10 for that.”

I was confused at first, then I laughed as I remembered Mphatso saying the same thing.

“I will start by saying Chisomo and I, well, are kind of seeing each other.”

The last part was dragged but Samantha ululated and jumped up and down

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causing havoc in the office. We had to take an early lunch so we could finish our conversation in private.

“Do not even think about leaving any details out of this conversation because I am here waiting for the full details.”

I smiled, looking at the food she bought for us as we were far from the office I felt relaxed. I told her everything, and she was smiling all the time I was relaying the events like a retard.

“We are just enjoying our stolen moments, as you can see.”

“To me, you two are a couple made from heaven and he was meant to meet you. Remember, I told you he never smiled except for you it was a sign.”

I looked at her with a worried face. “I am scared, as I am not sure if I will manage not to mess this relationship up.”

“You are talking about ‘the husband’ who caused havoc at work.”

“How did you learn about this when you were not even here? Let me not ask, as I know that news travel fast, but bad news travel at the speed of light.”

“He is partly to blame for my hesitance, but not entirely. I also do not know if I will not mess this one up.”

“You do not need to think, just go with the flow. I am giving you my blessing, so from this moment on no more mishaps.”

We both laughed.

“As if your blessings are the key for all my troubles to vanish.”

The lunch was smooth and filled with laughter and I even forgot I missed her so much.

When we got back to the office, Samantha had a lot of work to do, we had little time to waste. When I got to the I sent a message to Chisomo informing him how I was missing him. He replied quickly. I was still smiling when Alfredo got to my office unannounced.

“Maya, please I will do anything, I can not afford what your lawyer sent to my lawyer.”

I didn't even want to respond, but I wanted to work hence I calmly told her to contact her lawyer, not me.....

“I didn’t mean to harm you I just wanted you to stop”

“Stop what? Why then did that send Samantha into a coma? Do you even think of your life before you do these things? Not everything happening around you is about you. I came here to work and start a new life so why would you fight me? If you haven’t noticed I just do my job and go home. I am here with everyone and for everyone. I gave you the benefit of the doubt but you almost took my life.

Who is going to look after your innocent child when you do and spend time in jail? Did you ever stop to think about that innocent soul when you were on your vendetta quest? Did you even think of your boss and the scandal that was going to follow your poisoning incident? My parents would not take that lying down remember my sister is a judge. They would not have stayed back to bury their daughter who didn’t even fall ill.”

When I looked at her spooked face, I knew she had been naive not to think about the consequences of her actions. Her principal aim was to eliminate the imaginary enemy which was me.

“I am sorry to have disturbed you.”

I didn’t even respond I watched her leave my office. I was cursing the law as well for taking too long to investigate. I sent a message to my sister after she left.

'Any progress with the case? It's taking too damn long, and I am irritated by this human manure of a person. You know my boss can't do anything unless she is charged with any wrongdoings.'

She immediately called me, assuring me we were close to the court date and it would not drag out, as it was a simple case. I was relieved, but irritated at the same time. Alfredo was turning me into something I was not. I recalled my uncle's words, then I immediately called him. He was so happy to hear I was doing fine. He told me I should pray without seizing as the enemy came in different forms.

From his call, I felt better. I even remember my aunt who I had not seen in a while. When I called her, she was down with a fever.

"Why do you look lost?"

I looked at my man standing by the door looking all kinds of yummy. I smiled, rebuking myself for having those thoughts.

"My aunt is not feeling well, and I am worried, as she is not a sickling person. She never lefts any sickness put her down."

"I am so sorry. Why don't I drive you to her place after work, then we will come back to collect your car."

I smiled,

“As tempting as that might be I am not ready to be questioned by her. She will not let any sickness stop her from putting me under third degree.”

We both laughed. We were in the ‘knowing each other’ stage so it was better to keep the pleasant moments first and save inopportune moments for later. I didn’t want him to run away before I could explore this.

“I will drive to her place do not worry but if you want me to come back before going home I would gladly oblige.”

We were both looking at each other. There was no need for words to be uttered, as we both knew we wanted to finish what we had started the last time. We were both adults and what we started at that time required an ending or a cool-off phrase.

“Yes please my darling, I will wait for you patiently.”

The seductive voice made me forget about my surrounding. My drive to my aunt’s place was excruciating, as it was filled with anticipation.

I was smiling on my way to my aunt's place. I didn't even want to stay longer, but it was my duty to check up on her. I knew my family would not do so until later but I worried more about her.

“What brings you here Mayamiko? I told you I was going to be fine?”

“Look you are all alone.”

I said, going inside the house and picking up things on my way. My aunt was not an untidy person, so it worried me.

“Bankhazi, basibweni balingu? (Where is my uncle?)”

“You know him and beer.”

We both laughed. If it's something that my aunt failed to separate from my uncle it was his beer. He would go to any beer hall and drink. Even some homemade beer legally or illegally brewed he knew the venues.

“If you are to re-marry stay away from men who love beer.”

I was thinking about my predicaments as I didn't know Chisomo that well. What if he was a drunkard, as I only saw him sober at work? What if she loved beer and women?

“So, you have a man now?”

She was looking at me with a curious face I just laughed ignoring her stares.

“Youngsters.”

“No Ankhazi, I am not even seeing anyone I was just imagining my life with someone else again. Do you think I will be happy again and be free in a relationship?”

It was a genuine question, I was not going to just assume Chisomo would not hurt me.

“Life is so unpredictable my dear. No one knows the future at all what I know is you can never dismiss a chance of happiness because you believe you will be hurt. We might as well stop living then.”

She was right about that. We both laughed.

“I am not scared of being happy but I doubt I will commit the way I had done it before. I loved Asante. What do I mean? I love Asante so much and it hurts me to see her going through what she is going through. I feel like the universe is not supposed to give kids to such careless parents. I am scared something will happen to her but for now, she is still safe as her neighbour is helping us to communicate with me. I hope she will survive till her 18th birthday. I wonder why she doesn't get the same care from her mother who carried her in her belly. I am scared I

might not be fertile so it might happen if I marry someone with kids, then I will have to leave them someday.”

“You will be fine think a little about the future. If we knew what the future held, we would choose better for ourselves. We will never choose poverty or heartbreak. Look at me I should be a minister’s wife but I dumped him for his looks and lack of money only to discover that he had it in him to have a better life.”

“You lie!”

I was shocked, but I wanted more. It was weird to talk to my aunt about those things but I was going to compromise my beliefs as it was my first time having such a talk with my aunt.

“I was a looker in my days and men were after me.”

I laughed at her but I knew she was telling the truth.

“All I am saying is, keep your head up and be happy as we love you and I love you.”

“Nkhukutemwa chomene (I love you so much)”

When we were chatting, I was preparing the soup for her. I made sure she drank it before going to bed. Before leaving, I also gave her some medication.

Before leaving, I informed Chisomo who gave me a location of where he was. I was driving singing to reduce my nervous state.

I was excited, thinking I was going to his house. When I parked and checked the surroundings, it was at Kasha Premier Lodges. I was speechless when I saw his handsome smile welcoming me.

“I hope I am not rushing you and rushing things.”

He said, after giving me a bone-crushing hug. He held my hand and led me to the room he booked. I felt like a teenager in her first relationship.

“If I thought you were going too fast, I wasn’t even going to come to this side. I have one request, though.”

He looked at me with concern written all over his face.

“No, just hear me out. Please do not hurt me. If you feel the need to leave me, just say the word.”

He smiled and stopped us on our track and kissed me passionately.

“I love you and I will never stop loving you. Now let us not think about the future. Your request is granted though ma’am as I would love to get the same treatment as well. Just tell me when I am wrong and correct me so that I can rectify my inaccuracies.”

“Deal,”

We sealed the deal inside the room he had booked for us. The place was so beautiful. I was emotional, as I had never been out with Joseph before. He never even gave me a honeymoon. The only place besides our home was his mother's place where he had taken me for a change or back home that was the order of our life. Why was I thinking about that worthless man? I made a vow to enjoy these little things as if I was in a relationship for the first time in my life.

"I took a shower while I was waiting for your call. Please make yourself at home while I go and pick up our dinner."

He kissed my forehead before heading out. The things I felt from the pit of my stomach coming up to consume my outside body. I excitedly took off my clothes and ran to the shower. To my surprise, there was a female toiletry bag with all my favourite cosmetics. How did that man know all that? I wanted to cry because it was like I was in a dream and I was praying not to wake up from that dream.

The moment I stepped out of the bathroom on my birthday suit was the moment he got in with the food parcel which met with the floor the moment his eyes landed on me. I became shy, but he rushed to me, removing his shirt while his eyes burnt with so much desire.

I couldn't even react because the bulge in his trouser got me shy and excited at the same time.

“Please do not be shy on me. This is our night, and no one is going to disturb us. Our phones will be off till morning.”

I just nodded like an obedient child promised a candy stick. But come to think of it I was about to consume the candy stick with my other mouth. I closed my mouth with my hand as if he heard what I was thinking about.

“You are so beautiful, more than I had imagined or pictured. I love you and I love your body.”

The way he said it was not to be taken lightly.

He was filled with passion but his actions confirmed he was worshipping my body. He took me into his arms and kissed me with a hunger I have never known and passion was written all over the kiss. His hands were in use as well, not just idle. He cupped my breasts and looked at me in the eyes breathless.

“They are so beautiful and tender.”

He said with admiration which sent me to cloud nine as I felt like a queen.

“Thank you.”

My voice was hoarse as I was drowning in passion. He smiled, showing me his killer smile that always sent my knees to the ICU.

“You are a goddess that needs to be worshipped and I feel like I am not worthy of your beauty and time.”

“Please do not say that. Just shut up and kiss me!”

“Yes ma’am.”

He crushed his lips onto mine as I put my hands to use by unbuckling his belt. The excitement was consuming me. I felt inexperienced as his kisses and caresses felt so natural but good. When I was done, I removed his trouser and boxer shorts which he kicked and stepped on to the point of dropping us on top of the bed. We both giggled like children playing house.

“You are not supposed to laugh at your man.”

His warm hand landed on my honey pot and I froze but his eyes gave me the assurance I was going to be okay. All those things were foreign to me. I was very much married to a cave dweller, and I was okay with my life, as I didn’t have any comparison. I missed out on life hence I was ready to learn.

Before I could finish thinking, there was a finger rubbing me up and down and when I was about to lose my senses, his mouth passionately claimed mine. I was a gone girl, I was never leaving this gold mine. It was a hill I was willing to die on.

“I want to take my time but I want you as it has been more than a decade.” “What?”

“Sshhh, you broke my celibacy life, so let me punish you.”

I didn't have time to react as his shaft was moving up and down my honeypot while he slowly separated my legs. I was too weak to even think as passion took over. I became aware when his shaft slowly claimed its position and filled me in. I gasped and looked at him. His eyes said a silent sorry and the other unsaid words as he pushed his way in.

“Shiz niz.”

He groaned and removed his shaft, leaving me feeling empty. That didn't last long as he went back with ease the second time around. “Wait when did you put on the condom?”

“When you were busy getting drunk from my kisses.”

I pinched him a little as he went deeper and sent me to a paralysed state. He came to my neck and sucked it, making me wake up from a few seconds of coma. Was it even possible? When I was still processing, he went out again and came back in with a bang. I cried out from the pleasure I was feeling.

So that was what I had missed all my life. How could he erase all my little experiences with a few thrusts? So that is what they meant about kissing some frogs before meeting one's prince.

“Look at me, do not close your eyes. You know I need to see what you are feeling through your eyes.”

I never thought that was possible, but I obeyed as he thrust at that moment and I saw his eyes changing. That was what he meant? I was drawn to his eyes as I felt the pit of my stomach experiencing foreign things.

I moved to meet up with him as I felt like floating in the clouds. If this was what I was going to get, then I was going to surrender to these stolen moments and become a committed slave. "I love you."

He was so surprised and I had surprised myself as well. Who could have blamed me when I was drowning in love?

He pulled out and brought me to my knees with my butt on his back. His warm hand cover my sensitive breast while he thrusts from behind. On that day, I learnt to speak in tongues. He pulled me toward him still caressing my breast and trusting fast. With the increasing pace came more pleasure that was unexplainable. His groan was louder with his increased pace. I reached my destination before him but it wasn't long before he landed as well.

To say I was amazed would be an understatement. I just lay on my tummy while he got rid of the condom. That was the day my life began. The past years were a lie...

When I woke up, it was as if I was in a dream and I didn't want that dream to end. What if I woke up, then realised I was still living my miserable life? I was too tired to even open my eyes. When I smelt an unfamiliar scent, I immediately shoot my eyes open.

The same time I opened them was the same time Chisomo came into the room dripping wet from a shower. I was drooling I knew I was drooling but my body didn't feel happy for me as it was too tired. The empty box of condoms also supported that claim in full view. I think my parents were going to disown me when they saw the things I was done to the previous night. Or let me rephrase. The things I allowed this handsome man to teach me the previous night.

Did we even sleep? I doubt I think I only napped. I remember we ate cold food then from there it was chatting and love making throughout the night. He smiled at me and that smile was so dangerous that it could turn a nun into a mother of the nation. What was I saying?

"Good morning, darling. How are you doing this morning?"

"Is it morning already? I am so tired I can't even move."

“I am running late already but you don’t need to worry I already called the boss to tell him you may be excused as you are not feeling well.”

“What?”

“Do not be surprised my love, I am your manager, so you reported to me and I passed the message to the boss.”

This man kept surprising me as always.

“Let me drive home then.”

“No need for that all taken care of, as I am going to check out later. The breakfast with your lunch later will be delivered, so relax.”

If I was in a dream, I was praying for the dream maker to keep it going for days to come. I was even scared it was too good to be true.

“Thank you very much. What will I do without you?”

He came closer and kissed my forehead.

“You don’t need to find out because I am here for the long run. I will not say this is what I planned, but falling in love with you seems so easy as if I have known you for years.”

“You are so sweet.”

“Not as sweet as the core I was buried inside the entire night.”

I was so embarrassed I wanted to go under the cover.

“How are you so energetic this morning while I am dying of tiredness?”

“You do not know that you are my energy pill. I was lacking motivation, but I am motivated and energised. So taking care of you is my pleasure, as you gave me too much of that in return. You want me to show you home much I.....”

“You wouldn’t dare.”

I said laughing, going to the bathroom. I was in the shower when he bid me farewell. I knew he was running late, so I didn’t expect a lovey-dovey farewell. I was loved enough so whatever he gave or showed me was more than enough. He left me with the instructions to rest which I was planning on doing as I was exhausted.

After my bath, the breakfast was delivered as promised and it was all my favourite. This man knew me more than my ex-husband. Why was I thinking about that man. He was the past and my past was like it never existed so I was going to bury it.

Before I knew it I was in dreamland, I was even snoring. The breakfast was so filling it made me sleep right away. I was awakened by my ringing phone.

“You are indeed snoring when the world is falling apart.”

Samantha with her dramatic voice that was raging through the phone.

“Why so much drama? I am not feeling when and you are disturbing my sleep.”

“Not feeling well my foot. If I haven’t seen Mr. Manager’s post, I would not have believed that you went with him behind my back and not told me about it as your best friend.”

Best friend since when and what was she talking about?

“Samantha, I am lost please tell me what is going on?”

“Oh, she is still tired and sleeping. Go to Facebook and see. I know you didn’t tell me much but I know now. Do not worry no one at work know about it as Mr. Manager doesn’t accept friend requests from his colleagues. I forced his hand that’s why we are friends and that’s why I knew about his post. He has a huge following and so many people have shared his post.”

“What are you on about?”

“Well, sleepyhead, I was going to enlighten you but you deprived me of the juicy stuff so please find out yourself.”

True to her word she just dropped the call on my ear. Why was she so petty? I knew I would not hear the end. Even Mphatso was going to be on my neck so I was prepared. At least my family and I included were not Facebook fanatics, so I was safe

for now. I rushed to my account and to my surprise it was busier than I expected. He had tagged me in a picture he had posted. Wait a minute this picture.

It was a picture of someone in bed, it didn't show the face but from the breast down. It was my picture although I was sleeping facing down my body was there staring at me. It was a beautiful but sexy picture as I was covered from the waist down with my other leg protruding from the other side of the bed. I was shocked, but I smiled at the picture as it was so beautiful.

Was I that beautiful, or it was someone else? But again, the room was clearly the one we used the previous night. I went back to the past

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and the caption brought tears to my heart.

[When my mother once told me that angels are real I laughed at her as she was telling me about fairytales. I wish she were still alive to see the angel who brought me back to life. To my surprise, I am willing to go the extra mile to prove to you angels exist. Those who want to know why I am happy should ask Mrs. Jere. I love you my darling to eternity and beyond.]

There was a heart after that and my name was tagged there at the bottom. I was curious I went to the comments.

[Finally, I was beginning to think you were a born bachelor. We need to thank the angel for removing you from this misery.]

The comment was from Jerry Banda his friend. I scrolled down to the rest of the comments most of them had good comments congratulating him.

[You deserve this one, my man. A good man like you should not have stayed longer without a companion. Even the bible says it. Congratulations.]

It was from a lady who was his friend.

[Are you sure this is not from a magazine because I do not trust you a bit.]

There was a laughing emoji and so many comments under his comment. Some were saying it was unlike him some were saying he was afraid of ladies how did he get me? There was a particular lady who wrote how lucky I was to tame the beast and how lucky he was to get an angel like me. She was even asking about the date of the wedding. I laughed at the comment as she continued to sell her events company and how good her husband was with decoration.

Chisomo commented and laughed at her. It seemed they knew each other. He promised to look for her when he was ready. He told her he wanted to enjoy the relationship first. I was smitten by this. I knew I didn't want my relationship public it felt so

beautiful to be loved and cherished. I was not used to public affection, and it felt good. It was as if I was a teenager in her first relationship. I wanted to stand on top of the highest building and shout “I am in love” at the top of my lungs.

I sent a message to him.

“When did you take that picture?”

Before long, he called me.

“I thought I told you to rest. Why are you abusing that beautiful body?”

I laughed at his concerned voice, but with a mixture of a laugh in it.

“If it is not Samantha who woke me up for your Facebook post. I am here looking at the comments. I am not a social media fan but I see you have so many friends who are asking me to be their friends.”

“I am your friend and you don’t need them.”

There was jealousy written all over his voice.

“Do not be jealous of my friend requests you are the one who tagged me in your post.”

“I am just kidding. You can have as many friends as you like but some are just nosey people, so keep them aside because they will complicate your life. I am glad I am not in trouble.”

“Who said you are not in trouble.”

“My darling, I will massage you.”

I laughed at the way he was begging me.

“I do not want a massage. I am still thinking of what I want from you.”

“Then, while you are thinking can you officially be my fiancée?”

I laughed at him, then I realised he was serious about what he was saying. I took a deep breath.

“Any baby mama drama?”

“No, why are you asking?”

“Remember, I asked you the first day we talked about these moments? So let me ask, any mother-in-law, baby mama drama I don’t think I can deal with this.”

“No, to both but what is the reason behind it?”

“I don’t want drama in my life.”

“I won’t bring other people into your life, my love. Let me go back to work we will talk about this when I knock off. I love you, so do not doubt that. I will always love you till the end.”

The emotional floodgates were opened and I couldn't respond I only said "Me too" and then I dropped the call.

I wanted to talk to someone outside my family so I called Mphatso but she was not answering. I then remembered they might be in the fields as it was daylight. When I was busy reading the comments again, my brother called.

"Where were you last night?"

"I was at good and how are you doing today?"

He was not expecting such an answer, so he laughed as well.

"I was worried about you, I passed by your place."

"I was working late, so I had to drop Samantha at her place first, then I went in for the coffee."

Samantha had to forgive me for lying. I knew he would not ask her but still I felt so bad about the lie I had created around her name.

"Okay, I was worried. Always inform us when you are working late. I wanted to find out if the meeting is still on for this coming weekend?"

I had forgotten about the meeting. I was a terrible sister, but I would not show him I had forgotten about it.

“I am on top of everything and I am ready for the meeting. What do you take me for?”

“I am glad you got everything under control. Mother was also asking about you please pass home after work and see her. I wonder what she will be doing if you were still staying at Blantyre. I will see you over the weekend then. Take care of yourself I love you.”

We both laughed at his statement. She was a mother hen there was nothing we could have done except to accept that our mother cared about us so much.

“I love you too, big brother.”

After dropping the call, there was a notification on my phone as I had left the Facebook app on without logging off. Notifications were still pouring in. Some tags and shares were showing. There was only one share which shocked me.

What the.....

This girl was irritating me. What did Alfredo want from me? She had even tagged her friends to attack me but before long there were people who were Chisomo's friends who fought back.

[Keep your nasty comments to yourself. Loose girls like you do not even deserve to be in his wall.]

There were people who commented under that person's comment. Most of them were dragging Alfredo to the ground. I wondered why he was not saying anything as he ignored her like a plague.

[Some people will never see a good thing even if it's in front of their eyes. What is this fool saying about our boy who is in love? I know he would never have approached this lady if she wasn't his type. You are not his type it shows as he will not go for someone like you, so sit your ugly butt down and let love birds enjoy their life.]

The lady who commented was his friend and there were pictures she took with Chisomo and Jerry.

There were so many comments crushing her comments from what I realised the friends who were supporting her removed their comments. They were late as some people had already saved the comments and they were circulating. Most of the people were making fun of them.

What I didn't understand was the fact that she had a child so what happened to the baby daddy. I was certain her fight with me was because Mr. Jere. There was a time when I was not sure, but from that day from her nasty comments and calling upon people to attack me online. While I was still browsing, he called again.

"My darling, I did not intend to cause people to come after you."

He was so worried, and it touched me as I had never heard that tone before.

"We can never control what people say so I am not angry. I know you didn't intend to invite those unwanted quests on your post. How is work?"

I tried to put his mind at rest by changing the topic.

"Work is work, but boring, as I keep on checking your office from time to time. Are you well rested?"

"Yes, I am and I will be leaving soon."

"Do not go before I check out."

I assured him I was going to wait for him and he was happy. I was at a cheerful space that I didn't take what Alfredo to into my mind. All I knew I was going to ask her and call her into order as she was taking things too far.

I slept only to be awoken by a warm hand on my cheek.

“You are already coming from work? Why didn’t you come and collect me during lunch.”

He smiled at me and removed his palm, leaving the space on my cheek cold. I involuntarily put it back there, placing my hand on top of his. I wanted to laugh at myself.

“I called and you were not answering so I thought it best to let you rest so I can take you home well rested.”

I felt my heart swell with just that brief sentence he uttered.

“I didn’t even hear my phone ring I am so sorry.”

“No need to apologise. You worked hard last night.”

I closed my eyes embarrassed. I think if my parents were to learn about what happen inside that rented room, they were going to check for the DNA if I wasn’t adopted. I was going to be an orphan by default. I laughed at the thought.

“Do not be shy. I am not going anywhere so I have the rest of my days to teach you more tricks.”

My eyes open wide as if they were going to hit their sockets. So there was more in his sleeves while I thought I have learnt. I was no amateur at all I think I was as blank as a slate.

“Let me take my things so we can leave.”

“I bought some changing clothes for you my darling.”

I was so surprised. I think I was the only one who bought my clothes since I started college. I doubt even people close to me knew my size. I was married to Joseph who I doubted he knew my shoe size which hardly changed since we got married. I was so emotional I didn't even know how to express myself.

“How did you know my size? When did you buy these?”

He smiled, rendering me weak as I was becoming his captive. I wanted to shout ‘command me master because I am your prisoner’ but I just looked at him.

“I bought them from my way here after work. I didn't want you wearing the same clothes as you wore yesterday. As for your other question, the answer is obvious but I will tell you, anyway. I do not need anyone to tell me what size of underwear my woman wears when I am still alive.”

“Wooooow!”

That was all I could say. I got my answer so why was I going to trouble myself with worry. I changed while he was helping me by tiding up. I was in awe. I had hit the jackpot. I wanted to post it as well, but I didn't have the guts I just smiled and bottled it in like a big girl I was.

“May you please take me home, as I am not sure I am able to drive at this point?”

I was going to milk that cow till it produced glitters instead of milk. Don't you dare judge me a girl had to enjoy those things that she lacked from her marriage?

"Do not stress my darling that was my plan. I will come and check out when I come to pick up my car. I wouldn't let you drive alone or else they will mess up with my woman. I do not want people to think you are single. If it were in my powers, we will be choosing a wedding ring."

I looked at him surprised when I realised how serious he was I just laughed as he joined in. We left the place with me reluctant to leave as I knew I was going to miss him terrible. But life was not a fairytale, so I had to get back to the real life.

"Thank you for the beautiful night and I will always cherish you. Do not even put it in your mind that I do not love you, as I have already admitted to myself that I am whipped."

We both laughed. He was indeed whipped.

"I am happy and I hope this happiness will last as much as I hope it will. Let's do this thing."

We fist bumped.

"I love your smile, did I tell you that?"

"You say weird things but I love those things

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thank you very much you told me and said so many new things as well so yes and I will never tire of hearing it.”

“That’s my girl. I will say it as many times. I do not want you to doubt me or doubt my intentions toward you. I want you to know that I will always be there and I will never let you down.”

I didn’t reply as I was emotional. We bid each other farewell, and I was already missing him. I had to call Mphatso.

“So I hear from the streets that my friend is trending while she is busy acting as Brooke Logan from ‘The Bold and The Beautiful’ I can’t believe it. Besides, I didn’t know those clothes were hiding such a body. I think that is why I love you I am not straight I think I am turning. Will you marry me?”

My laughter was heard the whole compound when I was busy trying to process how crazy my friend was.

“You saw me naked in college always.”

“You were still not mature than so there was no smooth skin but the noodles and lucky star fish body.”

I was beyond hurting from laughter, my lungs were expanding. Those were the days. College was beautiful and fun but the hunger there was also on its high. We used to eat noodles and tin fish even cereal was not a breakfast meal but anytime meal when hunger was at its peak. We hated to love those days

because our freedom was good but our life was lived like beggars who were having fun.

“You are telling me my body is not free of those college days of torture?”

“Did you look at that photo? I am so glad Samantha tagged me I would not have a beautiful screensaver.”

“How could you?”

“My friend is hotty, and I am allowed to brag and show off.”

“I will not stop you. I just got back home, and I wanted to tell you how my stolen night was but you are busy reprimanding me.”

“I have stopped, please do tell.”

I laughed at her enthusiasm. As I knew she would love to hear every detail of what was happening in my life. We spoke till late. I was not hungry for food I was missing my man.

‘Look at you already whipped and thinking about someone else’s son as if you are attached to the hip.’

I laughed at myself. I was glad he called, and we had a beautiful chat. From that day I knew I had made the right choice to give us a chance to explore.

The following morning, I received good news from my sister. She was in a hurry, rushing to court but she told me my lawyer did what he was hired for and made sure the case didn't get the trial. So Alfredo was going to serve time for her crimes. She admitted to poisoning which was attempted murder. Her charges that were brought against me were dropped as well which helped her chance as she asked for a reduced sentence.

I was not even going to bother myself, as she was going to serve some time and leave me alone. I was hoping for her to change during the period she was going to spend in prison. Life was not as simple as 123 or black and white. She was going to meet an opponent that would not be as forgiving or lenient as I was. I was glad I would not meet her at work for a while or forever as her job was hanging by the thread as well.

"Come here."

I almost jumped but relaxed when Chisomo pulled me to the alley and kissed the air out of my lungs. I was happy, as my day was going to be happier.

"Good morning, my darling."

How was I going to answer when I couldn't breathe? That man wanted his love to kill me I could see that.

"I love you and have a day as beautiful as you are. I am going to be busy today, but wait for me after work."

I just nodded as he kissed me again. His smile alone always made my day.

“Someone is glowing and I do not even want to ask for the reason, as I now know who is making her glow.”

Samantha was coming towards me, flying.

“Now I need all the details I will not let you off the hook. When did all this start? No, not dare lie to me or I will expose you.”

“Sshhh, not so loud. The reason Mr. Manager blocked people from the office was because they are so nosy, so please do not let them hear that.”

“Then it is time for you to tell me the truth. I will not take no for an answer.”

“I will let you in I promise as long as it’s not here. You know even pens have ears.”

She laughed and followed me as I was going to the office.

“Today is the day.”

“Stop following me. I promise to take you out for lunch and tell you away from the prying eyes.”

“Deal,”

She said that with a smile and hurried back to her position. I was left looking at her, smiling alone.

‘They are not looking, the bathroom in 5 minutes.’

Those were the messages I lived for. Chisomo worked as hard as he played. Played I mean sex. He always had condoms stashed in weird places. At first I was shy to carry them but then I got used to our Stolen Moment that I didn't want to miss any opportunity.

In days where he would be busy, messages will follow each other in intervals and I was loving being loved. I even lost words to describe what he was doing to me. One brick at a time he removed that wall that I had built. I was slowly forgetting my life with Joseph, but not Asante. She communicated from time to time and I deposited money on the card frequently, although she didn't use it much. Their neighbour was helping us. They had moved to a high density suburb, but she was adjusting. Her neighbour made it easy for us to communicate and for the money to be safe.

At her age she was doing well I think running away from home at that time helped her as she saw life in a different light. She never stopped complaining about her father who loved his job more than her. Well, there was nothing new there. Her granny who didn't want her to stay in her house longer, as she didn't want to clean frequently. No wonder she was always in my

house. She was not visiting frequently as they were staying in the high density suburb. That's lowering her standards.

She always complained about her mother who will come frequently to cause trouble for them and shout till the neighbours came out. Nothing new there as always but then I didn't entertain her hence the visits were not recurrent. She confessed her marks had dropped as life was hard, but promised to work harder. I would not persecute her as she was still young and changing the lifestyle was a contributing factor. Well, blood or no blood, she was my child at heart and I was glad the poisoning was less as I was far because the mother saw no need thinking she will take my place. I still wondered why she never got to be Mrs. after my departure.

I was brought to reality by another message then I snapped out of it and sent, 'after you my king' then waited for the reply which was sent immediately with a dancing guy. I knew he was happy as I had called him 'my king', little things made him happy hence it was easy for us.

"I missed you so much. You know this week I have been busy, and I have been getting so many versions on how to devour you in the handicap bathroom."

The way he said this I was already wet hoping he was going to do something about it. He had read my mind. We were in a bathroom so there was no time for foreplay. I saw a shiny

paper, and I knew my fantasy was coming to reality. Ever since he kissed me inside the bathroom I had images of us changing positions and all but I became shy as always.

“I missed you more. Don’t you think someone will come in here?”

“I doubt even the cleaners visit this bathroom once in a while.”

He was already attacking me with a passionate kiss. I couldn’t resist the urge to take the lead on that day. I was wearing a skirt which made it easier. His finger reached my lips, and he parted them, why inserting the first finger.

“You are already wet.”

He was surprised, and I just kissed him so that we do not waste time. I felt another finger as I was about to explode someone touched the bathroom handle. I think I cursed them with different languages as I was filling the itch. Chisomo was already wearing a condom. He quickly cleared his throat.

“I am in the bathroom.”

The other person was about to open when they heard his voice.

“Sorry sir I didn’t know it was occupied.”

It was one of the junior workers and his voice was shaking from fear. I was relieved my momentum was distu..... I didn’t finish that as his finger went deep inside.

He was not even scared we were almost caught.

“How are you calm?”

“They are called stolen moments for this reason. The adrenaline, the zeal and anticipation should feel like this.”

He was working on me with his fingers and I couldn't respond. My lead role was gone from fear but the pleasure was too much for me to quit the supporting role. I would rather play the supporting role if this pleasure was going to send me to places unknown.

His fingers were replaced by his shaft that always left me breathless. My other leg was flying while he looked into my eyes. His whisper was always the same 'I love you' which left me paralysed.

He turned me to face the mirror and holding onto the sink. He was so quick to thrust and it felt so good.

“Look at us my darling do not close your eyes.”

When I looked at us in the mirror, I was in awe. I only knew that sex was for the bedroom but they lied to me. I felt some magic passing through my body that day and I respected it or rather the man who did that to me and with me.

“See how beautiful you are when I am inside you. See what you make me feel like every day. This is an imprint I will leave so that you will not look at any other man.”

Was he serious? How was I going to leave him when he was my kidnaper? My heart had been kidnapped a long time ago, but I was too stubborn to admit.

“Maya, do not doubt yourself. You make me happy and you make my body happy. I am happier than I was before. Slowly my walls are crumbling.”

He said that trusting one last time putting his hand over my mouth as he knew there was going to be a scream coming after.

“Not at work darling, we don’t scream too much or we will be caught.”

He discarded the condom while I was left trying to compose myself. I didn’t know life and work could be so fun. I washed my face to cool down. I was not wearing any makeup on that day. I had overslept because of a long midnight call.

“Sorry, I didn’t know there was someone here.”

It was the same junior worker who had disturbed us. I was afraid to even ask what he wanted in that bathroom. I was not used to calling it toilet as I felt it was rude.

“It is okay

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madam; I usually use this lavatory as it is hardly used so I take my time.”

I laughed, leaving him standing there. From his expression and relaxed mood, I knew he didn't catch on what we did minutes ago. But I would not subject myself to someone telling me they were taking their time to do number 2 at work. I was not even comfortable at my rented place. I rushed to my office, hoping people didn't notice what was going on. I was glad Chisomo was very professional. At work, he was still the serious guy I met when I joined the company. The only person who knew about us was Samantha and I guess Alfredo also caught the drift as she had commented on the picture. I was not comfortable with that so I wanted to ask Samantha.

When I got to my office, I worked as if I was motivated. I think when one is loved well and right, all things go according to plan. I was not slacking as people portray people in love. I was always with my family when I was not with him or at work. No one said I have changed except the fact that I was glowing and they all knew I was happy and free from that sham of a marriage. I think stolen moments were better than a normal relationship.

“Finally, I can eat the manager’s money. You rarely pay for our lunch, anyway.”

I laughed at her.

“Who told you this is his money? I am paying for you because I need some information.”

“I should have known. So this is a bribe?”

“Do not take it that way. I wanted to ask about Alfredo, I know she hates my relationship with you but to poison me there has to be something behind that.”

“So Mr. Manager didn’t tell you?”

“Tell me what?”

“What do you two talk about when you are doing your lover’s things? Do you only shag?”

“Samantha!”

“I am just asking I wanted to be sure that I will not be an aunt soon as you are shagging like rabbits.”

I hit her with a soviet and she laughed at me as if I was mad.

“Well, when she started working.....”

“There you are. I am coming from your workplace. They told me you are having lunch, so I thought of this place.”

It was my sister behind me. I was surprised I stood up and hugged her.

“Is everything okay?”

I had to ask as she was not a crowd person and if she was looking for me which meant there was trouble.

“I came to pick you up so you can drive me to the hospital. Our aunt was admitted so father was panicking over the phone and I hate it when he panics. I can take mother’s panic as it is common.”

She was right father rarely panicked.

“I thought she was getting better. It’s been months since she had been sick.”

“I am not sure as well. Let us go and find out.”

“You can go I will inform the boss that you had an emergency. Do not worry, I will ask them to put our food on the take-away plates.”

“Thank you, Samantha and hello Samantha,”

I didn’t want to laugh but my sister never acted like a judge and I wondered how they took her seriously in her courtroom.

“Do not mind my sister. Thank you Sam. I will talk to you later.”

We rushed to get my car. I was worried though I was not panicking.

“Do you think it is serious?”

My sister was getting worried, but I had to assure her if it was bad news we would have heard something already. When we got to the hospital, they were in the ER.

“Father, is everything okay?”

He looked at my sister and nodded.

“You father just troubled you. I am fine.”

“You are not fine the doctor is saying you should rest as we are not taking care of you.”

It was a sibling thing that I would not bother myself with I went to my mother who was talking to the doctor.

“Mother, how are you? Doctor, how are you?”

“Hello Miss,”

“Your aunt collapse she was alone in the house. Lucky the neighbour saw her when she was passing. The doctor is saying she is over working and exhausted.”

“Where is her husband?”

“He is at work but I called him already. They are far so he will need to wait for his boss for him to get here.”

“I told her to rest, but she doesn’t.”

“She will have to be admitted for a few days to recuperate. Her body was recovering from the immune disturbance it got but her lack of rest led to the collapse of its function.”

“Will she be alright?”

I was concerned as well, but not scared as she was not bad.

“She needs some rest and fluids that’s all hence I suggest we keep her for days here but with your permission as you are going to be paying for her stay.”

“I do not think that will be a problem. I will see that all her medical bills are covered by me in person.”

“Thank you very much I will go and give the nurse the information she will resume with the process.”

We thank him and approached the siblings who were still bickering.

“Enough you two, I will go and sign the papers and pay the bill. We are leaving you here for some days so you can recover. No negotiations or else when you die I will wake you up and kill you myself.”

The queen had spoken, and the people were to listen and do as she said. I excused myself to call Chisomo.

“My darling, what is going on? I heard you rushed to the hospital what is happening?”

“The news reporter had already reported.”

I laughed as I knew Samantha would not keep it to herself. She was worried I would not blame her.

“She was worried and so was I. Are you okay?”

“Yes, it was my aunt. She is okay though only exhausted, so the doctor is admitting her for a few days to monitor her. She collapsed and her husband was working outside of the city I guess she didn’t have anyone to help her.”

“What about her kids? I think she had grown-up kids if I am not mistaken.”

“Are you talking about those who can’t even boil eggs? They can even burn water on the stove.”

The way he laughed at me. I was being serious. They were not considerate. They were not appreciative of how hard their parents worked to raise them and still care for them.

“As long as you are good my darling, then I am happy as well. I will miss you this evening when knocking off.”

“I will make it up to you tomorrow.”

“Thank you, darling.”

I was happy that he was not changing on me but what Samantha was about to tell me scared me I had to ask her to find me at my place after work. When everything was done, I had to drive my sister to her place.

“You need to get rid of your phobia as I will not be your driver for long.”

She laughed at me.

“Even your next husband will have to be told when he marries you that from time to time you will be my driver.”

It was my turn to laugh.

“I am not getting married.”

“Tell it to someone who doesn’t know you well. I know there is a cock that is making you glow these days. Your parents don’t see that but I can see through you. The phone calls and the smiles are enough for me. I know how hopelessly you are in believing in romance so soon I will be attending your wedding. This one better give you a wedding or we are going to fight. I can even create a criminal record for him and put him to jail for messing with my little sister.”

Okay, that was unexpected and a mouthful. I was shocked and scared at the same time.

“How ...did....you...”

“Close your mouth, baby girl. I have been a judge for a long time, so studying people is my job or else we will release criminals and put innocent people in jail. I hope you are happy and be careful because I will not watch them messing with you this time around.”

“I will be careful.”

“There was no time to deny, but I would not tell her all the details as she was going to judge me.”

“As long as you are happy. I wanted to tell you the good news. My land application got approved and the adoption home idea as well although the registration process is too long the initial stages are done so we can start looking for kids who need our help.”

I screamed, and she reprimanded me to look on the road.

“I am so happy, do you blame me? I knew you were going to kill this. I am glad you are doing this on your own it gives you that sense of purpose. What will happen though if you get kids before they finish building on the site?”

“That is already covered. We are renting a place. I already set money aside to purchase what is needed. The money won't be enough so I have already applied for funding from NGO

companies outside our country. I have so much faith in this but my savings and salary will run this in the meantime.”

“Sometimes even small donations will count. I will help you with proposals to approach supermarkets and furniture shops. You will lose nothing even if they reject but you will gain something if you they respond to your plea.”

“That will be a swell idea I will leave that to you. I do not mind even if you join our admin team so that you can give them more ideas. I need this to be a success.”

That is how I joined her team part-time. I was only attending to matters regarding fundraising. I didn’t want to be involved in the place's running as it was her baby. I only got what they asked me to do and threw in suggestions that were needed.

“I love you, sis, please take care.”

She said when she got off and bid me farewell. I was rushing home to Samantha as I was eager to learn the truth. It would not wait any longer. Luck was on my side because as I approached the gate I saw her standing next to my door.

“How can you command me like this I am not your slave.”

I laughed at her opening the door. She followed behind and went straight to the fridge to take something to drink.

“You are boring you don’t even have a beer.”

“I am not a drunkard all I want to hear is about Chisomo and Alfredo is he the baby daddy for her child?”

“What? Hell no, come on, don’t you trust your man? He can’t do that to you. Chisomo has never had a relationship at work hence I am taking hats off you. We don’t even know about his private life that’s how disciplined he is.”

“So tell me I am curious why then did you ask me if he told me anything?”

“They came in the company the same day and people thought they were coming from the same place and they knew each other. You know the feeling of belonging so I think he felt like talking to Alfredo more as they were both new. Although he was always in his office. It was the first time we got a manager from the outside world. By that, I mean someone from a different company together.

Alfredo then spread the rumours that she was Chisomo’s woman so we should treat her with respect. You know I am an open person so we chatted from time to time. I gave her relationship advice imagine.”

I was shocked.

“So it was all a lie?”

“It was all a white lie. I will say a black lie as her heart is black from envy and filthy jealousy. She even bought a ring and

announced that she was engaged to him. There was a lady who was always friendly to me and Mr. Manager she spread rumours about her being a home breaker and having a relationship with a married man as well as 'her' Chisomo. They dived her and she went into depression when I chose to side with her Alfredo made a mess of things.

One day Chisomo came to work

he was furious and called the meeting. The big boss was there as well. He told everyone he was not in a relationship and he was not engaged or he will never be in a relationship at that time. He said he was busy putting his life together to be worrying about relationships so people should stop congratulating him on the engagement he doesn't know about. He didn't even want to hear about the person behind the rumour. From then the battle lines were drawn, so he never smiled with anyone till you came along. Alfredo is bitter that you took her life."

"She had already moved on, who is the father of her child?"

"Her best friend, who is getting married to his childhood sweetheart this coming year."

"That is some messed up ish."

"You can say that again."

“As long as my Chisomo had no history with her I am happy about that.”

“Look who is saying ‘my Chisomo’ but how does it sound in your mouth, my love?”

We both laughed.

“I am at my happy place as we speak so I do not want to worry about people causing trouble for us. I am coming from a marriage where I was constantly the third wheel because of a baby mama.”

“I am so sorry about what you went through. I know Chisomo is very loving and will allow nothing to happen to you.”

“I have this little voice or it is because I was hurt for so many years. All I know is I am happy for now and I will try these Stolen Moments and see where they will take us. I am enjoying so far and he is a gentleman.”

“You have nothing to worry about then.”

We spent a few minutes talking about other things before I drove her to her place. As always, she was playing music, and I was falling in love with the type of music she was into.

The following morning, as usual, he was waiting for me in the parking lot.

“I missed you last night and your phone was off.”

He said after the kiss.

“I am so sorry I was charging it and forgot to switch it on. I was exhausted physically and emotionally.”

“I am so sorry my love. Do you need me to take you out on a holiday so that you can rest?”

“I will put a pin on it. I want a partner for my brother’s wedding, though?”

“You know I am always ready for your needs. You will always come first in everything I do, my darling.”

“Thank you very much. You will be my manager as I am not ready to introduce you to my family.”

“I am okay with that as long as you considered me as your partner. I was going to be hurt if you were going to take someone else as your partner.”

“You are stuck with me. You will always be my partner.”

The wedding was getting closer and anxiety was killing me more than the bride and the groom. My reputation was on the line as I was the lead organiser. I was happy with the progress so far, but I feared the unknown as sometimes plans go wrong at the last hour.

“You are the best at this. I think you are in the wrong profession.”

My brother said when we were leaving the venue for the reception. I laughed at his comment.

"It was only your wedding, I wanted the best for my brother. I doubt I will take the anxiety on other people I am not related to. This cost a lot of money so if it was a fail then I was going to refund but with you, I knew I would not do that."

He pinched me.

"Ouch, you are mean."

"I was going to ask for it with interest."

We both laughed.

"My wife-to-be already loved your ideas before I even saw them in action. She had faith in you more than people around you imagine."

"Hence she is getting all her heart desires because she got my back. I am so happy I had to put some ideas I dreamt about having for my wedding. Even if I didn't have one, I now know I fulfilled my childhood fantasies."

"I know you have given up but one day you will get married. Look at me, I never dreamt of a wedding in my life but you opened my eyes. I know you will get a man who will put you before anything else and you will see yourself shopping for your wedding."

Sometimes we want to find validation from people or things that we forget the most important thing which is to be happy. I wanted Joseph to make me happy so much that I forgot to take care of myself. What was happening in my life was the opposite. I was sitting back and enjoying people taking care of me for a change and it was refreshing Mphatso even reminded me about countless times she told me to stop and take care of myself. I was enjoying my life. My life was full of anticipation as each day came and that made me feel I had a purpose in life. Mphatso and Samantha were my number one cheerleaders and I would not disappoint them, especially Mphatso.

“We did a great job ladies let us celebrate.”

It was the day before the wedding and we were with the mothers but we had moved to my old room. It was fun as we were talking about girl stuff.

“I knew we were going to pull it off with Maya here, controlling everything. You are supposed to be the manager as well or your boyfriend is teaching you the ropes already?”

There we go, Samantha had to open her mouth.

“I knew you were dating, and you didn’t say anything to me. I suspected, but I didn’t expect to be the last one to know.”

My sister looked so hurt but she had to know why I was uncomfortable telling people about my relationship. I was glad Mphatso answered on my behalf.

“Do not blame her, Nthanda, she is coming from a complicated marriage, and advertising her love life will be the last thing on her mind. Coming from a broken marriage at her age is not what she had imagined. She had dreamt of having a family for a while but it all went out the window. Do you think she doesn’t want to broadcast it to the world? She wants to but is scared at the same time that something might stop her from being happy. She loves deeply, and she was burnt so she is taking it

slowly. If this will make you feel better, we also learnt about it from Facebook as her lover is not ashamed of her.”

Mphatso was laughing as if she didn't just make my ribcage rip off with the pressure from my swollen heart. I had mega love for my ladies.

“Are you for real?”

My sister only heard the last part, and it made me laugh.

“So after delivering the speech of her life you only heard the last part?”

I looked at my sister taking out her phone.

“What can I say? I heard everything before that and I am happy you have someone who loves you equally this time around. So please tell me his name I want to see this man. I think he has won me over as well.”

“Are you not mad at me?”

“Not at all, as long as you are happy then I will be happy as well. Soon we will be gathered here for your wedding and I will tell him nicely to give you a wedding.”

We all laughed, looking at her.

“What, I am a nice person. Even in my courthouse, they know I am an expert judge I do not know why people accuse me when I am an amiable lady.”

“You, amiable lady; that will be the day it snows in hell.”

Mphatso said and started laughing and we joined her.

“You do not know nice people.”

We moved from that topic as we talked about Mphatso and her farm life. She was truly enjoying her life and happy to have moved. It was slow but coming into place. Her husband was busy looking for means to improve their business finances as he was good at it.

Happiness was written all over her face. That made me happy as they deserved this to work. When leaving your job to start something new, that is not a guarantee of success many people think one is risking and careless. People had rebuked them to their faces some behind their backs and they kept their heads held high.

“I am so proud of you. One day you will be one of the wealthiest people in the country and I will be the friend to that big shot.”

We laughed but with pride oozing on all pores of our bodies. It was refreshing to see women and men standing up for what

they believed in. I was scared to start afresh when it came to business so work was for me.

“We need to plan a party for the officially open this farm.”

My sister was not the one to suggest such, so it was strange to us but a brilliant idea. It was seconded, and we started planning as if we were experts in the field. Although we were not, our ideas came into place and we even petted our backs.

The old people made us sleep early. The cooking was done, and the talking was supposed to be saved for the following day.

When we woke up, we were ready to have fun. The catering company was doing everything, and the grannies were going to help here and there so it was time to play with the other kids. I was going to be sitting next to my man, so I had to look good for him. The makeup was on point and the readiness was over a hundred percent.

“You are looking beautiful but it is dangerous as this is a public place.”

It was Chisomo whispering to me.

“Why is it dangerous?”

“I can’t even take my eyes off you and you expect my hands to behave?”

I laughed but stopped midway when I got a dangerous look from my sister.

“See what you make me do? You know she is a judge and she might tell the police to arrest you for disturbing the peace?”

It was his turn to laugh although he suppressed his laugh.

“Do not laugh. She told me yesterday that she wants to talk to you.”

“Why?”

His facial expression changed as if he was disputing.

“We were talking and Samantha dropped your name on the conversation by default and she said she wanted to talk to you face to face. Or can I say woman to man.”

“Well, I am ready for that. I thought she wanted to see me as a judge, not your sister.”

“Unfortunately, on this occasion, it might be both. You cannot separate the two because I suspect she will throw her weight as a judge as well.”

“For you, I can meet all the judges and the army in Malawi.”

Just that small sentence made my heart swell with longing and love.

“This is heart-warming hope you are not pulling my leg.”

“I am not a small boy I do not play games my darling I do what men are supposed to do. I tell the truth as it is. I will not chase after skirts at my age. I have one skirt I am chasing after and I wish to lift it right now.”

I laughed but my body was responding to his words and my mind was running wild at that point. It was as if he read my mind because he whispered again.

“You know there have beautiful bathrooms or even a storeroom for us will do I will make sure you came back quickly and not miss anything.”

I suppressed a laugh and pinched him a little. When I looked at the surrounding people, I saw love and happiness. I was glad to be part of the family. More than that, I was happy Chisomo got to share with me those moments. “Come, let me show you something.”

I took his hand, and we sneaked out. When we were out of sight and I knew no one could see us, I pulled him for a kiss.

“I want us to try something I saw a storeroom on that side of this place.”

He stood still and laughed at me then smiled seductively. I knew he was surprised as he was used to a shy partner who didn't initiate anything.

“Do not judge me; I have to keep up with my game because I do not want to be the odd one out in this relationship.”

He laughed. “Either way, I was the odd one out as well. I am not complaining though because I am loving this. I will admit I had something like this in mind as well, hence I came prepared.”

I smiled, leading him to the storeroom.

“You know you make me happy every day. Why don’t we get married as well?” I laughed at him,

“You have wedding blues, my love, now come here, let us finish what we started.”

The storeroom might have been uncomfortable, but it was very fun and adrenaline-pumping. “Is there someone in here?”

The voice from outside made us stop on our trail. The person was about to open and Chisomo’s hand flew to my mouth. I suppressed a laugh or was it a panic but Chisomo looked so serious and ready to answer the person who was about to come through the door. Then we heard another voice.

“Come this side, they need you at the kitchen for the food. The truck just arrived.”

“Okay I am coming; I thought I heard voices here inside the storeroom.”

We heard footsteps getting further when we breathed a sigh of relief simultaneously. We looked at each other and laughed.

“You see what I was telling you about? We need to get married and stop sneaking around.” “I can't think straight with you inside me.”

He laughed at me. I was not thinking about marriage at that point. I was enjoying our time together. We went to the bathroom from the storeroom, of course, different bathrooms, to freshen up. I was busy smiling to myself in the mirror. How could happiness make me glow so much? Without being told, what I saw in the mirror was the change I never expected to see. It showed how unhappy and how bad my life was. I could only see it when I was outside that life. Hence, it is difficult to advice people who are in an abusive relationship. To me that life was normal, and I didn't see anything wrong until I tasted the good life. I was never going back to that hole hence I was reluctant to even think about marriage.

The wedding was so beautiful. I got to dance with my father and my brother. “I see you have a boyfriend now.”

That was my brother when we were dancing.

“You are right, a boy who is a friend. I need to make friends at work. Remember, I was kept in a cage so now it is time to live my life like people my age are doing. I never had friends except

for Mphatso. I was never even close to my sister because of this marriage. I was not even close to you as well. Now that I am going to live a life opposite to what I lived before because I wasted my years I will never get them back but I can live the rest of my life not apologetic to anyone you see.”

My brother was so emotional, but that was the truth.

“I am glad you are taking control of your life. It's difficult but you make it seem easy when you do it effortlessly. Young ladies should learn from you because you are one good example. I am proud of you and so happy that you didn't let what happened to stop you from being happy.”

“I am trying, although it's still hard. But I promise never to live my life in a box again. I want to make sure I get the best so I can share the rest with others.”

“We can only take one day at a time towards healing, so take your time we will be here to support you. Any word from your ex?” “I don't even want a sneeze let alone a word.”

We both laughed as his wife claimed him. I was smiling at them. They looked so happy and perfect together. My brother was going to make a good husband if he stopped chasing money, as usual.

The day was so beautiful there was nothing to take away from the beautiful thing. Although we know some people are never

satisfied so it was their funeral as it was not their wedding. The bride and groom were happy so were their families who were we to take away their happy moments?

Monday we went back to work with a hangover. I wished I was the one on my honeymoon. My day was going fine though, as we didn't have so many projects at that particular moment. I was done with the registrations as I was only waiting for the coming year to continue with my studies. I was waiting for a fat bonus as well at the end of the financial year.

We were preparing for home when a lady came looking for me. I was surprised as I didn't know her. When I was still busy trying to get what she wanted, a voice came through. "Mommy,"

Me: "Mommy?!" Chisomo: "Mommy??"

That came from both of us at the same time. What the...

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