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Book name: THE COLOURS in Me
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Chapter One

There was that thing, that little too big thing I hated about doing interviews. That thing that annoyed me more than anything in the entire world.

It was not the same questions anymore, I had long gotten over that, matter of fact, I now treated that like drinking bad coffee made by the man I despised in the entire world. It was the laziness the journalist carried, the lack of productiveness and lord! The dressing, lack of style. It always made my eyes blind. But most of all, their inability to know what's real and what's not, they inability to read emotions.

"So, Mrs. Catlet, how do you feel about your husband buying the CC Telecom?"

I smiled. News traveled fast, especially if the news had anything to do with Edward Catlet, especially Edward Catlet the third. "Edward is into opportunities, he doesn't let opportunities pass him by and if there's any

quality he possesses that I love, it's his drive for success. His hunger to make it." Lie. I didn't love anything about him but I had to keep the act. I knew what he was capable of and how ruthless he could become if I didn't act right.

"Your husband is a very powerful man, he's rich, very rich, how does that affect your daily life?"

I looked beside me and caught him staring at me with an affectionate smile. The world would never suspect anything with that smile. He was handsome, he showered me with love in public, offered the best killer smiles, hid the monster beneath the smile so perfectly.

"It doesn't, I support my husband at all times, I hold his hand throughout and everyday I wake up as a proud wife." I answered all that looking at him with that same fake smile I had been smiling for two years now. No one knew it was fake.

The journalist from the Reid magazine quickly scribbled something on her small book then gave me a smile that said 'I'm done' before getting up on her feet.

My eyes immediately went to her bright red skirt with pleats and blue turtleneck top and lastly, her knee high black boots. Too many bright colors on one person. She looked like what my mother called a Sunday meal.

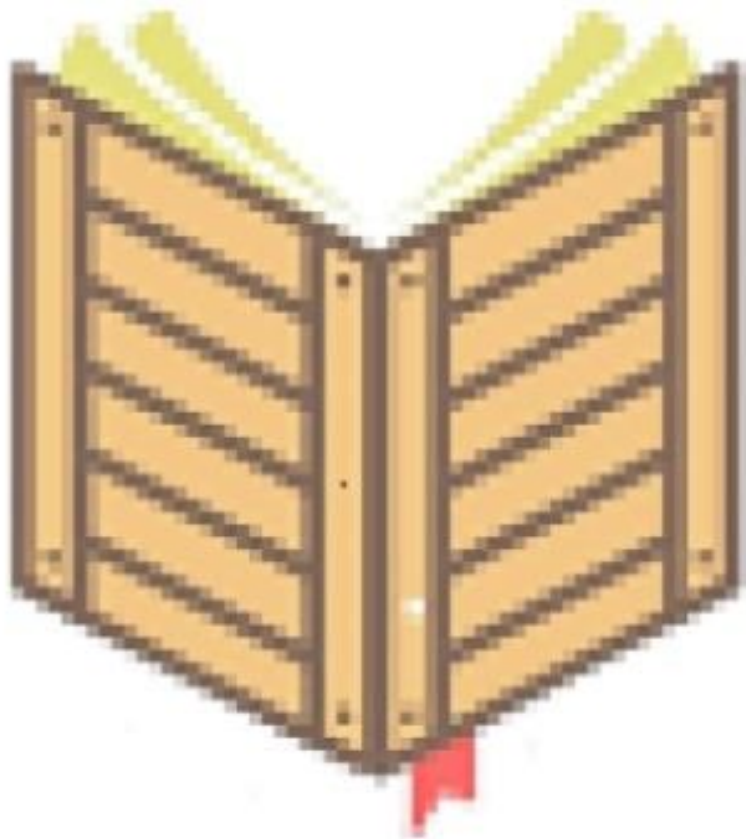
"Thank you for your time, Mr. and Mrs. Catlet."

Edward stood up with grace, offering the journalist a quick and brief handshake. "The pleasure was ours."

I knew that gesture so well, it was the 'get out of my property and never come back' and yes, a lot of people got it. She wasn't the only one.

"Damn about time!" Edward muttered as soon as the journalist disappeared out of sight. As if I hadn't heard

him, I reached for my glass of wine and took a steady sip. "We have a very important dinner to go to, go and dress, Mary awaits you." The annoyance in his voice hardly could be misplaced only this time I had not been the one to be the reason for it.
"And please, do something about your hair."



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I smiled placing my glass down. My hair was black. Deep rich black and very very thick. Long and thick. I loved my hair, most times that I felt I had lost myself, my hair would be there to catch me.

I took after my mother, she had long thick hair like mine, only hers was longer. She usually braided it exposing her round beautiful face.

"I am not going to straighten my hair if that's what you are suggesting." I said calmly and softly. As always.

He looked at me for a while, he knew there was nothing he could do about my hair. He could have robbed me of a lot of things, but my hair was out of reach.

I stood up and walked to the stairs, my ears straining for any movement. He wasn't coming after me. With each step I took, I relatively relaxed.

Mary was a strikingly black attractive woman in her early forties. I loved her because she was understanding and because she was my friend. My only friend. Edward had hired her immediately after we got married, when things were still a bed full of roses and sweets.

Perhaps he had hired her because I was also a woman of color. I wasn't sure anymore. Mary was a black American, and somehow believed that her ancestors were from Senegal. Where she got that theory beats me but I never questioned. "Hey, Mr. Catlet asked I dress you for the night." She begun as soon as I stepped in my bedroom. Even though Edward and I had been married for three years, we did not share a bedroom on everyday basis. At first we did... till the miscarriages. Without realisation, my hand fell to my tummy but quickly I took it off.

Not today Neli. Not today.

"I appreciate everything you do." Even though she was my stylist, matter of fact, my everything as she did everything to make me look the part, she was my friend and I had to thank her.

"I'm getting paid for it." "You know what I mean."

She smiled then motioned I sit in front of my dressing table. "Let's quickly do your makeup."

I sat down and let her get started. "I broke up with Lucus." I looked at her through the mirror. "Again?"

Lucus was her on and off boyfriend.

"This time for good." "What happened?"

"I'm sick and tired of bad sex."

Laughing, I knew exactly what she meant. "So you cheat?" "No. I looked for someone to help him."

"And he found out?"

"It was for his own good."

"So who's this guy you cheat on your boyfriend of three years with?"

Rolling her eyes she made a face. "Steve."

"Your boss?" I couldn't keep the shock from my voice. "Yeah. He's.. talented."

"Mary you know. "

"That mixing work and sex is bad. I know. But "

"No. You said he's married."

"Girl look, his wife is probably not doing something right, I'm helping her."

I shook my head with disapproval. I knew how being cheat on felt. I had watched my mother cry silent tears, watched her break down silently as she couldn't say anything. Having a husband cheat on his wife perhaps could be bad but having a husband cheat on his wife and have his wife not allowed to say anything was worse. The memories of her silent cries still haunted me.

My own husband's infidelity haunted me.

No woman deserved that but then agin, this world was unfair.

"It will never happen again." She somehow defended herself with that statement. "It's ok. So he moved out?"

"Yeah. He had to and thank God he didn't take what didn't belong to him." "He wouldn't, you know he loves you."

"He loved my money. I told you to stop watching those movies of yours. Little girl, wake up and smell the coffee."

I watched her work on my face silently. If there was something I had learnt from my mother was that some arguments were really not worth it. So usually I saved my breath on arguments that appeared to be useful to me.

"He picked this dress for you." Mary picked up the dress from the bed after putting the makeup away. I already looked different. My bun made me smile. It was big and beautiful, my crown.

I looked at the maroon silky off the shoulders dress with a slit. "It's Gucci."

She beamed with excitement.

"I'm sure it is." I muttered getting up then undressed and took the dress from her but the way she stared at my nakedness made me cautious.

"He beat you? Again?"

Quickly I put on the dress and pulled it down over my hips. "Wow! It's beautiful." "Why don't you just walk away?"

"Where are the shoes?"

"He doesn't want you obviously. I heard men who beat their wives don't want them anymore. Why do you let yourself be treated like this?"

"The shoes?"

She threw the sandals with diamond details on the floor. "You need to leave him. He doesn't want you because if he did, he'd treat you with respect. He wouldn't raise his hand on you."

I put on the shoes and admired myself on the huge mirror. I looked like what millions of girls dreamt to look like, a queen.

"I look—"

"Walk away! Listen to me, I'm your friend—"

"You don't understand! You think I want this? This is my life Mary and I can't walk away! So please, where is the jewellery I'm supposed to put on?" I surprised myself on how I remained calm.

"On your dressing table." She said already walking out. No one understood. I couldn't walk away. God knows how many times I had tried to. I was stuck with no where to go. I couldn't even go home. I couldn't go anywhere. I took a deep breath recalling the conversation I had with Alyson, she was happy for

my dearest husband had spoken good about me in magazines. Called me his pillar of strength.

Even if I told her what went on in my sham of a marriage, she would never believe. No one could ever believe me.

I reached for the diamond necklace and put it on. The piece felt heavy on my neck but I was Edward's wife and Edward's wife didn't dress cheaply.

As soon as I put it on, he walked in, already in his expensive suit. "Are you ready?"

"Yes."

He stood behind me and stared at me through the mirror. "This dinner is very important to me Neli, I hope you understand because if you try anything, there will be hell to pay." My intestines tied as he whispered menacingly in my ear. I took a deep breath and smiled. "I know, Edward."

"Good." And he was out by the door.

Sometimes I wondered if really I once loved this monster. I barely knew him anymore. He was a stranger, a monster and I was trapped. Maybe if I had stayed in Kenya with my family things would have been better. I almost laughed realizing nothing could have been better. My father would have long married me off to Owuondah, the village chief. He was going to if I didn't leave.

The arrangement for the wedding were already ready. My father was ecstatic. His second daughter was getting married, it didn't matter if it was to a 65 year old man with four wives already. He may have been rich enough but that's not the future I wanted for myself, it was

never my dream. When I turned 18 years, I knew he had his eyes on me and I knew I had to make a plan for myself just like mama always told me, if you don't save yourself then no one will.

My dream was to become a well known designer. There are days I usually sat at the back of our hut and just paged through old magazines that Normita, our neighbour's daughter would bring with from the city. She worked as a maid in Nairobi. I would aspire to be the one behind the beautiful clothes worn by the women.

The first time I told my parents, my father was livid. To him I had no right to dream as all I had to think about was getting married. Eloping from home had never crossed my mind till the day of my wedding with Owuondah, a man who had 19 children and 7 grandchildren.

The only money I had was the one to reach Nairobi, I had gotten it from mama. At first when she gave it to me I couldn't understand but on the day of the wedding I understood. I had to run and never look back. And I did. I ran from home, took a bus to Nairobi.

An entire world of sin lived before my eyes, a world of both sweetness and bitterness. Nineteen year old me stood in the city of Nairobi with no one but myself, nothing but a small plastic bag with my clothes.

Suddenly I was afraid. Regret started to dig chaos in my mind. I started walking, as if in trance, to where my feet led me.

"Darling, are you alright?"

Turning, my eyes met an aging concerned face. Old enough to be my father, I wished he were my father, wished he would save me but fear blighted me when his eyes glistened with what appeared to be lust.

"You look lost, need help?" He asked. Something about his voice told me to run. I immediately hated him. Him and everyone else like him. Together with my father. I hated them.

I turned and almost ran. I knew I needed to get away from him and fast. It was getting dark. For the first time in my life I slept beneath a bridge like a street kid. The fact that it was winter didn't help. It was so cold that as I laid on that box, I could hardly feel my body parts. I was numb all over. It felt as if God was punishing me from running away from my own wedding. Throughout the night I shivered so hard it was a convulsion.

Tremors rocked through me while my teeth slammed against each other so hard they would just break if possible.

The next morning I woke up and I knew I had to find a job. Normita had explained to me that most rich people needed maids in their big houses. First thing after I woke up, I walked from shop to shop looking for a job. They either needed people with qualifications or experience. Some of the male managers looked at me with nothing but disgusting want.

The first day I didn't get anything other than disappointments. I ate left overs in restaurants. More like stole and ate what people left behind. Even though I was only a few hours from home, going back now was not an option, I had to make it. You really never know how much strong you are till you have no option but to

be strong. The first job I got was as a toilet cleaner at some Guest house. The pay wasn't much but it got me accommodation. I got a room to share, it was big only we were fifteen. I had nothing and that's when I made my first friend ever, Patricia.

Patricia was what mama called a slut.

She was what Normita and I identified as 'night workers' and she didn't care surprisingly.

No body actually cared. I barely knew the other girls but they worked the same job as Patricia. They wore the skimpiest clothes ever, wore the longest heels ever, had the longest weaves.

"Sometimes you have to put your morals aside to make ends meet." Patricia would always say. I always ignored her, I believed I would make it without opening my legs to anyone so I kept my job cleaning the toilets.

The toilets were not bad, some urine outside the urinal or sometimes unflushed toilets. I always thought it was because the people were well mannered recalling the toilets back at high school. You would sacrifice to hold yourself till you return home for the toilets at school were too bad. Some students came with diarrhoea and made a mess, some girls left their pads they used during periods on the floor and sometimes it would just be unflushed toilets full of shit or sometimes mound of shit right on the floor.

To me, the toilets at the lodge were bearable so I cleaned wholeheartedly. My break came when I met Joyce at the lodge. A mid twenties beautiful lady. I had overheard her talk about needing a maid as she entered the lodge and I knew she was my gate pass.

"So you want to be maid eh darling?" She had asked when I told her. "Yes ma,"
"Call me Aunty Joyce."

I found it funny how she preferred being referred to as Aunty Joyce but after I started working as her maid I finally understood. It was in the way she spoke and carried herself, we were in the same level only she had found a man to drag her out of poverty so she as best as she could, always tried to draw the line between us.

One day I had overheard her talk with her friend in her vast sitting room. She had not bothered reducing her voice and I figured she wanted me to hear her.

"She used to clean toilets." She had told her friend with a voice full of laughter. "She's beyond the title of being poor. If it wasn't for me, she would be a prostitute right now."

I knew we were cut from the same cloth but I watched her try to reinvent herself with riches she never worked for. Her words had sliced into me like ice that though I now resided in her house as a live in helper, I wanted to kick her back to poverty.

I didn't quit but rather worked harder.

And when Chief Oluberu winked at me one day, I knew what I had to do.

Growing up I dreamt of giving my virginity to a man that I loved but when the time came, it was to a potbelly fat short man with smelly sweat.

And like that, I replaced Aunt Joyce. She cried, fought me but fact remained, everything was mine. All I had to do was keep Chief Oluberu happy. I had read in magazines about being a designer and when I told Chief, he was more than happy to see me happy. I enrolled to a

college and started my fashion design degree.

I had a goal and I was fighting to get it. After two and half years, Chief spoke of marrying me, making me his third wife. He even introduced me to his first wife. I said yes and pretended to be pregnant. I asked him to wait till the baby was born and he was more than happy. Either way, because he had no child, he was more than happy that I was bearing his first child. He did everything for me as I carried my facade of being pregnant.

I couldn't cater for his sexual needs anymore and he didn't care. All he wanted was the baby which initially wasn't there, I suspected he was infertile. He had three wives, they all couldn't be infertile.

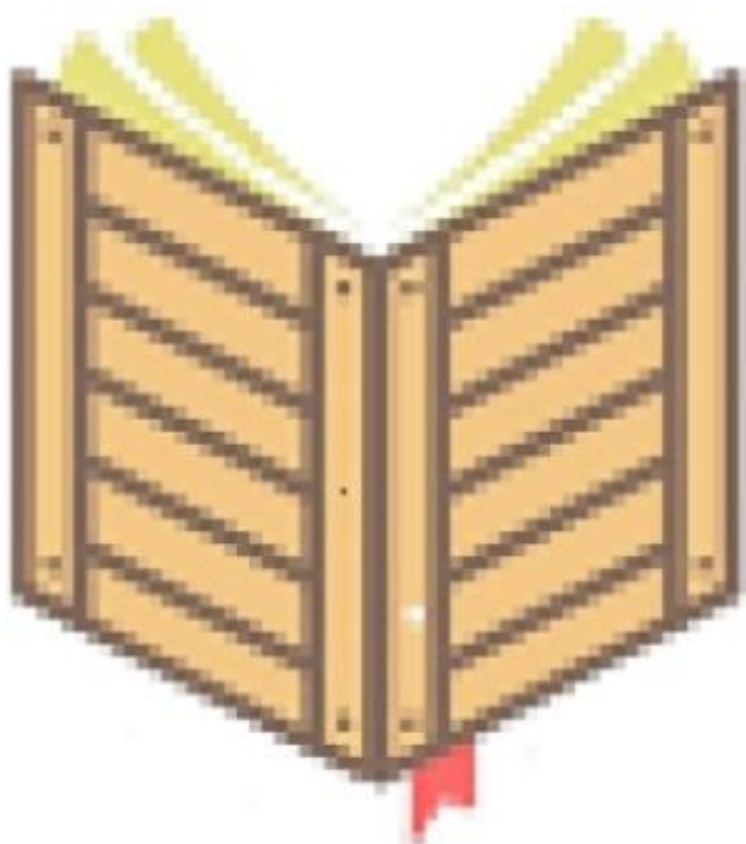
Six months later I asked for money after telling Chief that my parents had passed on. He gave me \$5 000 which I changed to pounds and flew to London. My visa had been approved.

In London it was different. It was cold, the cold coiled itself around your body like an unwanted blanket. Nights came early, and the cold hung in the air like mist. The first days were hard. I would find it hard to walk around looking for a job due to the cold. It left me startled and coiled on the tiny bed of the tiny room I was staying in at some tiny hotel.

I didn't struggle getting a job as a cleaner at some restaurant. When I had asked to speak to the owner, the waiter had immediately told me that they needed a cleaner. I guess maybe it was my 'fro or the way my skin was dark in the midst of white skins that made me look like a cleaner or perhaps my dressing.

Back in Kenya they used to say I was very light in

complexion, but standing with white people, I realized just how dark I was, matter of fact, I was just a black woman.



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"So you are from Africa?" One of the waiters would ask sometime after I started working there.

I found it funny how they would always ask such a question only to forget my answer seconds later. Not that they would stop asking.

My first job in London was a cleaner. I still wanted to be a designer but I had to face reality. I made a friend, Alyson White. My first ever white friend. She was a chef so after the restaurant closed she'd sometimes teach me how to cook.

"I wish I were like you." She'd say sometimes. "Have a voluptuous body like yours. I really could do with gaining some weight."

See, I found Alyson intriguing somehow. I had read about how white girls like being thin because it's 'sexy' and how being a little thick is 'fat'.

It was a first to hear a white girl want to be a little thick because I was. She liked my black natural hair, said it was rare to see black people embracing their own natural hair.

So I kept my hair and fell in love with it. I fell in love with my coarse hair.

I told Alyson my dreams. She smiled when I told her. "Wow! Maybe you should start your own line."

She had said it in passing but I took the words as a message. The night I told her was the first night I took a pencil and paper and started my first design. Ideas spilled from my head to my hand and I came up with my first drawing. Alyson was shocked, of course she hadn't expected it but that wasn't the case with her. She said she hadn't expected me to be that good, said I could

compete with well known brands like Versaci.

That moment there was no regrets, I had a feeling things would be different. Occasionally I envisaged myself already as one of the most famous designers, like those I read in magazines. I would let those thoughts run away with me until I find myself living a glamorous life, living in the grand houses and driving the open roofcars, music so loud. I would imagine people wearing my clothes.

"You can really make it Nelima," she said.

I loved the way she said my name, it sounded like an English word coming from her mouth. Five months later I was promoted to being a waiter and by then, Alyson had gotten married and was staying at the country side with her husband.

"What's your name lover?" Men would ask when I served them.

"Nelima," I'd respond with a smile, always. You smiled more, you got more tip. This was the rule, keep the customer happy and get tips.

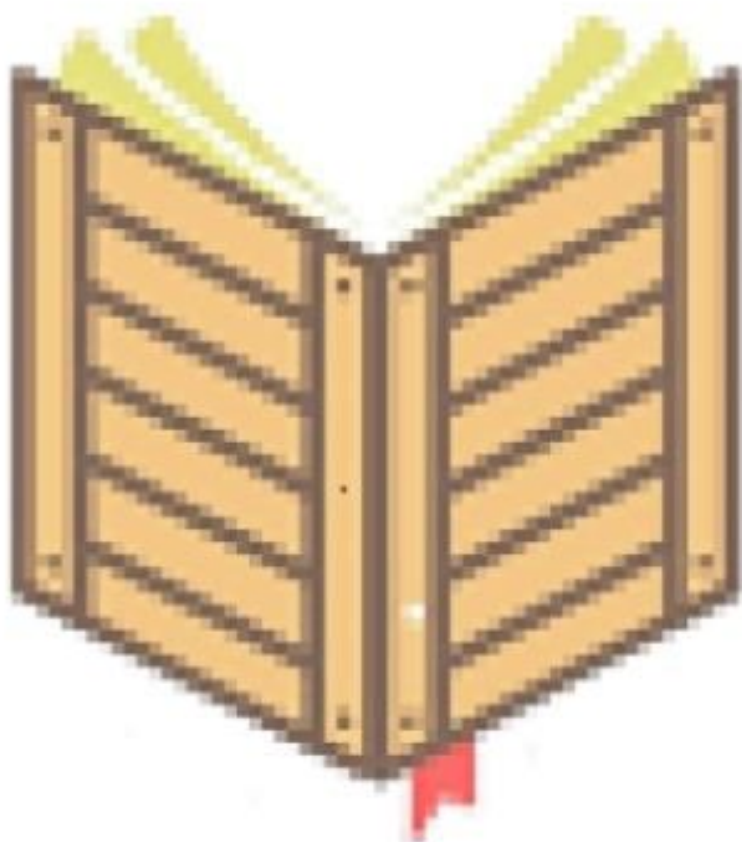
"Nelima," I'd respond with a smile, always. You smiled more, you got more tip. This was the rule, keep the customer happy and get tips.

I lived my life like that for another five months and managed to buy my first materials and make my first piece. **NOVELSGURU.COM**

It was good but I didn't sell it. I felt I needed to show it to a well known designer and maybe get a job as an assistant designer. As far as it was far fetched, to me it actually made sense.

I made more pieces as time went on, I took my time on them, gave them my all. I didn't care if it took me months doing one piece. Two years later, as a waiter, I

had 10



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pieces and was ready to show them to Carlos Duan, owner and founder of Duan, one of the well-known fashion house.

I had read about him and I was more than convinced he would like my pieces. Duan fashion house was what I saw as heaven on earth. The Duan fashion house headquarters was located in a tall building, more than twenty stories. Standing in front of the building I felt too tiny. Too small. I had felt too dizzy but I pushed through with my bag containing my pieces.

Have you ever felt like you are walking towards the door containing your future? The door that has all of it for you? That's how I felt that moment. I had my heart in my mouth, hands sweaty and my knees weak. I was scared. I was scared of what awaited me. I was scared of what was coming for me.

Sitting down in the waiting area I held my bag tightly and tried to pray. For the first time I couldn't remember how to pray, I couldn't find the words.

The looks I got from the receptionist didn't help either, from her eyes I knew she felt I was nothing but a waste of time. I sat wondering idly just how it felt to be Carlos Duan. It probably felt too good, it had to. The door finally opened and a tall lean man walked out. Tall, elegant and from his suit which looked custom made, rich. Very rich.

My heartbeat quickened, my blood rushed. He was handsome, too handsome. I had never seen such a good looking white man before who left my mouth dry. He was older but irresistible, too good looking. Just by looking at him I felt drawn to him.

Forcing myself to look at his expensive suit, I sucked in a deep breath. I felt it was more than a moment of

weakness but that was not why I was sitting on that bench in the Duan fashion house.

I forced myself together but when I heard his voice, I scattered apart. "Mam are you ok?"

My heart stopped momentarily. I had completely forgotten how to breathe. Raising my head slowly I found him staring at me.

"You are sweating, are you ok?" Again he asked. Suddenly my capability of thinking deserted me. He looked sincerely concerned and I couldn't get a single word out.

Was he Carlos Duan? I knew Carlos Duan but I had forgotten how he looked like. I had forgotten everything.

"Take.." His voice broke my trance of thoughts. He was now holding a glass full of water. His cologne filled my nose, my body reacting to it. He smelt good, as I had expected.

My hands shook as I took the glass from him, I felt funny. Finishing the water I gave him back the glass making him smile. His smile made him look even more handsome. He looked like a very important powerful man and I suspected he was. "Are you ok?" He softly asked.

I nodded quickly. Something was off with me. "Uh.. ok."

Taking a deep breath, I opened my mouth. "Mr. Duan.." His unexpected chuckle cut me off. I felt more stupid and foolish. I just wanted to die.

"I am not Mr. Duan," he said with his British accent that I was still growing acquainted to. "You must be here for Carlos."

Relief flooded throughout me. At least I hadn't made a fool out of myself in front of Carlos himself.

"Oh, sorry."

"It's ok. I'm Edward." He introduced himself. He was probably in his mid thirties. "Ok."

I tried standing but his hands on mine stopped me.

"Wait, are you sure you are alright? You should sit down for a minute."

He was crouched before me, holding my gaze. Blinking a couple of times I nodded. "I'm fine, thank you."

Looking away, I caught sight of the receptionist. She was staring at us in shock. Of course it was shocking to have such a breathtaking man crouching before me looking all but worried.

"Ok." He stood up and left. It's like nothing had happened but it had.

"Mr. Duan is ready for you." The receptionist said after 10 minutes of me sitting thinking of nothing but Edward.

Carlos Duan was a gay man who looked nothing but gay. He smiled a lot, kept the mood light. He didn't make me feel stupid, matter of fact my designs left him in awe. Not what I had expected but even better than what I would have dreamt of.

"These are amazing. You are amazing. Such raw talent." He said while looking into my book full with drawings. "I like you."

Carlos hired me on the spot. I was his Personal assistant and my pay was far much better than anything I had ever gotten. But I still thought of

Edward. Every time I recalled our encounter I'd feel like dying but because of my new job, I forced him out of my head.

Being Carlos's assistant was much harder than I had anticipated. He was a free spirited person but I never sat down. There was always something to be done, someone to call, somewhere to go. After two weeks I realized he was a polite person. He had been polite to me the first day we met and he continued being polite. Even when being rude, you wouldn't realise it as he said it in the most nicest kindest way ever.

So he had been nice to me. He had offered the PA job to me nicely. Not that he thought I was a good designer and working alongside him would help me learn. No. He thought I was good enough to be a Personal assistant and said it in a way that I would feel honoured. He didn't think I could make a good designer but he didn't have it in him to actually say it like that. He rather suggested a job that was suited for me and made me feel as if he thought otherwise.

It was hard coming into terms with that but I had seen it. That was just the way he was. No one could ever be like him and he kept it going like that.

Two months as his PA it had sunk in but I still pushed my dreams on the side. I kept on making drawings and pieces only this time I wore them myself.

I had almost forgotten about Edward till I bumped into him at the fashion house. He had been meeting Carlos but Carlos wasn't in. He was in France, attending a fashion week.

"Hi," he said lightly with a chuckle.

I immediately recalled the first and last encounter we had shared and felt my blood rush. I still couldn't escape the embarrassment even in my dreams.

"Edward."

I loved his smile. It was.. addictive. "I'm glad you remember my name, if I may ask, what is your name?"

"Neli." For the first time ever, I hadn't bothered saying my name in full. I felt Nelima sounded too African and Neli fit in much better.

"Neli. Nice name. Well considering your boss is not in and I have wasted my time, do you want to grab a cup of coffee? There's a cafe shop down the road."

Looking into his eyes I couldn't say no. Besides him being the first man to approach me, he was the first man I had ever... been interested in.

Edward was funny and handsome. He smiled a lot. He was nice and lovely. He liked my hair too. He liked my dark skin too. In two months I had fallen in love with a white man.

Even though I kept denying it, I knew I had fallen in love. He was just an ordinary man yet loving. He wasn't pushy and that's what I loved about him. The fact that he was 11 years older than me didn't matter, it didn't seem to move me. He was the first person I could talk to since I left home. The only friend I could freely tell my biggest fears without hesitation.

I could be
myself with
Edward.

When he told me he loved me, I knew I felt the same. So our relationship started. He was the perfect man. The perfect everything. He did everything right, he loved me

hard, gave me his all. He was rich, he was running his great grandfather's company. My life soon changed. From the small apartment I had started renting, he convinced me to move in one of his double stories. It was big and beautiful and made of glass.

I could see everything change but I couldn't bring myself to stop it. It just kept on changing. One moment I was Carlos's assistant and the next, I had my own boutique. Edward had bought it for me, said I didn't need Carlos. I had my own car, Edward said a lady like me deserved to be treated like a queen. I now wore expensive clothes, he said it was courtesy of being his girlfriend.

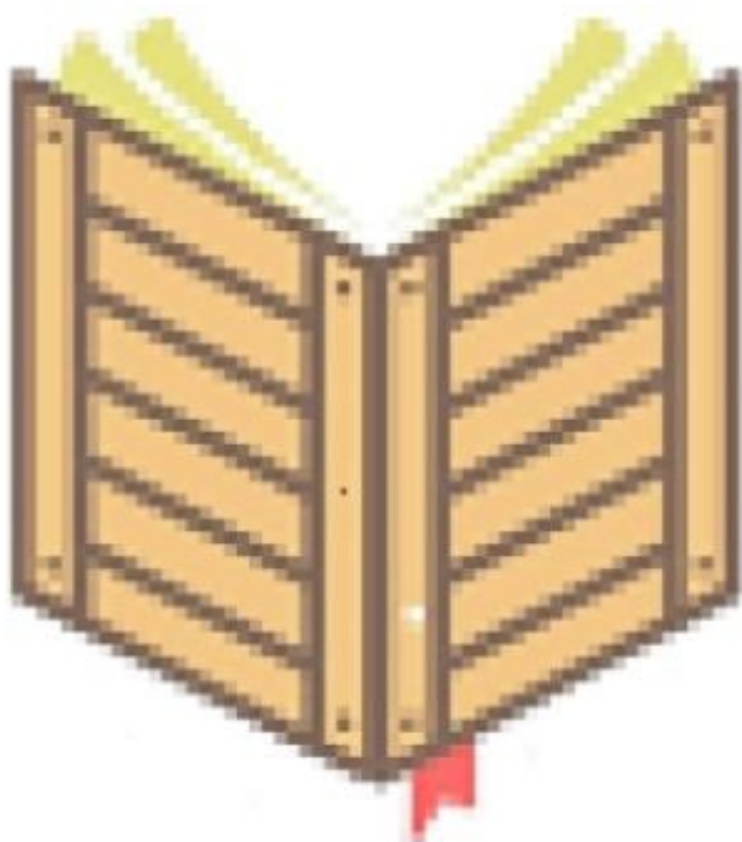
They say money changes people, I believe it does. I had changed, I could barely recognise myself, I could barely remember the girl I once was. That's when the sleepless nights came. Have you ever been so happy that you fear it's too much and something is bound to come and destroy all that happiness? That's how I felt. I felt it was all bound to end, I felt it was all a dream and soon enough I would just wake up and find it all gone.

A year later, Edward proposed. And I said yes.

So we got married. I wore the white gown and walked down aisle alone. Edward's family and friends were there, and I was alone. I had no family. I hadn't spoken to my mother in years, the last time I had spoken to her was on the day of my wedding with Owuondah.

His family was loving. He was a loving husband. I was a happy wife. The happiness multiplied when I got pregnant four months later. Edward was extremely

happy, so was his mother. I hadn't seen him that happy.



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Then I had a miscarriage when I was five months pregnant. Edward was in Australia on a business trip. I was alone. I had just woken up in the middle of the night due to cramps. Seeing the blood I knew what had happened but my brain couldn't process it.

I had laid on the bed for an hour just trying to understand and when I finally got hold of the phone to call an ambulance, I knew it had happened. Something deep in me had died.

By the time I reached the hospital, I was crying. Crying for my loss. It was like something was just strangling me, the pain. The grief. The agony. It was too much. I had never felt so useless in my entire life. I wanted to die for I saw no reason in living.

Edward arrived later the following night. My miscarriage affected him as much it did to me, it affected him so much that I felt him slip away from me. The doctors said it was mother nature.

We tried again, Edward wanted us to try again and we did. I fell pregnant but this time around I didn't even reach four months. I lost the baby at 10 weeks. Then again we tried. Only for another miscarriage. The doctors couldn't find the reason why I kept losing all my babies.

With each miscarriage, I always felt crushed. Each miscarriage killed something deep in me. Each miscarriage left me in pieces. But neither did Edward or his mother see that. They kept pushing.

Till the doctor announced my womb can never carry any baby full term. In other words, I was good as infertile.

The doctors said I had cervical cancer, the first

stage. But all that didn't move Edward.

Only two years into our marriage and everything had changed. I was only 26 yet I felt 67. Edward paid for my chemotherapy and the doctors announced I was cancer free after the treatment.

But something had changed.

Everything had changed.

Edward had changed.

The distance between us grew with each day. I saw less of him each day. I thought maybe he was just dealing with what we had been going through but it kept getting worse. I tried to reach out but he didn't want me.

The snapping started. The mood swings. The insults. Then the slaps here and there. Then the cheating. In front of the world we maintained a happy couple front but behind closed doors, it was something else.

He had turned into something, into a monster. I watched the love between us die each and everyday and when it was over, I wanted a divorce.

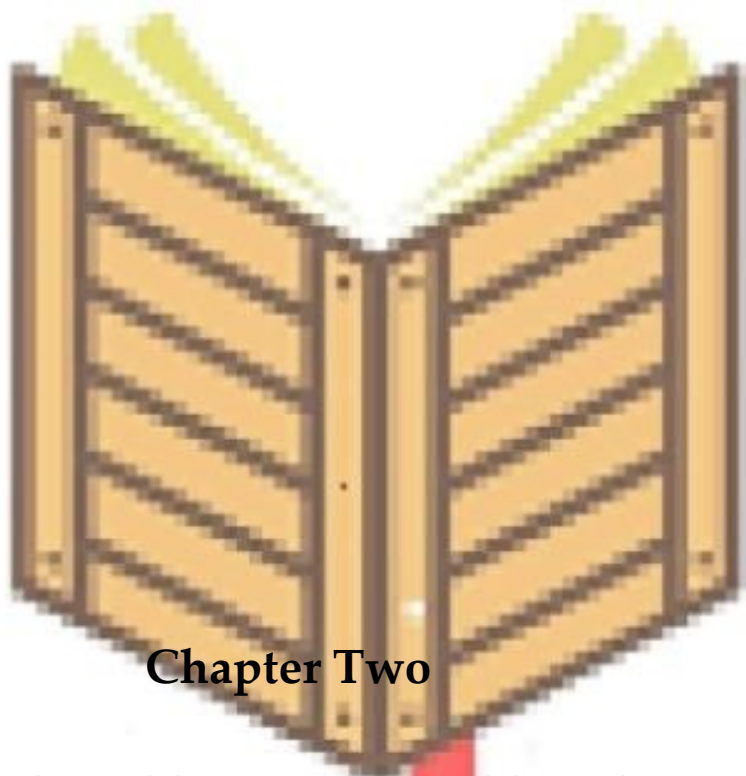
But he wouldn't let me leave.

He became more violent. More of a monster. Our marriage turned into a prison. Then I realized something.

Nothing had happened. Edward hadn't changed.

The Edward I knew wasn't the real Edward. The Edward I now was dealing with was the true original Edward.

I never questioned him. When we had met, he told me he was once married but I never asked what happened. And right then I knew what had happened. He was nothing but a lying, cheating abusive bastard and I was stuck.



Chapter Two

Outside in the cold evening I could see happy faces, joyous faces. Almost everyone was happy, it was new year's eve once again. Another year yet to begin. Sighing I knew it would be full of pain but I planned to make the best out of it. I was going to take the new year and make it mine. This time around, live with no limitations.

As the car slid through the iron gates of the huge mansion, I sat back relaxing. It was going to be yet another night full of fake smiles and laughter with

money hungry people.

Once upon a time, I dreamt to be like them. Once upon a time, I just wanted to be like them.

As I enjoyed the comfort of silence, the car came to a halt. We were parked right by the entrance. Edward looked at me.

"Behave."

I nodded. I didn't have it in me to fight with him anymore. He was just a sad soul, I wished one day he would find the one. The one who would teach him how to love truly.

The driver opened the door for Edward and gracefully so, he stepped out and helped me out.



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He put his arm around my waist and together we walked inside the mansion. We were having dinner with 'important people' as Edward would say.

An elegant lady dressed in a sparkling black dress walked up to us holding a glass of wine in her hand. She was beautiful and I suspected she was the host. Moving her blonde hair from her face with her free hand, she approached us, a smile already in place.

Taking a deep breath,

I smiled. "Edward,"

her soft voice

sounded.

Edward freed me and hugged the petite blonde lady showing affection. "Lisa," "It's always good to see you, you look good."

"So do you." He let her go but couldn't keep his eyes off.

"You brought your date? PA?" She asked looking at me.

I still smiled, I was used to feeling like an outcast at such events.

"Uh no, this is Neli, she's uh.. my wife."

She frowned then flashed me a smile.

"How do you do, darling?" "Um Neli, this is my friend, Lisa. I told you about her."

No, he had not told me about her but as usual, I played along.

"It's nice meeting you, Edward said the most nicest things about you." "Likewise, Edward I'm so glad you came. Come, my father is already here."

I walked behind them like a third wheel that I was. Approaching the table where a group of people were sitting, I immediately regretted not playing sick. I knew the night was going to end while I sat in silence. I was

nothing but Edward's wife, Edward's African wife.

I was not important but just some poor black woman to most people. The waiter soon came and poured me a glass of wine. I took a sip and sighed. Twenty minutes later everyone was talking about money, business and politics and Edward was talking to Lisa's father while she smiled at him sweetly.

I still had the same glass of wine, I kept taking sips and just staring at Edward. As I diverted my eyes from him I moved to each and every one on the table. They all looked sophisticated and rich making me wonder if really they were happy with their lives.

My eyes stopped on some man. He wasn't dressed the part, he was wearing a T-shirt and something told me with a jeans. His hair was kept unruly. The fact that he looked bored and just not interested made me smile. He didn't bother hiding it.

Shaking my head I looked beside me. Without thinking I stood up and muttered a silent excuse me.

Edward didn't hear me so I just walked outside. I needed a breather. My feet led me to a huge pool outside. The cold breeze made me hug myself. A lot of thoughts ran through my head but what stayed was my mother.

I prayed she was still alive.

"I still don't understand the use of these boring dinners." A husky voice said from behind me. I turned and smiled slightly. It was the disinterested guy. He was tall, taller than Edward. What was I thinking? I myself was taller than Edward but this guy probably was 6'2.

"They have such dinners so they can talk about how rich they are." I responded.

He rubbed his hands together then took out a cigarette from his pocket together with a lighter.

"That's all they know."

"Yeah."

He lighted his cigarette then started smoking. "Can I have a pass?"

He looked at me. "You smoke?"

"There's always a first time for everything."

He stared at me for a while before he gave me his cigarette. The first puff I took made me feel suffocated with smoke, I started coughing.

"Don't do too much. Just relax."

My eyes were watery. Nodding I tried again, this time it was better.

"Why are you here? Your husband seems to have forgotten you back in there." I took a puff taking off the heels. "I can't say no."

"That's sad."

I chuckled. "It's life."

He took his cigarette from me.

"What's your name." "Neli.

Nelima."

"Nelima? What's that? It sounds like a bad ugly name." "It means the one born in darkness."

Huffing his cigarette he nodded.

"Who named you?" "My father's mother."

He nodded. "You are a sad being."

"Why are you here?" I asked trying to change the subject.

"My father forced me otherwise I would be out there on a mission right now." He now sounded annoyed.

"A mission? You sound like a thug but then don't look like one." "And how do thugs look like?"

"They..." I sighed. "I guess I don't know."

"I was supposed to take a Bugatti from some insanely rich spoilt brat."

I looked at him as he put his cigarette out. "I'm sorry you missed your mission." "Don't be. I will get it tomorrow."

"Why do you steal if your father is rich?"

"Because it makes me happy."

"Wanna go to some bar?" I looked at the mansion then at him.

"Edward—" "Did you sign a prenuptial?"

I frowned but then nodded.

"You are not happy so we are going to have fun. If he divorces you, it shouldn't matter, you are not getting anything even if you stay here unhappy."

"I just can't leave."

"Happiness is a choice and so is sadness. Life is short, I usually make the best out of it."

He turned and walked away going to the gate entrance. I opened my purse and took my bucket list.

On number 1 was go to a club or bar and just have fun. I knew what would happen if I left the dinner but at the same time, it didn't matter anymore. It would soon be over, my count down had started a month ago.

I held my purse tightly and picked up my shoes. With a naughty giggle I ran after him.

"Your life must be boring." He said not turning to look at me. "You looked pathetic and sad back in there."

"Are you always like this?"

We stepped out of the gate then walked to a black sports car. An Audi R8. He unlocked the car.

"Like what? Honest?"

"Arrogant. Is this yours?"

He got in his car. "No but for tonight it is."

I let out a chortle out of shock.

"You stole it?" "Are you coming or not? I don't have all day." "Where's your own car?"

He closed his door then started the car. Sighing, I walked to the passenger seat and got in the car.

"Have you ever been to a bar?"

I stole a glance at him as he drove from the mansion. "No." "Age?"

"That's a private question."

"You are in my car, hoping to run away from your husband with me, it's too late now, there's no privacy with me."

He was right but just for tonight, I wouldn't think about Edward and the consequences of what I had done.

"He's going to be very upset." "And beat you up?"

I smiled shrugging.

"Most likely." "Then why do you stay?"

"He won't let me leave."

He didn't respond and just stayed quiet. I itched to know what he thought but wouldn't ask so I stared pensively out the window.

"I have a bucket list." I murmured.

He turned and gazed at me, his face impassive. Ever since we started talking he hadn't smiled as yet.

"Is your life that sad?"

Laughing I took it out. "I guess. I want to do everything on the list."

He pulled the car in front of the bar I guess. I could hear the noise from the car. Taking the paper with my bucket list he frowned. "You have 30 wishes?"

"Yes."

"Bungee jumping, jet ski riding... what the fuck is watch penguins?" "I just want to watch them."

He looked at me then back at the paper.

"Mindful mediation?" "Yeah.."

"Your list is weird. You want to sleep with a random person, doesn't he make you reach orgasm?"

He was so straight forward, I found it intriguing. "He used to." Handing the paper back to me he got out of the car. I followed suit.

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"Is this a strip club?" I asked as soon as we got inside the bar using the back door. There were women on poles barely wearing anything. Most women were barely dressed, it was pandemonium at it's best. It was packed and everyone was sweating. "It's a bar. Come."

We passed a bouncer and they didn't ask anything. I let him lead me through the bar till we were at the stools where the bartender stood. The bartender came and my stranger ordered our drinks.

Soon my house by Flo Rida started playing. "I love this song." I told him.

"Can you dance?"

"No."

"Wait here."

He left me and disappeared somewhere. The song changed and something fast started playing. He was back seconds later.

"Come.."

He dragged me by my hand and led me to where everyone was dancing. I giggled. "Hey, I don't know how to dance!" I screamed above the music.

He started dancing. My mouth went dry as I watched him dance. People moved back and as I tried to move with them he put his hands around my waist. My cheeks started burning. People were now cheering.

When the song stopped he pulled me against him. "Dance. Dance with me." Another fast song. Everyone had joined us now. He moved my body with his, I could feel his hard body against mine, could smell his cologne

mixed with nicotine. An hour later I too was sweating and tipsy. I had loosened up. The club was now filled with reggae songs. I had made up my mind, it was a club. A real bad bad club. No bar was this bad.

I was now sitting with a beer in my hand. I couldn't spot my unknown man anywhere.

"Hey boo!"

A chocolate complexion man said with his deep voice while sitting beside me. He was hot. Dark and hot, too fine!

"Hi,"

"How are you?" His eyes went to my glass then back to my face. "Fine you?"

"I'm good boo, want another drink?"

"No, she's good." My unknown man chipped in quietly. He was back and didn't look too happy. Matter of fact he was glowering at Mr. Dark chocolate.

"Nick, sup, dawg?" Mr. Dark chocolate said standing up. The atmosphere had changed.

He nodded and Mr. Dark chocolate scurried off somewhere. Who was he? Nick? Was that his name?

"Let's go."

He dragged me out of the strip club. My head was swimming and I vaguely remembered Edward.

Wherever he was, he was spitting fire and busy making phone calls for people to find me.

I laughed when we got outside.

"Where are we going, stranger?"

He turned and looked at me. "I don't know but you are coming with me." "And if I don't want?"

"You do, by the way, I'm Nick. Nick Bradley."

I giggled childishly then took off my shoes.

"You don't sound British." "I'm not. Let's go."

He was already walking to the stolen car.

"Where are you from?" I screamed running after him.

"That doesn't matter." He unlocked the car walking to the driver's seat.

"It is. I'm from Kenya. My name is Nelima Niji. Your name is Nick." I said slowly then laughed. "Mr. Bradley, I think it will be fair that I know where you are from." He got in the car. There! He was arrogant.

I joined him the car and pouted looking at him. "Tell me please.."

Ignoring me he started the car and started driving. As crazy as it felt, I actually felt safe with him. In a few hour's time he had managed to make me happy. I couldn't recall the last time I felt that happy.

"Somewhere in your list you said you want to take a course in car racing. We are going to do that tonight."

"Are you always like this?"

Impulsive?" "Like is short

so why not? Plus it's fun." NOVELSGURU.COM

I smiled opening the window. "My husband —"

"You think too much, that's why you are always sad." I shook my head. He was totally a different breed.

I relaxed and looked ahead. I still felt slightly tipsy. After about 45 minutes the car was parked with other many cars. I had never been to this part of London but

then, I had never been to a lot of places because Edward kept me prisoned in the big house. Girls were a lot, half naked and I guessed it looked normal because no one was cold. "Aren't they cold?"

He looked at the girls passing his car in only bikini's. "I don't know and really don't give a fuck. Let's go."

He clambered out of the car making me follow after him. My long dress did make me feel out of place and at the same time comfortable.

"Nick!" Some chubby guy greeted offering him a handshake. "Jamara, I got my girl here, she wants a race!" He told him.

They both turned to look at me.

"New girl?" Jamara asked with a chuckle. "Nah.. just a passer but can you help?"

"Yeah, whatcha' got?"

He pointed at his stolen car and Jamara chuckled. "You know what to do."

As the chubby guy... Jamara walked away Nick looked at me with a sly smile. "Ok, you are in but you lose, we lose the car and we leave here walking."

"But.—"

"You win, we get another car." "But I've never—"

"You know how to drive huh?" "Yes but—"

"She's all yours."

I looked back at the car, I was sure it couldn't be that bad. Minutes later I was in the car and only waiting for the gunshot to go off.

Nick came and stood by my window. "Remember, we need the car."

Laughing I shook my head. "Umm... that's the thing, we are going to walk from here. Sorry."

He moved back and I focused on the lady between my car and some pretty girl's who I was taking the race with. She looked like a professional car racer and I knew completely that I was going to lose.

"You can do this Neli... you can only do this once." I told myself with a grin.

The moment the gun went off, I pressed on the gas and the car flew forward. I laughed pressing the gas even more. It was really fast that I felt my blood pump. I couldn't keep the grin off my face as the car flew. Seconds later I remembered I was in a race and glanced at my side. The car wasn't there but in front of me. Feet from me and we were approaching the end.

My feet pressed more on the gas and it continued shooting forward. It was too fast but the end was near and there was nothing I could do more. People screamed when I stopped the car seconds after my superior had stopped hers.

Stepping out of the car Nick approached me with the Jamara. "I'm sorry?"

He smiled. He had a really cute smile that made my cheeks hotter, I couldn't deny it, he was really good looking, really attractive. More than Edward.

"We better start walking."

He gave the Jamara a handshake and started walking.

Taking off my heels, I ran behind him. Something told me I was always going to run after him.

"So what do we do now?" "Steal."

Stealing was wrong. Wrong and dangerous but with Nick, it was fun. The fact that he chose his cars carefully made it a whole lot funnier. I looked at him as he drove the Mercedes he had stolen from some restaurant's parking lot. He had no key to the car but still, he was driving it.

"Don't you ever get scared that you might get caught?" He glanced at me then back at the road.

"No. I never get caught." "Do you have a girlfriend?" I asked calmly.

"No. Shit!" He cursed peering through the review mirror. My heart skipped when I heard the sirens.

"What—"

"Relax."

He swirled the car into some building, a hotel then stepped on the gas and straight it went into the underground garage. Parking the car between other cars, he stepped out.

"Let's go!"

I quickly stepped out with my purse. Putting his hand around my waist he pulled me to some door. As soon as we got in, we heard the police sirens.

I chuckled. "That was close."

"I've seen worser days." "So.. where are you from?"

He opened another door and led me inside. "My father is from Brazil but has been here since I was a teenager."

"Your mother?"

"South Africa."

"What?" I couldn't keep the shock from my voice. "Why are you shocked?"

"You.. where's she?" "Dead." "Sorry."

From the long passage he opened another door and we were outside. "Why are you whispering?"

His question threw me off, I laughed realizing I had been whispering all along. "Sorry."

He shook his head and started walking back to the road. "Stop apologizing." "Sorry I... ok."

I walked behind him and found myself staring at his butt. I couldn't help it, he had a sexy butt.

"Good enough for you?"

I cleared my throat moving beside him. He glanced at me with a smirk. "Where are you going Nelima?"

"I don't know but wherever you are going."

He walked to some tall building, it looked like a hotel but something told me otherwise. Getting through the glass door we passed the reception and went straight to the elevator. Some lady joined us in a short black

number and smiled at Nick.

He plainly and rudely ignored her. She blushed and looked away, poor soul. The elevator stopped and he walked out.

"You stay here?"

"Yes."

We walked to the door of his house I figured, he unlocked and we stepped in. I sucked in my breath as I looked around. Not what I had expected. It was too clean, spotless.

"Wow!"

"What?"

"I expected a pig house."

He turned to look at me. "Why?" I shrugged. "Just.."

He walked back towards me and stood a breath away. "I'm no pig but if it makes you feel better, I do have a cleaner." He whispered. My whole body tightened in a hot heavy manner. Desire hit me so hard making me lose my breath.

"I want to fuck little Mr. Edward's wife."

My mouth dried as my body came to attention again. I was dead already, Edward was going to kill me, it didn't matter if I let very attractive Nick use me or not. "You have a vendetta to settle?" I asked, barely audible.

"Yes but you want me too."

He tilted my chin. "And you are going to have me."

He leaned over and kissed me. Softly then deepened the kiss thrusting his tongue between my lips. My heart pumped even more as he kissed me real good. I had never been kissed that good before. I could feel my panties dampen only with a kiss. Letting my lips go he ran his thumb on then my cheek. "I'm going to fuck you so bad, you will never forget me."

All the red flags went off in my head but I couldn't stop myself, couldn't stop him. I wanted him so bad and I had wanted him since dinner. He turned me so I stare at the closed door and unzipped my dress. Gliding down my body, it fell.

"Fuck!" He cupped my ass then kissed my neck.

"Beautiful."

I swallowed hard as he pulled my panties down my legs. I was really letting a stranger fuck me. It was on my list but it felt somehow.

Once my panties were off he parted my legs and next his thumb was rubbing my clit. I tipped my head back, a moan escaping my lips.

What are you doing? This is not you! My subconscious screamed.

But then, I didn't even know myself. And I had fantasized about this moment, it might have been happening differently but it was happening.

"Shit!" I cried throwing my head back. I felt wanton.

"I'm going to fuck you so hard, you will still feel me inside you even when I'm done."

He rammed two fingers inside me and I tensed all around him. I could feel my build up begin, I was so close. The pleasure felt too much and I knew I was about to suffer a mind blowing orgasm.

"You are close aren't you? Come for me.." He commanded and I unraveled around his fingers. I was now shaking and panting due to uncontrollable pleasure. My knees were weak and before I could even gather myself, he plunged into me making me feel each and every inch of himself. He was enormous, I felt so full.

Easing out, he was back in again and soon we found rhythm. My head was spinning with each stroke delivered. He fucked me hard till I could feel tears stream down my cheeks, it was too much, the pleasure was too much to handle.

"Come all over me baby.."

My body stiffened as if on command before I cried out detonating around him over and over. He groaned too, his strokes even deeper and faster then he finally gave me the last powerful stroke.

He slowed down then kissed my neck. "I bet he's never made you come like that." Sleeping with a stranger— tick.

Chapter Three

It was quiet, too quiet as usual but something felt amiss. I felt tranquil, the environment felt serene. Even before I opened my eyes, I knew peace awaited me. Not sure if it was right to enjoy and relish the new environment as yet, I opened my eyes and looked around the room. Definitely not my room but comfortable enough. It had a home feeling to it.

My perplexed head struggled with the memories and as soon as I recalled everything I looked down on myself. Naked. I sat upright, the condom was hard to miss on the floor.

I sighed wondering how long it would take Edward to find me now. I felt it was better if I just went back home and bring up a silly excuse.

I brought the sheets to my chest when he opened the door and walked in. He was dressed already.

"You are awake."

"Yes. Thank you for letting me sleep here."

"Why do you want to fulfil the bucket list? You must have a reason." He said leaning against the door. Now I could see, he was really attractive. His brown eyes spelt trouble. Trouble and danger.

"Because life is short, like you said."

His exquisite mouth curved with a smile of untold naughtiness and wantonness. "Well, good for you. Your husband is looking for you."

I smiled, "I know."

He held up my bucket list. "We can do skydiving today. I have a friend who can help."

"If Edward catches us..—"

"He won't, go and bath, there are clothes somewhere here." "Why are you helping me?"

"You are sad."

"That's why." "I have cancer."

It came out easy and smooth. I had accepted my fate, there was nothing anyone could do anymore. He blinked a couple of times, he hadn't expected it.

"You what?"

"I have cancer."

He ran his hand through his curly hair in frustration. "And you didn't think to tell me last night?"

"What would I have said?" "I don't know!"

"Fuck!"

"I'm sorry."

"How long do you have?" "Five months."

"Wow!"

Glancing at Nick, I could feel tears of desolation and loneliness simmering close to surface. Since I found out I never allowed myself to overthink it, I didn't allow myself to cry. I tried looking at the bright side, my bucket list. Truth was, I was devastated, depressed and crushed. This was not how I wanted to die. I didn't want to die as yet. A tear trickled down my cheek and I quickly wiped it away.

"When was the last time you were in Brazil?" I asked cheerfully. "7 years ago."

I smiled brushing off my gloomy mood. There was no need to be sad, after all, I was still going to die so why not live a little?

"Well, one of my wishes is that I go to Iguaza fall located between Brazil and Argentina. Of course you know that. I think it would be fun."

He continued driving in silence. I don't know whose car we were in but it had been outside and he took it. He had the keys at least.

"Nick I—"

"I don't think I can help you." His voice was quiet and soft.

I nodded with a smile hiding my disappointment and sadness. "I understand. I'm really sorry."

I watched as he took a familiar road, he was driving me back to the Catlet mansion. Straightening the oversized T-shirt I was wearing I briefly closed my eyes. I had to accept reality. There was no way I could achieve the bucket list but at least I had done some of the things.

I could live with that. Yesterday had been the best day of my life. It was going to stay forever cherished in my heart till the last day.

As he approached the gates to my prison I looked at him. "Thank you for yesterday. It was the best day of my life, I will forever have you to thank."

He nodded stopping the car. I stepped out immediately. Walking to the gate I pondered on what to say to Edward. The gates automatically opened and I walked in. He was probably there watching me through the cameras.

I took a deep breath in opening the doors inside the mansion. A heavy cloud suddenly hung on my head. I was back to the hell hole.

"Good morning Madam," Victoria said as soon as I entered. She was one of the cleaners. I liked her, she

smiled a lot too.

"Hey Vic, is Mr. Catlet in?"

Something ran in her eyes but it immediately disappeared. "Yes Madam." "Ok."

I walked to the stairs and quietly took them up. He was probably in his study, I prayed to reach my room and lock myself inside. It was a stupid idea but at the same time appealing.

Or I could just tell him about my cancer and hope he lets me go.

I stopped on my tracks when I heard sounds from his room. I felt myself tense, my breath catching.

Increasing my speed I took the stairs and walked to his room down the hall. The sounds kept getting louder and louder.

Everything inside me was welling up uncontrollably.

Don't get in. Don't get in. I

continuously told myself but still found myself holding the door handle. Opening the door slowly I walked in.

Hold it in. Don't let it out. Hold it in.

My subconscious screamed. But I couldn't bare it. They couldn't see me. He was having sex with Mary. My only friend. The only one who could understand. A familiar heart ache coiled itself around me. My heart heaved in my chest, pushing the pain into my throat.

"What the. "

Nick sounded loud enough from behind me. Edward turned and looked.

Shock reflected in his eyes then confusion then anger. I knew what was coming. He stepped away from Mary and picked his pants up.

"Oh my..." Mary said, panicking. I felt pity for her. "Uhh Neli.. you.. you are back."

Wiping my tears away I nodded. "Yeah.." "Who's this?" Edward asked, he sounded angry.

"You now cheat with my friends?" The question left my mouth without warning. He walked towards me and raised his hand to strike me but Nick pulled me back. "I'm her man, what are you going to do now?" Edward laughed, a laugh of mocking laced with disbelief. "You are her man? Who do you think you are?"

"Her man, that's what I think." The confidence in Nick's voice scared me. Edward was too dangerous. Too powerful.

"Neli, so you have turned into a whore now? Huh?" "The only whore I can see is the one in front of me." "Boy you—"

"One more word towards Neli, I'm taking your teeth out and there's nothing you can do to me."

My mouth fell open when Edward swung his fist towards Nick. Nick dodged and threw his fist hard at Edward making him fall to the ground, his nose already bleeding. Mary screamed and rushed towards him, a towel around her body. "You have broken his nose."

I looked at her. "He will live. He's not what you think he is but go ahead, make yourself his next puppet."

"He doesn't want you anymore."

I nodded. "I'm glad." I took off my ring

and threw it at her. "Let's go."

"Wait.." I said, my feet moving without the approval of my brain. I rushed to my room and grabbed my traveling documents.

"Let's go."

Nick said taking my hand as soon as I got to him. Did he understand what he had started? Edward wasn't going to let this go. He knew people, a lot of people. He could make things happen with only a single phone call.

"He's going to hurt you." I told him as he led me down the stairs. "Have you killed and me tortured."

"He can't touch me. He wouldn't even dream of it." "Who are you?"

He stopped in front of Victoria who was standing with shock staring at me. She knew what went on in the house and knew what was probably coming.

"Someone you don't want to mess with." He whispered then dragged me out of the mansion. His car was parked besides Edward's Ferrari.

"Why did you come up?"

Unlocking his car he climbed in. I followed suit. "It will be too bad if you died a sad human being."

"But you don't know me." I asked with a chuckle while he started the car. "I think I know enough." He sped out of the gate. Smiling I shook my head, definitely a different breed.

My heart leaped as Nick drove in an airfield. I could see a several planes, small ones. I was really going to sky dive, my smile broadened. It was really happening.

"Where's your girlfriend?"

He stopped the car. "I told you I don't have one." Of cause he had, I smiled. "Why?"

"I don't want one. Give me that." He took my traveling documents and threw them on the dashboard.

We climbed out of the car. He was really attractive, he could get anyone but didn't want. We walked towards some plane, a man was standing beside it. He greeted Nick then looked at me.

"Eric."

"Hi, Nick?"

"Yeah.." He answered the unknown question. The man handed Nick two jumpsuits. I quickly put it on and let Nick fix the harness of my parachute and the diving goggles around my neck.

I noticed a camera he was holding. "Is that mine?" "Yeah, number 4 on the wish list."

"Thank you."

"Get in.."

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He helped me inside the plane. As our pilot started the plane I giggled excitedly. "I can't believe this is really happening."

Nick held the camera in his hands and probably was taking a really "Hi, I'm Nelima and I'm about to sky dive. At how many feet, Nick?"

"15 000 feet."

"Yes that." I laughed, I knew I looked silly but I didn't care. I looked down as the plane took off. Surprisingly I was not nervous, I was ecstatic, full of energy and vigour.

Nick gave me a quick five minutes instructions on what to do.

At 15 000 feet I heard a siren and the look on Nick's face told me it was about time. Nick nudged me to the open door.

"Ready?"

I nodded. He gave me the camera then did a count down starting from 3.

Ever felt so free? So at peace? So weightless? That was how I felt at the first seconds of our free fall. I wished to hold on to that peace. I had this strange feeling, I liked how I felt as I fell. Free.

I looked at Nick beside me, he gave me a sign so I launch the parachute. As soon as I launched it, I found myself floating. He had done the same to. I grinned when he gave me thumbs up.

Landing I knew I wanted to do it again.

"That was... awesome. We should do it again." I was already taking off the jumpsuit. He smirked. "Next time."

"That was really.. extraordinary, thank you." I could not keep the silly grin off my face. He ran his tongue on his lower lip. Sexy as fuck he was.

"We should go for breakfast."

He whispered and last night's events replayed in my head. His touch, his kisses... I blushed then looked down.

"Yeah.."

Clasping my hand, we walked to the car.

"Where's your family?" He asked, the first question concerning my personal life. We were now driving back.

"Kenya."

When he didn't say anything I continued talking, telling him all about my family, including my arranged marriage. He probably didn't care but I couldn't stop myself. "I feel she's still alive."

"So you have never been back there since you ran." It was more of a statement than question and still, I answered.

"Yes."

"Why did you marry the short asshole?" His question rather came off rudely. Why did I marry him? Ohh, I thought he loved me, thought he cared about me, thought he was happy with me, thought I could be happy with him.

I shrugged. "I loved him." "See where love landed you!"

I smiled rubbing my hands together. "I wasn't the one for him." He didn't respond.

In a restaurant, I ordered my breakfast after Nick ordered his. "What do you do for a living? Expect stealing of cause." I asked him as the waiter moved away after placing the breakfast before us.

"Run Braad."

Braad? The name sounded familiar, perhaps too

..... "The car making, airplane making and everything making brand? Edward's biggest competitor?" I asked in awe. I thought of Santino Bradley, Edward hated himit clicked almost immediately.

Santino Bradley was Nick's father. His only child.

There had been a few times when Edward mentioned it to me, when we were still good.

"Yeah.."

I chuckled. I was really running around with Edward's biggest competitor. Edward hated Santino Bradley because he was better than him. Richer than him though I couldn't recall seeing him at the dinner.

"Wow! But.. your father.. I've never seen you before." "Yeah. "

"This won't do any good to you."

He looked up from his meal, "what?" "You seen with Edward's wife."

"Do I look like I care?"

Certainly the 'I-don't-care' type. He had an attitude for days. I secretly eyed him as I ate but curiosity got the better of me.

"How old are you?"

"How's that any of your business?"

I smiled. "You should stop this facade, you are not a bad guy." He smirked.

"Why? Because I fucked you last night?"

"No. You may be arrogant and rude but you are not a bad guy."

"People are oceans baby, question is, how deep are you?" He said standing up walked away. I chuckled, how deep am I?

Rushing after him I grabbed his hand. "I want a tape recorder but don't have money."

He glanced at me still walking. "I don't think you have ever had money, have you?" Smiling, I shook my head guiltily. "No. I ruined myself. I just wanted to get there, to that high level. Told myself then I will be happy."

He led me inside a store then walked to the shelves. "It's a shame you are dying before living."

"It is but it's a blessing I get to do it now. Maybe I needed to be at a different place and different situation with different people to want to be a different person. Help me." I begged.

He stood and gazed at me intently. "I will do it for my mother." "She died because of cancer?"

He shook his head no. "I couldn't help her so I will help you for her. And either way, I do need you."

Now I was confused, here I was thinking I'm a victim that's been saved. "What do you mean?"

He grabbed a tape recorder. "I have to get rid of someone using you." "I don't understand."

"My father wants me to marry someone, some business associate's daughter."

I chuckled then found myself laughing real hard. "You must be joking! Who does those things here?"

"It's a business deal."

"Business deal to make your father happy?"

He stared at me impassively, silently then glanced at his watch. "Let's go."

"You don't look like the type to be forced to do anything." I said walking behind him.

He paid for the recording tape though I didn't miss the way the cashier looked at him. Her eyes met mine momentarily and she blushed, embarrassed. I didn't blame her, he was worth looking at.

"I have a proposition for you." He said already reaching the door.

"What have I gotten myself into.." I muttered following behind him. Should have known there was a catch.

"Nothing much, in exchange of helping you accomplish the rest of your... bucket list activities."

"And what makes you think I will agree?"

Gazing speculatively at me, he chuckled then bit his lower lip. "You won't say no because if then, how are you getting to Iguaza or any other place you want to visit before your death?"

"Wow!"

"Don't take it personal, we all dying one day."

I took the tape recorder from him smiling.

"Thank you, for everything." "You are welcome."

In the car I sighed looking at the tape recorder. I had five months, approximately I did but perhaps four. The doctors weren't sure. The cancer had spread. The first time

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they told me I had cancer, I thought the Lord was unfair, that He hadn't given me a chance to live yet and already he was taking me away.

I got treatment and I got healed but then I did forget to live. And I was going to start living, with Nick.

"Wendy and I have known each other from birth. Our marriage has been fixed since we were born."

"I'm sorry."

"I hate her. All her life, she's lived to see our wedding and now..."

I could tell where he was coming from and something told me he could say no but it was going to cost him something far worse than him being stuck in a loveless marriage.

"How old are you?" "29," he answered.

"Well I really would not want you married to someone you don't love so if I can help, please."

"Yeah, you are going to my fiance." He said easily.

Assessing my recording device, tears threatened to spill. There was a lot I wanted to say but wasn't sure where to start. I didn't care about who was going to listen to the tapes.

Leaning against the wall in Nick's room I smiled then pressed 'record'.

"Hi... hello." I chuckled as a tear betrayed me. "This is Nelima Niji and I'm about to lead you in the last five or four, maybe three months of my life. Sad? Yeah. Really sad but I'm really trying to look at this positively. Not that something or a miracle will take place but that

maybe the day I finally take my last breath, I will be happy."

Tears shimmered in my eyes. "The last... 24 hours have been amazing. I have done everything I never knew I would do. All thanks to Nick." A smile slowly curled my lips thinking about everything. "Like most dying people, I have a bucket list. Nick, I hope you will listen to this, thing is I'm not sure I will live pass three months."

Another tear fell, followed by another then a river. It made me laugh. "I'm sorry, when I say five months left I'm really trying to be positive but I don't think I will live up to that. As much as it hurts, I won't live till then so here it is. Take me back home to my mother if I happen to die before we can go to Kenya. If she's dead, which I'm truly praying she's not, let me buried beside her." I took a deep breath trying to bring myself under control. "Secondly, we won't finish the bucket list. I know it. So I want you to finish it for me, enjoy it for me, take those pictures for me." I laughed. "You say you live your life on the run for it is fun, I agree. Planning everything can be... boring so finish my bucket list. Try new things, please if you can, let them be legal.

Jail is real. But be happy. Smile more, you have a beautiful smile." I sighed. "Thank you. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to live before I die, not a lot of people get that opportunity. Thank you for the car racing and shit!" I chuckled then laughed curtly. "Sorry we lost it. But it was fun. And yeah, the sex was good and lastly, sky diving, I wish we can do it again. That... I loved it. I loved who I was when I was floating. Free. Felt great."

Finishing I lay on the floor. It really was coming to an end.

And I was scared.

I was scared because I didn't know what was going to happen to me. Perhaps I was going to hell or maybe I was going to be a ghost. Whatever the case was, I was scared. I had really been playing hide and seek with death and finally, death had caught me.

I reached for the tape recorder then pressed 'record' yet again.

"I'm scared. I'm scared of the unknown. I'm scared of dying." I whispered. "Aren't we all? Obviously we are but it's worse when you know when. So yeah.. I'm scared." I smiled putting it away.

I wanted to talk to Edward. Tell him he was a good man, that the monster he was had been created by his evil mother. Tell him there was someone out there waiting for him, his future wife but I couldn't. I couldn't tell him that. He needed to figure it out on his own.

We all had to find ourselves on our own and I prayed he would too.



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Chapter Four

"What? Wow!" I exclaimed, failing not to laugh.

He rose up with his beer and started walking away. To his room probably. The room I had slept in previously.

"Wait, I just can't believe it or can't begin to understand. You got married to one of your high school sweetheart while drunk?" I voiced out.

"I'm human too."

"But you.." I held myself then smiled. "So where is your ex wife?"

"Don't know and don't care." He responded already inside the bedroom.

Looking around I inhaled deeply, somehow I felt free. I had never thought I would leave Edward, matter of fact, I never knew I could have the courage to. Looking at the blank walls of Nick's house, I could smile. It wasn't the same walls which had stared at me at Edward's mansion, the prison.

This were different walls, walls of freedom.

Standing up, I walked over to the bedroom. He was lying on his bed, face up. "Can I please get a pillow and blanket." **NOVELSGURU.COM**

He sat up straight. "This bed is enough to fit both of us." "Thank you."

I took off my shoes and crawled on the bed. "Is this house yours?" Laying beside me he shook his head. "No. A friend's. But I usually —"

"Bring your girls here." I finished the sentence for him. I had figured that out a while ago and couldn't blame him

for bringing me up in his brothel.

"Yeah.."

"Tell me about your supposedly bride." I murmured softly. "Wendy."

He sighed climbing from the bed. His hands got the hem of his T-shirt then got it off. I inhaled silently, he was greatly built. I couldn't help staring at his V-line then his bulge. Feeling slightly naughty I moved my eyes away back to his face. He had smirk pasted now.

"I know you want me, Nelima, all you have to do is ask." I looked up at ceiling. "Tell me about Wendy."

He switched off the light but the moonlight still provided enough light for me to see his figure. Feeling the mattress sink I waited till he was beside me.

"What do you want to know?" His tone was ice cold yet polite. "What happened?"

"Nothing. Our parents just matched us." "I know but tell me everything." I insisted. "Neli.." I could tell he didn't want to.

"Please, I told you everything about myself, I think it's only fair you return the favour or what, Mr. Bradley?" I grimaced at the way I sounded coy in my own ears.

"There's nothing much to tell. Wendy was born four years after me. My parents then had started Braad together. My father owned the bigger portion of it though. They agreed that their kids would get married to keep the business in the family. Officially I was supposed to marry Edington's first born daughter who's two years older than me but after Wendy was born, fate changed. The only way I can ever inherit the business in case my father passes on is if I marry Wendy so we run the business." "Are you the only child?"

"No. I have an elder brother. Keith. His mother is English."

"Your father, is he married?" I could hear myself prying but could not really help myself.

"Yes." His voice was quiet. I knew it probably was to a new woman. "So how am I going to help you?" I asked genuinely interested.

"We are going to say you are pregnant." I blinked turning to look at him.

"What?"

"We are going to say you are pregnant. Wendy doesn't want to have kids because she's a model so it will be to our advantage." **NOVELSGURU.COM**

"But what if he knows me? Or even if he doesn't, he can get people to run a background check on me."

"Yes, I know and probably Edward already knows who I am."

I chuckled trying to understand his plan. "That's the most stupidest plan I have ever heard." I decided.

"The right thing any sane person does is marry their baby mama."

"And you think that your father will let you just break

whatever arrangement he had with Wendy's father?"

"You are smart, I like that and you are right. In five months I would have bought Edington and his daughter out."

"But if you could do that, why haven't you done it already? You could have used anyone really, to do what you want me to do."

"You are Edward's wife. And either way, I didn't have full rights to the company yet."

"What does me being Edward's wife have to do with anything?"

"My father will enjoy seeing your husband upset, he will cause a scene and lose a very important deal."

"And you will steal it?"

"Yes and buy Edington out."

"That's confusing... and twisted." "I know."

"Do you need the company that much?"

I could feel his eyes on me. "The company is mine."

"Yes. Very rich mogul, son of Santino Bradley steals cars. Why do you do that? You have all the money in the world.. I don't understand."

"I told you, it's for fun."

"I don't think that's the only reason you do it."

I told him calmly. "Why do you think I do it then?" I could hear amusement in his voice.

"I think when you steal a car in the parking lot so to reach another place then just leave the car is for fun. It's like a sort of hobby and you get kicks from the adrenaline of actually being followed around."

"Not a bad theory."

"And then when you steal very expensive cars, that's not for fun." "What is it for then?"

"You steal different kinds of cars, which you can afford but really can't get because you feel you don't need to buy it to get it so you steal. You take them to some secret place or whatever.. break them down to the ground then build something new." "Wow!"

"Or you and your father are criminals beneath suits and you steal for a living and the company... it's just a cover up."

"I like this one more." He whispered then chuckled. "Not bad." "What about Edward?"

"He will divorce you on his own, trust me."

"I like you." I confessed. "I like being with you. I wish I met you sooner. I wish we never part ways."

"You do?" He teased me gently.

I could feel his gaze on me as tears of hopelessness shone in my eyes. "It'll be all right." He whispered and pulling me unto him. He kissed me, tenderly my lips with his. My heart beat so hard against my chest as my body shook. No one had ever had such an effect on me... only him. He glided his tongue deep in my mouth while his hand went beneath the T-shirt I was wearing.

My nipples throbbed with the need to be touched and sucked. I went into a frenzy recalling the previous's night

events. Unhooking my bra still kissing me, my muscles clenched with anticipation.

Pulling the T-shirt over my head, he pulled me against him making me feel his hard body against mine, skin to skin. I wanted him, I wanted him so badly. Discarding my bra, he went down and took my nipple in his mouth, his other hand massaging the other.

My head fell back as an involuntary moan escaped my lips. I could feel my panties soaking. Freeing my breast his hands got hold of the jeans I was putting on then unbuttoned them. Pulling my jeans down my legs, I shivered silently.

Ever since I left home, the only thing I had been doing is sleeping with men to get from one place to another. It felt strange thinking of it that moment but that was the truth. I even wondered what was the difference between a prostitute and I. I closed my eyes as I felt tears fill them up. It felt stupid and ridiculous to cry now.

To forget I let him please both of us, I clung unto him, holding him tightly as if my life depended on it. As he pushed into me, it felt like he knew each and every secret of my body. Knew where to touch and stroke, knew where to kiss.

When it was finally over he let me rest my head on his chest. "You ok?" He whispered.

I nodded but felt too weak to say anything. Closing my eyes, I drowned in my sorrows.

Mist filled the bathroom, but that didn't seem to have an effect on me. I was sitting in the shower's floor, at the corner. Ever since I woke up, all I wanted to do was cry. There was just a lump stuck on my throat, strangling me. Music from the living room had filled the entire bedroom. When I woke up he was already awake.

I wanted to sit on the floor for longer, letting the hot water wash away my pain but something told me my pity party wasn't really going to change anything. Getting up I closed the tape then grabbed a towel walking out.

Back in the bedroom, there were clothes on the bed. Mine probably.

Putting on the black long skirt with a vent on the side that started from just above my knee I got rid of my gloomy mood. The skirt was too tight and hugged each and every curve. This was something Edward wouldn't let me wear. I chuckled picking the white T-shirt printed CHICAGO in bold letters. Putting it on I tucked it in and pulled the skirt to make it a high waisted skirt. The black converse were Nick's signature shoes, he always wore black converses and I guess he couldn't imagine me in heels. I put the shoes on then walked out to where the music was coming from.

He was in the kitchen, cooking. He turned and looked at me before going back to whatever he was cooking. Sitting on the kitchen stool, I watched him shirtless while cooking, I could have never guessed he knew how to cook.

"There," he said, placing a plate of what looked like burnt food and coffee before me. "It's a little burnt."
I almost laughed, it didn't look a little burnt to me.

"Thank you."

He sat beside me as I took my first bite of the burnt French toast. Almost spitting it out, I took a sip of the coffee and swallowed hard. And here I thought Edward's coffee was the worst!

I watched him take the first bite of his horrible food in silence. His facial expression changed as he swallowed. I handed him his mug of coffee failing to rid my laughter. I burst out laughing when he spit it out. "Maybe cooking isn't your specialty."

"Ok. Bad food. Let's get something from a restaurant then go home." He already had our plates in the sink.

"Your house?"

"Yes. "

"It's ok. I will cook." I swiftly opened his fridge and took out four eggs, bread and butter. "But thank you, after all, it's the thought that counts."

He folded his arms on his chest and watched as I quickly tried cooking eatable breakfast. Back at Edward's house we had a chef, Lewis, and he cooked almost everyday but on days Edward was out on trips or out cheating, we cooked together. "Your friend coming back?" I asked whisking the eggs.

"No."

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After several minutes I was dishing. "You and your brother... are you close?" "No."

"I have an older sister. I never mention it because even before I came to London or even left home, I had not seen her in four years. She got married to a miner and they moved together. She never visited." I let out a silent chortle. "After two years we heard an accident

had happened at the mine and that a lot of people died.
My father bid us from going to look for her."
"What's her name?"



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"Mosi. Meaning a first born child. Mosi." I smiled handing him his plate. "Why are you and your brother not close?"

"He never liked me. Accused my mother and I of ruining his parent's marriage so I never liked him either."

I sat down and asked, "was your mother also married to your father?"

"No." He sounded angry. I didn't need to ask to know, his mother was a mistress. Now I was curious on how she died.

"I don't feel awkward around you." He looked at me. "Why?"

"Because you have African genes in you, your hair is even curly. Makes me feel not alone. Isn't that weird?"

He stood up and discarded his empty plate in the sink. "No. Finish up."

I looked down on my plate. I wanted to ask him questions, to tell him stories. To keep on talking. That moment I realized I hated silence. I hated his one word answers. But there was nothing I could do, I figured he was just like that. Getting off the stool I handed him the plate.

"Can we take a long drive?" I asked.

"What kind of cancer do you have?" He asked placing the plate aside. I slightly flinched but knew I had to tell him.

"At first, after some miscarriages I suffered, the doctors said I had cancer. Cervical cancer and that was why I couldn't carry full term. And yes, also it had moved to my womb. I did the treatment, removed the womb, they declared me cancer free. Six months I went to the same doctor. He is Edward's doctor. Every time Edward took it

too far.. he was the one he called and that time he had taken it too far. I was bleeding. At first I thought it was period but.. it seemed abnormal so I visited him. He said it was cancer. That it was back. That it had now moved to other parts of the body. It was advancing. He said that it can be treated.

"Behind Edward's back, I did chemo and radiation therapy. I thought it was over, for a while it was but then again a month ago, he said it was back and aggressive and there's nothing anyone can do now."

"So he still doesn't know?"

"Yes. Even if he did, it wouldn't make a difference now, would it?" He nodded but couldn't look in my eyes anymore.

"Lets go."

In his car he drove silently while a song filled the car. Not sure what song it was, I looked at him.

"Who's singing?"

"Khalid."

I nodded trying to remember if I knew an artist of that name. Of cause I knew DJKhalid but I knew it was not the same one. An hour later, we were still driving. "Where are we going?"

"Where the road takes us." He smiled at me.

Closing my eyes I tried to memorise his face in my head so I would always remember the moment. So I would remember how extra attractive he got when smiling, he had a natural naughty smile which I loved. I cherished the moment so I

would remember myself sitting beside him in his car. Opening my eyes, I smiled back and prayed one day, he too would remember me.

"Where are we?" I asked when he finally stopped the car. He stepped out and approached some lady. They spoke for a few seconds before he came back to the car. "Come."

I climbed out of the car after grabbing the camera and let him lead me. "Where are we?"

"Broadstairs."

As we walked, I took pictures. I stopped when we passed a cosy pub. "Let's have cocktails." I told him.

"Ok."

The pub was not that filled and I could understand, it was in the middle of the day. As soon as we sat down, I ordered us cocktails.

"And what if I don't want cocktail?" He turned to look at me, his eyes searching mine.

I smiled. "You will, once you take a sip."

The bartender soon placed our drinks before us. Taking a sip of my drink I watched two girls sit on his side and from the way they were looking at him, I knew they wanted him.

"Hi," I heard one say but he didn't respond, he was watching me. "You are being rude."

I pointed out. **NOVELSGURU.COM**

"Am I?"

"Yes. There's a special place for people like you in hell."

He laughed. A loud kind of laugh. He rarely laughed, matter of fact, I couldn't remember him laughing but he had a beautiful laugh.

"Really?"

Looking behind him, I caught the disappointed girl's face. "I think you know it."

I brought my glass to my lips and looked at the horizon. I wanted to sit here till the sun set.

"I want us to watch Titanic. Is there a cinema here?"

I felt his eyes on me but didn't bother turning. "I think so. What's Titanic." "I froze then slowly gazed at him. What did he mean?... What's Titanic?" "Are you joking? Everyone knows Titanic."

He looked sincerely perplexed. I was stunned. I had watched Titanic more than fivetimes and every time felt like the first time.

"I'm not everyone."

"Stop fooling. A movie about a ship that collided with an iceberg in the earlynineties and sank."

"Nelima no matter how much you try to explain the movie, it won't make me knowit." From his eyes I could tell he was laughing at me.

'It's ok. We can watch it together.

You will love it." "Though I doubt that's what they are playing tonight." "Can't we ask them?"

"I will make a plan." He said with resolve. I beamed, now more excited. "Fancy seeing you here, Nick." A voice said from behind us.

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We turned around, some curly haired lady stood behind us. Tearing my gaze from her, I looked back at the horizon continuing to drink my cocktail.

"Kali.." He said warmly.

From the corner of my eye, I saw them hug affectionately. A tiny smile curved my lips, it stung a bit. I could tell she was more than just a friend. I felt stupid seconds later, as they exchanged pleasantries. Nick didn't owe me anything.

"Really, you have been scarce."

"I think it's the other way round, how's being a model?" Should have figured, her slim figure said it all. At least she was slim by choice. I tried not to think about the weight I had lost. I still had my curves but I could see the difference on the mirror.

"It's busy and hectic. Where's that stupid boy you call Randy?"

They both laughed. "He's somewhere drunk or high." I closed my eyes as the conversation trailed till I couldn't hear anything. I could feel myself slip by the second.

"Neli!" I opened my eyes to the loud voice and violent shaking. Nick looked down on me, he looked worried so I smiled.

"Are you ok? Do you need a doctor?"

I shook my head. "No. I'm fine. I want to watch the sun set." My weak voice got him more worried. Kali was behind him.

"Is she ok?"

"Yeah," he picked me up, what I was doing on the floor puzzled me but I didn't question.

Walking out with me I laid my head on his chest and sighed. He stopped minutes later and sat me down on the sand. I smiled, the beach.

"This is beautiful."

Sitting beside me, he ran his hand in his curly hair with frustration. "I'm fine, Nick."

"I think you should see a doctor." "We all know what the problem is."

"Are you.. —"

"I'm fine, I promise."

I laid down and looked at the clear blue sky. "Lie down with me, Nick." Without looking at me he laid on his back beside me. I took his hand into mine.

"Just relax, this is it. The serene moment."

"Aren't you scared?" He asked, suddenly.

Squeezing his hand I smiled. The more I looked into the clear skies, the more I relaxed though I could feel his tension and worry.

"The moment you stop looking for what can possibly go wrong, you will start to enjoy the moment.

It didn't bother me to lie there till the sun started to set. I had Nick's hand in mine the entire time and we were now closer to each other, our shoulders rubbing against each other.

"You must be hungry." He said when it was dark. It was silent that I could hear the ocean waves and the cool breeze too, was relaxing. I even felt sleepy but I wasn't going to sleep till I watched Titanic.

"Yes," I lied. My stomach was in knots but I wanted to try a totally new dish.

"You know, I never enjoyed seafood." I said as we started walking back. "I mean, I really tried but the thought just killed the entire mood."

"Seafood is not for everyone."

I laughed. "I guess. What's your favourite dish?" "Taco lasagna.

My mom used to cook it for me."

From his tone, I could tell he hated talking about it. *Lay off now*, I told myself. Back in the car, his phone rang. Taking it out he answered.

"Yah?" He sounded annoyed. I stared out through the window and watched people walking past our car either laughing or talking really loudly.

"I will be there but I have company."

My head spun what company? Who was he talking to? Seconds later he was placing his phone away and my tongue itched to question him but remembering I had no right, I buckled my seatbelt.

"I heard there's a good restaurant here." He said starting the car, his tone reassuring me that he wasn't going to say anything about the phone call.

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He guided me inside a cosy restaurant, almost filled. "Rush hour." He muttered disapprovingly.

The restaurant looked very warm to me, the kind of place usually a family would go to.

A waiter led us to a table and sitting down, she handed us menus after introducing herself.

Looking through the menu I quickly decided. Setting my menu down, I met Nick's eyes and smiled.

"Decided?"

"Yeah.."

I raised my hand summoning the waiter. Something I never did with Edward. With Edward, only expensive, fancy restaurants did it for him. Anything else could go to hell for all he cared. He ate the best expensive meals at all times. Sometimes he'd just book the entire restaurant.

"Mexican chicken salad wraps please," I told the waiter and looked at Nick. "Same and a bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon." He said watching me, the intensity startled me but I pretended not to notice.

As soon as the waiter placed our food on the table, I took my salad wrap and started eating. I intended not to stop till I was done but halfway through, I stopped eating.

"You are not eating." I said looking at his plate.

"I was waiting for you to finish."

A smile tugged on my lips. "I'm finished now."

Staring at me for a while, his eyes finally fell to his plate and he started eating. Minutes later he was done and we were walking out, the bottle of wine in my hands. I missed wine, back in Edward's house, I drank wine like water. Could finish an entire bottle alone. It didn't make me an alcoholic, being able to finish the bottle alone, but Edward thought otherwise.

"I don't want a drunkard of a wife Neli!" He would harshly say. Sometimes he'd get so upset that he would throw my glass against the wall.

Nick was silent all the way to the car, even when he drove to the cinema. When we arrived, we got inside. I figured he booked the entire cinema, probably bought each and every seat. The cinema wasn't that big. Sitting in the middle we both looked at the screen. Seconds later the movie started while he opened the wine and took sip straight from the bottle.

"Want?"

I took the bottle and drank.

As the movie started, my eyes never moved from the screen, I wanted to capture every scene, hear every word.

"What happened?"

I looked at Nick. "Huh?"

"I have a feeling you have watched this movie more than once, why are you crying then?"

Wiping away my tears, I smiled. "Can you just watch silently?"

"Why do you keep watching it?" He asked, his eyes focused on the screen.

"Because it's my first love. And only love. I used to watch it when I felt too lonely, it would keep me company. First time I watched it in a small school hall." I shook my head with a silly smile. "I had stolen money to pay so I watch it and getting home, I got a whip but I felt it was worth it."

He didn't say anything for the longest time. As the movie continued I relaxed, of course with the help of the wine that we kept exchanging. "Do you usually book cinemas? Like this?" The one time I had wanted to watch a movie at the cinema, Edward had booked it so we can be alone as he didn't like sharing his space with people of no importance. This other time, he took me to some movie's premier and not that he had wanted to watch it

but rather because I had and I had already bought the ticket at the cinema and as Edward's wife, I had to attend the premier if I really wanted to watch the movie.

Sometimes I liked being just being Nelima, sometimes I had wanted to just walk in the streets of London and just be, to just get in that restaurant everyone liked, to get in that local boutique... but Edward never let me. He never let me do anything. At first I thought he was just being overprotective given his profile but as time went on, I realized he was torturing me, destroying every contact I had with the outside world.

"No. I've never done this." He said quietly. "What's your favourite movie?"

Nick looked at me in surprise. "What?" He asked incredulously, disbelief lacing his voice. It was as if he couldn't believe I had asked him such a question.

"What's your favourite movie?" I repeated. "I don't have one."

"Really?"

"I forgot it. I remember watching the movie with my mother when I was still young. It was our favourite movie. But with the other memories of her, I forgot it." His voice was filled with melancholy.

I fought it with my all not to hug him, to comfort him in any way, his wistfulness moved something in me. I looked at the screen clasp my hands together.

"I'm sorry."

"I told you to stop apologizing." His voice was soft. He wasn't mad.

"What about your favourite book? I'm not really a book fan but I read one back in high school. Something Sidney Sheldon wrote. It was nice and years later, I looked into his other books but they were not as nice, so I stopped reading."

"I don't like reading too."

I laughed. "But you can start now." "Your movie is finished."

I smiled. "I know, Jack."

He stood up and helped me up. Walking outside I sighed. It was chilly. Opening the car door for me, I slid in wrapping my arms around myself.

"Thank you for today, another amazing day on the list." I said once he started the car.

"Tomorrow we are going for dinner at my dad's house but don't worry." "We are still going with the lie?"

"Yes."

"What about Edward?"

"He's going to fall right into the trap and divorce you."

"Then I won't have citizenship. I can already see the odds he will go to make sure I get deported immediately."

"Don't worry about that."

"Don't worry about that." I had heard those words more than hundred times. Feeling like laughing, I stared out through the window ignoring my subconscious. I never really did anything for myself.

When I ran away from home I had a plan, I knew what exactly I wanted to do and it wasn't depending on men even during my last days. When I started sleeping with Aunty Joyce's Chief, I told myself it was because I had to

and that I wouldn't do it for a long time. I told myself it was because I needed him, that he was imperative in my life at that moment.

Then when I came to London, I was just a plain fool. I thought with Edward it was love, I thought he took care of me because he loved me and I loved being a kept girlfriend or wife. I couldn't remember how many times men had told me not to worry or that they will take care of it. My life was a cliché on its own; I don't know why I always needed saving from men.

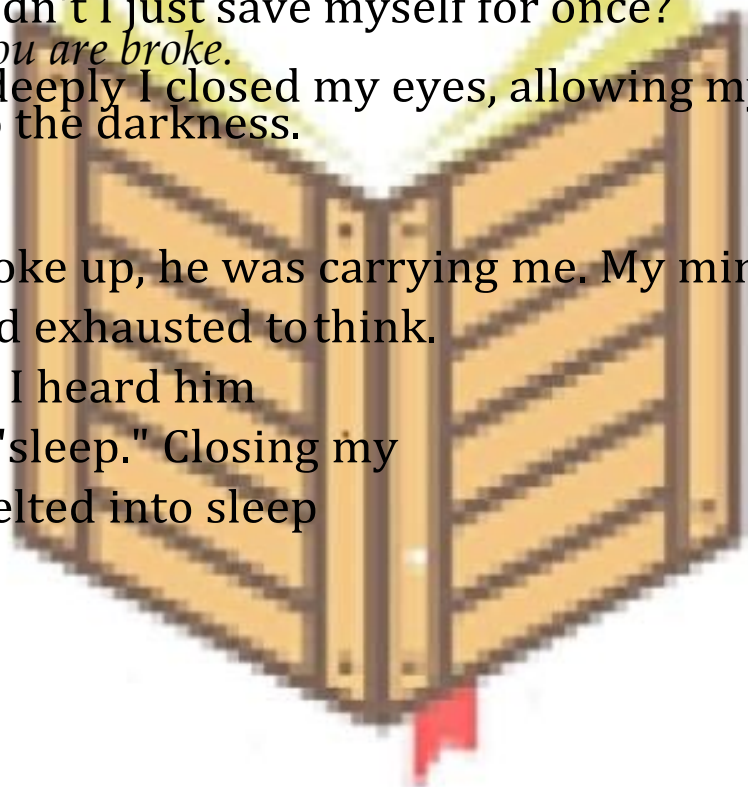
Why couldn't I just save myself for once?

Because you are broke.

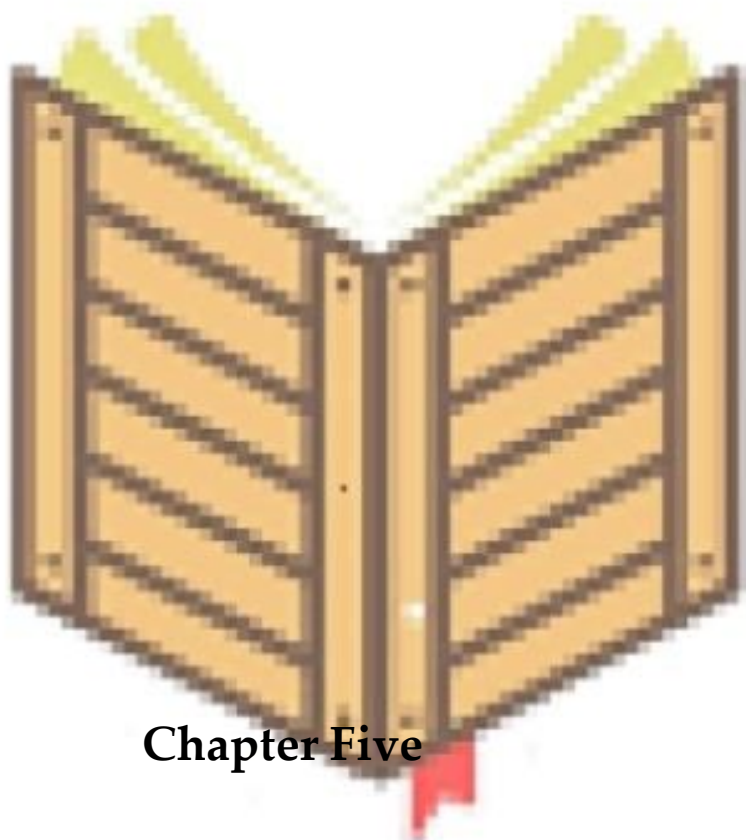
Inhaling deeply I closed my eyes, allowing myself to drift away into the darkness.

When I woke up, he was carrying me. My mind felt too mushy and exhausted to think.

I thought I heard him whisper "sleep." Closing my eyes, I melted into sleep again.



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Chapter Five

"Don't worry, I've got you." Nick said taking my hand. We had arrived at his father's triple storey. Maybe I had decided too quickly about Edward's house because the house I was looking at took the trophy.

I had always wanted a big house when growing up but after realizing the sadness and depression a big house could carry, I decided otherwise. Maybe a small house was just ok, a house one could build happy memories in.

I looked in his brown eyes and smiled. "Me too." I told him because it was the truth. He started walking with me by his side to the entrance. Even though he hid it too well, from his eyes I could tell he was nervous. I had never met his father but something told me he was intimidating, that's why Edward hated him that much.

The door opened and a man in a black suit stood right at the door to welcome us. He gave us a slight bow then greeted, "good evening Mr. Bradley, you too mam," Nick nodded while I greeted the man back. Inside the house, he led me through the foyer till we were standing in front of some door.

"I know this—"

"I trust you." I said, interrupting him. As strange as it felt, I trusted him.

You are too trusting.

My subconscious pointed out but I ignored her. "Ok."

Then he opened the door and the voices which had reached my ears in that second, stopped. Nick walked in and I followed half a step behind him, clasping his hand tightly with mine. There was a table. A huge table with people sitting, now looking at

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us. I saw his father first. The chubby man that Edward despised. He was looking at his son and he wore an impassive expression. I could not tell if he was upset or not. My gaze soon moved to the lady beside him, probably Nick's age. Was that Wendy? She was pretty and with huge breast and a cleavage. When she rested her head slightly on Santino's shoulder, I immediately knew she was the new wife. She was the first to speak. "Nick, you have made it!" Her voice was a bit too high, to scratchy and resembled a lot of pretense to it.

She stood up then walked over and hugged Nick who didn't respond and lastly me. She showed indifference that I started wondering if she was just like that or was a real pretender.

Nick put his hand on my waist and guided me to an empty chair. Sitting next to each other, he reached for my hand beneath the table.

"Nick, what's this?" The woman sitting beside Nick's step mother voiced. She sounded angry. Looking at her, I immediately knew who she was. Wendy. She wore her black bob hair and looked like someone from the magazine. She kept calm while looking at Nick, her glass of wine in her hand. I needed one too, the tension was enough to kill. She looked at me, from head to toe and plain disgust passed her eyes. "This is Neli. My girlfriend. She's pregnant." He said as calm as ever. All eyes soon fell on me, even of the man who looked unbothered by everything going on. In his black clothes, he looked as if he got paid to kill, he had this unexplainable aura around him. I couldn't stop wondering why on earth he was wearing such to a family dinner. "There goes the golden boy." He muttered though audibly.

Wendy laughed. A laugh of perhaps mockery, as if waiting on Nick to announce it was a joke. His father was just staring. Nick squeezed my hand and said, "Nelima is three months pregnant and I want to do right by her."

"It's a first considering how many girls you have impregnated and left me to clean up your mess." Santino said, now back at eating. I thought he would scream, shout and be angry but he was doing the opposite. "I thought you have grown." He said cutting his meat. "But I see I was wrong. You just had to go and take Catlet's wife and sleep with her and get her pregnant. What are you hoping to get?"

He was too calm that I started getting scared for Nick who seemed relaxed. "I'm going to marry her." Nick responded, confident as ever.

"Not under my watch. Wendy is going to be your wife and that's it."

"Yet you say I'm the black sheep." The man in black said. His bitterness could be felt from a distance. He was the brother, no doubt. "Look at how your favorite son wants to disgrace the family name but then, it's in his blood."

Nick laughed, anger seething from him. He was trying to remain calm but was failing. "The only embarrassing person here is you, I may be an illegitimate child but at least I carry the Bradley blood in my veins. You don't even know your own father."

It all happened too fast, first indirect insults were being exchanged and next was fists flying. I looked at the Wendy character who was looking at me with nothing but hatred. Why wasn't anyone stopping them? His father was still eating and his wife was just

staring with nothing but terror in her eyes.



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"Nick.. stop!" I tried yelling but he wasn't hearing me. He was on the floor, punching his brother repeatedly.

"Nick stop, you will hurt him! Stop!" I was now pulling him but he wasn't budging. Then I started feeling dizzy. The heels didn't help, my knees felt too weak that they gave in too quickly.

I could hear a scream somewhere but it was too late. My body met with the ground then the images blurred.

Next was his voice, his touch. "Neli.. are you ok? Shit!" I smiled and reached out to touch his face. "I'm fine. I want to go to Iguaza falls, can we?" I asked weakly and he nodded quickly before picking me up.

"Nick, where are you going?" Wendy's voice asked but I now had my eyes closed. His body tensed, a warning of anger.

"I don't want you and I never did, you know that."

"Nick, you and I are meant to be. The company needs us together."

"I don't need you, never did, especially not when you slept with Keith."

There was silence then he was walking. I knew he was walking away and knew no one was going to stop him.

"Nick?" I

called.

"Yeah?"

"Where are we going?" "Where you want to go."

He put me down and unlocked the car. I looked back at the house and Wendy was standing feet from us. I partly felt sorry for her but then, why on earth would she

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sleep with Keith? They were brothers. I could easily tell how he hated Nick.

"Did she really sleep with your brother?" I asked as he opened the car door for me. "Yeah, she was drunk and he did it to spite me."

I reached for his hand. "I got you."

A shy smile slowly crept on his face. "That's my line."

"Stolen." I said giggling while getting in the car. Joining me, he didn't look like the man who was giving his brother a good beating seconds ago. He somehow looked...happy. It was hard to tell but from the energy radiating from him, he was happy, it was a happy night.

He parked the car outside some restaurant.

"What are we doing here?" I asked following his lead, getting out of the car.

He took my hand and started walking with me. As silly as it was, I felt giddy. Our hands were entwined and people stared. I had always wondered how it felt to just walk in the streets of London, hands entwined. It felt good, too good.

He entered a clothing store with me. "You want clothes?"

Glancing at me he shook his head then called a shop assistant. "Good morning, how can I help?" The lady asked, a bright smile on her face and her eyes focused on Nick. I slipped away from Nick and started browsing through the shop, going from rack to rack. Getting to the dresses section, I held out a long sleeved sky blue floral dress. It was simple and beautiful, looking at the price I smiled. I could buy 100 dresses with only one dress of Edward's choice.

"Found something you like?" Nick asked from behind me.

Blushing, I put the dress back. "Sorry, what do you want here? I can help." "I told you to stop saying sorry. We are doing shopping for you."

I frowned, confused.

"What? Why?" "You don't have any clothes for starters." I looked down and laughed. "Yeah.." "You can take the dress if you like it."

Glancing at the dress again I wanted to say "no, I'm fine but thanks" only I really did need clothes. I could pay Nick back if and only if I got anything from the divorce.

"I will probably get my clothes from the divorce settlement. Take all of them and sell them. I know you don't need to but do it and take the money to repay yourself." I picked the dress and moved from him. I picked another dress, even cheaper. Long off the shoulders yellow dress. Then another and another. All cheap. It felt good. No more designers to decide for you.

My subconscious smiled proudly and whispered 'forget we are dying and just live.' "I like this." I said looking at a white jumpsuit. I could tell it was going to be lose on me but I loved it.

"I'm tired." Nick complained when I gave the jumpsuit to him. He was holding all the clothes I had been picking. I smiled and decided he looked more cute when sulking.

The entire morning was filled with my shopping and he was complaining throughout.

We lunched at the restaurant where the car was parked. I ordered some salad while Nick ordered burger and chips.

"I really thought people with a physic like yours watched what they eat." I said once the waiter excused us.

"A physic like me?"

I chuckled while he smirked.

"Yes. Edward did." "Well I don't.

I eat whatever and burn it off later."

"Can we go to a barber after we eat? I want to cut my hair." His face changed.

"Why?"

I laughed. "What do people do at barber shops?"

"Why do you want to cut your hair. You are beautiful... like that. Or is it falling off?" No, it wasn't falling off. My chemotherapy didn't affect my hair thankfully but I felt the strong need of being someone new. My hair held so many memories, some even painful and it was time to let go. I wanted short hair. Two inches long or even less. I didn't want to overthink it or give myself reason to be a coward.

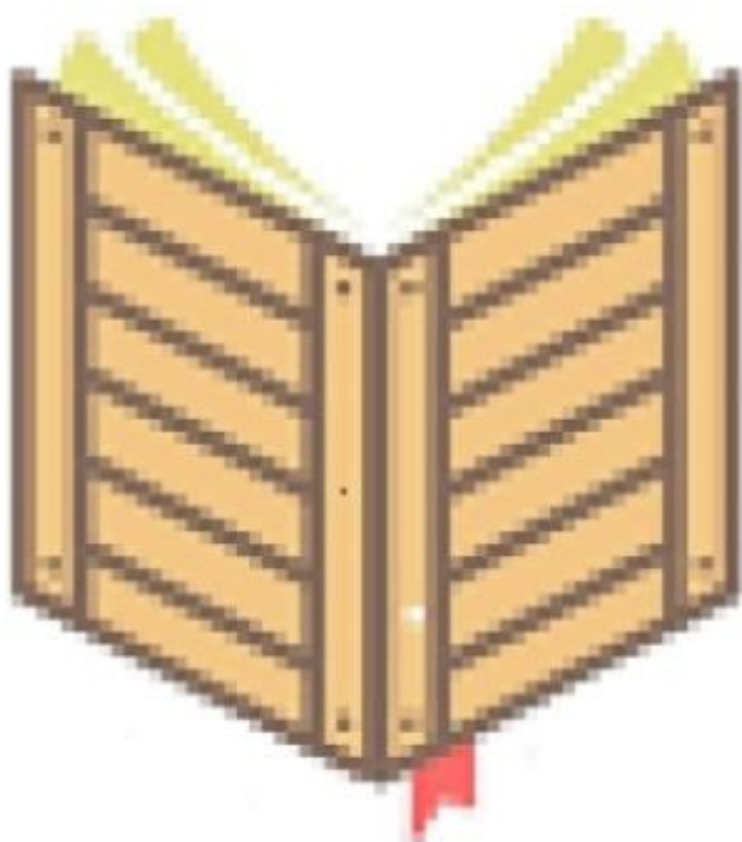
"No but a change of hairstyle will do. It's part of my bucket list." I said placing my hand on the Jean's pocket. I had it with me.

He didn't say anything else till we left the restaurant.

It's like everyone knew Nick. Entering a barber shop he had driven to, they greeted him. He fit in, whether with people of color or white or his own kind, biracial.

"What are you doing here Nick?" The owner of the barbershop who I now knew to be Cameron said, giving Nick a weird but interesting handshake. I could feel the sea of eyes on him, even the ladies. The way the ladies

cranked their necks to look at him made me chuckle, one would swear necks were going to break.



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"What's up man?" Nick greeted back.

"Nah, we all good. Been busy but all is good."

Cameron's American accent made me smile. He reminded me of some American reality shows I watched. I liked the way he dressed and just how he was. "My nigga J was talking about you just the other day, whatcha' got for us?"

"Nothin' today but tell him we'll talk. I got my girl, she wants to cut."

They all turned to look at me. "C'mon, Cici over there will sort you out." Cameron said pointing at the Cici, a girl with pink long braids chewing gum. I smiled, surprised on how pink looked good on her but not that good.

"Girl why you wanna cut all that? It looks fresh!" Cici said as I sat down. She already had her hands in my hair, chewing her gum loudly but her fake American accent the loudest.

"I want fresh air, make it an inch long if you can, then tint it blonde." My confidence startled me.

"*That*. That hairstyle be looking boom as fuck but it will look good on you since you are light in complexion." Caramel. I wanted to say. Caramel. Perhaps slightly lighter than someone with caramel complexion but still, caramel.

I smiled, having a lighter skin than others really wasn't an issue growing up. They liked me more because I was light in complexion at school, they used to say my skin was like that of honey but the problem began when I realized out of all my family, I was the only light skinned. Mama used to say my grandmother bathed me with milk when I was young and my uncle, my father's brother, said I took after him as he was light like me.

"Girl not to worry, I got you. Girl what's ya name?" "Nelima."

"I got a cousin, her name Neli, that girl be out there wildin', her man caught her banging that ass on another man last week and now he took her back." She said laughing.

Cici was funny and never stopped talking. After 10 minutes I knew she was from Jamaica and because her father was black American, she stayed with him in Brooklyn most of the time. "Like girl I had to sound like them, talk like them cause ya know how them be bullies, tryna shit on my Jamaican accent and not."

"I came here months ago, Tyrone, Cameron's brother who happens to be my half brother's friend, Ted, hooked me on this job. It pays really well. Daddy was mad mad but girl, a girl gat to do she gat to do for survival. Tell that to them niggas and they don't understand shit!"

"So where you from? You don't got the English accent." She asked after a while cutting my hair. All along I had been watching the flakes fall to the ground like snow, fighting the edge to tell her to stop.

"Kenya. I'm from Kenya." I told her. Nick had long stepped out of the shop with Cameron.

"Gee girl, I once fucked this nigga from Nigeria and damn, I had to give him all five star, he got deported though but he told me to wait for him."

"Is Nick your man?" A lady said standing next to Cici. She flipped her long weave back putting her red handbag down.

Cici got a shocked look on her face then laughed. "Ya

need to stop actin' jealous."



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The lady laughed and took off her sunglasses. "Jealous? Cici you —"

"Tammy Nick ain't ya man. Never been. You are a slut he fucked, you won't be anything more. In case you wanna cry, just give me a call after work, ya have my number."

Tammy stared at me through the mirror, her eyes searching for something. I stared back, rendered motionless.

"Can I help you?" I asked softly.

"No..." She picked her bag and walked out. I watched her as she disappeared from the mirror. Confused I looked at Cici who laughed.

"Girl that's just Tammy. Tamara, Nick fucked her twice and she thought otherwise." I nodded and closed my eyes. I wasn't surprised, he was too good looking, I didn't even blame Tamara for thinking she could have him.

I sat up, bravely and stared at my self. Was that me? My ears seemed a little too big. My neck longer, my eyes perhaps big. I couldn't get used to the image before me faster, couldn't get it registered in my head faster.

Couldn't decide if I looked hideous or not. Now I had my hair short and blonde. I felt faint, my head seemed big but looking more carefully into the mirror, the woman who stared at me looked more fierce, more in control, more in power, unafraid. Cici had done my makeup.

"Girl talk, what do you think? You like?" I stood up then smiled. "I love it!"
"Yey!"

"You look beautiful." Nick's voice said behind me. Expectantly I turned to look at him. "You looked beautiful with the hair too." He added. "Thank you." "I made ya girl look nice, she all slaying right now, I think I deserve a double." I laughed, perhaps if I had met her sooner, we would have been great friends. Nick gave her the money and the smile she had on made her look retarded in a cutemanner. "Ready to go?" I glanced up at him. "Yeah. Thanks Cici, I feel beautiful." "I got you girl, come back soon." Walking out I beamed. "I can't believe we are going to Iguaza falls." He opened the car door for me. "You look beautiful. Of cause you are beautiful butthe.." He bit his lower lip and unexpectedly, my face warmed up. "Get in." "Thank you." I murmured before sliding into the car.

Nick's house was medium big and manly. There was too much white and grey. Almost everything was white and grey. Entering his vast living room, the first thing you noticed was a painting of a woman. A beautiful woman. Her eyes held a huge mystery, a beautiful story and enough pain. I suspected it was his mother but last night when we arrived, I couldn't ask, he was too happy.

"She's my mother. I know you are dying to ask." He said standing beside me taking out a cigarette from his pocket.

"She's beautiful."

"Was." He took out his lighter.

"She was beautiful." I nodded slowly. "Yes. You painted it?"

"Yes."

"Maybe you should quit. And live." I said as he lighted his cigarette. Puffing out smoke he looked at me, stunned and amused. "Quit? And live?"

"Yes. Will you paint me too?"

"I don't know." There was bitterness in his voice. "Tell me when you decide."

Walking away to my borrowed room I hugged my arms around my body. The room was big. Big with everything white. I hated the colour white but I didn't tell him that. It wasn't important.

I took the recorder and sat on the floor. Pressing 'record' I sighed, I didn't know what to say. Maybe it was Cici that I wanted to talk about. She was a strong woman. Could tackle anything. Was funny and bubbly. I liked her and wished I had lived my life the way she lived hers. Carefree with no worry for later. She lived in the moment. Maybe it was my short hair I wanted to talk about. I still wasn't sure if I loved it or not but was pretty sure if I didn't then I would grow into loving it.

Or perhaps it was the shopping I had done today. The clothes I had chosen. Maybe I wanted to talk about how it felt to just be free. Or maybe it was Nick's brother I wanted to talk about. Or Wendy, maybe his father. I wasn't sure so I kept myself in silence then finally put

the recorder away. Tears welled up but as usual, I forbade them from falling.

Deciding to pack my bags, I got up from the floor. Walking back to the living room, he was now with someone else. A man. They looked at me and Nick introduced me. "Sean, this is Nelima, and Neli, this is my friend, Sean."

I smiled looking at Sean. "Nice meeting you."

He slightly looked confused but still smiled.

"Pleasure is all mine." "Are my shopping bags still—"

"I put them on my bed. Together with the suitcase. Go through the foyer, second room to your right." Sean was still looking at me cautiously.

"Ok."

I found myself moving forward, to the foyer. "Who's she?" I heard his friend ask, Sean. The further I moved away, the more the voices got muffled. I wanted to go back just to hear his response but I was already standing in front of the door. With little hesitance and more curiosity, I opened the door, stalking in immediately.

My feet came to a halt on their own. My breath hitched, eyes burning. Why? Why was I looking at myself.

The huge portrait stared back at me, leaning against the wall. Was that the way he saw me? I was laughing in the painting but the fear and pain and excitement in my eyes still visible. When had he done this?

Feeling him behind me I asked. "Why?"

"Because you deserve it." His response was short yet it pumped air out of my body. "You can pack up. Our flight departs in 2 hours."

Change of subject. I teared my gaze from the painting and reached for my shopping bags.

"I got you the window seat." I looked at him, perplexed.

"You said you liked the window seat last night.

A smile broke through my face, "thanks.

Is your friend gone?" "Yeah."

"He doesn't like

me?" "Why do

you say that?"

I shrugged then grabbed the suitcase too. He stayed rooted by the door forcing me to look at him. Looking into his eyes he looked... nervous. I wasn't sure.

"What is it?"

"Nothing.

I..." "What?"

I pressed.

"I spoke to a doctor."

Now I was beyond confused and alarmed. Was something wrong with him? "Are you ok?"

"Yeah.. I'm good. He gave me some pills. I told him about your condition."

I was silent for a while before I abruptly started laughing. I laughed till tears spilled from the corners of my eyes. Till my ribs ached. Till the laugh turned into a sob, more tears gushing. I finally stopped when I felt his thumb rub away my tears. I stepped back, pulling the hem of my T-shirt, his T-shirt and wiped my face dry. Taking a deep breath, I failed to be angry or feel anything particularly. "What?"

"You.."

"Nick." I smiled. "That was very thoughtful considering I left my pills at Edward's mansion. Thank you."

He looked fairly relieved. "You can now move. I have to pack." My emotions were beginning to scatter. I had to get away from him— fast.

"Yeah.." He muttered moving.

I pulled the suitcase with me back to my room taking quick deep breaths till I was safely behind the door in my room.

You are nothing but a burden to him. He doesn't need to deal with your stress on top of his own.

I put the suitcase on the bed and busied myself in routine work. Packing. I didn't need to think, I just had to do.

Take off the tag. Fold it. Place it in the suitcase. Repeat. Over and over till everything was safely packed.

A soft knock erupted, giving myself a few seconds to put on my happy face, I told him to come in. He had changed and was now wearing all black: black T-shirt, black jeans, black sneakers. Reminded me of Keith.

"If you are done we can grab milkshakes on our way to the airport." His deep smooth voice made me smile. Genuinely.

I looked at my well packed belongings. "Yeah. I'm done. A milkshake would be great."

He leaned against the door, eyes searching mine.

"Yellow looks good on you." He said finally. I looked down on the borrowed yellow T-shirt I was putting on. It was a little too big but with the jeans, it looked ok.

"Thanks."

Silence. Again. He went back to staring, searching. I hesitantly stood still, not sure if walking towards him would be a good idea or not. Then he was right in front of me. He tilted my head slightly and in his eyes I found a question. His eyes moved to my lips then back to my eyes. A second later his lips brushed softly against mine and my eyes closed on their own accord.

He kissed me as if I would break at first, blessing me with feathery kisses. I parted my lips and then we were tasting each other. He tasted of mint. Mint and a hint of nicotine. My blood boiled and butterflies erupted from my stomach. I had never felt like that, even with him... before.

Squeezing my body he groaned letting my lips go. I opened my eyes and met his, his were wild and the color had darkened possibly with want.

"Still up for the milkshakes?" His voice was too deep and my heart leaped. Something was definitely wrong with me. I waited, waited for him to let go and when he didn't I rested my head on his chest.

"So what do you see in me?" I asked softly hoping he would answer me. He was silent again then said, "I don't know where to begin."

"Well, do you see my fear?" My voice was barely audible but he heard.

"Yes. And more. I see a beautiful strong woman who have accepted herself but didn't have time to love herself. I see a woman ready, ready for anything but still scared of the unknown. Your beauty haven't moved."

I chuckled, fighting my tears. "You don't know me."

"I know enough. I think you have always been this beautiful. Maturing like fine wine."

"That sounds too cliché, it's a platitude." I was now smiling. "Slightly. But nevertheless, facts. I love your eyes."

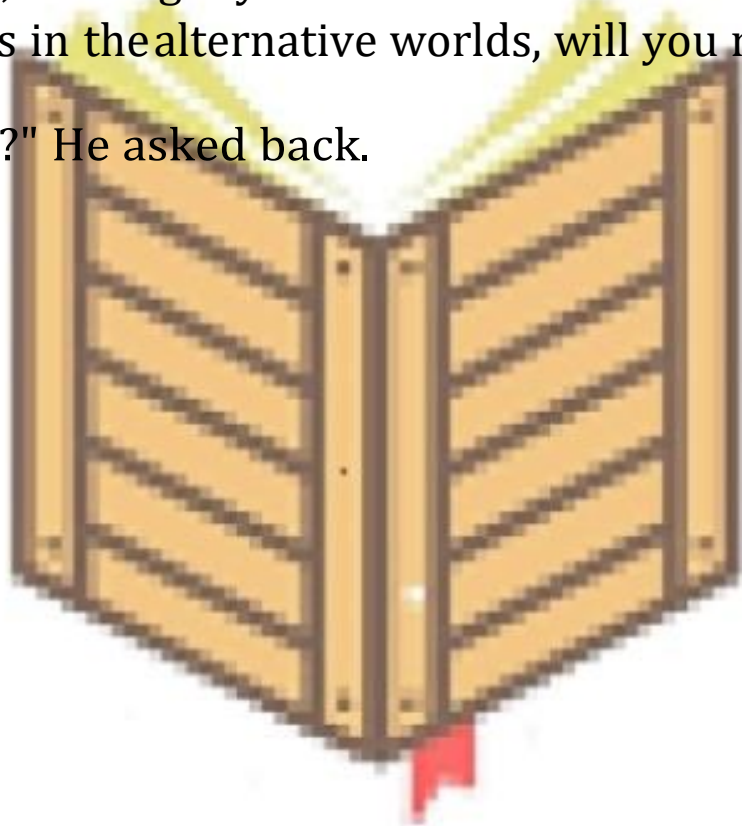
"Why?"

"That's for me to know."

"No one has ever told me they liked my eyes." I whispered. "Because they were blind."

A tear fell, wetting my cheek then his T-shirt. "If we ever cross paths in the alternative worlds, will you remember me?"

"Will you?" He asked back.



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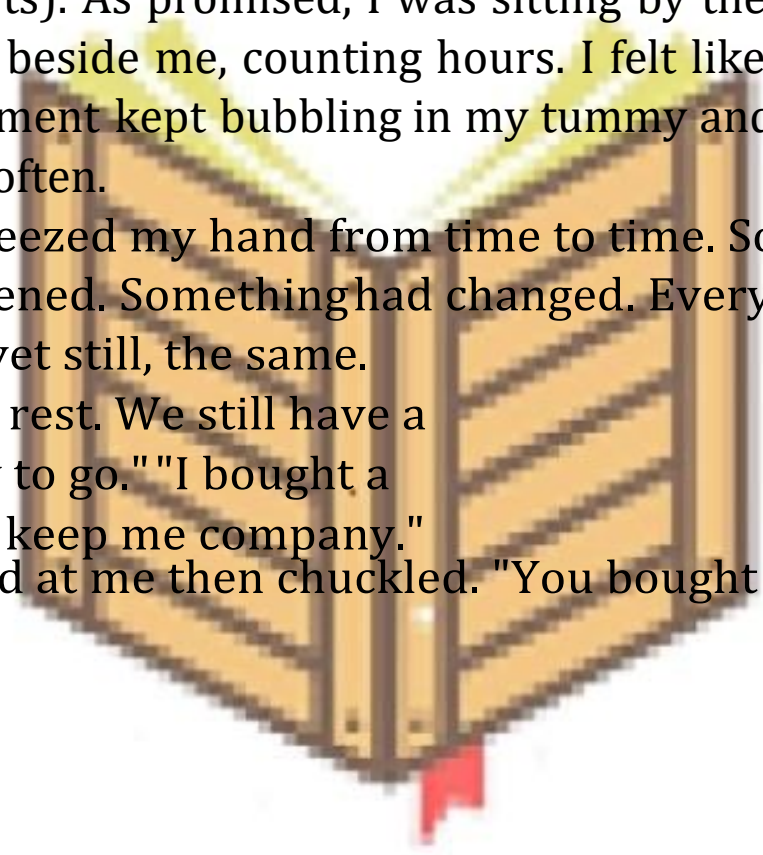
Chapter Six

According to my research, google that is, the flight to Sao Paulo had to take 11 hours and 50 minutes from London (all airports). As promised, I was sitting by the window with Nick beside me, counting hours. I felt like a child, the excitement kept bubbling in my tummy and my smiles came too often.

Nick squeezed my hand from time to time. Something had happened. Something had changed. Everything had changed yet still, the same.

"You can rest. We still have a long way to go." "I bought a book. To keep me company."

He looked at me then chuckled. "You bought a book."



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"Yes." I said, smiling while taking it out from the small backpack Nick purchased for me on our way to the airport. It had the bucket list, the camera, audio recorder and chocolates. Nick bought them because to him I once mentioned I loved chocolates, occasion forgotten.

"When?"

"When you went to put the shopping bags in the car earlier on, I snuck to the bookstore next to the clothing store and bought it with the change. Of course it wasn't enough but I begged till the owner gave in." I said giggling, feeling naughty.

"I would have bought it for you."

Of course he would have. And he did, perhaps with not enough money but still, he did.

"I know. And you did." I gave him the copy of Twilight. He looked at me as if I was the only thing he saw.

"Vampires are your thing?"

"You never know what's your thing till you try it out."

He looked at the book one more time before handing it back. From his eyes I could tell he wanted to say something but he was holding back.

I sat back and opened the first page. After a few pages I finally began to understand why people read fiction so much, to disappear and become someone else. It wasn't long before I started reading the same line more than twice, fighting away my sleep. Slowly I lost the battle and drifted off to sleep. I dreamt I was happy. The happiness was everywhere. In my bones, my chest, my heart. I inhaled the happiness and wished I could take it all in.

When I woke up, my head was on Nick's shoulder, our hands entwined. My head buzzed but still, I felt good. I

wanted it to stay like that forever. I listened to the soft throbbing of his heart till the flight attendant came. She offered me orange juice.

I sipped slowly, my body fatigue. Memories flooded my mind, Nick dancing. The car race. I looked at him recalling that I had been wanting to ask him where he learnt dancing. Sighing I put my free hand on my chest, excitement of the falls sipping back in. Thinking of everything that was happening I allowed myself a moment of weakness and lingered on for a minute. It felt good thinking I wasn't dying and that this happiness was just going to last for long.

"Are you alright?"

His voice was smooth yet too lazy. Butterflies erupted in my stomach, again. Was this normal? I was a 27 year-old woman for crying out loud! My gaze fell on him and my heart skipped.

"I'm fine."

He stretched then reached for my glass of orange juice.

"Just woke up?"

I nodded watching him finish my juice in one go. Seconds later after finishing my juice he burped and I couldn't help it but laugh. He joined me in a beat.

"For someone like me, I think that's acceptable."

I found myself rolling my eyes, it felt funny doing so and not expect a slap afterward. "That sounds very egoistical."

He smirked. "Does it?"

I relaxed on my seat and looked at my book. "Already in love with Edward Cullen?" Chuckling I shook my head. "I think I'm more scared than falling in love."

Nick laughed, a relief kind of laugh.

"Thank God!" "Why?"

His lips pursed momentarily then he finally smiled, that smile that had my entire body heating up. "It would have been a shame if you did." His voice was neutral. "If he was human I think maybe... just maybe."

"And here I thought it was going well.

Now I need a smoke." I blinked a couple of times. "That's not allowed in here."

He grinned. "Rules are meant to be broken." "You—"

"Relax— joking."

I sighed with relief then opened the last page I had read of Twilight. I could feel his eyes on me, burning my skin but I ignored him. I wanted to tell him to quit smoking, that he might get lung cancer and die. But words didn't pass my lips.

From the corner of my eye I caught him taking out earphones. He stuck them in his ears leaning back, eyes closed. Slowly I read the same sentence I had fallen asleep trying to read. I surprised myself closing the book and leaning unto him. He looked at me with questioning eyes before taking off the earphones.

"Are you—"

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"I'm fine. Can I listen with you?"

"Sure." He murmured then offered the left side to me.

Sticking in the earphone I smiled and looked at him. "Echosmith?" He nodded.

"Yep!"

"Are you a DJ?"

A ghost smile touched the corner of his lips. "What do you think?"

"I think Echosmith is one of my favourites. But there's a song I love." He hand me his phone with amusement. "I also wanna hear it."

I took his phone without hesitation and typed the song. It came up almost immediately, one would swear he had all songs.

"Icona pop?" He asked with a laugh as soon as it started playing. "Yeah. I love the song,"

I rested my head on his shoulder listening to the lyrics of 'all night' with a smile. Minutes later of repeated lyrics and same beat, I was feeling sleepy and this time I didn't fight it.

Waking up another song was playing and Nick was busy on his laptop. I slowly removed my head from his shoulder muffling a yawn.

"Sleeping beauty." He glanced at me. "Had a nice sleep?"

I nodded feeling too groggy. My body had needs and I figured that's what had really woken me up.

"We are 3 hours away."

"Oh.. umm, I want to go to the ladies."

"Want me to escort you?" His deep smooth voice was laced with naughtiness. I blushed. "No.

Thanks."

I was up before he could say another word. His wild eyes were too suggesting.

In the toilet, pulling up my jeans I looked at my reflection on the mirror. With a frown, I splashed water on my face, I looked too tired. Feeling conscious, I wondered

why I never carried anything for my lips with. Saliva wasn't enough but it did the trick.

"You look fine. You look ok." I whispered to myself on the mirror. "Stop it. You look fine."

Abruptly I started laughing. I felt crazy, what was happening to me?

You are falling in love. My subconscious alerted me but like the devil, stroking me, the voice alerted me of the inevitable. *But for you, there's no happy ending.*

I shook my head and smiled. I was dying but just not now and so I could live in the moment.

Returning to my seat, Nick had put his laptop away. "I was about to send a search party."

"I think I'm hungry."

A minute later I had another orange juice with a plate of cake. A huge piece. "What's your favourite colour? White?"

"Are we really doing this?"

I took a bite of my cake nodding. "No. My favourite colour is black." "Azrael."

"Should I grab a dictionary?"

"Like an angel of death. Ok.. do you deejay?" "Sometimes."

"Where did you learn to dance?" "From the streets."

I took another bite. "Eddie Murphy, Jamie Fox or Martin Lawrence?" He laughed.

"Eddie Murphy."

"I love Martin Lawrence but Eddie is still ok. Can you sing?" "You are unforgettable, I need to get you alone..."

He sang.

I laughed. "That's terrible. Whoever sang that song will probably hate you." "I never promised to be good."

My laugh boomed. "That's ok. It's not that bad bad." "The fact that you said bad twice worries me."

The smile in his voice was soothing. "You are horrible and terrible but not that much."

We fell silent and the question which I had been trying to swallow finally made its way past my lips.

"Do you miss her? Your mom?"

His face changed and grew serious. My heart raced, had I taken it too far? "Sometimes.

Sometimes I don't remember her."

"Do you talk to her? I saw in a movie that—"

He cut me short pressing his lips on mine. Then his tongue was parting my lips, gliding in and stroking my tongue. My entire body shook as he ravaged my lips. I kissed him back, my hand pulling at his curly hair. Suddenly my lips were free. "No. I don't see ghost Nelima. But I do see you. Everywhere."

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"How long is our next flight?" My voice was virtually drowned in an airport announcement and buzz. I couldn't understand anything being said as it was delivered in Portuguese.

"2 hours 10 minutes."

I sighed peering into the sea of faces. We pushed toward the departure gate at the Rio de Janeiro airport to board a different plane to Foz do Iguassu, Brazil.

Inside the plane, once again I occupied the window seat. The plane slowly moved from the gate, speed increasing till liftoff.

I smiled as soon as the flight attendant announced we could move around. "My heart always skips at liftoff."

"Why?"

"Well I always think of what would happen if ever the plane crash." "You die. That's it."

I laughed. "Guess I'm scared of dying." "We all are."

I looked out through the window. "I'm sorry, I.—"

"It's ok." I turned to look at him. "It's life. It will be over before you know it." "Wanna listen to music?"

I smiled. "Yeah, 2 hours is a lot of time."

Sticking in one earphone I immediately recalled the song. Khalid I think. Easy silence fell on us.

Nick led me across to the man who had his name written on a huge card. "How do you know it's

you?" I asked as we approached him.

"I know him."

The man smiled at Nick and they both changed pleasantries in a foreign language to me. I smiled wishing I knew what they were saying to each other or what the lady standing right beside me was saying to her child. Seconds later the man took our bags and was leading us outside the airport. I felt fatigue wear in strongly making me stumble. Nick was suddenly right there beside me, hands around my waist steadying me. I moved my eyes to his and was faced with worry, fear and so much concern.

"You ok?"

I nodded, not trusting my own voice.

The uncertainty in his eyes was almost palpable.

"Nelima.." He breathed, squeezing my waist a bit.

"I'm fine." I whispered. "Just tired. Let's go."

His hand never moved from my waist till we were standing in front of the car. Nick opened the door for me and I climbed in, sinking in the plush seats and inhaling leather scent.

Nick settled beside me and seconds later, the car was moving.

"We will have dinner once we get to the hotel." He said curtly, the warmth to his tone gone.

"Are you ok?" My voice trembled.

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"Yeah." He responded in a flat voice. His mood had completely changed and my brain worked 10 times more trying to figure out what had happened.

A few minutes of silence had my head wanting to explode with possible explanations of his sudden change of mood. As the silence stretched, the more I felt as if we were strangers sitting at the backseat of an uber.

"Is it me?" I asked, my heart in my mouth.

But he didn't look at me, just shook his head and turned to the window. Parts of me silently prayed and hoped he would turn back to me and smile. But as more minutes passed, I knew he was not going to. I blinked looking at the car roof, fighting my burning tears. I brushed away the wayward tear that had fallen without making a sound.

The car finally stopped. The hotel looked beautiful from outside. Inside, Nick checked us in as Mr. and Mrs. Bradley. I stared at the receptionist as she smiled brightly at Nick. I looked at her tag name, Myla. She was a beautiful brunette with a gap between her upper front teeth and a dimple on the left cheek.

I stepped back and took out my bucket list from the backpack. A smile on my lips as I stared at Paris (Eiffel Tower) which was on the bucket list.

"I'm done."

I looked up and he was frowning. I quickly put the bucket list back in the bag standing up. In the elevators, I stared at the teenage couple who were with us. I secretly wondered if the hotel allowed underage kids but then inwardly laughed at myself, who really cared if both looked 16 if not 17?

The twin room was big enough and exquisite. I looked at the double bed then at Nick who had placed my suitcase and his overnight bag on the floor. He wasn't looking at me and perhaps still upset. Placing my backpack down, I quickly took off my shoes and climbed on the bed. Curling my body under the soft blanket I closed my eyes and shut off everything. My body relaxed as I started drifting to sleep. I thought I heard him say he's ordering food but really wasn't sure.

Something warm touched my face.

Trying to ignore it made it worse and my senses were coming back to life. I could hear my name whispered hurriedly, panic lacing the whisper.

"Neli wake up.."

I squeezed my eyes shut. I was close to waking up and the more the voice sounded higher, the more anxious I got.

"Neli.."

I opened my eyes and Nick was there. His face inches from mine. "Hey, wake up." I blinked twice, thrice, he was still there. I sighed.

"I was worried." He said hurriedly, moving away from me and jerking his hand in his hair in frustration.

I frowned. "Why?"

"God knows what might happen to you in your sleep! Some people die." His voice trailed off on the last part. I grimaced at the thought of dying in my sleep but only to smile seconds later.

"But I was breathing, I'm sure you could see that."

He looked at me silently then shook his head. "It was hard to tell. I thought you weren't."

He looked away before I could try to read him. When he stared at me again, he was angry.

"Why are you not on treatment?" His voice was so hush. "What?"

"You should be on treatment! Or maybe you've always wanted to die." He accused. I couldn't even be angry or at least, raise my voice. "Nick I'm dying. I have stage 4 cell cervical cancer. The removal of my womb didn't help because somehow it had already spread. I did chemo, they thought it would help and it did but not enough. The cancer has moved into my liver, lymph nodes and now probably my lungs. I'm terminal, even if I undergo chemo, that won't cure me, it won't save me. It won't make comfortable either because it's all pain! I'd rather live my last days enjoying life than in and out of hospital."

"There has to be something.." He muttered. "You can't just die!"

"There's nothing. It's over. I just want to enjoy this before I start coughing." I chuckled. "Look, I'm sorry I'm putting you through this. This is the last thing I have ever wanted. After here, take me to Paris then put me in a flight back home. That's all."

He rubbed his eyes.

"How long have I been sleeping? What time is it?" I was now out of bed. "It's 9 a.m, you have been out for 5 hours."

"Well I'm going to take a quick shower, change then we can go. I heard the Argentina side is more fun than the Brazil side." My voice sounded cheerful and very fake in my own ears.

"Are you not hungry? You should eat and drink your pills."

I had no appetite but still nodded. I couldn't worry him even more. "Yeah." "I ordered food. Breakfast."

"Ok. Let me take a bath."

I grabbed my suitcase and darted to the bathroom then met with my reflection on the mirror.

I looked better than ever or maybe I was just deceiving myself. Whatever it was, I was feeling my best. I was free. Under the shower I opened the tap and welcomed the warm torrent. My stiff muscles slowly relaxed and by the time I stepped out, I felt new.

I dressed quickly. Soft cotton white panties and a matching bra, high waisted jean shorts that barely covered my thighs. I bended looking at the mirror and my butt was safe at least. I had never worn such before and God damnit, it felt good! I grabbed a white vest then lastly, a cream camisole printed 'FLAWLESS' in black.

"Breakfast is getting cold." He knocked on the door. "Just a minute."

I put on my white sneakers then repacked the bag. Stepping out, he was sitting on the bed, his eyes moved up and down my body.

"There's a chance we might get wet." I said trying to explain my dressing then blushed when he raised his brow. "Wet.. water splashing over us."

He was wearing jeans, white T-shirt with a denim jacket. He looked... hot. More attractive. More handsome, breathtaking.

Stop it Nelima! I warned myself.

"Come and eat."

He walked to the balcony I hadn't noticed when we arrived. I followed him to the small table on the balcony with the breakfast and only two chairs. I gasped when realized we could actually see the falls from the hotel.

"Nick!"

"I know. Sit." I looked at him wondering just how he could not be moved by the falls.

Sitting down I grabbed a muffin and placed it in my plate. "Coffee?" He asked.

"No, juice."

He quietly poured juice for me and handing it to me, he placed a turkey ranch club wrap that was in his plate in mine.

"Uh no, I don't —"

"You haven't had a real meal in the last 12 hours, I'm not going to have you die out of hunger."

"Nick..—"

"Eat!" He commanded staring at me in an imperious, challenging way.

I started eating, barely gauging the taste of the food. I could feel his eyes on me the entire time.

Finishing I stood up and headed back in the bedroom and straight to the bathroom. After brushing my teeth I stepped out, he already had the camera in his hands.

"Take," he handed it to me. "We have to get bus tickets to visit the falls from the visiting center."

"I'm so excited." I confessed. "I want to jump up and

down."

He smiled taking my hand. "Let's get going then. The park National do Iguazu ticketing office has opened already. But first, the pills."

The queue at the ticketing office was already long. An Australian couple who stood in front of us explained it was usually long but said at least we were going to get in the first bus. It wasn't their first time to visit the Iguazu falls or second, rather the fourth time.

Nick got us the park entry tickets together with the lunch buffet tickets to avoid another queue later. In the bus, Nick and I sat together and the Australian couple on the seats in front of us.

"So how long have you been married?" The wife asked, her head turned to us, glee in her eyes. "Philip and I have been married for 27 years now."

I looked at Nick pressing my lips together.

"We have been married for 5 days now." He answered gracefully pulling me closer to him.

"Oh, lovely!" She turned to the front and I focused my attention on Nick. "Why did you lie?"

"Shhh.." He shushed me then grinned. "Relax. You look cute when worked up."

I opened my mouth to talk but couldn't find the words. I finally just looked out through the window and released the smile that had been wanting to occupy my lips. It didn't matter if his last sentence was a cliché, it still made butterflies erupt in my tummy.

We stayed in the bus till the last stop, the restaurant. Climbing down from the bus, I had my camera in place. From the restaurant to Devil's throat, it took us less than 5 minutes.

"Apparently Devil's Throat is the heart of the falls." I said loudly taking pictures of the falls. The deafening noise of the water was like music to my ears.

"Isn't this amazing Nick?"

He put his arm around my neck and kissed my forehead.

"It is."

The Australian couple were right, indeed we had Devil's Throat to ourselves. There wasn't a crowd.

We explored from the upper level which is level with the road. I took pictures of birds that appeared to be flying right into the sheer wall of water and disappearing on the other side.

"I wish I were like those birds. Flying like that so close to such beauty." "I don't think I would enjoy being a bird."

"You would be stealing worms from other birds."

He burst out into laughter. "That's the most amusing thing I have ever heard." "What would you call me if I was a bird."

Nick took the camera from me and snapped a few shots of me. "I would call you Brownie because of your eyes."

"I like Brownie."

Taking the camera from him I continued walking. From

the upper level we went to the lower level using the stairs

"Take, I wouldn't want you getting wet." He said, his voice so low and seductive. "And getting sick of cause." He had a poncho in his hands.

"When did you get this?"

He smirked. "While you were sleeping."

We walked through a specifically constructed walkway and as the water hit the canyon, a huge spray was created making visibility low. It felt as if I was part of the falls and the falls were part of me.

By the time we finished exploring Devil's Throat, the trail to explore the falls was now turning into a zoo and crowds had formed. We used the road instead of following the trail to the viewpoints.

Brazil had the balcony to the falls, you could see a terraced cascade of the falls. "Look at the hotel." I pointed.

"Yeah, pretty cool right?"

"More than cool."

From the falls, we went back to Macuco Safari boat ride. The third stop we had skipped in the bus. Nick had purchased our tickets online so we didn't need to queue.

There was an option of either dry boat or wet boat though the guide did explain we would get wet on both boats.

"Let's take the wet boat."

Nick looked unsure.

"Are you sure?" "You are the unsure one."

"I just don't want you getting sick." "It's the same Nick, relax."

We sat at the front seat in the boat, my camera already rolling for a video, thank God it was waterproof.

The boat went directly underneath the thundering falls. The poncho did protect me from the dunking but my head was exposed. The force of the falls was so strong that most of the time, my eyes were closed. The water kept hitting us from all sides. The boat went under the falls at least 4 times. Arriving at the landing, I wanted to go back again even though my camisole was slightly wet. It was an exhilarating moment.

The lunch buffet back at the restaurant was delicious but I didn't have the appetite. Not wanting to ruin the good day Nick and I were having, I ate silently viewing the stunning open air terrace.

"I wish we can stay here forever." I sighed.

"Feel free to build your house here." He said getting up.

"I hope you won't have a problem with the cops."

I laughed and followed after him. "Nice plan."

From the restaurant we took a bus back to the park entrance and there, Nick called an uber using the free WiFi to drive us back to our hotel. I was exhausted but

happy. I slid in the backseat of the uber when it arrived and Nick gracefully sat beside me. "Thank you, for today. It was amazing." I said hugging him. He put his arms around me, holding me tightly.



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Chapter Seven

"Checkmate." I said looking at him while his eyes remained fixed on the chessboard. Seconds passed and he couldn't seem to stop staring. Finally he raised his eyes to meet mine, a frown on his face.

"How did you do that?" It was a question of disbelief. "Years of playing with Edward and always losing." "Did you ever win?"

I smiled. "Yes. He'd get angry."

His eyes fell to the chessboard and looking up, this time he was smiling. "He created a beast."

I laughed, loudly. "I guess. Want another game?"

"I think my pride and ego are too bruised for that. They have had enough." He stood up and walked over to the balcony. It was raining and I was so glad it hadn't rained during the day.

Following him to the balcony I shivered, the cold breeze had me wanting to go back inside.

"Do you think it will rain tomorrow?" "No. I checked the weather forecast."

I hugged myself taking in a deep breath. "Are you going to see your family while we are here?"

"No."

I pressed my lips together, trying not to pry by asking private questions.

"They never liked my mother. To them I'm an illegitimate child." He answered my unasked question. I couldn't help seeing an innocent child in my head who

faced rejection together with his mother. I felt sad for him.

"Don't feel sorry for me."

"I won't." I muttered. "Aren't you tired? You haven't slept in the last... uh now 24 hours."

"Really now? Are you telling me to sleep?" The naughtiness in his voice was back and so was the usual Nick.

"Yes. Now!" I fought to keep a straight face, hand on my waist. "And if I don't? What will you do?"

I looked at him realizing I actually could do nothing. I giggled shaking my head. "Nothing."

"But I will go to sleep. As demanded." He gestured we go back inside the room. I took off my shoes and crawled to the bed. He closed the balcony door and walking further in the room, took off his T-shirt. I couldn't deny the fact that he was greatly built and like that, my mind ran off. I started thinking of the kind of woman he was going to marry. Would she be tall or short? Thick or slim thick like the curly haired girl. The thoughts were like knives to my chest, jabbing it so hard.

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I watched him undress till he was only in his briefs, fighting my tears away. Why couldn't that woman be me? I bit my lower lip trying to stop myself but it was too late and I felt stupid.

Only 5 days and I already felt like this. It wasn't normal and it wasn't infatuation and I so badly wanted it to be. Tears surfaced to my eyes, I had to admit it, I was falling in love with him. I was dying and falling in love. I wanted him forever, I wanted to be his forever. A lump grew on my throat, he was the first man I have ever loved like this.

"Like what you see?" He asked pulling me from my thoughts. I chuckled. "You are full of yourself."

"Oh please! I know it when a woman is drooling." I rested my head on the pillow as he lay beside me. "Are you ok?" He asked making me laugh and sob.

"How many times do you ask that question per day?" "Well I have to make sure."

I nodded blinking away my tears. "I'm fine. I'm ok."

"Good. Anyways I was thinking we fly to Argentina tomorrow, what do you think? There are buses too. Or we can just get a taxi."

A tear fell and I quickly wiped it away before he could see. "A taxi will do." "Ok. You can sleep or do you want me to cuddle you?"

I looked at him then turned to my side. Seconds later I felt his arms around me. I stared blankly at the wall and silently cried. The pain I felt was too unbearable,

itstrangled me, sucking my soul out.

Calming down after a while, I kept staring at the wall. I listened carefully to Nick's breathing and I could tell he was sleeping. Gently I put his arm away, got off bed and grabbed my backpack. I tiptoed to the bathroom and slowly closed the door.

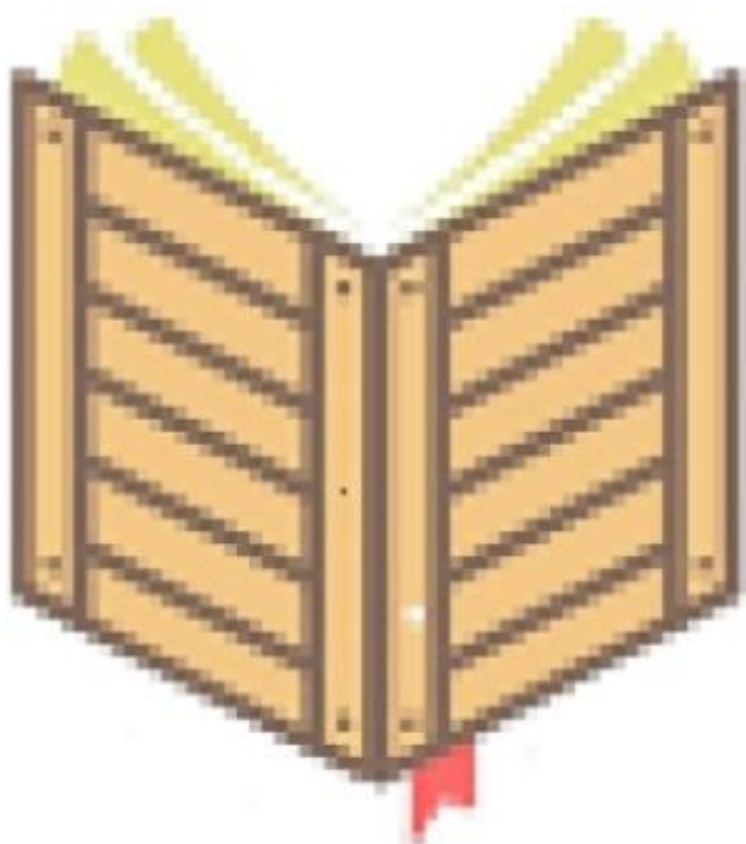
I sat on the glossy floors, not caring of the coldness feeling too numb to feel anything. I quietly took out my audio recorder and pressed 'record'. Sighing I looked around the bathroom.

"To whoever is going to listen to this, I'm inside a beautiful bathroom, in a hotel which is close to Iguaza falls. The hotel is beautiful.." I whispered. "But not as beautiful as the falls. I loved the experience, the excitement. Everything about the falls is just splendid." A smile played on my lips. "I can live here forever and not complain. Ladies and gentleman, I'm proud to announce that I'm falling in love." I giggled as tears streamed down my cheeks. "I guess I'm the Jack on this one.

Someone has to leave first and it's me. There is no... other version for this story. Sorry, it doesn't carry a happy ending." I wiped my tears with the back of my free hand. "Uhh it's sad. And painful but it's ok. I know he will find someone and I hope it will be enough for him. I'm jealous though. I wish it would be me. But... his heart will go on as Celine Dion sang. Maybe every night in his dreams he will see me and feel me." I took a deep breath to calm down my emotions though I had the edge to cry. To cry out loud. "I'm ok. I'm fine."

The driver was waiting for us, he was on time. I smiled

when he opened the door for me.



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"Thank you."

Seconds later he was pulling away. I looked at Nick who was just staring at me. "What?"

"I have a feeling something is wrong. Your eyes are swollen."

I fixed my sunglasses wondering how he knew that. I had been wearing them since he woke up.

"Were you crying last night?" He sounded sincerely concerned but I couldn't tell him that I had spent the night crying, crying because I loved him and was dying before I experienced how loving someone that deep felt.

"No."

"When I was 7 I think, probably 6, I don't quite remember how old I was but somewhere there." He chuckled. "I caught my parents having sex."

A titter escaped my lips. "What?"

"Yep. Worst part was that they didn't see me and it was on my bed." "Nooo!"

"I remember having a drawing resembling my family in my hands. I wanted to show them but I was met with a surprise. I had an idea of what was going on." "I'm sorry."

He chuckled. "Don't be. I walked out and thought it was a good normal thing to do." "No you didn't!"

"I had a friend, she stayed across the street. I forgot her name but she was my friend. And was a bit younger than me. We used to play getting married and in our little heads we were husband and wife. Her mother was my mother's friend. So I went over to her house, at the tree house. Her dad had built us a tree house. I told her what I saw and told her that's what husband and wife

do."

I giggled putting my hand over my mouth. "Please tell me you did not."

"We did it. It was weird. I didn't even know I had a dick or that she has a vagina." After seconds of trying to hold it in I finally let it out. I laughed till my ribs hurt. "You can stop laughing at me now. I was a child."

"You are crazy."

"Glad you find me amusing."

I smiled looking at him while he grinned. "Thanks." "Anytime."

The taxi dropped us at the immigration for passport stamping so to enter Argentina. Nick had all my things. From there, the taxi took us to the park entrance and we arrived a few minutes before 8 a.m. Nick got us the train tickets because in Argentina you are carted between different trails of free trains.

We walked to the train and was met with a chaos of tour guides trying to get spots for their groups. By 0830 hours, the train was leaving.

Nick wrapped his arm around me making me rest my head on his chest. "I'm still wondering why you were crying." He murmured.

"I wasn't."

"You are a terrible liar." His arms tightened around me.

"What's in that bag?"

I looked at my fanny pack around my waist. "Camera, and sunscreen." I took the sunscreen out. "It smells nice."

He took the camera. "Wow! Natural photographer."

"Well thank you Mr. Bradley."

He smiled down on me holding out the camera. "I think a selfie will do."

Rolling my eyes I gave my brightest, biggest smile to the camera. As he looked at the selfie I stared out through the window.

"It's beautiful."

I looked at him then at the selfie he was showing me. "I look hideous."

He placed the camera back in the fanny pack and looked at the tour guide who was explaining something to his group. From the way he was speaking, I could sense years of experience. He kept running his hand in his blonde hair from time to time, at first I thought it was due to frustration till I saw him laugh while doing it.

We got off the train at the last stop.

It wasn't easy to access Devil's Throat this side because it lay on the other side of Iguaza river, a kilometre wide. We crossed the river using the elevated wooden walkway.

There was a crowd already, a huge crowd.

"Wow!" I said looking at the hundreds of people. "But we got in the first train." "Yeah, that doesn't matter here. Come."

We took a trail that led us to the upper circuit of Devil's Throat. I felt as if I was in paradise. We watched the water plunging down the cliffs underneath us in complete awe. Every few minutes large clouds of spray shot into the air.

We spent time trying to explore using different viewpoints. Nick now had the camera. We watched veils of the falls come into view.

The lower circuit were more of experiencing than

viewing. We didn't have ponchos so we felt the spray of the falls at some viewpoints.

"What's that?" I asked pointing at an animal sitting on the side of trail. "Capuchin."

"They look hungry."

"Don't feed them. They have a nasty bite."

"I wasn't going to. I was just observing. I'm not going to feed no animal." He laughed. "Good to know."

"You are wet." I said looking at his T-shirt which was sticking to his body. He looked at himself then me.

"So are you."

He kept his gaze on me till I couldn't handle it anymore. My entire body was burning. I walked in front of him through the Macuco trail. Nick had his hand now in mine as we followed the trail.

"Do you think if Jack knew that at the end he was going to die, would he have still gotten in Titanic and fallen in love with Rose?" I asked my mind far away.

"Yeah." Nick responded making me stop walking and stare him carefully. "Yeah?"

"Yeah. I think he would have. Rose was his once in a life time love story. There are different kinds of love out there, but never the same love twice."

This time I didn't move my gaze from his eyes and neither did he. Slowly I started smiling, tears surfacing.

"Stop..."

"Stop
what?"

I giggled, tears spilling from the corner of my eyes. "You are looking at me with that look." My voice was barely audible.

"Is it bad thing if I am?"

I shook my head as more tears gushed. "No. It's not a bad thing. It's the most... amazing thing to ever happen to me. I wish... I wish I can capture the moment somewhere but..."

"But what?" He rubbed my tears away with his hand. I placed my hand on top of his.

"I'm not the one you should be giving that look to. I'm the wrong girl."

"I don't know what's going on but you... I think this is what my mother meant when she said one day I will find someone who I will be ready to do anything for. I want to save you."

I moved from him, I was emotionally having a breakdown. I shook my head tasting the saltiness of my own tears. "You can't save me, no one can."

"I can get you the best doctor money can buy."

The words played loudly in my ears and in his eyes I saw hope. Hope and faith. He grabbed my hands. "You don't have to die. I want you stay. To be alive."

"It's too late." I whispered. "It's too late

Nick. It's just too late." "It's never too

late."

"Stop..."

"I love the way you laugh."

I chuckled sobbing. I wanted him to stop but at the same time, wanted him to go on. "Or giggle. I love hearing you giggle."

"That's corny."

He bit his lower lip. "I know and... I don't like how it

feels. I feel like I'm in some cheek fleek movie."

My lips curved, forming a smile. "No, you sound like a something in a song. Or novel."

"That
bad?"

"Yep!"

"Well I can't help it. You are beautiful. In and out." He sighed looking up in the sky. It was getting late. "You look nothing like my usual type but... I can't help it. Even if you were a bird, I would remember you."

"But how? I will probably look like many other birds."

He let my hands go and cupped my face. "I would still get lost in your eyes." Silence grew between us and our eyes remained locked together. I loved the way he looked at me.

"Come, you need to eat something." He took my hand and we turned back to the lower circuit. There was a restaurant there.

After forcing small bites of the lunch buffet down, Nick decided we go back to Devil's Throat and we watched the falls as the sun set.

"This is beautiful."

"So are you. Let's go, there's a place I want you to visit."

"Nick, what are we doing here?" I asked as we walked inside the airport.

"We are going to Rio de Janeiro." "Why?"

He turned to look at me. "Relax."

He checked us in and soon, we were inside the plane. The flight to Rio was filled with curiosity and anxiousness. Nick was relaxed, he was even smiling.

After what seemed like ages to me, we were walking out of Rio de Janeiro airport. Instead of leading me to a taxi, Nick led me to a sports car.

"Get in." He already had my door open. "Whose car is this?"

"Mine."

"Nick... where..—"

"Shhh.. ask no questions and hear no lies. You trust me right?" "Of cause I—"

"Then get in."

Silently I slid in. My heart was thudding loudly and I couldn't understand why I was shaking. I trusted him, there was no reason to be scared.

"Ready?" He asked starting the car. It purred to life while he smirked. "There are only a few of this in the world." The pride in his voice couldn't be mistaken for anything.

I looked at the brand.

"Ferrari?" "Yeah, now you just relax."

He drove through the streets of Rio filled with people and wherever we were headed, the crowd kept getting thicker that at some point he'd just slow down. The disbelief in some people's eyes as they stared at the car was amazing. I narrowed my eyes

forward till I saw the source of the crowds.

"Race?"

He glanced at me. "Yeah.."

"Nick this is a foreign. " I stopped myself when I realized just how stupid I sounded. This was his zone. His country." "Don't worry."

He drove through the crowd till he parked the car alongside many other funny designed cars. He stepped out and rounded the car to my door.

"Are you sure this —"

"Nelima, relax." He took my hand and pulled me out of the car. "Nothing is going to happen."

He walked with me to a huge group of people. I looked at the half naked women and swallowed. The air felt different, everything felt different and I clung to Nick.

"Nick!" The guy in the center of the group screamed puffing out smoke. Everyone turned and made way for us. Now I wished I had remained in the car.

I looked at the man, tattoos everywhere, even on his face. He had two girls around him.

"Ricardo!"

They hugged briefly and from the way Nick smiled I knew there was history. "My boy is back!" The man yelled.

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Nick let me go as Ricardo placed his arm on his shoulder. "This boy is my son!" "Nick, been time!"

I turned to look where the voice had come from and was met with a fine dressed and handsome man. From his eyes I could see he was daring and liked challenges. Behind him parked a grey Bugatti, one like the one Edward was planning to purchase a few weeks ago.

He smirked looking at Nick. "Good to see you back." His voice made me shiver, not that it was bad but just spelt trouble.

"Sergio."

Bad blood. No one needed to tell me there was bad blood between them, it was too visible. Sergio turned as if heading to his car then suddenly turned, gun in his hand and pointing it directly at Nick.

"Nick!" I screamed, already beside him. I couldn't care less if everyone was now staring at me.

"Ahh! Look what he brought." Sergio said laughing. "Isn't she a beauty? Hmm... full lips, beautiful face and those eyes."

Nick pulled me behind him. "You are pissing me off, Sergio." Nick's voice was low yet so deep that everyone heard.

Sergio cocked the gun, he wasn't smirking anymore. You could see nothing but hatred in his eyes, it was so cold.

"Nick.." I whispered, terrified.

"Shoot me. If you don't, you are going to regret it." Nick snarled.

Ricardo was watching while busy caressing his two women. I wanted to scream, why wasn't anyone doing anything?

Nick me pushed me back gently then took a few strides to Sergio. "Don't be a coward. If you won't pull the trigger, then fight like a man."

Sergio chuckled throwing the gun down. He swung his fist at Nick who dodged gracefully.

"Rule number 1. Never miss." Nick's fist landed right on Sergio's face, and blood spit from his mouth.

"Rule number 2. Never show weakness." Nick threw another fist, this time blood dripped from Sergio's nose but still he chuckled wiping it away.

"Rule number 3." He said wickedly grabbing the gun from the ground. "Either you die or he dies."

"Stop! This is not how to settle this." Ricardo was now between them. "It's a race. Whoever wins, wins and this little whatever you want to call it, ends now! In your cars! Now!"

Nick started walking towards the car.

"Nick, you said nothing will happen." I said following after him. "This was nothing. Don't worry."

I grabbed his hand. "Nick.."

He grinned. "Never knew you cared this much." "What? Are you listening to yourself?"

"Yeah.. this is just a little game. Don't worry."

"I just don't understand you, you are crazy. You are so insane, you could have died."

He opened the door smiling. "And I guess that's why you are still with me."

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I watched as he got in the car and drove to everyone. A huge crowd had now gathered. I slowly followed behind and stood a distance from the scene. A half naked woman stood between the cars and immediately after she blew the whistle, the cars sped away.

"Hey, hot mama!"

I sighed as the tall thin guy approached me.

"Wanna see my car?" "No, thank you."

He looked at me from head to tall, lust visible in his eyes. "Who did you come with?"

"Nick. Nick Bradley." I said with confidence hoping that would scare him off. It worked like charm. He scurried away almost immediately. Looking around I wondered just how it felt having a life here. People's screams made me raise my head. The red Ferrari was back. They all gathered around the car while the Bugatti pulled up. Sergio stepped out and he looked angry. One of the tires at the back was deflated.

"He played unfair!" He screamed pointing at Nick and from the way Ricardo shrugged, there was nothing he could do.

They came face to face, Sergio was red with anger.

"This is not over Nick. It's far from being over."

He walked back to the car and drove away, just not fast enough. Ricardo hugged Nick and said something that they both laughed. Police sirens stopped the entire celebration, the crowd started dispersing. I lost Nick's face in the chaos, all I could hear now was screams mixed with the sound tire screeching.

I tensed feeling hands on my waist.

"Let's go." Nick's voice. I sighed with relief while we walked to the car. Getting inside he sped off.

"You won."

He chuckled.

"Yeah. I did." "I was worried."

"You need to relax." "Where are we going now?"

"We are going to dance."

I beamed at him, that was safe. Safe for him. But I felt too exhausted, I felt tired but still smiled brightly.

"Ok." My voice was barely a whisper but he heard me. Minutes later we were walking in a club I think and it was packed. Bodies were crushed against each other, sweat dripping from people's foreheads and music playing loudly. Nick put his hand around my waist and led me across the crowd, my body rubbing against other bodies. He helped me on a stool at the bar and ordered me a drink. Cocktail. The same one I had once ordered for him.

I gave him a smile that said "thanks" taking a sip of my drink. A lady joined us, standing on his side and flashed a smile. I took another sip of my drink and watched him look at her.

Through the music I thought I heard her say "hey handsome" but wasn't really sure. She touched his arm moving closer to him then whispered something in his ear. I smiled realizing I was holding my breath and that I was angry. Angry at the brunette

bob lady for throwing herself at Nick. Angry that he was actually tolerating her. And angry at myself for feeling that way.

I gulped down the rest of my drink and ordered another. Nick slightly moved from her, maybe because he wasn't comfortable or just because he wanted to take a good look at her. She was pretty enough with the shortest dress ever.

Surprisingly she walked off looking... embarrassed and didn't turn. Not even once. When he finally looked at me, I was smiling, genuinely. He took my hand and led me to the sweat dripping bodies, held me against him and moved with me. It was fun dancing with him and I laughed every time I stepped on his toes, which was frequent.

Then the crowd moved back, I tried moving but he wouldn't let go and when he did, everyone was around us. He started dancing around me, grabbing me and making me move with him from time to time. It was fun that when the song stopped and people started cheering, I wanted whoever that was controlling the music to restart the song.

"Let's go."

We walked out to the car. "You... you are a really great dancer." "So are you." He opened the door for me with a smirk.

I recalled how badly I was moving then laughed. "No I'm not but thanks for being nice enough to lie about it."

From the club, he drove back to the airport and we got in our plane just in time. "What's going to happen to the car?"

"Go back where it was." "Tonight was

fun. Thank you."

"Stick with me and I will take you places."

I giggled, relaxing on my seat even more. Taking his hand into mine, I gave it a gentle squeeze and surprisingly he shyly smiled making me blush.

I kept his hand in mine and closed my eyes. Something I had been wanting to do for a while since we left the club. As I drifted he pulled me unto him that I rest my head on his shoulder then kissed my forehead. My heart skipped and started its own marathon. I swear he could hear my heart beat hard against my chest, it was awful how I reacted to him and being in his arms like that made my skin shiver down to my core. I wanted him.

Don't do this to yourself Neli. He doesn't deserve it.

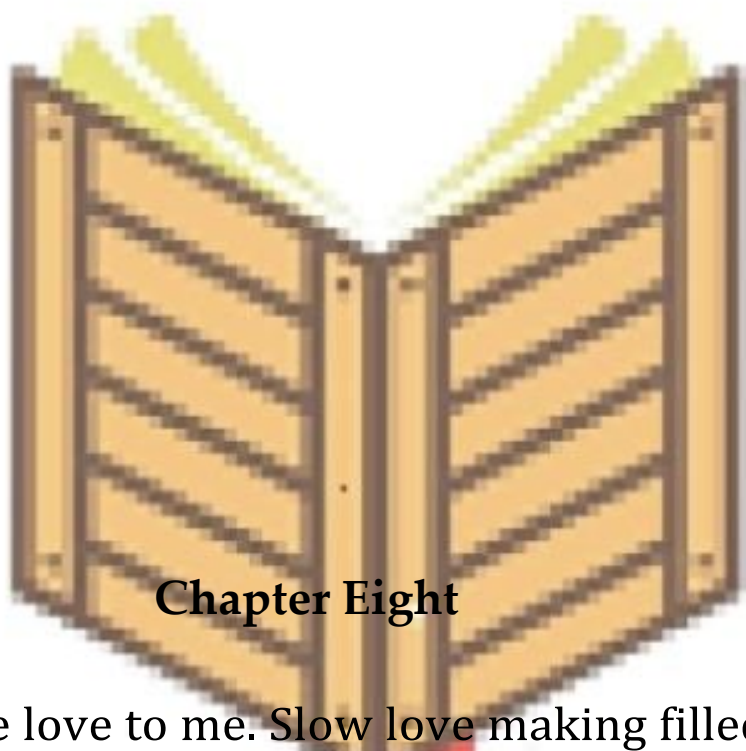
The voice in my head screamed but the heart won. I opened my eyes and raised my head, our lips were inches apart. I moved in to kiss him or did he? My head spun as our lips met, I could taste the beer he had ordered on his lips and somehow it was a sweet taste. I wanted more. I parted my lips and let him glide his tongue in my mouth, soon we were tasting each and the sweetness of the beer didn't stop.

He pulled away leaving me panting. "This is not wrong." He whispered. I took a deep breath.

"It's not but—"

"But nothing. You are going to be ok. We are going to get you help."

And that did it. Tears fell. I was crying because nothing could be done now though I badly wanted him to save me. I badly wanted to believe his words.



Chapter Eight

Nick made love to me. Slow love making filled with nothing but emotions. With his body on top of mine, his lips against mine and his hands all over my body, I couldn't think of nothing else but that moment, nothing else but him and I. Our bodies moved together in the same tune and rhythm.

I woke up slowly the following morning, feeling the bright light before I could open my eyes. I moved my hand beside me, searching for him and felt him immediately. I sighed with relief moving closer to him.

Opening my eyes, he was still sleeping. He looked beyond hot, so attractive. And a little innocent.

"Like what you see?" He asked, smirking.

"You are full of yourself."

He lazily opened his eyes as I pulled the sheet to my chest.

"There's nothing wrong in wanting another round. I can go on for as long you want me to." The naughty tone was back. Last night was different and I couldn't even deny it. The way he touched me and kissed me was different.

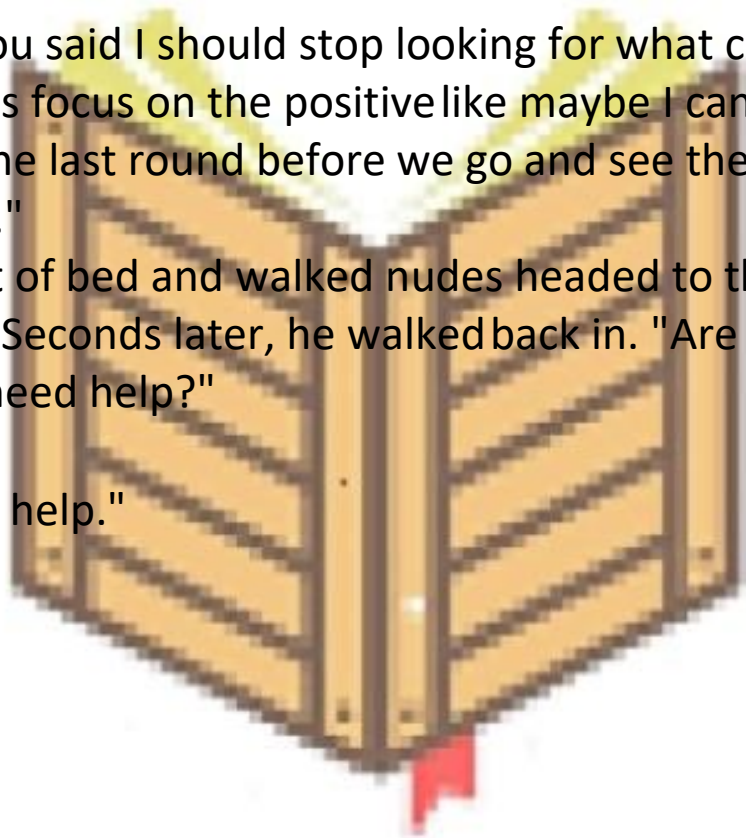
"Nick.."

"Shhh... you said I should stop looking for what can go wrong. Let's focus on the positive like maybe I can honor you with one last round before we go and see the anacondas."

He got out of bed and walked nude, headed to the bathroom. Seconds later, he walked back in. "Are you coming or do you need help?"

"I..."

"You need help."



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I laughed when he picked me up and shivered when our skins touched. He stared deep in my eyes till I couldn't handle it anymore.

"What?"

"Nothing, you know I got you right?"

In his arms I felt more safe, in his eyes I found solemn.

Peace. With a cracked smile I nodded. "Yes."

"Good."

He walked with me to the bathroom and put me down gently. Turning on the shower taps, warm water spurt over our bodies. I moved closer to him and wrapped my arms around his waist.

He put his arms around me immediately kissing my forehead. "I can be romantic too." He said, sarcasm filling his voice.

"I wonder what kind of a husband you would make."

"I will probably cheat but it's nothing serious." We laughed. "I have never thought of marriage. I mean I have but.. not in the way a normal person would."

I looked up at him. "And how would a normal person think?"

"Well they think of marriage as something very special and that it is for people who really love each other and want to spend the rest of their lives together. I never thought of it like that."

"I can understand. You haven't been in love before."

"Makes both of us." He pulled me directly under the shower. "Let me bath you, we have to catch our flight. "

"Can I get you a glass of water or juice." The flight attendant asked smiling. Nick scowled but the flight attendant didn't flinch.

"Juice please." I responded chuckling.

"You'd swear you are the only passenger here." Nick muttered enough for the flight attendant to hear.

"Can I get you anything sir?" "You can—"

I cut Nick shot. "He needs water, with ice cubes."

He nodded and walked away. "You have been rude to him ever since we got in this plane." "He wants you and it's annoying."

I smirked. "Are you jealous?"

"And if I am?" The intensity in his eyes was too much, the smirk on my face immediately disappeared. "So what?"

"Nick I'm sure you can handle it. We are almost there."

We both looked at the flight attendant as he returned with my juice and Nick's water. "Thanks.." I murmured getting my juice and Nick ignored him. I smiled and shrugged. Once he was gone I started drinking my juice silently.

"What happened to the girl you played with when you were young?" I asked softly breaking the silence.

"She moved."

I looked at him wanting to keep talking to him but not knowing what to say. "Want juice?" He took my glass without hesitation and handed it to the lady flight attendant who was passing by. "We are almost landing."

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"Are you ok?"

His gaze fell on me. "You are beautiful." I frowned chuckling. "That's random." "It's the truth."

The seriousness in his voice twisted my intestines painfully. "Thanks. You too. You are handsome, it's hard to get over."

He smirked, his eyes shining with naughtiness. "I know.." Laughing I shook my head. "You are insane."

An announcement broke through, we were landing and needed to put on our seatbelts. The plane smoothly landed and, as we got off the plane, I stretched.

"I hate long flights!"

Nick took my hand with his free hand while dragging our bags with the other and led me outside to a taxi. "I will give you a massage when we get to the hotel."

I slid in the taxi while the driver put our bags in the boot. We were in Manaus, ready to experience the amazon rainforest. The journey to our hotel was not that long and was glad when I finally got to rest my body on the bed.

"I'm going to order food. You need to eat and drink your pills." I smiled. "Ok."

He stepped out of the room leaving me with my thoughts. He cared and God! I loved that he cared. It felt good to have someone worry about me in that manner. Closing my eyes I let myself disintegrate to sleep and my body didn't protest.

"Neli.." He softly called my name. I inhaled deeply, the air smelt different. Opening my eyes he was staring at me.

"Hey, wake up. You need to eat."

I sat upright pulling aside the throw that had covered me.

Noticing the tray of food in his hands I sighed.

"I'm really not that hungry." I pointed out.

"You haven't eaten in more than 13 hours. You need to eat."

"I ate in Lima." I counted though I knew it didn't count. A few bites of a sandwich didn't count.

"Please..." He begged.

I felt the need to keep him happy and stress free so I took the tray and looked at the food. "Thank you."

I forced half the plate down my throat and gave him back. "I'm full." "It's ok."

I knew the routine now. Eat, drink pills and maybe talk or just cuddle then sleep. Today there was no talking rather he just pulled me in his arms and held me tightly. I relaxed in his arms and listened to his heartbeat feeling the strong connection between us. It all felt unreal, I had fallen for him so quick.

"Is it always like this? Does it always feel like this?" I asked pressing my palm on his chest. "I don't know but I think so."

I giggled nuzzling his chest. "And here I thought you wouldn't feel anything." "Don't get too comfortable."

"I can't promise you that."

"From here where do you want to go?"



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"Paris, Eiffel Tower."

"What do you want to see?"

"Funny question but I just want to see what the hype is all about." He chuckled. "I will take you."

"Thanks..

." "Now sleep."

"You and Sergio used to be friends?" I heard him sigh. "Yeah.."

"What happened?"

"You like knowing don't you?" "He wanted to kill you."

"Nope, he just wanted to make a scene." "Why does he hate you so much?"

"Neli..."

"Tell me." I pressed.

"I fucked his baby mama."

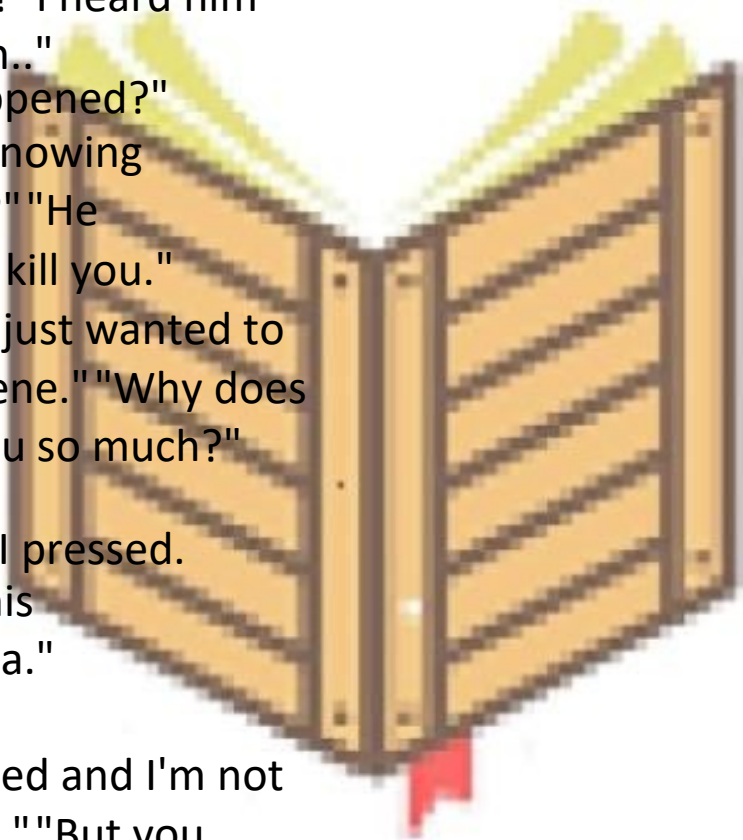
"Wow!"

"It happened and I'm not even sorry." "But you were friends."

"That's what I thought." "Why did she—"

"Neli... sleep."

I opened my mouth to speak but closed it immediately. He kissed my forehead. "Sleep."



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Nick helped me inside the cargo boat then led me to our seats. "This boat is uhh.. big and beautiful."

He sat beside me. "Yeah.. what's that?" He pointed the map I was holding. "A map. In case we get lost."

"That won't happen."

"Ok."

I rolled the camera as the boat started moving, getting ready to take more pictures. A lady sitting behind Nick asked him something in a foreign language, Portuguese to my best guess. He responded and she giggled making me wonder what exactly they were talking about.

"I wish I knew what you guys are talking about." "She's asking if you are my wife."

I raised a brow. "Really now?"

"Yeah." He grinned. "I told her we have been married for five years now." Rolling my eyes I took pictures. "You are crazy."

"Wanna know what else I told her?" "What?"

"That we have kids?"

"No but that would have been interesting. I told her that you are crazy."

I tried so hard not to smile but like a thief, the smile crept on my lips. "You need help." We could see the city from the boat. "Wow!"

Nick put on sunglasses. "I heard there are snakes in the water." "Fuck off!"

We cruised for a while before making our first stop. We stopped by the ecological park and I got to see regla water plants. From there we cruised down to Rio negro. Relatively 5 hours later we were watching where the amazon mud water and Rio negro water flowed separately in transfix. "Oh my.."

The two distinct rivers were flowing side by side, it was amazing to watch. From there I kept an eye for more giant water lilies and alligators, so far I had only seen 1.

Visiting a native family with an anaconda snake was by far the most interesting yet scary part of the trip.

"Not that big." Nick muttered looking at the snake. I gasped in shock. It didn't look small, it was huge.

"They grow bigger than that."

"I don't think I would want to live with a snake."

Nick chuckled, "I don't think it would want to live with you too."

Next was the jungle hike. We followed behind the tour guide with the crowd snapping pictures.

"Nick

..."

"Yea

h?"

"I'm pressed, I want to pee."

He looked at the group of people before grabbing my hand and slowing my pace till we were behind everyone.

"Come." He led me away from the group. "Don't you

think we should—"

"Shhh..."

I followed behind till we were standing in front of some huge tree. "Pee." He commanded.

I looked at him then smiled embarrassed.

"Can you turn?" "Nelima, I have seen it

all."

"Please."

He slowly turned and quickly I pulled down my jeans together with my panties and squatted. After a while I wiped myself with the last wiper I had in my pocket then stood up.

"We can go."

He turned and took my hand. "I wish I brought hand sanitizer." "Neli, we are in the bush."

"Yeah but I'm sure I'm the only lady here with no hand sanitizer." "So what?"

"Makes me feel somehow inadequate."

He stopped and took both my hands. "You are more than enough and if anyone doesn't see it then well it's their loss."

I smiled realizing this was the other side of him I was getting to know. "I like to sing but I don't know how to." I blurted.

"Thought you should know."

He laughed. "From this I'm going to take to do some karaoke." "Ah... I would bring the entire room down."

"Let's go."

We walked where we came from then took the direction that the crowd went. "Wow! I can't even hear them."

"At the speed they were going at I'm sure they are already coming back."

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"Should we wait for them here then?" "No, let's go."

I walked beside him closely. Everything was just green.

"Where were they going exactly?" "It's just a hike."

"Tell me about Ricardo."

"I worked in his garage since I was 10 till I was 15 and moved to UK." "He considers you his son?"

"Yeah, his son and I used to be close." "Son? Sergio?"

"No. Luis, he was killed." "I'm sorry."

He looked at me and pulled me unto him, pressing our foreheads together. "I told you to stop apologizing."

"Sorry."

He chuckled then pressed his lips against mine. An unusual sound made me step back from Nick almost immediately.

"What is it?"

I looked at him surprised. "You didn't hear anything?" "No."

"I heard a sound."

He looked around and when his eyes stopped moving, I saw terror flash in his eyes. Slowly my eyes landed where he was looking.

"Bear. Nick.." My voice was barely audible, even to my own ears. My heart was pounding so hard against my chest.

"Calm down." He whispered as it advanced toward us.

"I think we should run."

He looked at the bear making it's way toward us then back at me. "You are right. Run!" He shouted though I was already running. I had cancer but I wasn't about to be killed by a bear. My feet moved faster than my brain, each stamp my

feet made told me I was in trouble and I had to get away. A loud scream escaped my mouth as I tripped on grass and fell. "Neli!"

Pain seethed slowly into my body, I closed my eyes trying to ignore it. Nick was already crouched before me, pulling me up.

"Are you ok?"

"I'm fine. I'm fine."

He helped me to my feet. "That was a nasty fall." "Yeah.. but I'm

fine. Are we safe?"

He looked around. "I suppose but we are lost now."

I looked around and realized we were surrounded with nothing but the forest. "Shit!" "Do you have the map?"

I opened my fanny pack and gave it to him. My hands were trembling and I couldn't make out if it was due to fear or not.

He calmly looked at it then smiled at last.

"Are we lost?"

"Yes and it's getting late. This map isn't the one we need but it's ok." "God..."

"Don't stress, I got you."

"Nick..." I suddenly felt too tired. I wished I was calm as he was but my heart was racing.



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"Hey, relax. Nothing will happen to you. Not when you are with me. It's getting late, are you hungry?"

"I haven't been hungry in months, I'm fine." "Ok, stay here. I'm coming."

I grabbed his hand. "No! What if something happens to you or you get even more lost and we lose each other? Let's just wait here. I'm sure they will find us."

He cupped my face. "I need you to calm down. Nothing is going to happen to us. I'm going to try to locate the river then from there we can have an idea of where we are."

My heart squeezed painfully. "I'm scared." "I know but I'm here. I got you."

I wrapped my arms around his waist and eased my body in his arms. He held me tightly kissing my forehead. "Don't worry. I'm going to get us out of here."

When he finally let me go I didn't protest but just watched him walk away. I sat under a huge tree, resting my back on it. I felt like a child counting minutes but I couldn't help it. All possible worst scenarios played in my head as each minute passed. I wagged with relief when I saw walking back to me.

"See? I'm back in one piece."

"I thought a jaguar had teared you into pieces."

He laughed loudly making me join in. "Don't worry, nothing like that will happen and I found the trail that can get us back to the boat or possibly lead us deeper in the jungle." "We will probably end up like Tarzan."

"The fuck?" He laughed. "Ok look, don't worry. Let's go."

I stood up and followed him to the trail. Relief washed all over me when I realized we were in the right direction. Getting where the boat was, there was nothing.

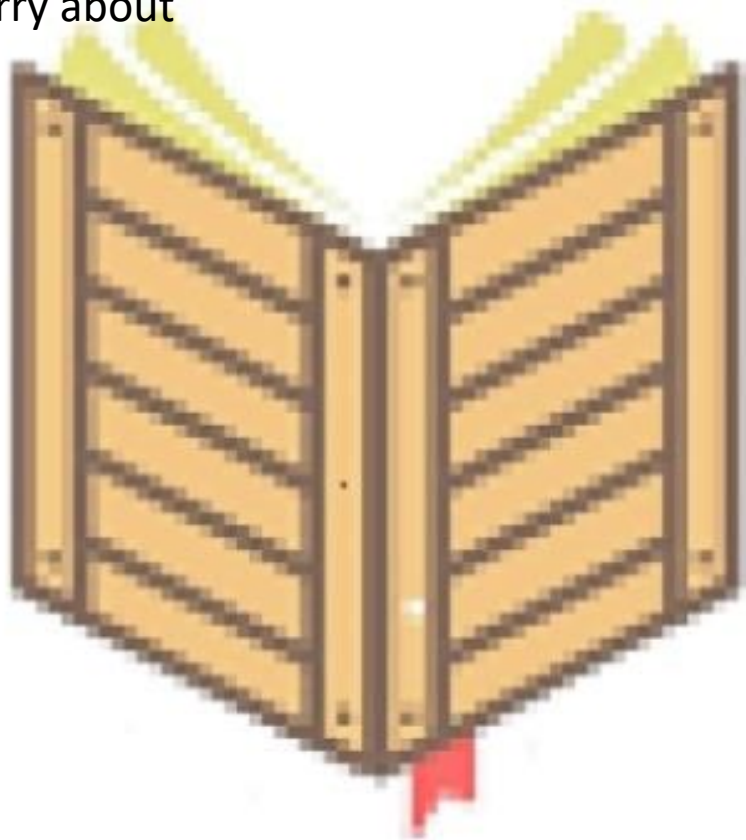
"I guess they are gone."

"What? Don't they check if the people are all there? This is insane." "Well Tarzan, how about we find a nice place to camp for the night." "Don't call me that." I sat on the ground fighting not to cry.

He picked me up, threw me on his shoulder and walked to a tree then put me down. "Sit, I will catch us fish."

I looked at the water. "With?"

"Don't worry about that."



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Chapter Nine

"How is it?"

I smiled. "Ok, I underestimated you. It tastes good." "Told you."

The fish was overcooked but still tasted delicious. I looked at the blazing fire and sighed. Perhaps for a night in the jungle, not so bad.

"What are you thinking?"

I giggled now aware of his eyes on me. "That at least the jaguar has not found us. We are still alive, that counts."

"Maybe we should really make it count."

I looked at the fire biting my lower lip. "You can't want us to have—" "Sex? I'm not a horny teenager who's thinking of nothing but fucking." I blushed burying my face in my hands. "You are insane."

Feeling his hands around me, he pulled me up. "Let's dance." I chuckled. "To what? Crickets?"

"Yeah.. why not?"

Putting his hands around my waist he moved slowly. I looked in his eyes smiling.

"Left. Right. Left. Right." He murmured softly, his lips just an inch away from mine. I giggled every time I stepped on his toes.

"My toes are screaming."

"I'm sorry. I'm just bad at this. I have always been the awkward girl." I whispered with a small laugh.

"Follow after me."

He slowed down making it easy for me to imitate. "There..." "I guess I pass as a fast learner, Mr. Bradley."

"I'm afraid I'm not a good liar, Miss Niji."

I stopped moving. "I thought you forgot. Edward forgot. I don't think he even remembers." "Nelima Niji, how can I possibly forget?"

Wrapping my arms around his neck I stood on my toes and kissed him, my tongue going past his lips. He pulled my body even closer making me feel his hard muscles. He groaned and pulled away from me. "Are you sure you want to give a show to the crickets."

I looked up at the stars.

"Maybe the stars." "I always carry a condom around."

I laughed. "You don't you?"

His lips were on mine again and his hands all over my body. I couldn't think of discomfort while I moved with him, our bodies conjoined. I wiped away the sweat off his forehead then kissed him. He was going faster and more faster.

"Nick..." I breathed. He looked in my eyes and smiled cupping my face. "I think it's always have been you."

"Nick..."

"That day. At the dinner... It felt like déjà vu." I closed my eyes feeling tears spring up. "I knew it had to be you."



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"Nick..."
"And..—"

"Nick stop."

He was panting and moving. I was so close. "I can't. I'm already in too deep." "I'm the wrong girl."

"No. You are the right one."

My body shivered trembling, then it hit both of us violently. He held me tightly riding the powerful wave, sweat dripping on me.

"Nick..."

He kissed me slowing down. "Shhh..."

We laid on the ground, my head on his chest looking up at the stars. I felt like I could reach up to them and touch them. Perhaps cuddle them. I raised my hand sighing. "I wish I could touch the stars."

"Want me to take you there?"

Chuckling, I nodded. "I would love that, Mr. Bradley."

"But from mere curiosity, how would you touching the stars please you?" He asked after a beat.

I smiled looking at the brightest star. "I think it would bring me great joy to know I can do the impossible."

"Well I'm glad to announce you would be the first human being to touch a star." "That would be awesome." My voice was just a whisper. Nick hummed a song. "What's that?"

He hummed for another minute then finally stopped. "Chris Brown and Drake. Want me to play the song for you?"

I sucked in a deep breath even though it felt too hard too.

"You have your phone with you?"

I probably sounded angry but I couldn't care less. "Yes." Then I lost it.

"You fucken have your phone?!" I was now sitting upright.

"Yes and before you can stab me with a stick to death, there's no WiFi coverage here so there's no way I could have called for help."

I looked up and laughed, till tears spilled from the corner of my eyes, till my ribs hurt, till I my lungs didn't have enough oxygen. "Wow!"

He pulled me back to his chest.

"Want to hear it?" "I don't remember the last time I was that angry."

"About to kill someone angry?" The sarcasm in his tone made me want to laugh at myself even more.

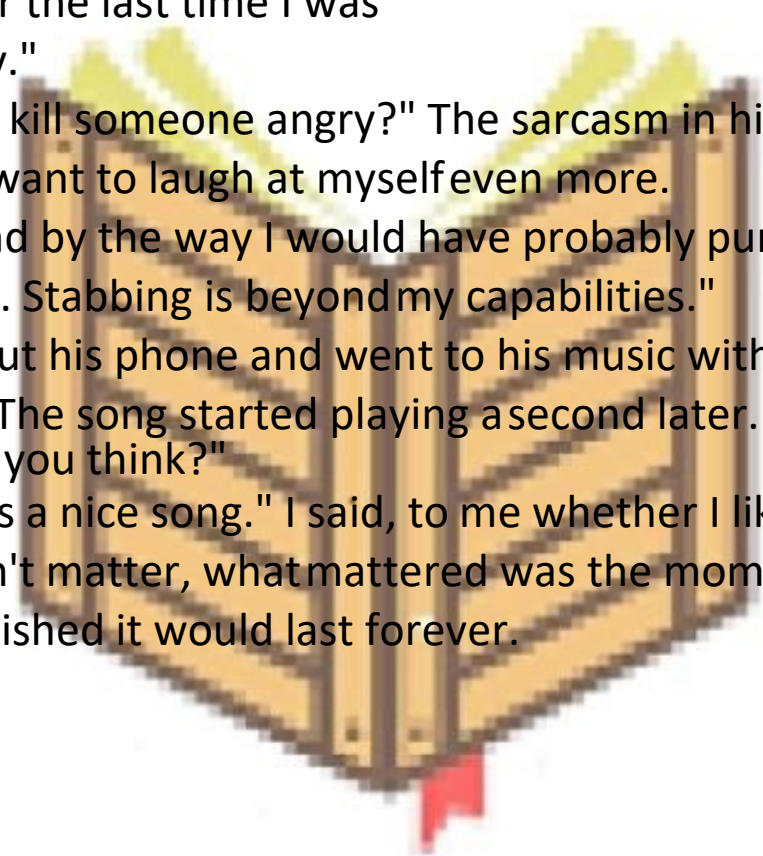
"Yeah.. and by the way I would have probably punched you really hard. Stabbing is beyond my capabilities."

He took out his phone and went to his music with me watching. The song started playing a second later.

"What do you think?"

"I think it's a nice song." I said, to me whether I liked the song or not didn't matter, what mattered was the moment we were having. I wished it would last forever.

"Good."



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I bit my lower lip struggling to breathe but quietly struggled alone. I was not going to let anything ruin the moment, not even the cancer which I suspected had now invaded my lungs.

"I think I'm in love with you."

I blinked as the stars blurred. My heart had skipped and I was trying to breathe and think at the same time. Tears fell from the corner of my eyes, why was it so painful?

"Why?"

"I'm sorry I lied, I'm in love with you and I don't even know why. Maybe it's the way you giggle, and smile or maybe it's your eyes, truth be told, I fell in love with them first or maybe it's your sense of humour or maybe it's your accent."

Inhaling deeply I put my hands on my chest. "My accent? Funny."

"Yeah. It's funny that I'm in love with a dying woman who won't take treatment because she rather spend her last days living her best life than trying to keep alive, a woman who don't believe she should fall in love or anyone should fall in love with her because she's dying but I think she doesn't know this, I live in the moment."

"Nick..."

"I never thought I would fall for someone like you but it doesn't make it wrong because I'm happy."

I chuckled trying not to break down into a loud scream kind of cry. "I think falling for a dying woman is the worst decision you have ever made."

"Good thing I didn't make the decision. It just happened."

"I don't want to put you through a painful phase that will probably haunt you." "I think it's a bit too late for that now."

I turned my head so I look at him. He was smirking while I tried to hide my agony. "There won't be a happy ending, trust me."

"I know but that won't stop me from enjoying the ride. I will be your Jack. And you... you will be my Rose."

"This won't be perfect as you possibly can imagine it to be." I was looking for every and any reason to get him to stop loving me though deep down I did not want him to stop.

"I don't want perfect. I want you."

There was no way in changing his mind, so I decided to let him be and just focus on trying to breathe. He put his arms around me and held me tightly. I closed my eyes and willed myself into sleeping. If I had to be one of those people who died in their sleep then I was really going to die happy.

I woke up before Nick. The first thoughts to cross my mind was the fact that (a) I wasn't dead and (b) I could breathe. I looked at Nick then sighed. We were ok. I looked up at sky wondering if the universe ever slept. An hour or so later, Nick woke up and the morning sun was rising.

"Not so bad." He muttered.

"Are you ok?" "Never felt better, Nick Bradley."

"I'm happy to hear that and also to tell you our tour group will be here in a few minutes." "Looking for us?"

"Pretty much."

And he was right. More minutes later they had arrived in a speed boat. I noticed our tour guide and the relief on his face first. I wondered why they hadn't come for us yesterday.

The tour guide spoke to Nick in Portuguese and in seconds, I was in the speed boat headed back to safety.

"What was he saying?"

"They looked for us at the ecological park and went to the native family. It was very late to come here after they realized perhaps maybe we didn't get lost at the places they were searching."

Arriving at the port, Nick held his hand out for me, taking it I climbed out of the boat. The tour guide walked side to side with us, still communicating in Portuguese. There was a cab waiting for us. Nick got in with me and as it pulled away, I looked at him.

"Was he saying there's another trip today and he will make sure we don't lose the main group?"

He smiled. "Pretty much but I told him we would like to rest. And eat."

I nodded and getting to the hotel, first thing Nick did was get food and after that, make me drink pills which I really wasn't sure of their purpose. He sat with me in the bathtub.

"Hey, your father is probably spitting fire as we speak."

He laughed. "No and yes. He's probably enjoying seeing your husband lose control." I laughed imagining Edward trying to locate me and realizing I had ran off with his competitor's son.

"That would be fun watching."

"I didn't just sleep with Sergio's girlfriend. I had a threesome with his girlfriend and sister." I gasped then laughed. "Wow! You know as much as that was a random thing to say, you could have just chosen not to tell me. I would have not found out, I can bet on that with my life."

"I know but I wanted to."

"No wonder he really despises you. I can't say I blame him." "Neither do I. Nelima?"

I relaxed more in his arms. "Yeah?" "I love you."

I closed my eyes. "I didn't think of nothing but that last night. I love you Nick." I bit my lower lip then finally giggled. "I met you 9 days ago if not 10 and I love you."

"It's 9."

"Yes. I still love you."

"We are going to Mexico tomorrow." "Okay."

"But there's someone I want you to meet here." "In

Manaus?"

"Yes."

"Okay."

The taxi dropped us in front of a building. My best guess was a hotel or museum. I secretly hoped it was a museum but walking inside, a thought I had been holding back at the back of my head confirmed itself. I looked at him and I could see he was nervous and maybe scared too.

"Clinic? You want me to be examined?"

He glanced at me taking my hand into his. "I want to know if there's a chance you can live to see just how much more happy you can be.. how much I can make you happy."

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That upset me. And the more I thought of it, the more I got upset. He had hope, hope I had long lost and it angered me. Why couldn't he just accept that I was dying? Lord knows I was having trouble with that because I didn't want to die, not yet at least but I had accepted reality.

He opened some door and led me in. It was an office and an old man was sitting, smoking. "Ahh you must be... Nick?" He asked his eyes darting between Nick and I, he sounded American. My gaze fell on his messy desk and dirty office. I started laughing like a mad person, surely this man was not a doctor and was not about to examine me.

"Yeah. This is Nelima, she's my girlfriend. She needs your help."

Girlfriend.

The word rang at the back of my head repeatedly. Was I? I looked at the supposedly doctor who was now grinning.

"Wow! Not bad. Beautiful black woman with blonde hair. Worth the money." I frowned at his statement.

"Can you help her or not?" Nick sounded... angry. Angry and annoyed.

"Look I looked at the reports you sent me and to be honest, she's good as dead. I'm sorry but that's just it. I advise you to enjoy the weeks that are left or month or months, you never know, the best I can say is... 2 months. Not that there are no treatments. There are treatments but they, mostly won't work on her and she will always be in pain. Unless you want to make her a lab rat, go and live now."

"You can't be serious. They said you are the best at such cases." I reached for his arm. "Nick..."

"I'm willing to pay any amount!"

"Look son, you can give me whatever shit you think is enough and still, she will die. It won't work. Probably buy her months of pain and depression. At the end, she will have one wish

which is... I want to die. And she will."

"What about the people you have saved before?!" Nick roared.

"I have not saved anyone! They lied to you. They all died. Cancer won't stop till you are fucken dead. I'm sorry if you were expecting some fucken kind of miracle from me, it won't happen. You put her under treatment, a year later, or 5 or 10, the cancer is back! Well that's for other cases, not your girlfriend's but what I'm saying is... they all die. We all will die. Your girlfriend is going to die. That's it."

I jumped when Nick hit the doctor's table making some files fall. "I need you to help her. That's all!"

"Nothing and no one at this stage can help her. But feel free to look for another doctor who you think can help her and pay whatever millions you have perhaps that will teach you that no amount of money or medicine or surgeries can buy life if its meant to end."

We walked out of the doctor's office and from Nick's sweaty palms, I could tell he was angry but what about me?

"Why won't you just stop?" I asked as we approached the cab. "I told you I was dying, why won't you just stop?"

"Because I want you to stay! I freaking want you to stay and be there, always! I love you and I want you to stay with me."

I looked at him, rendered speechless. Then tears poured into my eyes. He wanted me to stay and be there, always.

"Well..." I chuckled wiping away my tears. "Let's make use of the following most probably 30 days because the other 30 I guarantee you, I will be very sick, probably in and out of

hospital and constantly in pain." I took his hands into mine. "Let's live in the moment. Let's have fun and let's fall in love. Such love comes once in a lifetime. Let's build memories, memories I will probably take to heaven or hell or wherever dead people go. And maybe in our next life, you and I will meet, I will be your girl and you will fall in love with my eyes and we will last forever."

He abruptly abruptly pulled me in his arms, pulling my body against his and attacked my lips with his. I struggled to move my lips with his but soon fell into beat, I kissed him back with the same fervor, pulling his hair and thrusting my tongue in his mouth. Tears warmed my cheeks while I kissed him fiercely, why did I have to love him?

He broke the kiss and stepped back panting. My knees felt weak and I was an emotional rollercoaster. He covered his face with his hands for a few seconds.

"When is your birthday?"

"Umm.. uhh.. it's uh on.." I blushed embarrassed trying to recall my own birthday. "It's in March. First of March."

"Can you live till then for me" I

looked in his eyes.

"Yeah." "Thanks."

"Hey, they just announced our flight." I told Nick as he spoke on his phone. "Sort it out." He said to the phone and hung up starring at me.

"Everything ok?"

"Yeah, let's go."

I frowned, he didn't sound ok over the phone.

"Are you sure you are ok?" He chuckled linking our hands together. "Never been better."

Inside the plane I asked for champagne as soon as the plane had taken off. "How many hours is this trip?"

"7 hours."

I took a swing of my champagne looking at the flight attendant talking to some woman. "That doctor we saw yesterday..."

Nick looked at me. "I'm sorry that—"

"Don't be sorry. It's ok. I'm still upset but I understand. Its always hard coming into terms with certain things but... that man, he was.." I chuckled. "Funny and interesting in some way."

"I think the correct word you are looking for is arrogant."

"I know a couple of people who are arrogant, he's just honest. I think perhaps something happened to him."

"Honest?"

I inhaled deeply. "Yes. I'm dying. He didn't sugarcoat it and that always upsets a lot of people. I like him. I like him because he's honest. My sister is like that. She's brutal. She would like him."

"I don't."

Laughing softly I shook my head. "I figured."

"But don't worry." He said clasping my hand with his. "I got you."

The flight attendant walked away and the lady took a magazine after turning to look behind her. My heart skipped a beat. "Nick.."

"Yeah?"

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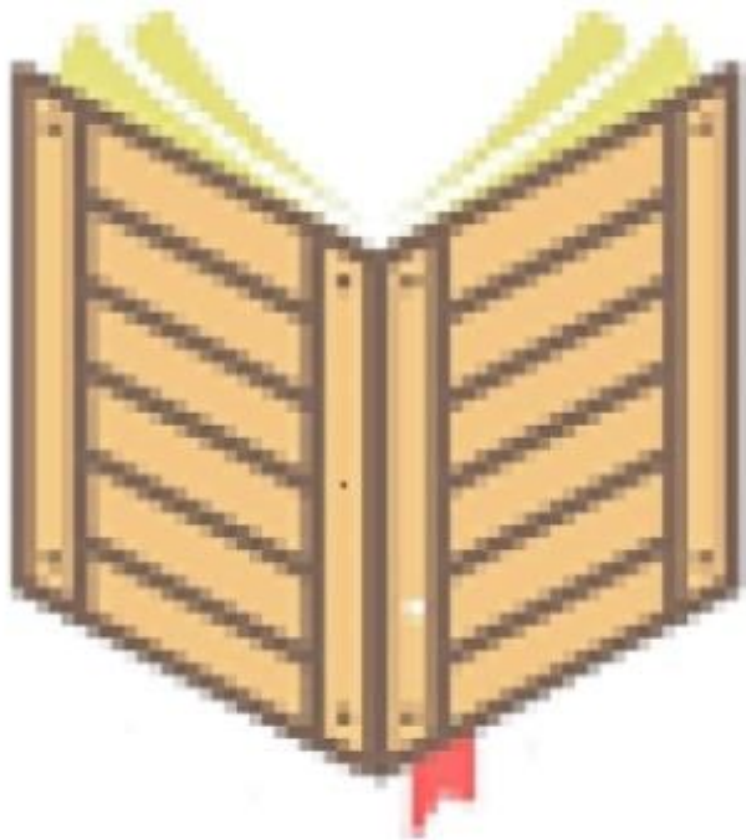
"I know
her."

"Who?"

"That lady. I know her."

Nick looked at her then back at me. "Don't worry. I got you."

"No you don't understand Nick, she works for the company
Edward uses... she's a PI. I met her once."



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Chapter Ten

"Perhaps you should relax."

I looked at him. "Nick, Edward is onto us. Do you understand what that means?" I whispered while we walked to a taxi.

"You have been restless the entire flight. I told you to trust me." He said then spoke to the taxi driver in Spanish. I knew a few words to know it was Spanish.

He opened the back door and gestured I get in. "Nelima, I told you, I got you. Don't worry about her. Do you see her anywhere around you?"

I looked around and sighed inwardly when I didn't see the black hair anywhere. "Where's she?"



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"On her way back to Brazil. I need you to trust me babe, when I say I got you, trust me. Ok?"

"Okay."

"Good. Get in. It's late."

I slid in the backseat and immediately the taxi pulled off. "I knew he just wouldn't let me go."

"He won't do anything to you. Not while I'm here." He pulled me to his chest. "You know fear kills right?" His voice was light and I rolled my eyes. "Serious."

"You are insane."

"Nelima... you haven't seen nothing."

I stared down at my shaking hands. It annoyed me that Edward had this kind of effect on me even when he was miles away.

"He will have you hurt."

"Me? I'm the last person he can want to hurt."

We got out of the car and walked inside a fancy hotel. At the reception I massaged my temples while Nick spoke to the receptionist.

Moments later he stood in front of me with a nervous expression. "What?" "Seems like I didn't confirm the booking."

"No!"

"So our names are not on the list and the hotel is already packed." "God Nick!"

"What? I'm human. There's a lodge."

"I need a bar." I muttered feeling too upset that I struggled to breathe. "No. Come."

Outside the night, he stopped another taxi. They spoke for a while till Nick opened the door for me.

"I'm sorry I didn't confirm the booking but there's a good lodge somewhere here. Neli this is it. Mexico city. Just relax."

Outside most lights were on, we passed a couple kissing.

"Want to try that?" Nick asked. Chuckling I nodded with

my eyes still outside. "Yeah."

"Sir, please stop the car."

I turned to look at him in shock.

"What? No! Not now." "Stop right here. I will pay extra." He totally ignored me. "Nick no! Sir please don't listen to him. Nick!"

"Sir stop the car."

The taxi driver stopped the car and I watched with amusement as he step out. He came to my door and opened it.

"Come out. Let's kiss in the streets of Mexico city." "You are insane!"

He gazed down at me with a smile that had me blushing. "Come be crazy with me." Pulling me out of the car he embraced me kissing my forehead. "You smell sweet." "Are you trying to get me in the mood?"

He chuckled. "Is it working?" I looked up at him. "Nope."

"Not even a little bit?" "Nope."

He got closer. "Really?"



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"Nah."

Brushing his lips against mine softly he looked at me, "still?" I took a deep breath feeling bubbles in my stomach.

"Still."

He nibbled on my lips for a second long, my knees were slowly giving up on me. "Now?" "Want to fuck?"

He laughed. "Sweet but no. I want to do this." Then he kissed me. Slowly and gently. Moving my lips with his then finally tasting me. I clung unto to him while he took his time with my mouth. I could feel all sorts of electric waves spark all over my body. Freeing my mouth he smirked.

"I will pull your soul out of your body. Literally."

I ran my fingers on my swollen lips. He helped me back in the taxi and while the taxi moved, I took time pulling myself together.

The taxi stopped after a while. Nick paid while we stepped out. Dragging our bags inside I sighed wishing I had met Nick sooner. He spoke to the receptionist in English and I listened. "Mam, we have just arrived and we really are stranded." He said to the receptionist who couldn't keep eye contact for far too long. She kept blushing and giggling while telling him they were fully booked.

"I understand that but we are fully booked. Though I can help. My grandparents live close by."

"Are there no hotels anywhere nearby?" I asked. "There are but

Mr. Bradley..—"

"Nick." The charm. I almost rolled my eyes as she blushed yet again.

"Yes. Nick didn't talk to his bank before coming here and so he can't use his bank cards."

I grabbed my bag and pulled it outside. He joined me and from his nervous smile I could tell it wasn't a joke.

"Mexico was not really part of the plan but fuck the plan, we are already here!" "I'm sorry for making you do all this."

He cupped my face. "I want to do all this. I have never felt more happier." I shook my head.

"Nick..—"

"Stop! We are in Mexico and I have some cash to keep us going for two more days here and we are going to have fun. Let me enjoy my 30 days in peace."

I hugged him. "There. Now let's walk to Charlie's grandparent's house." "What if they don't take in strangers?"

"Then unfortunately we will have to beg." He grabbed my suitcase and started walking. Charlie's grandparent's house was not hard to find. Nick spoke to them while I smiled sweetly trying to look as friendly as I could be. It was an old couple, perhaps in their seventies and from the way they held hands I could feel their love.

They welcomed us into their home and walking in I was immediately embraced by the vibe the house carried. Everything had aged but still looked lively.

"Luis and I bought this house when we were young." The grandmother spoke gesturing around the house. "And we haven't changed anything for exactly 51 years." Nick nodded and I thought of Ricardo and his son, Luis.

"Wow!" Nick muttered. I could still inhale their youth in the house. "It's beautiful."

"All thanks to my dear wife, so how long have you been married?" I frowned while Nick took my hand into mine. "11 days now." "Good. My wife and I have been married for 51 years."

"Down the passage, first door to your left. Charlie said you are friends." The grandfather said to Nick.

"Yes, some bonds can't be broken by distance." "That's good."

"Dearie come, let's make dinner. Luis and I hadn't eaten yet." I followed her to the tiny kitchen. She made a pure Mexican dish and I followed instructions. Her and Luis had only three children. Two sons and one daughter. Her first son passed on and the second one resided in China and lastly, Charlie's mother who was off in Hawaii living a wild yet free life.

"So where are you from?" She asked as we set the table up. I could hear Nick and Luis talking.

"Uhh I'm from Kenya. Africa."

"Oh Kenya, I have been there with my Luis before. Ages ago. We used to be travelers. Where did you and that young man meet?"

"At a dinner. New year's eve dinner."

"I told Charlie to find a man." And it started. She spoke of how now she thought maybe Charlie was gay because she never saw her with a man and that she was getting worried. "Luis, come, dinner is ready."

Nick sat beside me while Luis sat beside Ruth. "Delicious darling." Luis said after the first spoon.

Ruth smiled squeezing his hand. "Oh Luis "

My eyes fell to my plate and I started eating. It was really good. "Nick tells me you are travelers. Ruthy and I used to travel too."

Nick took my hand. "Neli and I have a couple of places we would like to visit before heading back home."

"Umm yes."

The old couple smiled. After dinner, Nick and I offered to clear the table and wash dishes while they watched their favorite show.

"Why are we lying to them?"

"Well because first of all, they wouldn't let us in had we not been married." "They are lovely."

"We have to play along. We leave tomorrow morning." "Where are we going?"

"You will see."

"Thank you so much for your hospitality." Nick said as we walked out. I had Ruth then Luishug me.

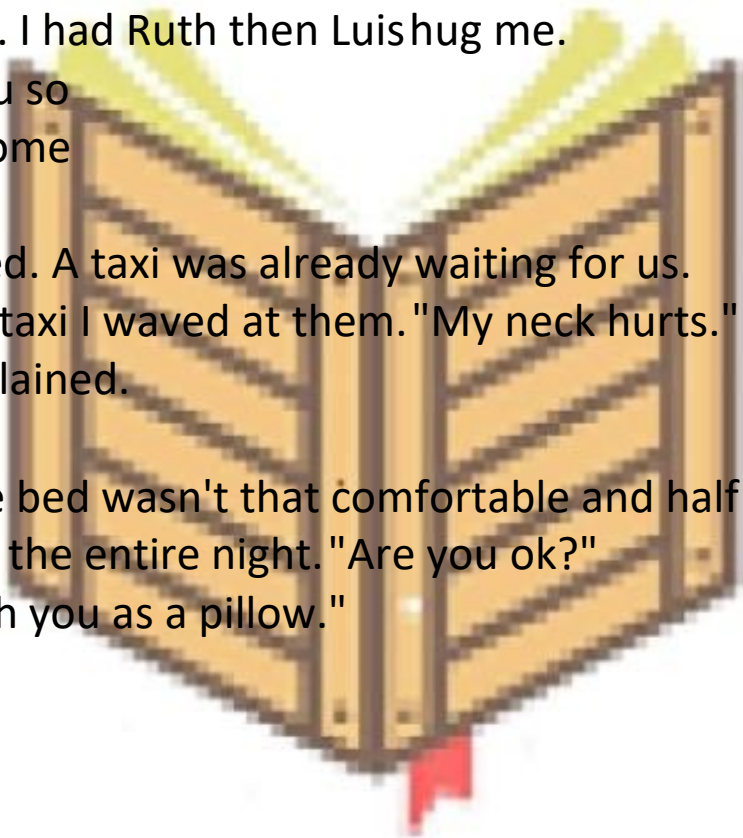
"Thank you so much." "Come back."

I just smiled. A taxi was already waiting for us. Inside the taxi I waved at them. "My neck hurts." Nick complained.

"Sorry."

Maybe the bed wasn't that comfortable and half of my body was on his the entire night. "Are you ok?"

"Yeah, with you as a pillow."



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Nick had plans for us. First he had me paint mural with a street artist. The artist didn't care if I really didn't know what I was doing. From there we went to some restaurant where a chef taught me how to make tacos.

"Not bad." Nick said after taking a bite.

I took a bite and spit immediately. "Maybe next time."

The chef laughed. After that we went to a museum. See, visiting a museum was part of my bucket list and not because museums were my thing but simply because I just wanted to see what people always got excited about.

We strolled behind a group of people. "I'm tired."

"Wanna leave?"

"No. Not yet."

"Want a piggyback ride?"

I giggled as soon as I was on his back.

"This is a first." "The pleasure is all mine."

"With all the weight I have lost I'm sure you won't die."

And so he walked around the museum with me on his back while making jokes. We repeatedly got 'shhhh's' from time to time.

"I can feel the warmth of—"

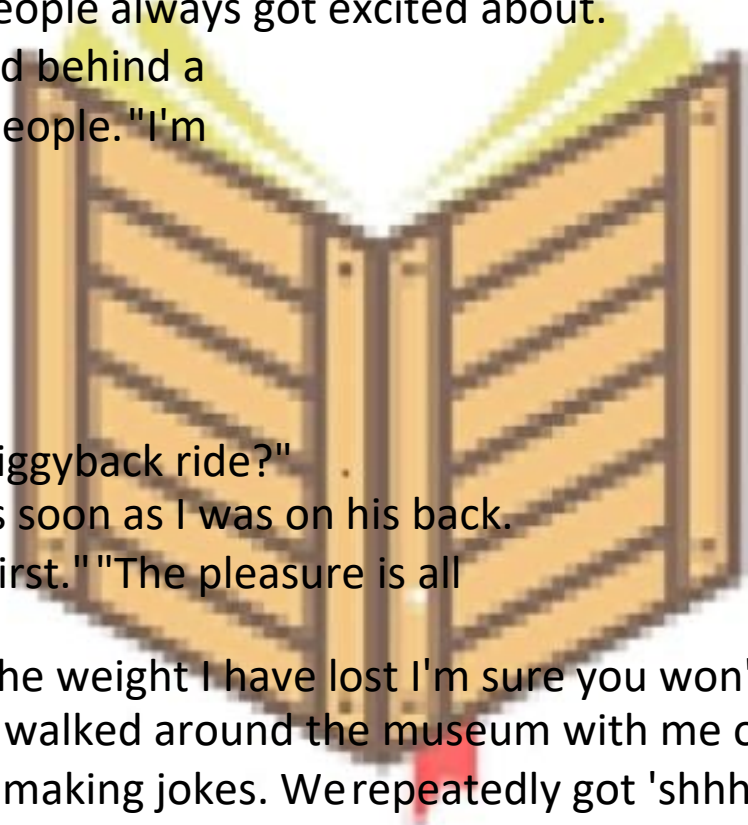
"Nick. Stop!"

"Those tacos you made, they were the worst." I chuckled. "I was learning."

"I had to kiss Charlie so she let's us crush at her grandparents house." "What?"

"You thought it was for free?"

I bit my lower lip trying not to be angry or



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upset. "Oh..." "Jealous?"

"No. You can put me down now."

He started laughing. Laughing out loud like an insane person that most people turned to look at him.

"Stop!"

"Shit. That

jealous?"

"Fuck you."

"I'm lying. I didn't kiss her.

Feel better?" I said

nothing.

"Mad?"

"Can you stop

talking?" "Say

you forgive

me." "Put me

down."

He obliged surprisingly. Turning he put his arms around my waist. "I'm sorry."

"Nick.."

He kissed me briefly.

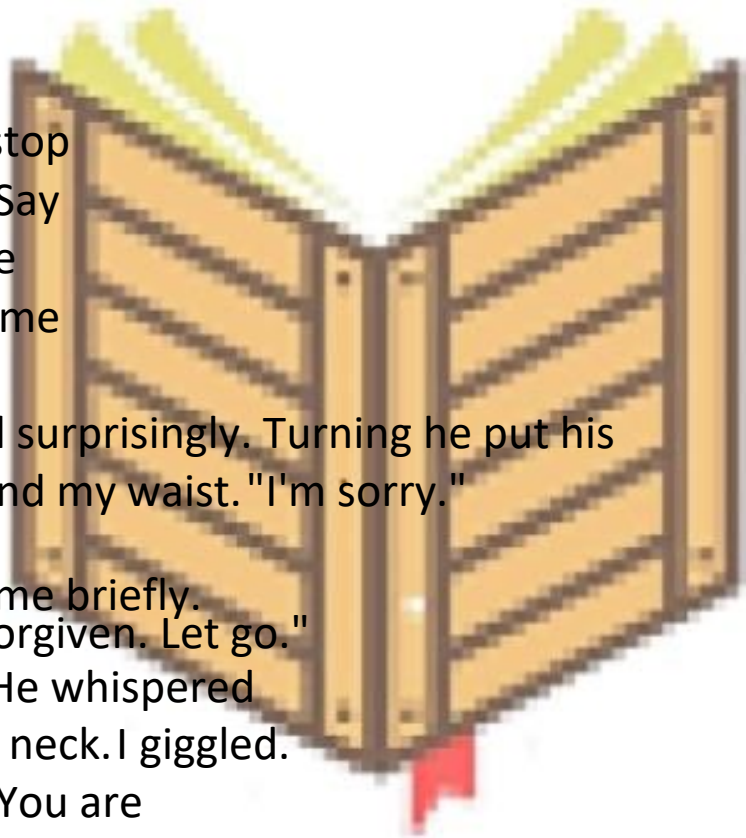
"You are forgiven. Let go."

"Really?" He whispered

kissing my neck. I giggled.

"Yes. Yes. You are

forgiven."



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"Good."

From the museum we went to the free market. I now had my camera with me snapping pictures as we walked.

"Nick?"

"Yeah?"

"You know how to speak Spanish." He took my hand. "And French." "Wow!"

"It's time for lunch."

We checked in then walked to our terminal. We were flying to Sumidero Canyon. "Do we have a place to sleep when we reach?"

He grinned. "Yes.

Don't fret." "Today was awesome."

"I know."

I looked around looking for suspicious faces. Edward probably knew his PI wasn't with us anymore and something told me he wouldn't give up.

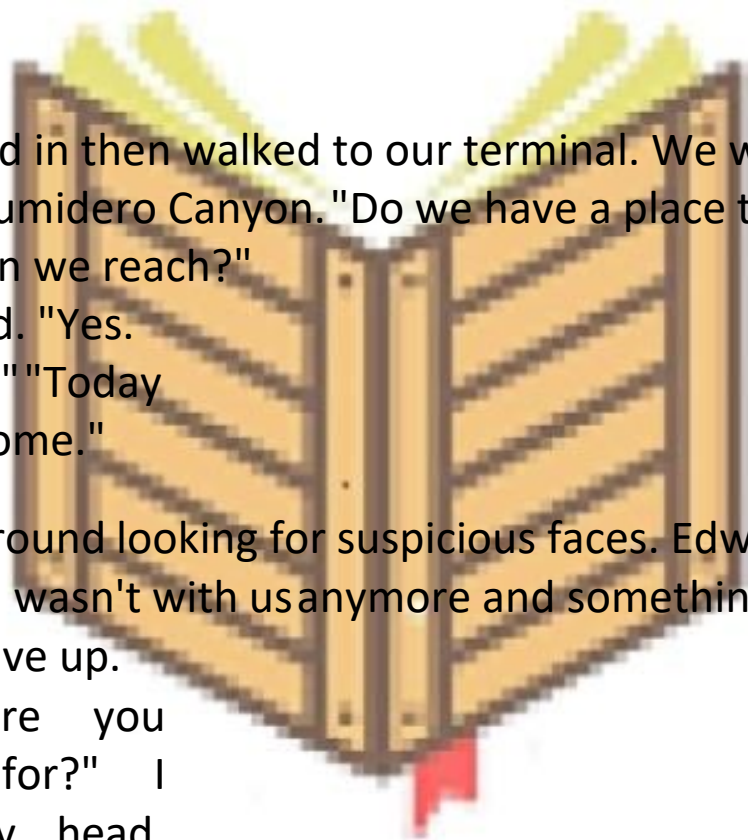
"What are you looking for?" I shook my head.

"Nothing." "Ok."

Reaching the gate I sat down. Then it struck me out of the blue, unexplainable pain. I gritted my teeth together burying my face between my legs. Tears surfaced as I thought about dying. Dying in pain. I couldn't even get a word out.

"Neli..." I heard Nick call me but he sounded far away. "Hey, let's go."

And more tears escaped my eyes while I searched for a



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place in my head to escape the pain. It just wouldn't go away. I tried recalling what the doctor had told me about the pain but everything was just scattered.

"Neli let's go."

And for the first time ever, I wished to just die right there. I tried thinking of my mother and my sister and Nick.

Feeling Nick's hands around my body I shut my eyes tightly. He pulled me then his face said it all.

Panic. "Fuck! Fuck!"

"Nick..." I mouthed not able to get a single word out. I could feel I was wet and I couldn't bring myself to make out if it was urine or blood. He picked me nonetheless and as I closed my eyes yet again, I was vaguely aware that he was running.

I could feel myself lose touch of the pain and with my body. Was this it? Was I dying? Somehow it felt better than the pain. I let myself disappear.

Opening my eyes the first thing I heard was the beeping noise. I looked at the white room and immediately could make out where I was. Hospital. And I was alone with the white walls. I couldn't feel the pain anymore and I had an oxygen mask.

I looked at the machines beeping, why didn't I just die? A tear fell from the corner of my eye. Sooner rather than later, right? Why did pain have to torture me before finally taking me? Why not just now?

The door opened and the doctor walked in. Behind her was Nick. Hair disheveled. He looked a mess, like he hadn't slept in years.

"Look who's awake!" She said with a smile.

Nick was with me in a second, holding my hand. The dark circles beneath his eyes broke my heart. Why did I have to ruin his life like this?

"Hey, fuck! I was worried. But you are fine now. You are ok. Okay?" I couldn't make out who he was trying to convince. Himself or me.

I nodded still then a broken smile curved his lips. "The doctor says you are strong. You are going to be fine and we are going to visit every place on your bucket list. I promise." He sounded desperate, desperate for me to make it. "It's going to be fun. I promise."

I nodded crying silently. There was just that thing about a silent cry, it was more painful. His own tears dropped on my cheek.

"Just... hold on a little longer, please."

I reached for the oxygen mask and pulled it away.

Reaching for his face I wiped away his tears.

"I'm sorry." My voice was barely a whisper.

"No. Don't be. You did nothing wrong. I told you..." He chuckled. "Stop apologizing. I'm so glad I met you. I love you. And you are going to be fine."

He hugged me and like that, we held each other. I let him hold me for long till I heard the door opening and the doctor's voice.

"How do you feel?" She asked with a smile. "Fine. I feel fine."

"Well your boyfriend here has begged for your release. I would like to keep you here longer and just maintain the situation since there's no treatment you are taking. Nelima?"

I looked in her eyes ignoring how my name sounded, I had heard worse.

"I don't know what journey you are leading but I hope it works out." She gave a piece of paper to Nick. "Feel free to call. But since you guys have plans, I will give you something for the pain. It will make it a little bearable."

"Thanks," Nick said putting the paper in his pocket. "How long..."

"2 days. You have been here for 2 days. Today counts as the third." The doctor responded. I sighed.

An hour later Nick and I walked out of the hospital. He led me to a taxi. "Where are we going?"

"Sumidero Canyon."

The flight was short. An hour and a half later we had arrived. "When last did you have proper sleep?"

"Well I couldn't really sleep. You were haunting me." I rolled my eyes. "You look like hell."

He ran his fingers in his hair. "I will sleep now that you are ok."

A cab was already waiting for us. This time there was a hotel.

"I checked my booking twice. Hi, I'm Nick." He said to the receptionist.

She smiled handing him some paperwork. He signed then was handed a key. "Have a lovely stay Mr. and Mrs. Bradley."

"Will sure do!"

Nick pulled our luggage and I followed behind him.

Our suite was breathtaking. "Wow!"

"They offer massages here. I think—"

"I think you need to rest. We will go to the canyon tomorrow."

I took off my shoes and lay on the bed. He moved to the bed and lay beside me.

"I thought you were going to die." Nick said after a while. "I was scared, I couldn't sleep." He took a breath. "The machines... you looked lifeless. I thought I would never hear you giggle or see your eyes again."

I chuckled. "Why is it so important for you to hear me giggle or see my eyes?"

"Every time you giggle I fall even more in love with you. And your eyes, well if it weren't for them we wouldn't be here."

We remained silent for a while then started laughing really loud. "Really?"

"Yeah but well... there are other things I love about you but most of all I love that I'm in love with you. I sound cheesy, I know."

"You sound just ok."

"Well, good. Now I truly believe it has always been you." "Do you think it will be hard?" I asked. "To let go?"

"I suppose. Yes."

I kissed his cheek. "Sleep."

"I have heard you wake up at night,

what do you do?" "Ride a broom."

He chuckled. "That would be interesting."

"Would you still want me as a witch? Though I think it would be fun."

Laughing he pulled my head to his chest. "It really doesn't matter what you are, as long as you are with me."

I listened to him breathe softly then raised my head to look at him. I wanted to kiss his lips then his face and everywhere else. He looked too innocent in his sleep. Slowly I got up and took his backpack. I took out the camera and started clicking

through all the pictures.

Coming across pictures of myself that Nick took I chuckled. Most of the time I was unaware and looked different. A knock on the door made me raise my head and suddenly the hairs at the back of my neck stood.

"Room service!" A voice said after another knock. I closed my eyes briefly looking up at the ceiling then laughed. Why did I have to think of Edward? Nick said I shouldn't worry.

Stop it Nelly. Stop! Don't let that bastard have such control over life like this. I took a deep breath and stood up. Opening the door it was the hotel staff. "Hello, how can I help you?"

She smiled then looked down at her carter. "I'm sorry, we didn't order anything."

"Oh, the hotel offers this for free." "Oh, well thank you."

She pushed it inside then gently placed two glasses and a bottle of wine on the table. As soon as she walked out I took the bottle in my hands. A couple of glasses certainly wouldn't hurt.

I drank the first glass staring at Nick. The second glass I was now sitting by the window staring as cars moved. As I emptied the last droplets of the wine I carefully looked at the glass deciding I had had enough. Two glasses were enough but maybe, one more wouldn't hurt.

My feet hurt. I have been walking for a very long time and I can't seem to stop. I look down and my feet are bleeding. No... I'm walking on blood. The ground is covered in blood and the more I keep walking, my feet sink further and further. Looking up I see her, Mama. She has her arms open for me. I start running but I can't. I'm sinking. No! Mama! Neli! She shouts. I'm crying. I want to get to her but I'm sinking. Neli! She calls again. She sounds louder.

Mama! The blood has reached my neck. I'm going to suffocate. I want Mama. I can't see her anymore.

"Neli!" Violent shaking. My ears rang as I snapped my eyes open.

"Neli!" A familiar voice called again and moving my eyes I found Nick staring at me. He wiped away my tears that I had not felt.

He held out a bottle, the bottle of wine. "You finished it?"

I blinked then tried getting up from the floor where I was lying, my head spun. I obviously passed out and felt embarrassed about it. Was I now an alcoholic?

"I.." I sighed shutting my eyes. "Oh.."

He picked me up and placed me on the bed where he handed me a glass of water. "Drink." The water was cold that it cooled me down. "I ordered dinner. It will—" a knock erupted at the door. "I will get that."

My eyes landed on the empty bottle of wine. I had not planned finishing it. Rubbing my temples I watched him bring in our dinner. My knees buckled when I tried standing up and I couldn't ignore how dizzy I felt.

"I hope you are hungry. I ordered..." He trailed off. Mama. I had dreamt my mother. She had been right there but I couldn't get to her.

"Mama.." I mumbled.

Nick looked at me.

"Are you ok?" I
nodded. "Fine."

Tears formed in my eyes, I felt sadness coil itself around my body then my heart making it heavy. It was the kind of sadness that pulled you to an entire different place. The kind of sadness that turned into physical ache.

"Hey.." I felt his hands cup my face. "Are you ok?"
Looking into his eyes, a tear fell. He wiped it almost immediately. "Shhhh..."

Engulfing me in his eyes I stared at the wall crying silently. I could see her face in my head and hear her voice, all I wanted that moment was to be in her arms. I knew a simple hug will do it but just from her.

"I got you." Nick whispered.

Calming down I tried smiling. "I'm sorry, I just.." I chuckled fearfully. "I'm sorry."

"Stop apologizing." He gently pressed his lips against mine.

"You didn't do anything wrong. Plus either way, the wine was not that strong so just calm down. How do you feel?" He asked checking my temperature.

"I'm fine just dizzy."

"I want you to eat then you can sleep it off."

He got the plate and started feeding me. I ate slowly trying to locate my appetite. He fed me till half of the plate was gone. Raising my hand I indicated I had had enough.

"There's desert, I
will order." "Nick

I... —"

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I was up on my feet before I knew it and was staggering to the bathroom. I let it all out inside the sink till I felt nothing but emptiness in my stomach.

He held my waist. "It's ok. I will get us juice."

I nodded prompting him to walk off so I deal with my shame. He let go of my waist and walked away. I cleansed my mouth washing off the sour taste. Washing my face I thought of nothing but light things, like the trip.

Walking out, the juice had arrived. "Thank you."

"You are amazing." Nick said while I sat on the bed. I gazed up at him and smiled. "I'm sure."

"I'm serious. Drink this, there's someone who wants to talk to you." My hands shook as he handed me the glass. "Who?"

"Drink." He mouthed.

Out of curiosity I quickly drank the juice. "Done."

Who?"

He nodded at the hotel phone and it immediately rang.

"I will give you some room." I grabbed his hand. "What if it's—"

"Relax. You have nothing to worry about. I told you, I got you."

He kissed my forehead and walked out. I slowly walked to the phone and put it on my ear. I could hear someone breathing.

"Hello?" I said into the phone, my heart racing. "Nelima?"

My heart skipped while my knees immediately became weak that I fell to the ground. My entire body shook as her thick voice rang at the back of my head. I felt a crushing urge to cry and sob.

"Nelima?" She said again and a sob left my lips. It turned into an uncontrollable sob that filled the entire suit.

"Nelima..." She whispered and I could hear she was crying too but not like me. She never cried, all my childhood I never saw her cry. She was strong like that, always there to defend me even wrong. She was the shield, my shield till just one day.

I put my free hand over my mouth to quieten down my sobs and I clearly heard her cry. "Nelima.." She cried. "Mosi."

When our sobs died down I tightly gripped the phone. "Mosi..." "I looked for you. I came back after mama told me you fled." "Mama?" "She's fine."

There was silence. Relief washed all over me, mama was fine. "Nelima *ninakukosa rohoni*."

Tears streamed down my face. "I miss you too."

"A man called. He said I could talk to you.

Is he your husband?" "No. He's..." I

couldn't find the perfect word to explain.

"Your boyfriend?"

"Yes and more. He's more than just my boyfriend."

"Please come and see me and mama." She begged. "It's hard, we thought..." She trailed off leaving me to finish off her sentence. They thought I was dead.

"I will come and I will stay forever wherever you want me to stay." I said. "I won't ever go away. I will always be there, forever."

"Come soon."

"Ok.

Papa?"

"He's the chief. And has two more wives." Of cause. I nodded.

"Normiti?"

"I heard she's in Zambia." "Your daughter?"

"She's now a big girl. I had another one."

"I can't wait for you to introduce them to me."

She laughed. "You sound like a white person. That man.. he said you stay in UK." "Yes. I stay in UK."

"I wish I was with mama, but I'm going to call her immediately." "Tell her I miss and I love her."

"I will." I heard her sigh.

"Please come soon." "Ok."

"I have to go." I lied trying to swallow my sadness. "We will talk." "Ok. Take care."

"Bye."

"Bye, I love you and I'm happy." "I love you too."

Hanging up I curled my body into a ball hugging the phone. I cried silently hoping maybe the sadness will go away but it just wouldn't. It just stuck unto me and didn't let me go.

"Hey.." Nick said. I could tell he was close. He picked me up seconds later and placed me on the bed. He lay beside me after taking the phone and putting it away. Pulling me to his chest, he held me.

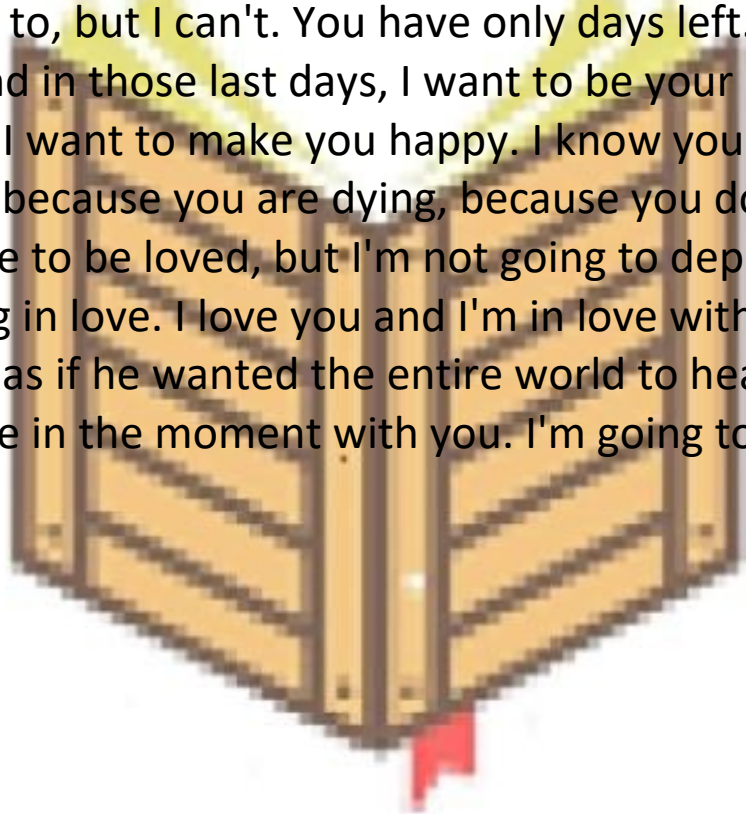
"I love you, Neli," he whispered, his words floated in the air

but couldn't get pass the cloud of sadness. I lay on the bed in his arms failing to sleep, inhaling painfully.

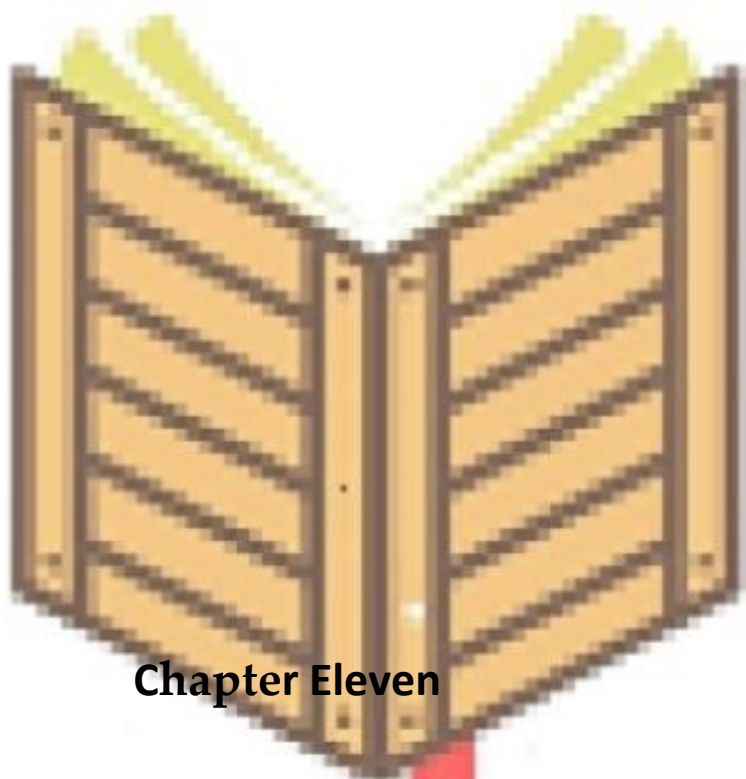
"Neli?"

I took a deep breath remaining torpid. "Remember what I told you when we first met? About happiness? You have an option to be happy and you only can decide if you want to be happy or not."

I closed my eyes while a tear rolled down. "I know that's what I said." He continued. "And it's true, I'm a living definition of it but... I know I can't save you from death. I badly want to, but I can't. You have only days left." He sighed. "And in those last days, I want to be your source of happiness. I want to make you happy. I know you may think it's useless because you are dying, because you don't think you deserve to be loved, but I'm not going to deprive myself joy of being in love. I love you and I'm in love with you." He said loudly as if he wanted the entire world to hear. "I'm going to live in the moment with you. I'm going to marry you."



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Chapter Eleven

I woke up to music the following morning. A little bit too loud I questioned if the hotel management actually allowed it. My head ached and I could feel my eyes were swollen.

"Hi," Nick said smiling. He looked too cute, wasn't it too early for that? He was already dressed and looking at the bright light that had filled the suit I wondered what time it was. "Hi," I murmured desperately trying to sound normal.

"You look..." He shook his head. "Like you have been hit by a train." I briefly looked down while he laughed. "I'm not lying but you still do look or still have a hint of being beautiful.

Wake up, I ran you a bath."

"How did you get hold of Mosi?"

He sat on the bed. "You once mentioned her. I

looked into it and found her." I nodded. "Thanks."

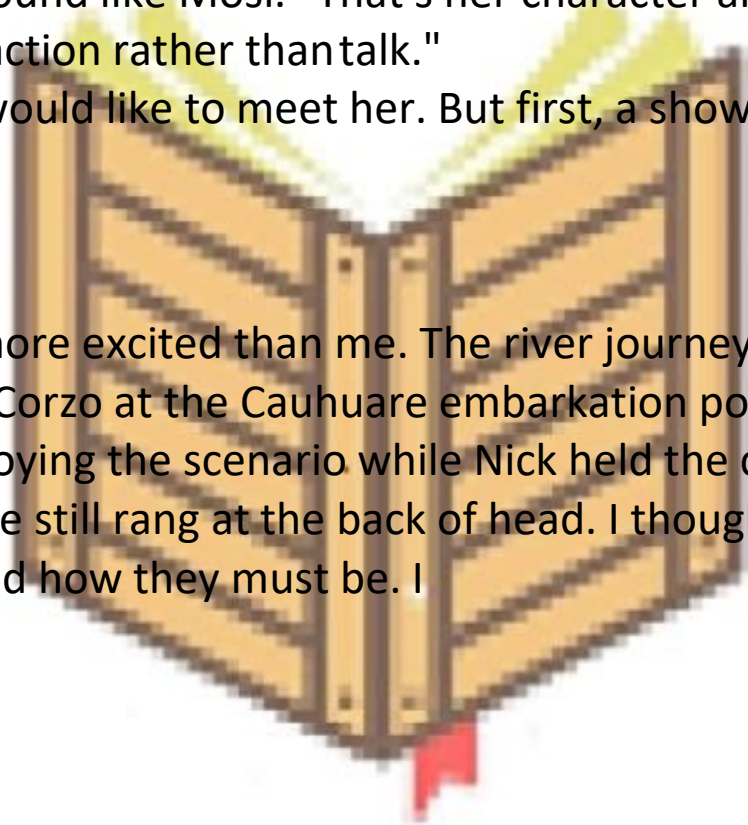
Taking both my hands into his, he kissed them. "I would do anything doable for you by anymans capabilities but don't push it."

I chuckled. "I can't ask you for more. What you did last night, it was the best gift ever." "She threatened me."

That did sound like Mosi. "That's her character and she's a person of action rather thantalk."

"I think I would like to meet her. But first, a shower then the canyon."

Nick was more excited than me. The river journey begun near Chiapo de Corzo at the Cauhuare embarkation point. I sat quietly enjoying the scenario while Nick held the camera. Mosi's voice still rang at the back of head. I thought of her children and how they must be. I



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always thought one day I would have my own kids and somehow in my little perfect world I called them Rachel and Dylan.

The boat stopped by an ecological park inside the canyon. Nick took pictures of the wildlife but most were of me.

"Neli?"

I looked at him and he clicked a photo. "Beautiful. Take off the sunglasses and hat." "My eyes—"

"Just for a sec." He begged.

I took the sunglasses and hat off. He grinned taking photos. "Great! You look normal." I laughed really hard.

"I bet I do."

Letting the camera hang on his neck, Nick took both my hands and pulled me closer. "I want to marry you. In Paris."

And no, I hadn't forgotten about that but I desperately wished he had. "Why?" "Because I'm in love with you.

And I know this won't ever happen so let me marry you."

"But I'm already married."

"Is that a yes?"

I frowned. "Nick, stop this."

He went down on his knees. "No!

Stop. Nick!" "Nelima Niji, will you please marry me?"

I took a step back. "Stop it Nick. You are causing a scene." People were now gathering around us.

"I love you. I'm in love with you. It feels weird, it's my first time falling in love... like this with a girl like you. But I am in love with a tall beautiful girl with the most beautiful eyes. She has this... whenever she giggles, I fall harder for her. She's awesome though truth be told, she does have her moments. She wakes up in the middle of the night too, that's a bonus. And yes, she does have a temper. But still is amazing. I know I can't have a lifetime and if I had I know I would probably

mess it up somewhere along the line but I do have now and tomorrow... I hope and I'm going to love you and I won't stop. Even for a second. So please, marry me, marry me because I love you. Marry me because I'm in love with you."

I laughed. "You are insane! Yes! I will marry you." Tears gushed out from my eyes. "I will marry you because you are insane!"

Nick took my hand and slowly took off my ring. "You don't need this." He placed it in my palm. I stared at it momentarily before throwing it away laughing.

"I wonder why I never took it off." "It's off now."

He looked around then removed the shoelace off his right shoe and tied it to my finger. "We will get married in front of Eiffel Tower. How's that?"

I hugged him. "It's perfect. But—"

"Shhh.."

His lips on mine completely silenced me. "I got you."

The rest of the adventure was filled with silence. I could not fathom why I had said yes to getting married. I wished time could rewind but immediately figured it was useless. I would say yes again. It was scary how I felt vulnerable because he managed to break my walls without even trying.

Looking up I found him staring, he had been staring at me most of the time. "What?"

"I think I'm allowed to stare for as much as I want to."

I chuckled wordlessly.

Back at the hotel we ate late lunch together sitting on the floor. It seemed like a very normal thing to do.

"Nick.."

"Hmm.."

"Do you ever think about that girl you were friends with when you were young?" "Yeah. Her name was Ingrid I think."

"What did she look like?"

He shrugged. "I forgot but she... her hair, it was the color of ginger." "Do you ever think of looking for her?"

"Why would I look for her?"

"I don't know, because you might fall in love with her hair."

He stared at me in silence, probably digesting my words. "Nelima you amuse me." "I'm just saying."

"I don't think

I will."

"Why?"

"Because she's not you."

The phone rang and I jumped, alarmed. I looked at him as he stood up. Was it Mosi? "Yeah?" He answered sounding bored and annoyed.

"No we good. No." He hung up.

"Who was it?" I tried to keep the curiosity away.

"It's the hotel. They offer massage

in case you want." "No I'm good."

"Do you want to talk to your sister again?"

I snapped my head at him and shuddered.

"No." I said with a sigh. "Ok. I was thinking tomorrow we—"

"Can we go to Paris

tomorrow?" "Uh yeah..

if that's what you

want." "Thanks."

I stood up and lay on the bed feeling too exhausted. "Your feet are swollen." I smiled.

"Tragic but I will be fine."

"I will be your your massager. Is that a proper word?" He asked getting my left foot in his hand.

"Masseuse."

"Yeah.." He gently massaged my feet.

"You are terrific. But you don't have to stay here with me. You can go check out a few places we can visit tonight."

"I'm not leaving you." He

said stubbornly. I bit my

lower lip. "Nick..."

"Forget

it." "You

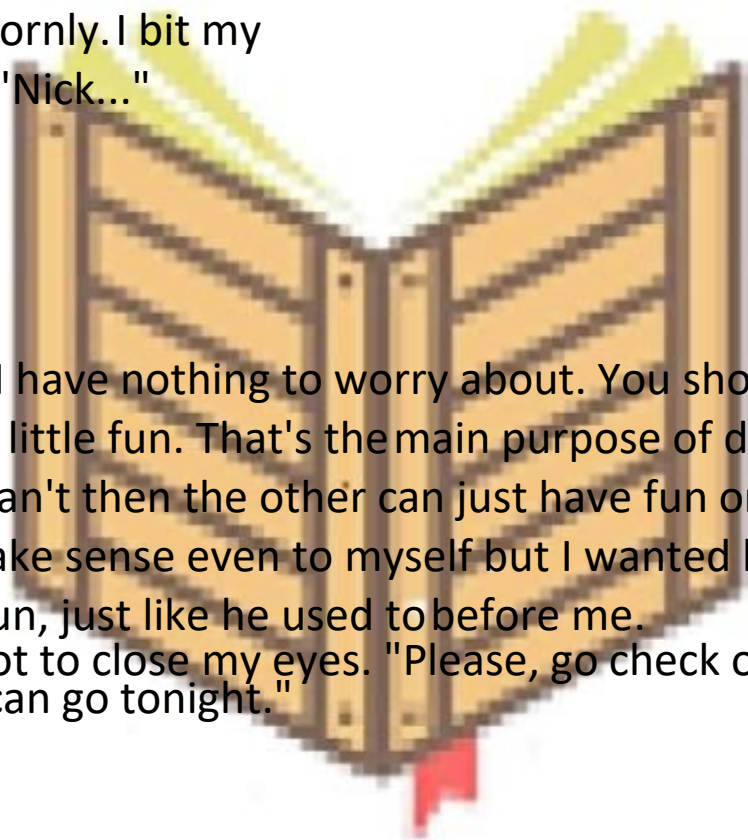
can't—"

"Shhhh."

"You said I have nothing to worry about. You should go out, and have a little fun. That's the main purpose of doing this, if one of us can't then the other can just have fun on behalf."

I didn't make sense even to myself but I wanted him to just have fun, just like he used to before me.

I fought not to close my eyes. "Please, go check out a nice place we can go tonight."



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"I can't —"

"You can. I'm not going to die. I promised. You will find me right here. I will wait for you." I whispered. "I promise. Go have some fun on my behalf."

He stood up. "Ok."

"Okay. Bye."

He nodded then walked out. I sighed closing my eyes finally. I dreamt my mother and this time around I was in her arms. I was happy but she was crying. She kept on crying no matter how much I told everything was going to be ok. Mosi was crying too then I realized I was dead and that what was in my mothers arms was just my body. I tried to get back in my body but it was just impossible till I woke up.

And I was in Nick's arms. He hadn't left.

Tears filled my eyes and they wet my cheeks. "I told you to go and have fun!" I sobbed burying my face on his chest.

He kissed my forehead rubbing my back in circular motions. "I could never leave you Neli." "One of us has to leave first. I'm proud to announce it's not you." Sarcasm dripped from my voice.

"Exactly! It makes the entire thing so much better. I don't get to leave, you do. You are the one that got away, not me." He looked at me and smiled. "Tragic isn't it?"

I laughed. Then started crying silently. He cupped my face. "No... don't cry. We still have time." He wiped my tears away. "We still have now."

"I love you."

"I love you. Though it really doesn't cover how I feel. I wish there were better words. Anyways," he grinned. "I downloaded a few songs, trust me, I never thought I would

be the one to listen to such songs."

He took his phone and I waited. The song started playing and I chuckled. "I love this song. One of my favorite."

"Can't say the same about myself. I caught the receptionist listening to it."

Whitney Houston kept singing 'higher love' and I couldn't help the smile that pasted itself on my lips.

"What time is it?" "Just after seven."

"We should go out." "Are you sure?"

"Yeah, let's go have fun."

The bar which looked like a strip club to me was packed. Most men sat watching the thin women on poles while throwing money at them. As soon as we sat down, a bartender wearing close to nothing spoke to Nick.

He ordered in Spanish and while she walked away I chuckled. "This is hot!" Nick looked at me.

"Wanna try the pole?"

"Ha-ha! I think I would rather watch."

Our drinks came and from the first sip I knew tonight was going to be one of the unforgettable nights. A song started playing and everyone cheered.

"Wanna dance?" He was already up and dancing, from the corner of my eye I caught one of dancers twerking right on some man's face.

"I don't know how to dance." "I have seen worse. Come!"

He led me to the flooded dance floor. I moved awkwardly as he started dancing. He was too good, it felt as if he was someone from the TV. He held my waist after a while and moved with me.

"Relax, you got this."

I laughed letting him control my moves. Everyone sang along with the song while dancing. More songs played and it seemed to be getting more packed. Back at the bar Nick and I took shots and minutes later it was a couple's competition. My throat burnt with every shot I swallowed down my throat but Nick was faster of course. We beat the other couple, Nick picked me up and kissed me.

"Yey!" I screamed as soon as he put me down. I was drunk, I could feel it.

I staggered back to the dance floor, I felt hands on my waist as I danced. I turned and it was a woman. Too drunk to care I kept dancing rubbing my body on hers. Her hands were everywhere and so were her lips.

"Ladies!" I heard Nick say then he picked up throwing me on his shoulder.

"Heey! Put me..." A wave of dizziness hit me silencing me then my intestines twisted. Outside I giggled as the cool breeze hit my skin.

"Wow! It was a fucken burner inside there." I laughed while Nick put me down. "Did you hear that? It was a burner inside there. A burner." I laughed even harder.

"Are you ok?"

"You—"

My stomach heaved and it all came back too fast I couldn't

control it, right on him. I looked at his T-shirt covered in vomit and felt more sick but this time vomiting on the ground.

Raising my head I laughed while he carefully took off the T-shirt exposing his greatly built body.

"I'm sorry."

"Let's go."

He threw the T-shirt and dragged me away.

"I want ice cream." I said staggering beside him. He picked me up and held me in bridal style, avoiding another vomit episode. I started singing loudly while he walked.

"We could do this all night!" I screamed.

"If you keep screaming you will be in Paris voiceless." He said staring down at me. "Ohh.." I whispered taking a deep breath. I felt too tired, too exhausted.

He stopped walking after a while and placed me down. My head spun and I leaned my body on Nick's.

"Are you good?"

"Yeah, just giddy."

Nick put his hand around my waist and looking around, I realized we were getting the ice creams.

Handing me my ice cream I smiled. "Thanks." "Let's go."

Hurling a cab, it stopped and we got inside. I ate my ice cream silently recalling the first time I ate ice cream. I was with Mosi and mama and we were visiting her sister at the nearby town. I could still remember crying because it melted too fast.

Inside our hotel room, Nick made me drink water before finally letting me sleep.

I woke up earlier and something told me it was before five. Looking beside me, Nick was still sleeping, his arm thrown over me. I closed my eyes trying to go back to sleep but all attempts failed.

I lay in the darkness in silence till I found myself gently removing Nick's hand over my waist and getting up from the bed. I walked to the door and slowly opened it. Walking out I sighed, it was quiet. My bare feet touched the floor while I walked slowly outside.

"Need any help?" A voice said from behind.

Looking behind, I stared at the man, good looking man. He had this smirk-frown expression that looked permanent on his face.

"No."

"Miguel. You are?"

Definitely a charmer, I decided and also a player. "Neli." I mumbled.

He rubbed his hands together running his tongue on his lower lip. "I don't know where the fuck you are going but I'm so glad I saw you, beside being beautiful it feels good to see someone of colour."

He stood beside me. He smelt good, too good and from his posture I could tell he had confidence for days. And was also cocky.

"Neli... wanna go out?"

"Uh, no. I should be getting—"

He grabbed my arm gently, his eyes dancing. "Hey, relax. I don't eat and I'm no thug. In case you don't notice, I'm black."

I chuckled. "I know, my boyfriend is probably awake and searching for me." Chances that Nick was awake were high.

He smiled cutely. "He is awake and..." He looked at his watch and bit his lower lip sexily. "He will be here in 30 seconds

tops. Does he ever look elsewhere because that dude looked nowhere but at you last night."

I frowned confused. "Huh?"

"At the club. He's head over hills but fuck that, as long as he's not married to you nothing will stop us."

I shook my head. Totally a special case. "Um Miguel, I appreciate your attempts to—" "Hey hey, relax. I'm your future husband."

I laughed. "Ok. That's my cue."

"Miguel D, just in case. You never know what the future holds."

"Babe.." Nick's voice was low yet loud. Seconds later I felt his hands around my waist and his lips on my neck. I shivered feeling butterflies in my stomach.

"What are you doing here?"

I looked at Miguel who winked and walked away. "Just needed some fresh air."

He turned me so I look at him. Shirtless. He was shirtless in only sweatpants that hung low on his hips exposing that v-line. He looked eatable.

"And him?"

"I don't know him." I mumbled trying not to drool and fuel his ego. But the look on his face, it was too late. The worrisome Nick was gone and naughty Nick had taken over.

"All you have to do is ask. You know I will be..." "Thanks but I'm fine. Let's go and sleep."

Nick and Miguel had the same aura around them but slightly different in a way. One would swear they were brothers.

"The hotel offers free condoms. It would save mine and—"

I started walking leaving him standing under the moonlight looking like a sex goddess. I squirmed when he picked me up throwing me on his shoulder. Gently, he spanked my butt. I giggled. "Nick.."

"Yeah?"

"I love you."

He put me down and pushed me against the wall. "I love you, too." He kissed me. "Don't wonder off like that again."

"Sorry."

"Let's go."

"Wait.." I wrapped my arms around his waist resting my head on his chest. "I love hearing you say you love me."

"I love you."

"I have been counting. Each time you say it, I count." I felt his lips on my forehead. "I love you."

I giggled and raised my head.

"One last time." "I love you."

I stood on my toes and kissed him. "I love you."

He lay me on the bed and him beside me.

"What was he saying?" "Jealous?"

"Alwa

ys." "I

forgot

."

"You were

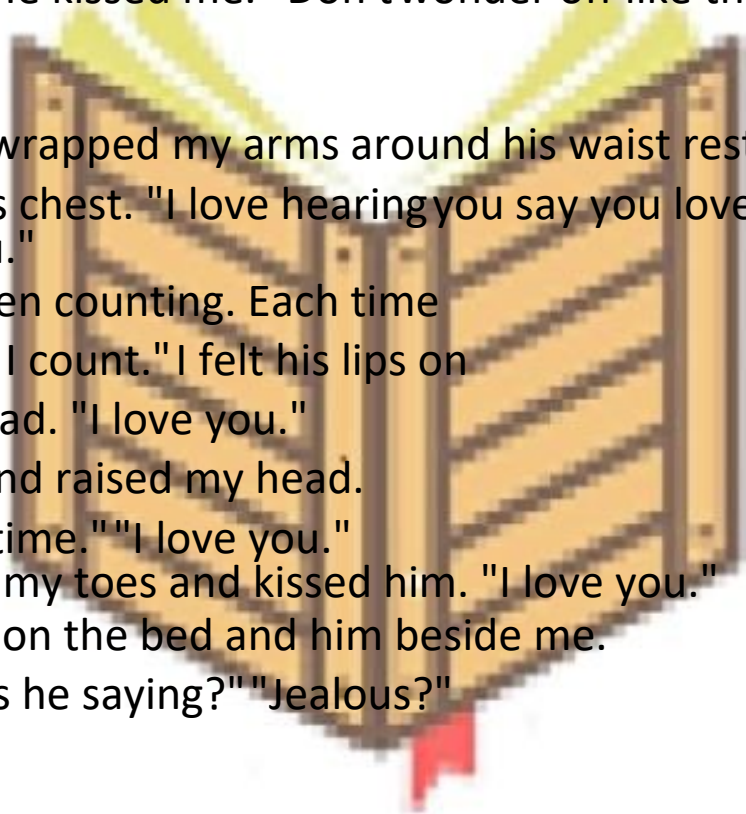
smiling." I

giggled.

"Was I?"

"You gave him

my smile." "Your



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smile?"

"Yes. The smile designated for me."

"I'm sorry." I said softly

looking in his eyes. He

blushed and looked away all

shy. "It's ok."

"What time is our flight

tomorrow.. umm today?" "In a

few hours. I suggest you catch

some sleep." "Thank you." I

kissed his chest. "For

everything." "I will do anything

for you."



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Chapter Twelve

Nick held my hand tightly, keeping me by his side while a man walked with our bags behind us. Cameras flashed our way, the media had been waiting. Paris fashion show was starting later in the evening. They were waiting for celebrities and I was not one though I knew it was only a matter of time till I was in tabloids or an gossip column.

'RICH MOGUL WIFE, NELI CATLET, SEEN AT PARIS AIRPORT LOOKING COSY WITH YET ANOTHER RICH MOGUL, NICK BRADLEY.'

I could already imagine what they were going to write and it made my intestines twist painfully. I refrained from even thinking about what Edward would do or will do when he sees me all over.

"Relax, I got you." Nick whispered kissing my hand. I didn't realize I was shaking till then. Outside the airport we got in a cab and as it pulled away I took a deep breath.

"Neli,"

I looked at him. "You don't have to worry. I'm here."

Nodding I let him pull me closer to him. The feel of his arms around me calmed me down, I felt safe in his arms. I pushed my worry at the back of my head. I couldn't let him get to me. As the cab stopped, I looked around and my breath caught, I was finally in Paris, the city of love, surrounded by all its finer things. Climbing down I freely inhaled the Paris air.

You are here, this is it.

We walked inside the hotel and while I let myself get lost in the beauty that lay before my eyes, Nick checked us in. A man soon approached us in a suit.

"Mr. and Mrs. Bradley, this way please."

Our bags were already being carried by some two men. The man in a suit walked in front of us to the elevator. There was something about the way they were treating us, I always experienced it each and everyday with Edward. From the house staff, from the owners of places we visited, they treated us like Lords, like we were made of glass. They worshiped the ground we walked on and all because of money.

Staring at Nick, I searched for that look I always saw in Edwards eyes every time someone worshiped him, the look of satisfaction, the look that said 'yes! Pray me! I'm your God!'

It wasn't there. The man in the suit was talking but I couldn't seem to gather any word that left his mouth as I observed Nick. He never acted like a rich person he was, he didn't have the aura of being powerful around him nor did it follow him like it knew where it belonged. Why are you not like the rest? I wanted to ask. Why don't you behave like them? Why don't you look like them? Why do you travel in economy class? Why not business class? Why don't you care if you in a five star hotel or not? Why don't you cause a scene in a restaurant just because your meal took a minute to come? But my tongue stayed in place.

He looked at me when we finally walked in our suite.

And no, it was not the presidential suite. It

was an ordinary suite. "Yoh thanks!" He

said to the man in suit.

I dragged my feet to the nearby

couch and sat down. "Are you ok?"

"Yeah, I'm good. I'm fine."

"Jet lag?"

My body could tell something was different but I wasn't really bothered. I looked in his eyes and he held my gaze.

Looking down I chuckled. "I'm hungry."

"You gave me a scare. I thought something was wrong. Let me order." I watched him make the call and the more I looked at him and listened to him talk, the more I realized how much different he was.

"Ok, I ordered something. Wanna take a shower in the mean time?"

Standing up, I walked to the bathroom with him. He undressed me slowly, taking his time to peel off every piece of clothing till I was bare. He kissed my shoulder.

"You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen." He whispered. I knew I was far from being beautiful, I was losing weight, I was changing and everyday I saw it on the mirror. The mirror didn't lie.

"How quick can we go to the zoo. I want too see some penguins." I asked laughing away my tears. He joined me.

"We can go after eating." "Ok."

He leaned over and kissed me. His tongue getting past my lips and rolling with mine. My heart flipped as he pulled me closer owning my mouth completely. An unwanted picture of Edward crossed my mind and I remembered the times he'd force himself on me knowing full well there was nothing I could do. He found pleasure in my pain and still expected me to moan and call out his name.

Nick stepped back. "I'm not him."

A fresh tear ran down my cheek and he wiped it gently. "You are safe with me."

And another ran down. I covered my face trying to get it together but more memories of Edward torturing me replayed in my head like an old ugly movie. Times were he

tied me to the bed and beat me up till I was numb then pleasure himself, times when he would push himself in mouth till I vomited and beat me.

A sob escaped my lips and next I was crying in Nick's arms. Loud sobs filled the bathroom. It was all catching up with me, the pain, the grief, I hadn't escaped it, it found me.

It all died slowly though by then I was feeling weak. Nick kept his expression impassive but the energy around him told me he was angry. I was too tired to care, too numb to feel anything other than the hollowness that had found place in my heart.

Nick bathed me then dried me before dressing me in his T-shirt. A knock on the door pulled him up and as he walked to the door, I dragged my body to bed and lay down shutting my eyes tightly immediately. I tried to keep the memories away but like a ghost, they snuck in my head and kept on chocking me.

A memory of when I was seven years settled in my head. Then I was innocent, free and happy. Then I lived in a painless world. I wished to go back to that place.

Sleep finally found me and I didn't fight it.

I woke up to an empty side. My eyes scanned the entire suite and his absence registered in my eyes. Getting out of bed I slowly walked to the bathroom and grabbing the door knob, I heard his voice. He was on the phone.

"I don't care!" His voice was low yet harsh. The anger rolled off his voice leaving me all tensed.

"Get it done! I will sort out the rest. Either way, I'm almost done. No, leave that. I will handle him when I come back. What the fuck am I supposed to do about that? Look just keep an eye on her, I know what they are doing. I just need evidence and it will be over. I don't care, I don't need her." Standing still I wished to walk back. To the bed and wait but my feet stayed rooted to the ground and my ears strained trying to get each and every word he spoke.

"Get Jas to that fucker. He's going regret ever being born after I'm done with him. No no, I will handle him myself, just watch him." He went silent and I wondered if he knew I was eavesdropping. I took a step back then he continued. "Don't worry. It will be a clean job." Job? The word rang in my head loudly. What job?

"And I need that doctor ready as soon as I land. I don't care, give him whatever he wants but I need him to be there as soon as we land. That's non of your business, just get the doctor and his team ready."

I quickly staggered back to the bed. Doctor? Job? My mind raced and slowly I got angry. Why couldn't he just accept reality? Didn't he think I thought of all that? The treatments? My eyes got teary but I refused to cry.

"What's going on?" I asked firmly when he walked out of the bathroom. He blinked with a frown on his face, clearly confused. "Huh?"

"I heard you." I didn't care if I had heard him eavesdropping. Confusion cleared from his eyes.

"You were eavesdropping?"

"Yes. I said what's going on?"

"Nothing you should worry about." He said carelessly as if he hadn't been the one talking of 'clean jobs' and doctors.

"Nothing I should worry about? Son, I'm not even worried, I have nothing to be worried about. What's wrong with you? I told you I don't want any treatment! It won't do me any good! And what is 'clean job'?" I was screaming and he looked terrified to say the least. "Uhh... clean job is for the car I built, it's going to be the fastest luxurious car ever if everything goes according to plan. I want everything in order to avoid any mistakes." "Oh.." I said, embarrassed. Of course it had to be his car. *You just made yourself a fool!*

"And just because you have given up, it doesn't mean I have. I may be hopeless in love with you, it's even painful, but I'm not entirely hopeless because I need you and I'm not going down without a fight."

"Are you crazy? Are you listening to yourself? A fight? Huh? You are not going down without a fight? And I'm going down without a fighting? I don't care?"

"I didn't say that. I'm not going to spend my sixteenth day with you fighting."

"Fuck you!" I yelled surprising myself. He stared at me for a while then started laughing really hard. I looked away biting my lower lip trying not to laugh but already, my anger had begun wearing off. "You are an idiot." I said chuckling.

"Can I come closer?" "I'm still angry."

Closing the distance between us, he pulled me in his embrace. "You scared the shit out of me. I thought you were going to kill me."

I sighed wrapping my arms around his waist. "I wish you can just let it go. Nick you said we are living in the now. I'm right here; right in front of you." I looked at him. "Can't you be happy with now?" I giggled while tears spilled at the corner of my eyes. "Because I am. I am

happy with now. The present. The future don't really matter because it's not in your hands, what's in your hands is now. You have the present in your hands."

He leaned down and kissed my tears. "I love you." "I know and I love you too."

"Can't we at least try? Just once."

"Today is our sixteenth day together. Let's have fourteen more." "Ok. Fourteen more. Fourteen."

"Yes. Fourteen."

I brought my hands up to his neck and kissed him, tasting the saltiness of my own tears on his.

"I was thinking we go to the fashion show. You will meet all the people you have always wanted to meet."

Staring at him, I raised a brow. "You think that's a good idea? The media—"

"They don't matter. I don't care."

I smiled. "Ok. But we don't have clothes. I know you don't care, but we need to look the part."

"Don't worry about all that. I got you."

"1 2 look!" She said taking her hand off my eyes. My reflection on the mirror stared back at me and I could hear the other me talking to me.

You are beautiful, what more do you want? What else are you searching for in those eyes? What do you need to see? The emptiness? The pain? The damage? What do you seek for in those eyes?

Beauty stared right back at me. Beauty that had I not seen in a while. Smiling I looked at Maddie. "Thank you. I look beautiful."

"You are more beautiful even without make-up

that's why I kept it light." "I love it. You say you are just starting as a make-up artist?"

She laughed. "Yeah. Well I do have a YouTube channel where I usually do my tutorials at but you are my first real client. It feels weird to say."

"Hey, we all have somewhere we start. Don't worry, you will make it big." "Thanks. I should get going. Call me anytime."

"I will. Bye."

I watched her walk out. She was young with dreams. From the mirror I stared at the blacksparkling mermaid cut dress that lay on the bed. Nick had brought it together with Maddie. Standing up, I walked over and held it in my hands. I could guess the price and knew it was enough to buy someone's life.

Taking off the robe, I put it on. It was sleeveless and showed a great deal of my cleavage then went down my hips. It wasn't tight though I could see the slightest of what was left of my hips. It was long and had a longer tail.

"Come in." I said at the soft knock on the door. I watched Nick as he walked in, I stared completely mesmerized. It was the first time seeing him look formal and he looked sexier than he'd ever looked. He unbuttoned his jacket walking towards me.

"Three piece suit?" My voice was a mere whisper. "You look beautiful."

"So do you."

"Ready?"

"

"Shoes!"

I quickly put on the heels then grabbed my clutch that was brought with the dress. "Ready as ever Mr. Bradley." I said giving him my hand. He took it and gave it a soft kiss. Just after dawn, Nick opened the door to a sports car for me. A Ferrari.

"Should I ask?"

"Don't, just get in."

The red carpet began at the entrance where the paparazzi and TV crews lined up, their cameras flashing. Nick stepped out and more cameras flashed, I felt nauseated at the sight.

Opening my door, he gave me his hand and helped me out of the car. It was a hive of energy and it drained me. Handing the keys to a concierge, his arm slid around my waist followed by his lips on my cheek.

"Don't think too much. I'm here. You are safe." His eyes were on me, reaching out to me. "Ok."

"Let's go."

Walking on the carpet I kept my megawatt smile in place. Every eye were on us and each camera flashed at us. Inside more cameras awaited. We walked up the stairs to the hall where everything was going to be held not stopping for posing.

"I have always hated that." I muttered. "Are you ok? We can—"

"I'm fine. Just exhausted from all that."

"Ahh!" A woman in a gold dress with a slit that begun right right at her waist approached us. With a wild guess I suspected she was a model. "Nick! Shocking to see you

here." "Paula, hi, its been a while."

He pulled me closer when she tried hugging him. "Oh, hi there," she said in a way that said 'I don't really care who you are' accompanied with a smile.

"Babe this is a long lost friend, Paula, this is my girlfriend, Neli."

Paula gave me a tight smile. She was not pleased and really did a lame job trying to hide it. "Oh," she said again, sounding disinterested. "Hi." She looked back at Nick. "How long will you be here"

"For as long as my girlfriend wants." Nick led me to the seats leaving Paula standing there. "You once fucked?" I asked.

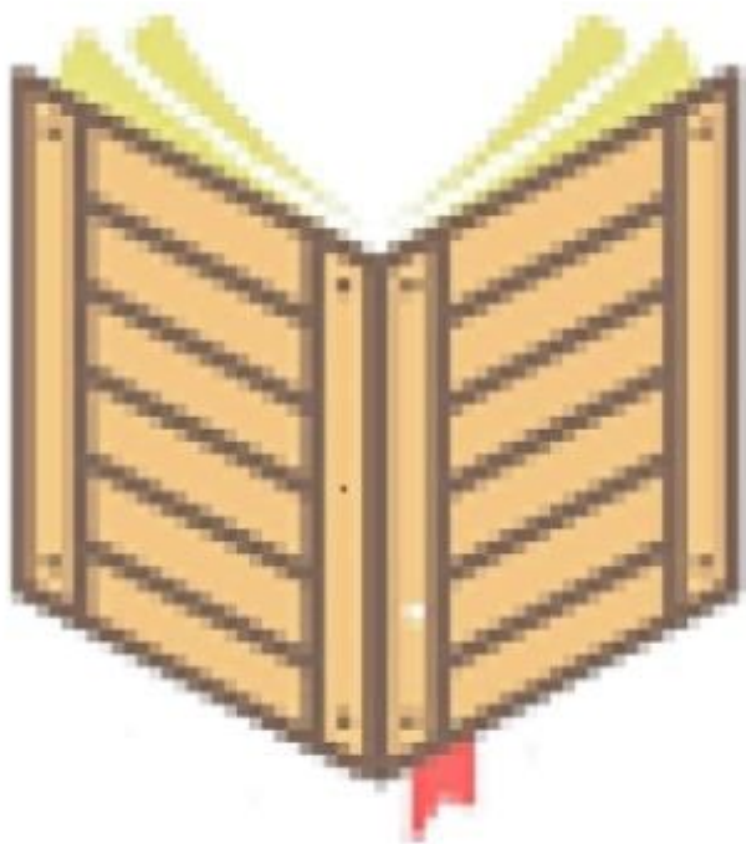
"Yeah. Once." He didn't seem bothered.

My eyes scanned the greatly decorated hall and my eyes kept coming across all the designers I always saw only in magazines and on TV. Maria Rivera stood feet from me, one of the best designer in the entire world. She was speaking to some man who seemed to hang on each word she said. Roberto was also in the crowd talking to Maggy, both fashion editors. More faces were there but my eyes finally rested on Carlos Duan.

He spoke with that polite smile of his that was fake. Looking around I wondered how many fake people were here. They always smiled while sizing each other up, all friendships weren't real, it was all a battle of 'are you rich enough to be someone I can want to associate with or am I richer than you and you deserve to kiss the ground I walk on.'

As the fashion show started, I smiled. Lord knew how I desired being the designer behind the perfect clothes, once upon a time. In and out, the models modeled. Great designs were displayed by great designers. Each design with it's own vibe.

"This is amazing!" I told Nick who squeezed my hand.



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Carefully I walked down the stairs with Nick's arm on my waist. Outside the sports car was already waiting by the entrance. He opened the door and I gracefully slid in.

I looked through the window as he drove away, leaving it all behind. "Today was out of this world amazing."

"As long as you enjoyed it."

I felt too happy and all sorts, was it jet lag?

"Can we play some songs?" "Yeah.."

I scrolled through his songs, I didn't know most of them. Pressing play on my song of choice, Nick glanced at me grinning.

"You know there a lot of songs on this list."

"I love this one, you love it too." I said moving my body from side to side letting Whitney Houston's voice control me.

Singing along, he kept gazing at me with that smile that always had butterfly erupt from my stomach. Opening the window I giggled letting the chilled air brush my face.

"I hate cars like that." I said looking at my rearview mirror. A black SUV was behind us. "What?"

I shook my head. "The car behind, it looks like the cars Edward always had to follow me around the rare times I went out on my own."

"Don't think about him."

"You are right. There's a point I prayed he'd just get in a car accident and lose his legs just to crush him. You know, it would kill him," I chuckled. "Slow death but now I just wish he finds happiness."

Nick kept his eyes on me for a while. "I got you. Wanna see what this baby can do?" His tone was light and playful. The Nick I fell in love with was back.

"Why not?"

He smirked then really stepped on it. He eased from one

lane to another as if he was in a race.

"Nick, the cops will—"

"Don't worry baby, that's where the name will play it's part plus... it will be a relief if we bumped into them."

"You are insane!"

The black SUV was still behind us. I smiled slightly wondering where it was going. The windscreen was tinted. "That car..."

"I guess they are just going our direction." Nick said checking his own rearview mirror. "Yeah... and also looking for a ticket like you are." My eyes were still on the SUV. *Don't panic. Don't panic. It's just a car.*

I took a deep breath trying to bring myself under control but it was of no use. Something was wrong and Nick knew.

"Hold on baby, we are about to fly."

He drove trying to escape the black SUV. I knew it was Edward. Who else could it be? He was not going to just accept lose, by now I knew he had already seen the news. Nick and I. He was possessive and very dangerous. On the rearview mirror, the SUV was out of sight. "Did we lose it?" My voice came out loud and bold surprising me.

"Yeah, don't stress. I expected it." He was too calm, too put. I looked at him.



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"He's dangerous Nick. He's like a wild animal, torturing his prey first before finally attacking. He has connections, he's a cunning man."

Nick took a sharp turn and sped inside an underground garage in full speed. Stepping on the breaks, we were already parked.

"He's all that only in your head. You need to stop letting him have so much control on your life. And don't worry, today he's met something else. I have been waiting for him."

Nick's tone made my intestines twist. What

was he talking about? "Nick..."

"I need you to trust me."

"Who are you?" The question left my lips while tears brimmed in my eyes.

He cupped my face forcing me to look right in his eyes.

"Babe... it's me. Nothing has changed, but he's going to pay for what he did to you. Those marks on your body, he's going to pay for it."

I shook my head trying not to cry. "I just want to be happy. That's all. Is that too much to ask for?"

"It's not and I'm here to make it all happen. I need you to trust me." "I'm tired. I want to sleep."

I wanted to forget the drive, the black SUV. Nick stepped out and walked round to my door. "Neli I love you. And I'm going to love you forever." He said squatting. "Let's not talk about him."

The sincerity in his eyes calmed me down. I trusted him and I just wanted Edward to leave us alone. But he was everywhere.

"I just want you safe. I would never forgive myself if anything had to happen to you." He took both my hands and kissed them. "Nothing is going to happen to me."

Taking the elevator we went up. We were in a different hotel

and briefly Nick explained we had moved. The concierge led us to our suite and this time the presidential suite.

"We are safe here." He said as we walked in. I looked around then walked to the huge bed. Opening the zip I let the dress shimmer down my body and on top of it, I kicked off my shoes. Crawling on the bed I sighed.

Nick said we were safe here and I trusted him.

"I ordered us dinner." He said and the worry in his voice was back. "Are you ok? Are you in pain?"

Was I? Yes. Yes I was in pain. Right on my chest. My heart was in pain. "Come lie with me Nick." I begged.

He didn't waste time, I felt his weight on the bed in seconds then breathed in his scent and finally, felt his arms around my body.

"I love you Nick."

He held me tighter. "You are going to be fine baby. I love you too."

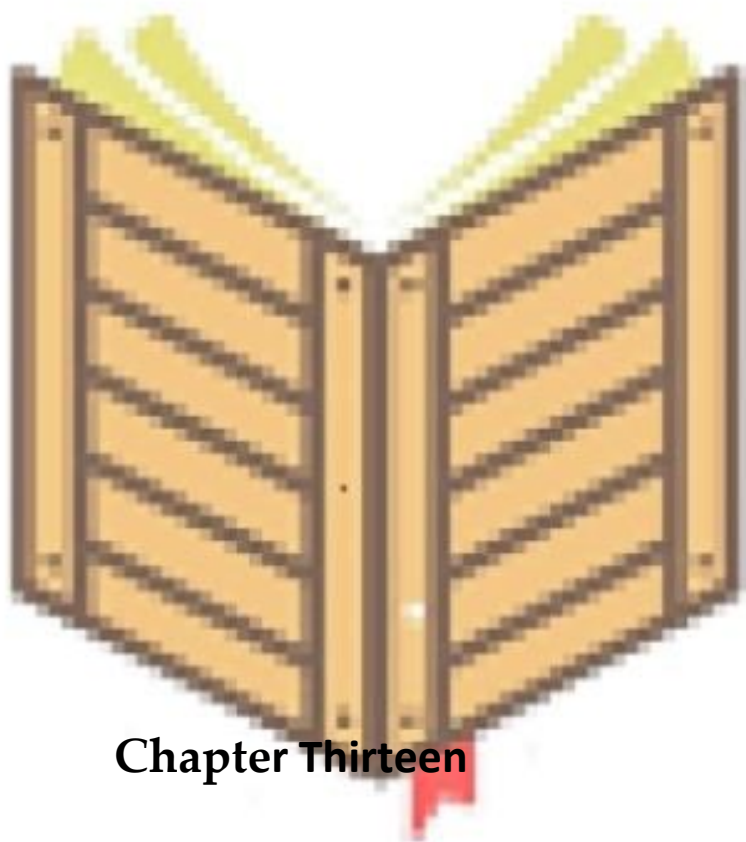
I smiled and kissed him. "You are the highlight of my entire life. I love you so much. But maybe, maybe we're not meant to be."

"Trust me, we are. We are. We are meant to be."

"Yeah. We are meant to be, for now. We will be, for a moment like this, we are meant to be."

"I want you stay Nelima, I love you and I want you stay and be here, with me. Everyday." He beseeched. But it was too late. It had been too late right from the start.

Giggling I looked at the ceiling. "Well, when you miss me, look up. The brightest star, that's me. Say hi."



Chapter Thirteen

Nick slept peacefully, his pink lips slightly apart. I stared at him, observed his soft breathing. I fought the edge to walk out and never look back, just to keep him safe. Edward lingered in the air dangerously and I badly wanted to protect Nick.

He stirred and sat still holding my breath but still he woke up. He frowned at the morninglight inside our suite sitting upright.

"What time is it?"

"Just after 9." I answered smiling. I could not deny the raw sexiness the man carried. His voice, his lips, his eyes, chest and everything else.

He gave a shy smile. "Hi,"

"Hi," I murmured, I loved that smile.

He pulled me unto him making me straddle him and nuzzled my breast while his hands traveled to my buttocks. I rested my head on his shoulder inhaling his scent.

"Slept well?"

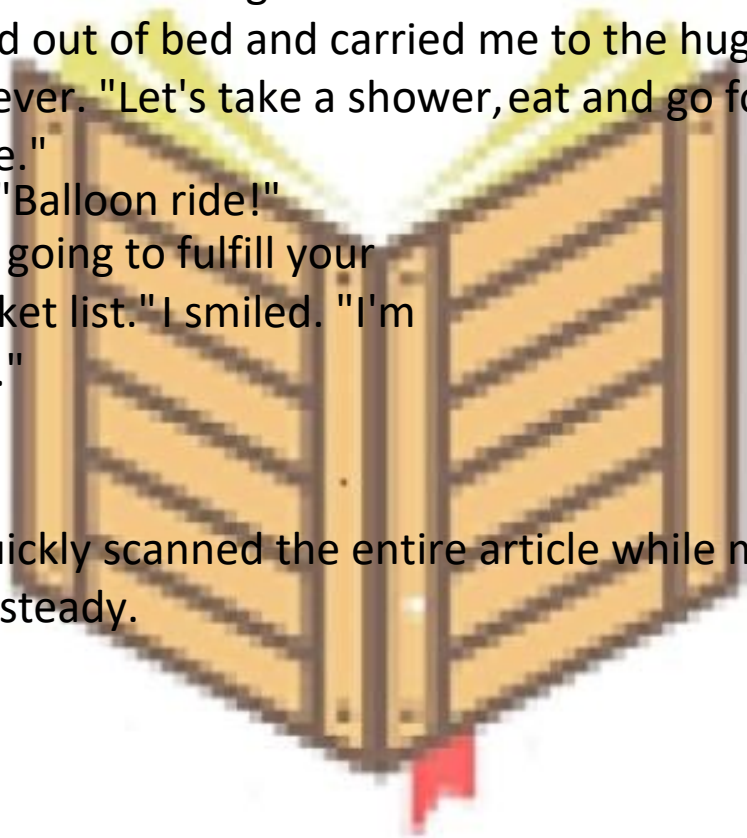
"Yes, safe." I said kissing his neck.

He stepped out of bed and carried me to the hugest bathroom ever. "Let's take a shower, eat and go for a balloon ride."

I grinned. "Balloon ride!"

"Yeah, I'm going to fulfill your entire bucket list." I smiled. "I'm so excited."

My eyes quickly scanned the entire article while my breath became unsteady.



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"What are you doing?" Nick asked joining me for breakfast. I put his phone down. "They wrote about me, about us."

He took his cup of coffee seemingly unruffled. "Don't mind those, they will always have something to write."

"Nick! I'm on TV too!" My voice was louder than intended. Why wasn't he taking this seriously?

Placing his cup down he took my hands into his. "Calm down babe, I got you. Let them write, that's all they do. Their lives are merely based on other people's lives, they are pathetic."

I took a silent prayer. I had to calm down or at least try to.

"They called me a slut." "What?"

"Not exactly but they did, in other words. I'm not a slut."

He took his phone and scrolled through. Looking at me he was grinning. "But babe, they said you are beautiful."

Keeping a straight face I took a bite of my meal. "And that's why I jump from man to man." He started laughing. "You are overreacting. They didn't say you jump from man to man, they said you have upgraded. Look babe, stop looking for negativity here. Let's be happy." He looked back at his phone. "They even said you have a glow they never saw before. Just relax. Eat up and let's go see Paris from the sky."

"What if—"

"Shhh, no what if's and what not's. Eat." Maybe I was overreacting but who wouldn't. Now I was famous for going from man to man.

I ate under his watchful gaze. "I'm full."

He looked at my plate. "But you hardly ate."

"I did! I ate a muffin and a pancake.

I even drank tea." "You nibbled on them." He pointed out.

"Can we go? I have no appetite. I can't help it."

He sighed grabbing his trilby hat then stood up. "Ok."

The Ferrari was still there and looked beautiful under the daylight. He sped through the road with our windows down. I checked my rearview mirror, and relaxed when I noticed nothing suspicious behind us.

"Take," he handed me sunglasses which looked similar to the ones he was putting on. I put them on and made a grab of his hat. "I think this would look good on me."

He chuckled rubbing his lower lip with his fingers. "It does." "I know right?"

Thirty minutes later he finally parked the car in front of a building. I followed after him to the back of the building and gasped at the ground full of hot air balloons and people.

"Wow!"

Nick took my hand and led me to the giant air balloons. I could not care if I was smiling like a retarded or not, I could not hide my excitement. I could see families, couples and just friends all over. There was a hot dog van parked at the far end of the ground and for the first time, I actually craved food, a hot dog.

"Nick, I want a hot dog so bad!"

He smiled frowning. "You do? You want a hot dog?"

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I nodded. "I have an appetite for a hot dog. Let's go get some then get in one of this!" Excitement rolled on my tone so easily it felt I had forgotten how it felt to have such joy before.

"Ok!"

We walked over to the van and lined up like everyone else. There was another van selling lemonade.

"We should also get lemonade. It feels... new! Doing something like this, eating a hot dog. I last ate one before I got married to that ugly man!"

"I wonder why you never saw his ugliness before." Nick teased taking his hat from me. He looked sexy and good, I could tell by the eyes which ogled. The tanktop he was putting on was loose and exposed more of his chest, though his muscles were not the way they were when I first saw him, he looked even more sexy.

"This looks delicious..." I said getting my hot dog. Nick walked with me to the next van and we both got lemonade.

Some man approached us in a black suit. I looked at Nick then at the man feeling my knees get weak.

"Ted!" Nick said, his tone firm and commanding. He knew him, relief washed all over me making me gulp all of my lemonade.

"Everything is good." Ted said, he was huge and did not smile. He looked scary. "Good."

Ted immediately walked away. "Are you ok?" I looked at a little girl passing us licking ice cream. "Yeah.. I just.."

"Relax. Security. I don't want anything ruining our fun. Still up for the ride?" He said pointing at the hot air balloon that was already in the sky.

"Yeah."

Inside our hot air balloon Nick had the camera in hand snapping pictures of me. Giggling I looked at the kids who

were staring at us. Slowly we went up.

"This really tastes good." I said finishing my hot dog. It felt good being up in the sky, the burden felt lighter.

Looking down I saw buildings and cars and trees. "It's so beautiful." "Yeah."

"I free here. I feel lighter. I wish it can always be like this. I wish the world was like this. I wish my life can be like this." He hugged me from behind. "It can be."

I chuckled shaking my head. "No." I turned and kissed him. "But yours can be. Though I doubt."

"You over think too much."

I took off my sunglasses then his. "Reality baby, I can't escape it. It's.. inevitable. Life is a bitch." I turned back to my view and accidentally dropped the sunglasses.

I laughed. "Well.. that went well." "We will get new ones."

But they can never be like the old ones, I wanted to say but bit my tongue. So we watched everything from the sky in silence, comfortable silence. Nick's arms remained around my waist and from time to time, he kissed my neck.

"The car you made... what are you going to call it?"

"I have not thought of that, well the last name will be different because the first name remains, our brand name,"

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"Call it Nelick."

He chuckled softly in my ear. "Nelick?" "Yeah. I think it would make great name."

"I like it."

"I like it too."

"Or you can call it after your mother. What was her name? I'm sure she would love it." I said and his silence told me I went far. I screwed my eyes shut wishing to take everything back.

"Adelaide. Her name was Adelaide."

"Uh.. you can call it Adelaide. She's proud of you wherever she is." My wisdom side kicked in. "I know I would be if I were your mother."

"I don't remember how she looked like from my own memory. I have to look at pictures to know."

"You were young. Memories get locked up somewhere, you can't blame yourself."

He let go and stepped back. I turned and found him running his hand in his hair due to frustration.

"I forgot my own mother Neli! Who does that?"

"You didn't forget her." I took a deep breath in. "She's here, in your heart and that's why you still talk about her. You were young and some memories get suppressed by other memories. It happens naturally, you can't blame yourself for it." I opened the locket on his necklace. He never took it off. A picture like the one at his house was inside. "Here, she's here. You may think you don't remember her but deep down in your heart she's there. In the midst of other memories she's there. You know it."

He closed his locket and rubbed his forehead. "We were together when the accident happen. I remember her voice but just not her face. We were running from something, from someone. She kept saying everything will be fine." He looked

up as if seeking for some miracle or answer. "I remember her scream. Then when the car stopped spinning, she asked if I was ok. We were upside down. She said she loved me. They got me out but couldn't get her out. I tried but.. fuck!" He turned giving me his back.

Something in the air had shifted. The air was enough to suffocate. I hugged him from behind the same way he had. I kept my silence and just hugged him. Whatever he went through, I couldn't begin to understand, I didn't even know how to console him.

Minutes later he had turned and was kissing hard, squeezing my body. I broke the kiss running out of air.

I gasped for air while he stared with regret. "Hey, that was hot." I said laughing. "We should do it again."

He smiled and pulled me closer again. "No.

I'm. Not going to kill you." "With what?

Hotness?"

He kissed me gently and briefly. "We should head back."

I watched Nick talk to Ted from the car while they stood a few meters away. He had an impassive look while Ted remained with his scary angry face which looked permanent on his face. I couldn't stop wondering what Nick was saying to Ted but something told me it had something to do with Edward.

Nick walked to the car and got in. "Is everything ok?" I asked while he started the car.

"Yeah, there's a show taking place. A couple of well known artist will be performing." He eased the car backward and turning it in the driveway.

"Who?"

"I'm not sure."

Stepping on the gas, he set out onto the main road. "I have always wanted to attend a show. I would love to go."

He glanced at me then back at the road. "Consider it done." Inside the road, Nick increased the speed.

"Whoaa!" I yelled.

"Slow down." He smirked. "Wanna drive?" "You want me to drive?"

"Yeah.." He said pulling over.

"What are you doing? You can't just stop the car?" The road was clear but still. He stepped out. "Then hurry."

I watched him walk round to my door in shock. He opened the door. "Hurry." "Nick I can't—"

"Yes you can. If the cops—" "Ok ok!"

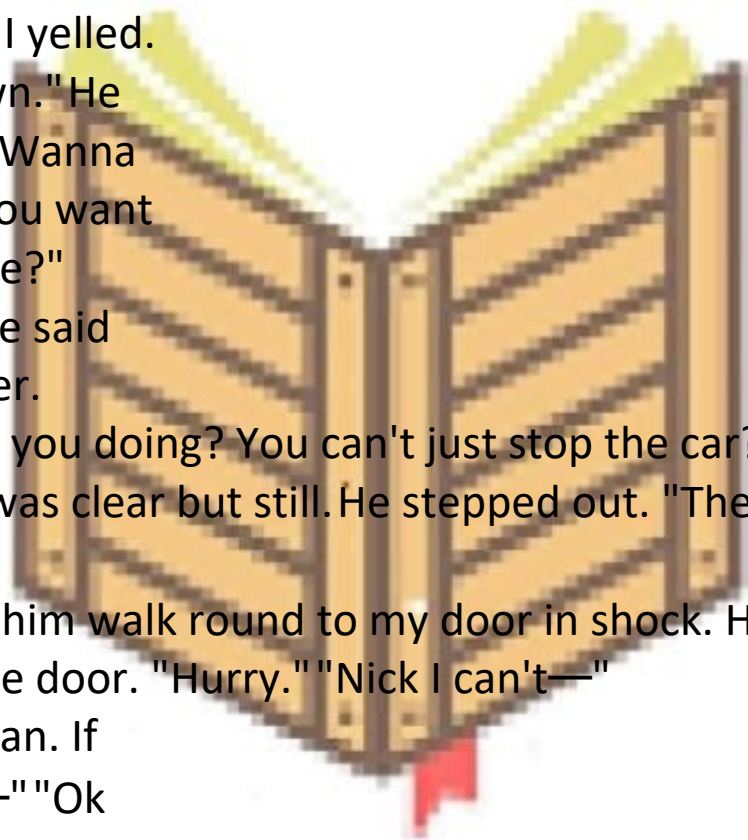
I climbed down and rushed over to the driver's seat. My hands shook when I put them on the steering.

"Just relax." I put on my seatbelt trying to get hold of myself. *It's just car Neli. Just a car. You can do this.* Gently, I nudged the gas pedal down and it moved forward.

Relaxing I increased the speed.

"That's it! The navigation knows where we are going."

"I noticed. Is Ted following us?" I tried for



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a nonchalant tone. "Yeah."

I looked at rearview mirror but could not see anything out of place. A white Mercedes C63 was behind us then a red Discovery on our side. "You won't see him. I told him to keep distance." Maybe it was the Audi R7 behind the Mercedes. "Oh.."

Nick scrolled through the songs. A familiar song started playing and I immediately knew I had heard it. Mexico at the club. Following directions on the navigation I thought of Miguel. I could remember his handsome face clearly in my head but that was not why I recalled him, it was actually the way he resembled Nick. I couldn't pinpoint anything in particular though I could really say there was something similar about them beside attitude and character. I could feel it in my guts.

"What are you thinking?"

I looked at Nick and smiled. "The girl I was dancing with that night. I think at some point we kissed, I'm not quite sure though."

"You did."

"We did? Damn! I've always wanted to kiss a girl. I guess it's a dream come true." "If I didn't take you home, she was probably going to take you to the restrooms."

"Were you jealous that you were not part of it and that's why you took me home?" I teased making him smirk dirtily.

"I can never be jealous of such baby, I would actually make a great audience." "Pervert." I

muttered. "Have you ever had a threesome?"

"You really want to know?" He now sounded cocky.

I kept my eyes on the road. "Yeah.." "I had a threesome before."

"How many times?" I asked only to feel stupid a second later. "How many times have you ever had sex?"
"Forget it."

One thing for sure I could say I regretted was wearing heels to a show. I silently prayed as another song came up. Everyone around me was singing along the lyrics, including Nick. I could freely say I was right in the dark. It was over an hour now and I felt in order to truly enjoy, I had to take off my shoes but I feared people looking at me as if I was crazy.

"Are you ok?" Nick screamed on top of the noise.

I nodded then dipped down. *Just take them off!* I took them off and felt my feet sigh with relief. All the jumping around had not been helping either. Raising my head, Nick was staring. I put my shoes in his hands then started dancing, well jumping up and down, just like the girl beside me was doing.

"Want to sit on my shoulders?" Nick whispered.

I almost laughed then caught attention of all girls who were sitting on their boyfriend's or friend's shoulders.

I turned nodding. He handed me my shoes before kneeling down. I didn't waste time, no one had ever made me sit on their shoulders. From big screens I could see the DJ who had now taken over the stage.

He too was having fun and so was I, till I started feeling out of breath and light headed. "Nick..." I called. The man in front of us turned by luck and our eyes met. The panic in his eyes was enough to have Nick put me down immediately. I

closed my eyes avoiding seeing the worry in his eyes and it kept getting worse.

Take a deep breath in. Calm down Neli. I tried calming down but I was scared. I was losing touch with myself. I was feeling numb and as more seconds passed, voices started sounding a distant away. I was vaguely aware of being in someone's arms.

Let go. Don't fight it. Just let go. Quitting fighting for my breath was easy. I just stopped and everything around me stilled blackening even further.

"Is she going to be ok?" I heard a voice scream.

"Sir move back, she will be fine. Just wait here." A female voice responded sounding more relaxed and calm.

"She needs me. She can't die." The male voice sounded frantic. I slowly opened my eyes and was immediately attacked by bright light. Slowly and more carefully, I tried again but my vision was blurry though I could see Nick.

"You are going to be ok. I love you." He said. I couldn't tell if he was crying or not. I wanted to tell him to relax and that I was fine but I felt too weak. I was falling in darkness again.

"Sir, I'm going to have to ask you to wait right here, she's going to be fine." I heard the female voice say again. I was moving and I knew I was in a hospital.

"Please save her. I need her. I love her."

Beeping sounds woke me up followed my muffled voices.

"Her cancer has spread. But there are clinical trials I can recommend though at this stage, the cancer is violent." A soft female voice said.

"She doesn't want treatment." Nick's voice responded. The pain in his voice hurt me too. I wished to take it away.

"Then there's nothing we can really do. The only thing we can offer is something for the pain."

"She's already taking that. Is there a treatment that can guarantee her recovery?"

There was silence for a moment. "I don't want to lie to you or feed you with empty promises or lift your hopes up for no reason. At this stage we can only pray for a miracle."

"She's my life. I can't lose her not when I just found her."

"I understand you. She will be fine. For now. But... she won't last that long. You have to be ready."

"When can she wake up? She said she wants to go to Eiffel Tower." He sounded teary. "Anytime really. I will have her discharge forms ready. You can still take her there."

I fought the fog when I heard footsteps. He was going and I wanted him to stay. My eye lids felt too heavy but as soon as I opened them, everything around me started feeling light.

"Shit!" He yelled startling me. "I will call the doctor." He ran outside and was back a second later.

"She's coming. You are ok."

I took off the oxygen mask. "Calm down!" My voice sounded husky and faint.

"Morning, Mrs. Bradley, good to see you awake. I'm Dr. Jones," the black lady said firmly. She had the no nonsense kind of face and looked young.

She examined me doing all the necessary check ups with a nurse by her side. "She's free to go. I have signed her discharge forms." Dr. Jones said looking at Nick. I watched her walk out with the nurse behind her before finally looking at Nick. "Morning?" I asked.

"Yeah. You slept in." "I'm sorry. I ruined...—"

"Stop it! Stop apologizing. You did nothing wrong." "You were worried..." I murmured.

"Yeah, but you are fine now. We can go to Eiffel Tower." I could see the fear in his eyes. "Are you scared?"

"Yeah." He admitted. "But it's all about taking risks and chances."

I did not need anyone to tell me he had not slept the previous night. He looked a mess. "You look like a real mess." I said chuckling.

"I think you love the mess."

I laughed and shook my head. "You are an idiot."

I stared down at people who stood at the bottom of Eiffel tower taking pictures with a glass of wine in my hand taking small sips in between. I curved my lips as my eyes fell on a man proposing.

"Look!"

Nick followed my eyes and we both watched the lady put her hand on her chest in shock. Whatever the man was saying, I could tell she was laughing. Seconds later they were hugging and kissing.

"That's just corny!"

I raised my hand with the shoelace tied as an engagement ring. "Is it?" "Let's go get married." The sudden excitement in his eyes scared me. "Now?"

"Yes. Now!"

"Nick! I'm still married."

"So? I will sort out the rest. Let's go get married Neli."

"Yeah. Let's just up and get married like a bunch of hormonal teenagers." I let sarcasm drip from my voice, of cause I sounded mean but I badly wanted to wipe away the excitement from his eyes.

He shrugged and drank his water. "I'm being serious."

I looked down at the couple and they were already gone leaving memories behind. "There's a fountain close by, we can go if you want," Nick said putting away his phone.

"Incase you are in to make more memories." He sounded normal, like he just had not suggested we get married seconds before.

"No I'm good."

I watched a family walk by. Two kids, mommy and daddy. It seemed perfect in my eyes. It was something I always asked God to bless me with. The first time I got pregnant, I was excited. Edward was too, it was going to be our first child together and four months later, the dream got wiped off. Just like that.

"I wonder just how it felt building something so spectacular like this." I sighed. "But I doubt anyone remembers exactly who built this. Life."

"I can research for you."

"Yeah... I know the information is written down somewhere, it has to be but... really, no one gives a fuck. Literally nobody gives a fuck. Well, majority of people of cause."

He shook his head, staring at me. I stared back for a while

then finally laughed. "What?" "Nothing." He said.
"You are staring." I giggled. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

He smirked. "Can't I stare at a beautiful woman who just refused marrying me?"

I blushed forcing my gaze to the wonderful view. I could feel his eyes on me and they made my skin hot. It was getting late, we had arrived in the morning and had our experience.

Somehow it felt more satisfying watching sitting in a restaurant on the first floor of Eiffel Tower.

I took another sip of my wine, glancing at Nick in the process. "There are a lot of beautiful women around you."
He half smiled. "I love staring at you. I want to marry you."

I briefly looked down at my coffee before my gaze met his again. "Ok." "Ok what?"

I giggled. "Ok let's go and get married. Mr. Shoelace." "Are you serious?"

I nodded. "Yeah. Let's go and get married."

Nick begged and pleaded with the Reverend at the nearby church we found. It was a Wednesday later afternoon and here we were, wanting to get married.

He wasn't getting anywhere so I interrupted their conversation. "Um Reverend, I have cancer. Stage 4." I had his attention now. "Before I die, my wish is that I marry the man I

love." I looked at Nick and chuckled. "Because we are living in the now. So please, wed us, please."

The Reverend sighed and I knew we had him. "Ok." I smiled. Cancer perks.

Nick took my hand and we followed after the reverend to the alter. He stood there staring at us with his bible in his hands.

"You remind me so much of my wife and I. We were ready to do anything so that we can be together. She ran from her home in Mongolia and we came here." He smiled fixing his spectacles. "Dear beloved, we are gathered here to... well, join this two souls and make them one. I will skip the procedure and go right to the point. I will start with you sir, please repeat after me. I, say your name,"

"I Nick Bradley,"

"Take, your name miss?"

"Nelima Niji."

He smiled. "Yes. Take Nelima Niji to be my lawful wedded wife,"

Nick squeezed my hands. "Take Nelima Niji to be my lawful wedded wife," "Through sickness and health, sorrow and joy, and till death do us part." "Through sickness and health, sorrow and joy and till death death do us part."

"Wonderful! It's your turn now, repeat after me. "I, Nelima Niji, take Nick Bradley to be my lawful wedded husband, through sickness and health, sorrow and joy, and till death do us part."

"I, Nelima Niki, take Nick Bradley to be my lawful wedded husband, through sickness and health, sorrow and joy, sane and insanity, insanity most of the time, and till death do us part." Tears filled my eyes.

The reverend cleared his throat. "Um.. rings?"

Nick and I looked at each other. "Yeah.." I said then took off my right shoelace from my converse. "We have this."

"Let me bless them." I took off the shoelace on my finger and handed it to Nick with a smile. After the reverend blessed them, we tied them on the fingers.

"Now I pronounce you as husband and wife, you may kiss the bride."

He cupped my face tenderly before leaning over and gently kissing me. Everything around me evaporated leaving him and me only and the burning kiss. I ended the kiss remembering the reverend.

"Thank you."

He smiled. "Anything for love." We watched him walk away. I looked at Nick. "Can I.."

"Yeah. I will be at the back seat." "Okay."

He walked to the back seats while I walked past the alter to the wall where a cross was painted. I knelt down and for the first time ever, I prayed wholeheartedly. Of course I used to pray, back at home, at the church, where Father Chinozi led. To me it never felt much like church, but mama always took the front row every Sunday.

I wondered if perhaps it made her feel better or closer to God. Papa never went to church. "It's all fake!" He would say. "They say pray to a white God, and call our ancestors demons, evil spirits and all sorts of names yet they pray to the lord of Abraham. What foolishness! Nonsense."

So I wondered why mama went and forced Mosi and I to attend with her. Whenever Father Chinozi said we pray, mama would start crying. It always left me in shock that she'd just from

nowhere start crying. Then I would close my eyes and start muttering a prayer she had taught us, over and over, till the prayer sounded nothing but a boring song in my own ears. But kneeling down in front of the cross, I closed my eyes and prayed. I prayed God help me accept things I can not change. I prayed God heals Nick after I'm gone. That He helped him deal with my loss and lastly, I asked for forgiveness.

"Done?" Nick asked when I approached him. I smiled.

"Yeah. Let's go."

We stepped out and my heart immediately lurched. The black SUV was parked behind Nick's Ferrari and men in black suits were standing around it.

"Nick..."

He pulled me behind him, these were not his men. Where was Ted?

"Hi Nick," a man said approaching us. He took off his sunglasses and smirked. "I told you...you can run but can't hide. Let's do this peacefully. Bring the lady. We don't want to hurt you."

My happiness quickly vanished and my world stopped spinning.

Edward!



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Chapter Fourteen

"Edward..." I whispered gripping Nick's arm. Tears filled my eyes spilling at the corners and warming my cheeks. He had found me.

"Ahhh.. she's smart. Your dear husband sent us to escort you back home. Your boyfriend here had us running around but here we are." I hated the man's voice, hated his face, hated the smirk on his face.

"You are not getting her. Not while I'm here." Nick sounded angry and irritated. "Look Nick," the man took a step closer. "You don't want to do this."

"I said you are not taking her anywhere!" "Nick Nick... oh Nick!" He laughed. "Boys!"

The other men walked towards us taking out guns. "Nick, it's fine." I hurriedly told him. "I will go." "You are not going anywhere!"

Gunshots went off. Another car had pulled up and more men came out with guns. "Get back in the church!" Nick ordered. "Now!"

I froze, it felt as if I was in a movie but only the movie was reality. I struggled to comprehend or to even see what was going on.

"Nelima now!" Nick yelled angrily and my feet obliged moving back to the church entrance. *Walk! Walk!* Inside the church I shut the door and crawled under the bench, coiling my body into a ball. *Don't move. Just stay still.* A voice whispered. Memories played in my head. Mama's screams. Mosi's screams. Me under the table. My father roaring like a

lion. *Don't move. Don't come out. Just stay still!* My eyes shut I kept mumbling incoherently. Mama's screams got louder and louder. Mosi kept crying and pleading. *Don't make a sound, don't cry, just stay still.* I bit my lower lip trying to keep it in.

"Nick!"

I put my hands over my ears shutting it out. Tears were now dripping to my neck. "Neli! Come out. Babe, it's me."

A sob escaped my lips. Seconds later I felt his hands on me pulling me in his arms. "Shhhh... I got you."

My tears dampened his T-shirt. Calming down I finally asked, "Edward?" "Don't worry. It's late. Are you hungry?"

I stilled, hunger? I raised my head from his T-shirt and looked at him. My eyes quickly scanned his body looking for a gun wound, a bruise or a cut. Nothing. I sighed with relief then started getting angry.

"People were shooting at us and you are talking about being hungry?"

He smiled. "Well we can't stop living just because people were shooting at us." "He won't stop."

"I know. But till..." He looked in my eyes cradling my face with his hands. "Till our last day together, he will be in prison and then, I will deal with him."

"Edward has connections. He probably has everyone on his payroll." "No. Just relax." He kissed me. "Trust me."

I nodded. I could hear raindrops from inside the church. "It's raining."

"Yeah... and we should get going."

He pulled me up and led me out. My eyes searched for his car but there was nothing. "Where's the car?"

"Yah... uh, we don't have a car anymore." "Can't you get another one?"

"No. I lost my phone."

"Where's Ted?"

"He's returning the car."

"Why didn't you borrow his phone or tell him that we need another car?" I sounded cold and angry.

"I was worried about you. I had to find you first."

I put my hands on my face. "What are we going to do now?" "Well, we can get a car—"

"No! You are not stealing a car!" "We don't have a choice. Let's go."

He pulled out of the church and I shivered as raindrops fell on my face. People ran holding umbrellas and my eyes scanned for a cab.

"Cab cab!" I screamed when my eyes spotted it.

"You have a great set of eyes." Nick complimented stopping it.

We both slid at the backseat while Nick told the driver our location. I looked out the window for a while before finally opening it and putting my hand out.

"Stop the cab." I mumbled.

"Hmm?"

I looked at the rain then turned to look at

Nick. "Stop the cab." He frowned. "It's raining."

"I know. Let's do a road trip. From here back to London. Stop the cab!" I said laughing. "You will catch a cold."

"Stop the cab! Sir, please stop."

The driver nodded stopping. I quickly climbed down pulling his hand with. It was pouring but I couldn't care less. He paid the driver before staring at me with a scowl.

"Worry about the cold tomorrow. For now, don't worry. Let's go."

He shook his head but still clasped our hands together. He walked with me as the rain dropped on us. I giggled when we approached a park and people were playing soccer in the rain while others cheered holding umbrellas.

"Can we join them?"

"Yeah..."

"Ok, perhaps soccer is not for you. You were horrible and we lost because of you." Nick said between his laughter and I laughed too, recalling all the times I was falling.

"Next time I will play a different position."

"Babe, you were only a goalkeeper, you can't play any other position. You are horrible." "Shut up!"

He pulled me in his arms and kissed me. A soft long kiss that left me breathless. "But that was fun."

"They are really nice people too." I looked as they all dispersed. A group of college friends. It had stopped raining but we were still wet. I shivered, consequences of playing in the rain were catching up with me.

"Yeah, we should go. You are going to catch a cold."

I moved closely beside him while he put his arm around my shoulder. "My favorite color is blue." I randomly said. "I have always loved blue but I don't recall ever owning anything blue growing up."

Nick gazed at me before stopping a cab. He opened the door for me and I got in followed by him.

"I like my hair like this. I think I love looking different." I chuckled. "When mama sees me, she will be shocked."

"She loves you."

"I know, I love her too, so much. When she sees me, I want her to put me anywhere she may want."

He took my hands and brought them to his lips. "Stop it."

I sighed. "I want her to be happy not sad. I want her and Mosi to be happy, not sad." "You are not going anywhere."

"My father will probably have a lot of negative things to say but it's ok. I forgive him. My mother should know I forgive him. Mosi should also forgive him."

I looked into his eyes and smiled. "I love you. You... you are the highlight of my life. I wish I met you first. If I could turn back the hands of time, I still would walk out of that dinner and run with you. I would still marry you."

"We still have time." He cupped my face bringing our foreheads together. "We still have now."

"I would marry you a thousand times if I could. I'm the happiest woman alive right now. If there's anything as the next life, I would still want to be your girl. I would still want to be the one."

"Neli..."

I kissed him. "In the next life, maybe will have forever." "I love you too. I love you so much."

He hugged me wrapping his arms tightly around me. I didn't complain, it felt perfect. Closing my eyes, warm tears warmed my cheeks slowly dripping on his T-shirt.

"So... can we do the road trip?" I whispered. "Anything you want."

A blue shiny convertible was packed right in front of the hotel. Nick smiled putting our bags in the boot.

"You see right here we have a 1962 Chevy SS Impala convertible." "It's beautiful."

"You have no idea!"

He opened the passenger door for me fixing his panama hat. "Thank you."

I slid inside inhaling the leather scent. He walked round to his side while I admired him, the shorts looked too good on him or maybe it was tank top. He looked edible.

"Ready?" He asked starting the car. "As ever!"

He sped away and I laughed raising my hand. "People do this in movies."

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He chuckled. "Well now you can do it too." "Yes!"

"This car doesn't have navigation so we are going to use a map." He handed a map to me. I opened it and sighed.

"I have a feeling we are going to get lost."

He glanced at me. "Isn't that the fun part of a trip? Put on this."

I took the sunglasses and put them on while he watched.

"Mr. Bradley, I still want to live a bit longer, eyes on the road please!" I said with a fake British accent.

"Of course Mrs. Bradley."

Mrs. Bradley sounded perfect in my ears. I looked at my finger, it wasn't a ring but I loved it. He took off his hat and put it on my head. He tuned his stereo and frowned when a song started playing.

"Etta James?"

"Yeah.." He sighed. "She used to listen to this song. It's one of the things I can remember." I looked at him then scooted closer. "I love this song too."

He briefly looked over at me with a smile before looking back at the road. I started singing along to I'd rather be blind.

He chuckled. "You are not bad."

I rolled my eyes. "Boy if I lived during the time of this song, I would have qualified to be her backup singer."

I put my feet on the dashboard grinning. The interior was all white and beautiful and leathery.

Taking his hand into mine, I kissed it. He looked at me and smiled. He didn't have to say anything.

Nick parked the car outside a store. I stepped out of the car and walked with him inside. We walked to the back and grabbed drinks before heading back to the till.

The cashier batted her eyelashes at Nick while he paid. I

couldn't blame her, not when all his muscles were out in the open. Her eyes fell over at me and I could see her trying to understand our relation. Offering her my best smile, she looked away.

Walking out, Nick had his hand on my waist. "Did I tell you how beautiful you look?" I took off the sunglasses.

"No, you did not, but thank you."

"You always look beautiful," he opened the drivers door and gestured I get in. "You want me to drive?"

"Yeah. Get in."

I hesitantly got in. Once he got in, I started it and it drummed to life. I drove carefully, manual wasn't really my best friend. We bobbed to old classic songs, songs I had grown to like in the last years and songs his mother loved.

We made a stop just outside France, a detour to a wine store. Inside the store we settled on a table.

"Wow! So classic and beautiful."

"I know. This store was opened in 1979, 10 years later, they started making their own wines."

A lady approached us with a smile.

"Nick, what did I do?" "Can't I just drop by?"



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She laughed. "When last did I see you? It's been years. Hi sweetie," she greeted me with an affectionate smile. I smiled back returning the gesture.

"Hello."

"Nick how are you?"

"I'm fine. This is Nelima, my wife, babe this is Miriam, my mother."

Miriam looked at me with a wider smile. "Oh my goodness, she's so beautiful. It's a pleasure meeting you but, I didn't get an invitation to the wedding."

"No one did."

"Oh well, nevertheless, I'm happy for you son.

Congratulations Nelima." "Thank you mam,"

"Oh no darling, call me Miriam, I will give you a little something as a gift." She looked at Nick with a proud smile.

"I'm so proud of you son. And all thanks to my beautiful Nelima." She hugged me. "Thank you. I have not seen him this happy before."

She walked away and Nick took my hands into his.

"She was my mother's friend." "She looks so young."

He chuckled.

"She's 67,"

"Wow!"

"Yeah.. and she likes you."

I smirked. "What's there not to like."

Miriam walked back with a bottle of wine. "This is our best wine. It's for you two." "Thank you."

She smiled at me then looked at Nick. "Adelaide would have been proud."

Nick stood up. "We are driving to London. I will call." He promised kissing her cheeks. "You should."

I got up and hugged her. "It was nice

meeting you, Miriam." "Likewise darling, do come visit. The store is always open for you."

"Thank you."

"Bye
Miriam."

"Bye.."

We walked back to the car and this time I settled beside him while he drove. "She's nice, is that her store?"

"Not entirely."

"Your father owns it?"

"My grandfather owned it." "Oh.."

"Santino gave it to my mother after I was born and when she died, she left her rights with Miriam."

"Do you have Tina Turner?"

He nodded. I looked through the tapes till I came across what I wanted. Seconds later the car was blasting with Tina Turner.

"There are other places we can see."

I shook my head. "No. Let's just go to London. I think for now, I have seen enough." "Ok, London it is."

Nick drove to Dieppe where we caught the ferry across the chanel to the port of Newhaven. "Are you good?"

I nodded. "Yeah. I'm good."



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Arriving in London I smiled. I had missed it. Nick drove to his house. Walking inside, the painting of his mother still hypnotized me. He walked in behind me.

"We can order lunch."

"Ok." I said moving my face from his mother's painting. "Or not. I can cook." "Ok. I will put this away." He said looking at our bags.

I strode to the kitchen and opened his fridge. I sighed closing it then settled on the kitchen stool.

"Should I order in?" Nick asked from behind me.

"No. Let's go to the store and get you grocery. The fridge is empty." "I figured. It's Sean."

"Your friend?"

"Yeah, it's his style. He never buys grocery so he steals from my house most of the time." "Wow!"

"Let's go."

It felt weird actually doing the shopping, foreign to be more precise. I never did the shopping, the chef always did. Nick strolled with me around the supermarket as I picked things placing them in the trolley.

"Who does your shopping?" I asked curiously. "My helper."

"You have a helper?"

"Yeah. She comes once month because I'm barely at my house." "Then she does your shopping?"

"Yeah. You should meet her, she's nice." "She is?"

"No. I don't know. But I think she is." I laughed.

"Typical you."

"I pay her to do my shopping."

"You should do your own shopping."

Walking out of the store after paying, Nick's phone rang. He took it out and answered. "Yeah? Can I get a break? I still need some time."

I helped him put the grocery in the boot while he spoke on the phone. "This is important to me. I said I will come. Yes she is."

He hung up. "Your father?"

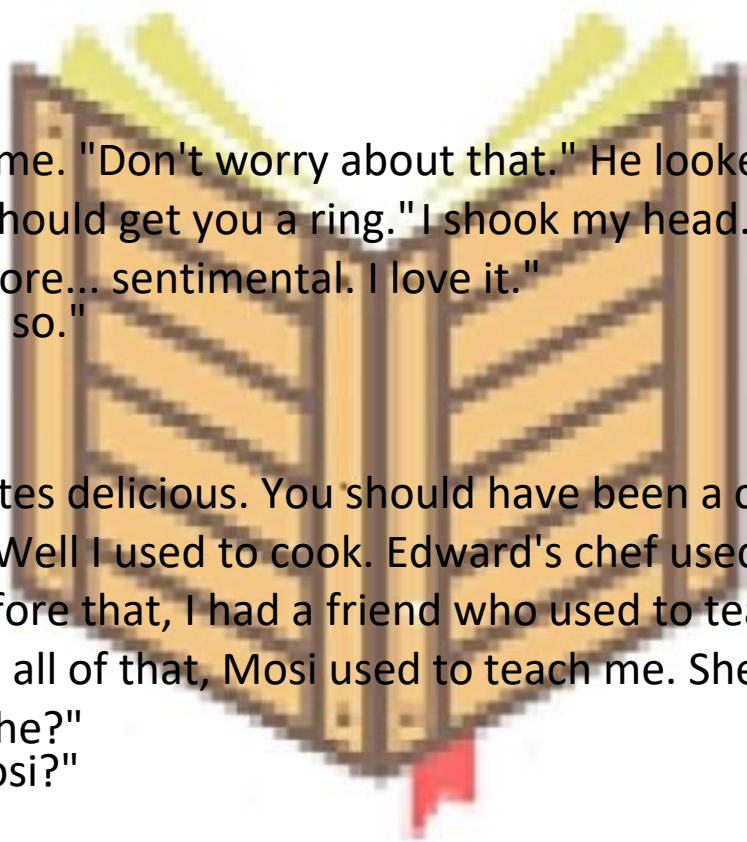
He kissed me. "Don't worry about that." He looked at my finger. "I should get you a ring." I shook my head. "No. I like this. It's more... sentimental. I love it."
"If you say so."

"This tastes delicious. You should have been a chef."

I smiled. "Well I used to cook. Edward's chef used to teach me and before that, I had a friend who used to teach me. And before all of that, Mosi used to teach me. She's good."

"Where's she?"

"Who? Mosi?"



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He shook his head. "Your friend."

"She got married and moved. She was the first friend I made in London. She's the one who pushed me to make my designs." I smiled recalling her encouragement. "We'd cook after the restaurant had closed."

A knock on the door made his smile disappear from his lips. He stood up hearing the door being opened. I put my fork down and followed slowly behind him.

In his living room, his father was sited on the couch staring at the painting like I had been. He had a cigar in his hands and a tall man stood on his side, his guard maybe. Looking at him carefully, I understood where Nick got his good looks from, the man was handsome, and looked very fit.

Nick clenched his jaws staring at his father. "A little respect will do. This is my house!" Santino set his eyes on Nick bringing the cigar to his lips. There was an aura around him that made chills run down my spine. His eyes averted to me. I kept his gaze till he smiled. A sick smile that twisted my intestines.

"Feisty and very beautiful huh? Now I see why the foolish boy kept you by his side."

I felt the heat rise to my face. "No no no, don't be alarmed. You leave your husband behind to run around with my son, did he send you to spy or you just look for more greener pastures? I know gold diggers like you, beautiful but still whores."

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"Get the fuck out of my house! You will not speak to her like that! She's mine and I will do anything to protect what's mine." Nick roared.

"I see you have managed to brainwash this fool I have for a son. What a disgrace. Women like her are poisonous. She lives off rich men. She opens legs to get her way."

"You sick bastard!"

Nick had lost it completely but as I looked at Santino I realized he was just trying to protect his son. At the end of the day, he was not lying.

Santino stood up, temper rising. "You are about to take over the company! You should not be seen with... whores like her! You need to get rid of her! Soon or else I will do it for you." The threat was so clear that I took a step back trying to get the words to register. "Like how you took care of mom?"

"Your mother died in a car crash! I didn't do anything to her." "I know you killed her and I'm going to kill you for it!"

"You stupid foolish boy! You are very pathetic, still crying for mommy. You will get rid of this whore before I do it my way. You won't like it!" He said walking out.

"Consider yourself dead. I'm not bluffing. I'm going to kill you. Keep that in mind." Santino didn't turn but just walked out with his bodyguard behind him. I smiled hugging Nick.

"Hey, calm down..."

I could hear him breathe a little too fast and his heart throbbed. I tightened my hold on him.

"He killed her!" He said through gritted teeth.

"Nick, you have to calm down. You shouldn't let him have so much control over you like this."

He held me at arm's length. "Are you ok?"

I laughed shaking my head. "I have seen worse. I'm fine. He's just... well, I don't have a good reputation either."

"I don't give a fuck!" "Let's watch a movie."

In his eyes, I could see worry. I cradled his face with my hands. "Nick, babe you need to calm down. I love you, that's all that matters. Right?"

He refused to meet my eyes. "Nick, look at me, we are going to focus on our happiness, the rest will come later. Let's watch a movie. We can watch your favourite movie."

"Neli—"

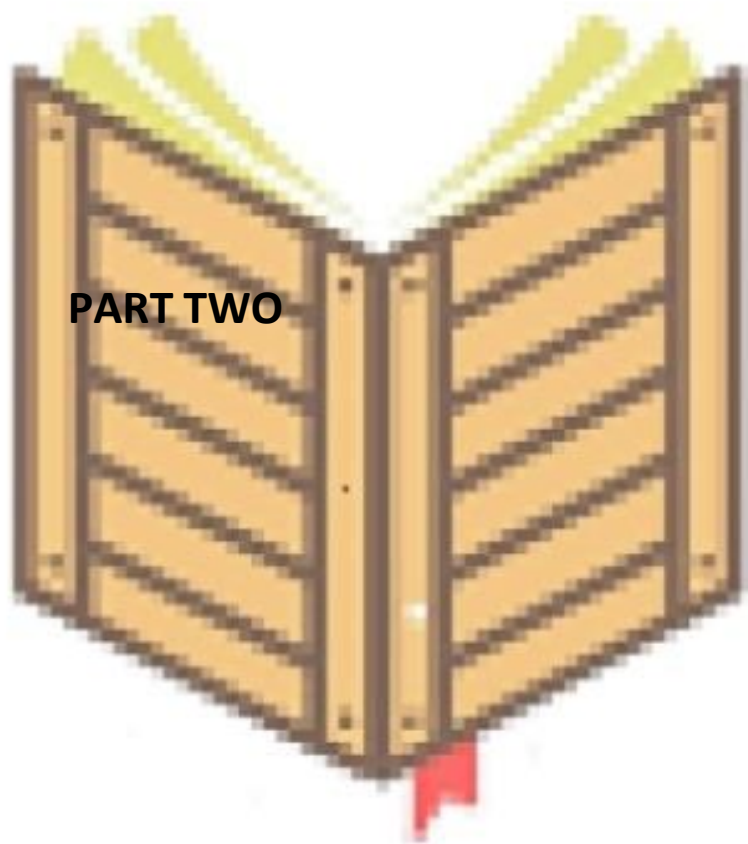
"Come, let's watch your favorite movie. What's your favorite movie?"

I dragged him to the couch. "Nick, I love you, your father won't change that, nothing can change that. Now, what's your favourite movie?"

He chuckled. "I have quite a few favourites," "I'm sure. Come here,"

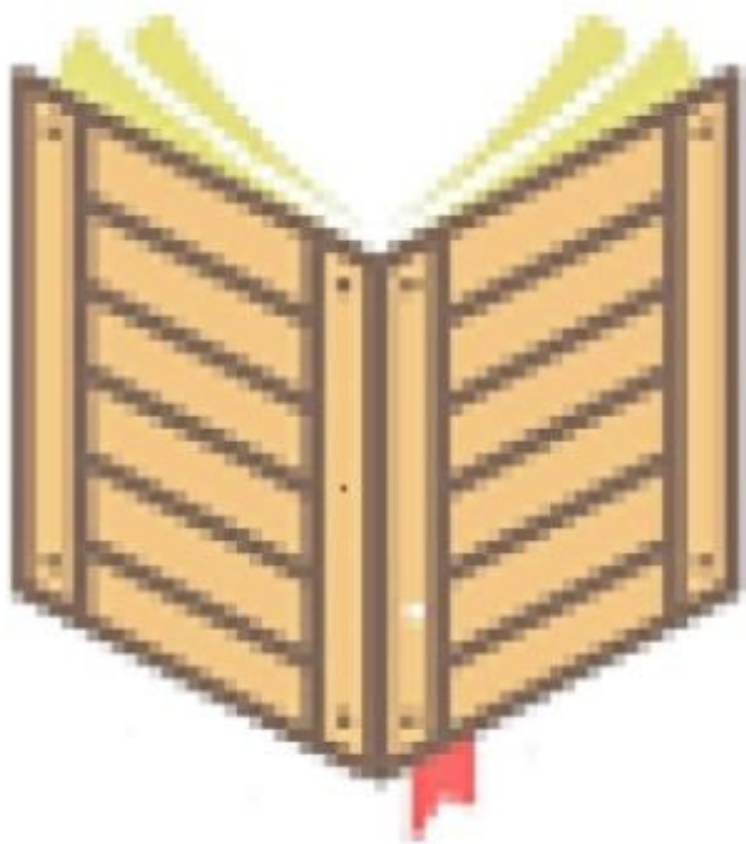
I stayed up night, a lot of thoughts keeping sleep at bay. I looked at Nick one last time before finally climbing off bed early in the morning. In his closet, my suitcase was there. I took off his T-shirt then crouched before the suitcase. Taking out some jeans and a T-shirt I laughed. Surely he would laugh when he saw me. I quickly dressed and put on a pair of sneakers before grabbing one of his hoodie.

I walked out of his closet then silently opened his door and crept out. I wanted to see Edward one last time.



PART TWO

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Chapter Fifteen

Nick stirred in his sleep and involuntarily moved to his side hoping to feel her warm body close by. Abruptly, he opened his eyes feeling her absence. She wasn't beside him as always and his heart skipped. Something was wrong, he

could feel it. Jumping out of bed he rushed to the bathroom, his eyes immediately landing on her suitcase. His T-shirt was beside the suitcase, the T-shirt he had made her wear last night.

Walking out of the bathroom he went to the kitchen then his sitting room and lastly, outside. She wasn't there and as much as Nick tried convincing himself that she was close by and safe, he couldn't seem to relax. God knew what that motherfucker of a husband would do to her.

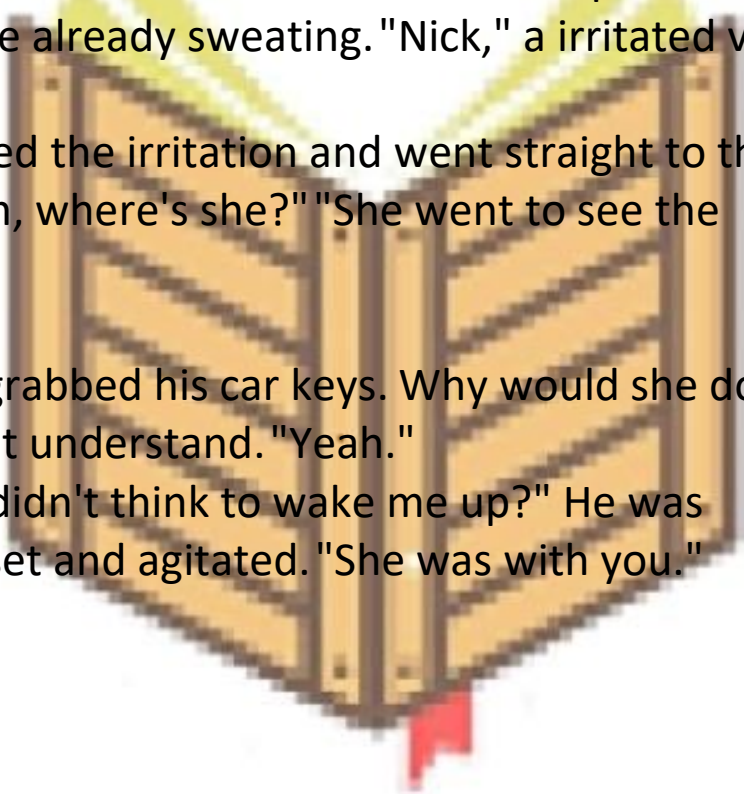
Back inside the house he reached for his phone. His palms were already sweating. "Nick," a irritated voice said.

Nick ignored the irritation and went straight to the point. "Tim, where's she?" "She went to see the fucker."

"What?"

Why? He grabbed his car keys. Why would she do that? He couldn't understand. "Yeah."

"And you didn't think to wake me up?" He was clearly upset and agitated. "She was with you."



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Of course it was a fault. How could she slip without him noticing? He had planned that today she sees the specialist and his team that had flown from India.

He put his phone away walking inside the garage and pressed the car keys and the button on the wall that opened the garage, the Range Rover beeped while the garage doors rose. He groaned inwardly getting inside the car, *wrong car!* Pressing the ignition, the car roared to life and he immediately drove out.

Nick connected his phone to the car and called Tim. "Get the team ready, just in case." He ordered. Tim might have been his friend but at the end of the day, he worked for him. "Ok."

Nick sped using different routes to avoid traffic. He had to get to her and fast. His thoughts went to Santino. He hated the manipulative son of a bitch and his days were numbered. He was going to avenge his mother's death. Lord knew it was not an accident and that she had been murdered.

His phone rang then a voice spoke. "Hey Nick, it's me, Sean told me you were back, wanna hang out?"

Nick had success experience with women, he couldn't deny it. The good looks and money and wild spirit always worked in his favor. They knew the drill, no strings attached.

"Kali,"

"I know you never keep them for long. Me and my girls are having a party, you can join if you want." She purred. Kali was his on and off fuck. They fucked from time to time, she was a model and was always traveling and always wanting to keep in the social circle. The media had once identified them as a couple and Nick knew that had worked for Kali, she was after all, a social climber.

"I'm busy. My wife and I have plans." He said sharply.

That had sent the message. Kala laughed. "Wife? Come on Nick.."

"I'm married." He was serious. He was married and he loved his wife. He wanted to save her. From death, from the world.

"Married? To who? And when?" "That should not be your concern."

"Nick we have something special going."

They had nothing special going, the last he recalled, they were only having sex. Nothing but pure dirty sex.

"No. We have nothing going on. I've got to go."

He hung up and sighed. Instead of turning him on, she irritated him and he hoped she got the message loud and clear.

He parked the car behind Tom's and stepped out.

"Couldn't you wear something more appropriate?" Tim said while Nick approached him. Changing from his sweatpants to a pair of a jeans was the last thing on his mind.

"Give me the gun. I'm going in." "You know she's still his wife right?"

"No. she's mine and I'm going to get her back."

He walked back to the car with the gun in his hands. He was burning with rage, if he found her with a single mark on her body, he was going to make sure he pays. The gate automatically opened when he drove to the gate of Edward's mansion.

Speeding through the driveway, he had the gun in his hand. He parked the Range rover behind Edward's Ferrari and smirked. He was going to get it, just for fun.

Barging inside the house, his eyes met with the helper's. He recalled her from the time had walked out with Nelima weeks ago.

"Where's she?"

"Hmm, madame is with Mr. Catlet, study." Her voice was timid.

"Thanks," he muttered, his legs already moving. He took the stairs two at a time, his heart beating more faster and louder. He opened the first door, a bedroom. He quickly walked out then went for the next door. Nick froze hearing muffled voices from inside.

His hand grabbed the doorknob and slowly he opened the door already stepping inside. She was sitting on a couch and the motherfucker kneeling before her, holding her hands.

Their eyes met and for a moment he was hypnotized by her eyes. They were a color of black tea. Not too strong. She had the most beautiful eyes ever, eyes that left him bare, eyes that exposed everything, eyes he was dearly in love with.

"Get away from her!"

"And he's here. Honey, tell this boy it's over." Edward stood up and fixed his suit. "What happened was a tiny mistake, a mistake that was caused by me. But that mistake is coming to an end."

Nick looked at Neli softening. "Babe, let's go."

"Haa!" Edward exclaimed. "You have been messing with my wife boy, and you should be glad I'm letting it slide or else, your entire bloodline will live to regret it."

"You bitch!" Nick dropped the gun and threw a punch at Edward who staggered back then looked at Nick wiping blood from his nose. Nick seethed with anger that he did not even feel the pain on his knuckles.

"You shouldn't have done that boy. Neli is my wife and she shall honor me! Leave my premises this very second!"

"Neli," Nick looked at her. "Let's go babe. You don't owe him shit!"

Edward reached for his phone. Nick couldn't careless, he was not leaving without her. Nick crouched before her.

"Babe, let's go home."

She smiled. Her eyes glowed. She had a beautiful smile, he still couldn't get over her beauty. Her round to oval shaped face was just imprinted in his head, most of the time he closed his eyes, he saw her, heard her voice, felt her touch.

"Please let's go."

"The security is on the way."

Nick ignored Edward and kissed her soft full plum lips. His heart beat hard against his chest. "Let's go home baby,"

"I'm sorry." She

whispered. "It's

ok. Let's go."

"I just wanted to tell him that

I forgive him." "It's ok. It's ok.

Let's go."

He stood up pulling her with. The doors opened and security walked in. Nick picked his gun up.

"I will come for you. Just not today, but please, do expect me."

He grabbed Neli's hand and attempted walking out but the security wouldn't move. "I'm afraid Bradley, you won't be taking my wife anywhere. I have every right on her."

"Your wife? Well, sorry to disappoint you, she's no longer yours. You signed divorce papers. Mrs. Bradley's lawyer will see you soon." Confidence rolled from him easily. The only reason he was holding back from hitting him was because of Neli.

"I never signed anything!"

"You didn't need to. But what's done is done. Now, before I resort to calling the police, tell your goons to get the fuck out of our way."

"Neli, honey, tell this boy to leave our house."

"Edward, let us go. Please stop it." Neli spoke looking at Edward. Her gaze seemed to have weakened him.

"Honey, we can fix what happened. I will get the best doctors for you. You will be fine, from then, we can visit your parents. Wouldn't you love that?"

"You sick son of a bitch!" Nick hissed. He knew his type, the type that showered a lady with whatever amounts of money they could offer so just she stayed even if unhappy. Men like his father. Heartless evil men.

"No. I'm going to meet my mother. Soon.

Now, let us go Edward." "Let them go, but know, I will get you back Neli." He promised.

Nick fought the edge to punch him yet again. The security moved and Nick pushed Neli out with him right behind her. He had to admit, his hoodie did look good on her.

The helper still stood where Nick had met her when he entered the house. "Madam," she said to Neli who smiled hugging her.

"Good luck.." "You too

madam."

"They let you in?" Neli asked as Nick opened the door for her.

"Yeah. He must have had faith that you will tell me where to get off. What the fuck would you come here for?" He hugged her tightly kissing her forehead. "Don't ever do that. That was stupid"

She giggled moving slightly from his embrace then wrapped

her arms around his neck, tears streaming down her cheeks.

"I'm sorry. I just... I'm sorry."

"It's ok, don't cry, I got you. I love you so freaking much!" He wiped her tears away. "Let's go."

She kissed him and he kissed her back fiercely. He couldn't understand why he loved her so much.

"Let's go now." She said getting in the car.

Nick closed her door then walked to the driver's door.

"She's fine. Relax." He chanted to himself.

Getting inside the car, he stared at her momentarily. Her hair was now a mixture of black at the roots and blonde at the ends. It made a perfect color for her.

Starting the car, he reversed then drove out. Tim followed two cars behind him. Nick didn't want to alarm Neli, that's why he had made it clear there's distance between them.

"What did you mean? Did he sign the divorce papers?"

Without looking at her, Nick answered. "No but someone did on his behalf."

"You forged his signature? Do you know that it's illegal?"

Her voice had risen and she was angry.

Glancing over at her, he grinned. "Don't fret. It could have been worse." "Are you insane?"

"I think we have published that. You should eat breakfast."

"I'm not hungry! Edward is no fool! How could you forge his signature?"

It was all a matter of power and Nick knew Edward didn't have enough of it to take him on. "Good thing he will never be able to prove it was forgery."

Nick felt her glare on him and knew just how cute she looked but couldn't afford smiling and having her scream the car down.

"I can't believe you!" She grumbled.

Nick watched Neli force food down her throat and sipping her juice thrice or more with each bite. Most of the time he couldn't tell if she was in pain or not, she always kept her smile intact.

"Why are you string at me?" She asked shyly. She wasn't the woman who was upset in the car.

"There's someone I want you to meet." She put her empty glass down.

"Who?" "If you are done, let's go."

Dr. Khan shook hands with Nick as soon as he walked inside his borrowed office. "Mr. Bradley, pleasure meeting you."

"Likewise, this is my wife, Nelima, babe, this is Dr. Khan," Neli looked at him frowning. "Nick, I thought we agreed—"

"Please, sit. Let's hear him out."

They sat opposite Dr. Khan. "I have looked at her file with my team. Her cancer is violent and it's a bit tricky now treating her. The cancer is now at a persistent stage and is spreading rapidly. We can try a combination of treatments and put her on trial, try out new treatments and—"

"Treatments which never work half of time?" Neli asked.

"Well it all depends. Mrs. Bradley, your cancer is at a

dangerous stage. Treating it is going to be—"

"Close to impossible? You don't have to lie you know."

She wasn't backing down. "Almost but we can try to buy you a few years."

She stood up. "That won't be necessary Mr. Khan, but thank you."

"Can you give it a chance!" Nick begged. He had to get her to agree. He had hope and it angered him that she didn't have any more hope left.

"Nick, I'm not going to spend my last days as a lab rat. It won't work. You know it. Why are you doing this?"

"Because I love you damnit!" He yelled. "I fucken love you!"

She remained silent for a while, her eyes boring in his. "So do I. Please don't make my last days more painful than they already are. Please." Tears glistened in her eyes. "Please, I want the last days to be perfect."

"Your sister, she's excited, she wants to see you."

She held his hand. "And she will. But I won't allow her to see me at my worst. I love her too much to watch her suffer with me."

"What about us? What about me?"

She giggled then smiled. "Well, you will tell your grandkids about me one day. You will make our story so beautiful and you will store our memories very safe in your heart. You will love again and you will be happy. It won't be with me but I will always be right there." She placed her hand on her chest.

"Here. I will be here. I love you so much Nick. I love you so so much. It even hurts." She took a deep breath in. "Or maybe don't talk about our love story."

Let it remain folded deep in your heart. If I could go back in time, I would still do everything we did. I would still fall in love with you. I wouldn't trade our moments for anything. Because it was perfect. It was beautiful. And I will forever be thankful." I wiped away my tears. "You were perfect. We were perfect."

He ran his hand in his hair then abruptly hugged her. "I love you more."

Minutes later he let her go flashing a crooked smile.

"Remember you promised to live till your birthday."

She chuckled. "Yeah. I remember. I will still be here, I promise." "Good. Wanna talk to your sister?"

She shook her head no. "Not yet."

He understood and respected her decision.

The drive back home was longer, more dreadful. Nick wanted to be on the couch watching a movie. He now realized it was the little things that mattered. It was how she shyly smiled whenever she watched a romantic movie, or how she laughed whenever he cracked a joke and how her eyes twinkled. He stole a glance at her, she was staring ahead, her face blank. Nick wondered what she was thinking or how she was feeling. Was she scared? Was she in pain? She turned as if on cue and flashed a smile.

At his house, she sat on the couch. "Did we finish all your favorite movies yesterday?" Her voice was so light.

"You fell asleep."

"Sorry." She mouthed then patted the space beside her.

"Well I'm not feeling sleepy now. I think the reason I slept was because a lot of people were dying."

Nick chuckled. She always had something to say. Sitting beside her, he kissed her. "We can watch Titanic."

"Why not? I would love to watch it for the 100th time. Or over."

A while later, Nick found himself staring at Neli as she

watched her favourite movie as if it was the first time she was watching it. It amazed him, she probably knew word for word, but still she watched as if it was her first time, smiling and giggling.

She sighed resting her head on his chest. "Nick..""Yeah?"

"Would you still say if you were Jack, you would have gotten in the ship knowing how our story was going to end?" She asked softly.

"Yes. I would have." And it was the truth. He would have. She didn't need to ask. "I would have too."

The next day, Nick walked inside the bar noticing Sean with Conrad and Randy. His two friends he had met in college. The two friends his father hated, good thing they hated him back.

"Dude! Where the fuck have you been?" Randy slurred while he sat beside them.

"My usual!" Nick told Jennet, the bar tender. They had fucked, once, in the storeroom. He didn't dwell on it and acted as if it never happened.

"Randy, it's just after 12, you already drunk."

Conrad laughed. "This motherfucker is a freaking fish! Sean tells me you have new meat, when can we have her?"

Jennet placed his drink in front of him. "She's not yours to have. She's my wife and I love her."

Sean shook his head. "Married?"

"Nah, wait, did you just say... you love her. Ladies and gentlemen!" Randy screamed. "My friend right here, Nick, he's in love!"

Nick took a sip of his drink ignoring the sarcasm from Randy's voice. "You fucked up! Since when do you love?"

"I need to see this girl. Sean, how's she?" Conrad asked.

"She's beautiful. And not his type. Not that she's below him, he's not in her level. Edward's wife. I still don't understand why you are so adamant in stirring up trouble."

"Whoa! You are fucking Edward's wife? Man, the fuck would you do that for?"

Nick looked at Conrad. He knew he had stirred up trouble but he never asked to fall in love with her. It had just happened.

"That doesn't matter now. She's mine."

"Well it does. Where's Wendy? I thought you were going to marry her."

"Hey shorty, wanna join us?" Randy said to a lady that was walking by. She turned with a smile.

"What's your name?" Conrad now had his eyes on her. Nick looked away, he wasn't in the mood and was leaving in a few minutes.

"Still has cancer?"

Sean asked. "Yeah.."

"What's going to

happen now?" "I **NOVELSGURU.COM**

don't know, the obvious?"

"And what are you going to do? You know Edward won't take it lying down." Sean was the decent friend, the one that was sane most of the time.

"Just watch." He said with a shrug. It pained him to even say it.

"Ok, guys! This is beautiful and wonderful Kay, and that's her

friend, Sarah." Randy screamed pointing at the two girls smiling shyly. Had it been a different day, Nick would be into it but it was different. He only wanted one woman.

"Well, I think they want to play, wanna take it somewhere?" Randy's life mainly consisted between sex and partying. His parents passed on a year ago leaving him with more money than he could manage.

"You game Nick or you have to go to... your lover?" Conrad teased. "Or perhaps you are ready to settle down and you are leaving the game to some of us."

"Fuck off!"

"Ok, ladies, I guess its only Randy, Sean and I. This pu—" "I'll burst your head open." Nick warned.

"Alright, let's go! We'll talk."

Sean was already up. "Yeah."

Once they left, Nick finished his drink then asked for another one. He was trying to ignore the pain wondering how his life had turned to such. On a normal Friday he would be out there having fun and being stress free. It was bullshitting to fall in love, especially with a dying girl.

He ordered more, he wanted to erase her from his mind, just for a while, but he kept seeing her face.

"Hey, lover boy! I'm Judi, wanna have fun?"

Nick looked at his watch and cursed beneath his breath. He had spent the entire day getting spent. He stood up and held on to the counter.

"Fuck!"

"Need any help."

Fuck off whore! Nick staggered out of the baby to his car. *Never drink and drive.* He ignored the voice in his head warning him. What was worse than losing the woman you loved?

"Nick! Wake up, come to bed." Her voice sounded so far away yet so close. "Nick, come to bed." He loved how she said his name.

"Nick!"

"Huh?" He mumbled in his sleep, rolling over. "Shit! Stop! You will fall!"

He opened his eyes and there she was, staring at him. Was he dreaming...? "Wake up! It's cold."

No. He wasn't. He felt dizzy but still stood up. She quickly put her arm around his waist to support his weight a bit.

"Let's go to bed."

He staggered with her to his bedroom and as soon as he was on the bed, he closed his eyes. After a few moments, he snapped his eyes open, searching for her.

"Neli?"

She touched his cheek lying beside him. "I'm here." "Don't leave me. I love you."

"I will right here. Sleep."

She whispered. "Promise?"

"I promise. Sleep. I love you."

He closed his eyes relaxing. She wasn't leaving. She was right here. "I love you." He mumbled one last time.

Chapter Sixteen

Time did not stop ticking. It never did and with each second, Nick wanted it to reverse. To go back. To stop. But that never happened. It made him feel sick.

Nelima's health was deteriorating and there was nothing he could do. Each day she put on a smile, she laughed and giggled. The pain was too much but still, she would brush it off.

Nick wanted to take her place, to take the pain from her. Most days she slept at the hospital and the days she actually slept with him were countable.

He repeatedly watched Titanic with her, she would still have the same emotions. She would still cry on most parts and Nick wondered if she saw her life as the Titanic. With each second that passed, did she realize her ship was sinking and that it was sinking with him?

Weeks passed like days, at the end of each week, Nick wondered where it had all gone. It now took more medicine to manage the pain. It all made her hallucinate most of the time.

On her lucid days, she smiled. Nick still loved her smile as much as it hurt him now. It was a mixture of pain and happiness. She could still smile even in pain.

"Nick," she said softly while they watched Titanic. "Yeah?"

"There's a note. For Mosi. It's in the suitcase. Will you give it to her?" "Yeah, I will." He promised.

"Thanks."

A month later, she was in hospital. The doctors had suggested they admit her so they manage the pain because it was worse.

One day when she opened her eyes, she had one request. "Call my mother. I want to talk to her." She said.

Nick called her sister instead. "I'm not home right now," she said. "Is everything ok?"

He contemplated between lying and being honest with her. "I'm going to be honest with you— your sister has cancer, she's dying. She's in hospital because the doctors don't think she has much left." He took a deep breath. "Now, can you help me out. She wants to speak to her mother. Her birthday is in 2 days, I want her to live till then but the odds don't look good."

Her sister was silent and Nick could understand.

"How long has she been sick?" "For years now. They treated it but it still came back."

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She started crying and Nick held his breath. Lord knew how he had been holding off doing that. He badly wanted to cry but every time, he would recall his father's words each time he had attempted crying.

"I will give you her number." She finally said. "After she speaks to her, I want to talk to her too, please. I don't have money right now. I could sell my property but I still need a passport and... please."

"Ok."

Immediately after Mosi sent the number, Nick called Neli's mother's number and handed the phone to her. The doctor had just given her, her dosage.

"It's her."

She gingerly took the phone and held it with both hands to her ear. Seconds later, her face changed. Nick remained rooted to the ground as she silently cried.

"Mama..." She put her hand over her mouth but tears still gushed like a broken water pipe. "*Nakubali mama pia.*" She whispered over and over again. When she finally handed the phone to him, she was breathing hard and fast.

"Are you ok?"

She nodded. "Yeah, thanks." "Your sister wants to talk to you."

"You told her?"

"I had to. Should I call her?" She shook her head.

"No." "Are you sure?"

Glancing over at him, she smiled. "Yes. I'm sure." "Ok."

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"This is stupid. You can't avoid me forever. We need to talk."

Talk? The last thing Nick wanted to do was talk to her, nor see her. She did nothing but disgust him.

"You and I have nothing to talk about. Stop embarrassing yourself."

She ignored his cold response and still continued. "For crying out loud, you know our future lies with us being together. Look, can we meet and talk. We need to iron out a few things out."

"I have nothing to discuss with you Wendy. Call Keith." He hung up. It shocked him that at some point they were close friends, inseparable. Then Keith happened and a lot of other bullshit. He lost interest then.

He walked inside the shop. "Mr. Bradley, welcome, we have been waiting for you." A man said.

Nick looked at him wondering if it was the same man he had spoken to over the phone. "Right this way."

Nick followed behind him to some door. Inside, samples of what he had asked for were placed on the huge table.

He looked at each and every bracelet till his eye caught sight of one. "Ummh, we managed to do it the way you requested."

Nick took it in his hands and looked at what it was made from. There was a tiny piece of the Eiffel tower, another written Mexico, another written Brazil, another Iguaza falls, another a cross and the rest of the places they had visited.

"I like this."

"It's an ankle bracelet. We also made a necklace which —"

"I will take this only."

"Ok."

Walking out, he had a smile pasted on his face. He was sure she was going to love it. He was going to give it to her the following day on her birthday. His phone rang while he got in his car.

"What do you want?"

"Nick, son, I need to talk to you."

"I'm busy." He pressed on the ignition and started driving to the hospital. "Tomorrow, at my house, nine sharp."

Before Nick could respond, he had hung up. Nick didn't want to go, the only thing that tied him to Santino was the company. At the moment, the last thing that was on his mind was the company but still, he was going to go. After all, this was the man who killed his mother, keeping an eye on him could do him good.

At the hospital, Nick walked to Neli's room. Last night she had told him she wanted to watch Titanic one last time so he had brought it with today. He was going to watch it with her, again.

Inside her room, the bed was empty. Nick's heart shattered. He rushed out and ran to the reception.

"Where's Nelima?"

The reception looked at him as he stood there, looking lost, feeling lost. "Sir, we—"

"Where did they take her?"

"Mr. Bradley, can we have a little chat in my office." Nick turned and looked at the doctor who had been managing her.

"Where's she?"

"Mr. Bradley —"

"Where's she?" He screamed. He was losing it and as much

as he tried to divert his mind from thinking of the worst, something deep in his head told him it was over, she was gone, and never coming back. Everything in him had collapsed.

"I'm sorry." That's all the doctor managed to say.

Neli had died in the early hours of that morning. She fought a great fight. The doctor had said to Nick. He wanted to see her, he wanted to hear her laugh, to see her beautiful eyes that always hypnotized him, wanted to hear her giggle. He just wanted to hold her, one last time.

He could still hear her voice in his head. Sitting in his car, he closed his eyes tightly but the pain was just unbearable. He couldn't stop thinking of what if she had been in pain when she died or if she was crying for him, for her mother, for her sister.

Real men don't cry. Stupid fuck heads cry. Weak men cry. You are not weak, can never be weak. Do you understand me?! You are not weak! Santino's voice roared in his head. "Fuck!" He cursed. It felt as if another part of him had died. A bigger part of him. The pain was too much. It felt too physical. He took out the ankle bracelet and held it delicately in his hands. He was going to give it to her tomorrow, on her birthday. She had promised him that she would live till then and she had broken that promise.

"Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!"

Reality seemed to be strangling him. He wanted to go back to Paris, back to those days where she was fine, at least in his eyes she was.

Was she married? If yes then we will need you to sign a few things. If not then her next of kin will have to. Her body can be transported back to Kenya. As soon as the documents are ready then she's free to go. Did she have any family? Perhaps her parents or siblings? We can speak to her nationality's embassy.

The doctor's words played in his head. Was she married? Yes, she was, to him.

Hours later, he finally stepped out of his car and walked inside his house. Walking to his bedroom, her picture stood out. He had hung it on the wall. She was laughing and she looked beautiful.

He walked to the closet and opened her suitcase. He knew it was there. It had to be there. Carefully he searched for it, feeling and touching her clothes. It felt as if she was right there with him. Ready to embrace him. To kiss him. Finally finding the recording device, he sat down beside her suitcase. Pressing play, her voice filled the closet. Warm and soft and fragile.

"Hi... hello." Nick closed his eyes hearing her chuckle. The sound never got old.

"This is Nelima Niji and I'm about to lead you in the last five or four, maybe three months of my life. Sad? Yeah. Really sad but I'm really trying to look at this positively. Not that something or a miracle will take place but that maybe the day I finally take my last breath, I will be happy." Her tone had changed. She now sounded serious. Nick wondered

when she had recorded this.

"The last... 24 hours have been amazing. I have done everything I never knew I would do. All thanks to Nick." Nick shook his head. It did sound like her. Only alive.

"Like most dying people, I have a bucket list. Nick, I hope you will listen to this, thing is I'm not sure I will live pass three months." She laughed sorrowfully. And yes, he was listening. It felt as if she had recorded it knowing he was going to be listening.

"I'm sorry, when I say five months left I'm really trying to be positive but I don't think I will live up to that. As much as it hurts, I won't live till then so here it is. Take me back home, to my mother if I happen to die before we can go to Kenya. If she's dead, which I'm truly praying she's not, let me be buried beside her." She wanted to go back to Kenya. Nick was going to do exactly that. Because he loved her.

"Secondly, we won't finish the bucket list. I know it. So I want you to finish it for me, enjoy it for me, take those pictures for me." She laughed.

"You say you live your life on the run for it is fun, I agree. Planning everything can be... boring so finish my bucket list. Try new things, please if you can, let them be legal. Jail is real. But be happy. Smile more, you have a beautiful smile." He heard her sigh.

"Thank you. Thank you for giving me this opportunities to live before I die, not a lot of people get that opportunity. Thank you for the car racing and shit!" She chuckled then laughed curtly.

"Sorry we lost it. But it was fun. And yeah, the sex was good and lastly, sky diving, I wish we can do it again. That... I loved it. I loved who I was when I was floating. Free felt great." All she had to do was say the word and they would have done it again. Nick knew he would have given her everything she wanted.

The audio stopped playing then the next audio after that one played.

"I'm scared. I'm scared of the unknown. I'm scared of dying." She whispered. *"Aren't we all? Obviously we are but it's worse when you know when. So yeah.. I'm scared."*

At first, Mosi had been excited to hear her sister's voice. It had been years, a lot of them and finally she heard her voice. Too soft as always, she remembered how she used to tease her because her voice sounded too tiny. But there had been something in the air between them, something too dense, too thick, it was in the way she spoke. Mosi knew her sister and knew something was off but knowing Nelima, she would just brush it off. It surprised her and yet made her smile that her young sister hadn't changed that much.

When she left home, she had left her sister young but speaking to her, it felt as if she had always been there. She

had gotten a call from a foreign number. At first she did not want to answer, everyone knew about how these satanist people called with foreign numbers to lure you into whatever cult they managed at night. She was skeptical but that did not stop her from answering.

The man had spoken in English, like a white man, too fast, words rolling one after another so easily. He said he was with her sister and she wanted to speak with her. The last time she had heard, Nelima was in Nigeria. That's what her Normita and some girl called Patricia had said. Mosi tried looking for her, on social media, but she wasn't there. Deep down she worried but still knew how Nelima was. If it wasn't working, she would come back and if she was dead, they would inform the nation. So she always bought the newspaper each and every Wednesday to check the column of those who died overseas and were being brought back but never found her name.

Everyday she wouldn't find her name, Mosi would sigh with relief. She had hope and as years passed by, she figured her sister was doing well for herself. The witch doctor she had visited with her mother said she was fine. Mosi did not believe in such but her mother had insisted by crying.

"What if she is dead? I carried her in here." Her mother had slapped her stomach. "I have to know. I sent her away."

"Mama... ok, we will go."

So they had went to the witch doctor. The doctor said she was fine and her mother believed.

When she spoke with her, she was shocked, she had wanted to scream, to jump around like her toddler. Nelima was alive and fine and she was going to come back home.

Mosi sat on her desk, her eyes fixed in front of the computer. Something was wrong. She could feel it. She looked over at her phone, the white man, Nick, had said he would call so she speaks to Nelima but still there was nothing.

"Mosi, where's your mind at? You have been staring at nothing the whole day, should I call the doctor or what?" Her colleague said, her voice filled with laughter.

Mosi sighed. "I'm fine."

"What is it? Your sister? Is she still coming? You know I have a friend of mine, Zawadi, she went to America 5 years ago and till today, she's not back. She doesn't call. I hear she works in a salon." Nekesa spoke as if Neli was her friend. Mosi did not want to discuss her sister with Nekesa and she regretted even telling her about Neli. It had been by mistake, she just got over excited and spoke to whoever was close to her.

"So when is she coming? You know, once they taste the good money, they surely will not want to return. Remember George? He went to china and since then, no one has seen him." Mosi sighed. Nekesa never stopped. Mosi sometimes wondered if she took a break from talking about other people and maybe think of how chubby she had become. One could barely see her neck, her arms had hanging skin and her wide curves had turned into something else. Her stomach was just big, Mosi couldn't tell if she was pregnant or just fat. "She's coming, thank you for asking. How is your husband?" Mosi asked. Everyone knew Nekesa's husband was cheating with a young girl, a slay queen or so they said, very long hair and long nails. Mosi watched Nekesa fake a smile, yes, that had to keep her quiet.

Mosi decided after work, she would call him. She had to know if her sister was ok. She had spoken to her mother

early in the morning and all she did was cry. Mosi had felt her tears wet her cheeks, ruining her make-up. The phone rang and she quickly answered.

"Boiyot law firm hello?" She said with the same voice she had used for the last two years that she worked as a receptionist.

The receiver spoke with attitude, probably new money. She wanted to speak with Mr. Warda himself, the owner of the law firm. Mosi managed to set an appointment for tomorrow late afternoon but that didn't not pass without the "do you know who I am?" question being thrown her way. She was used to it all now.

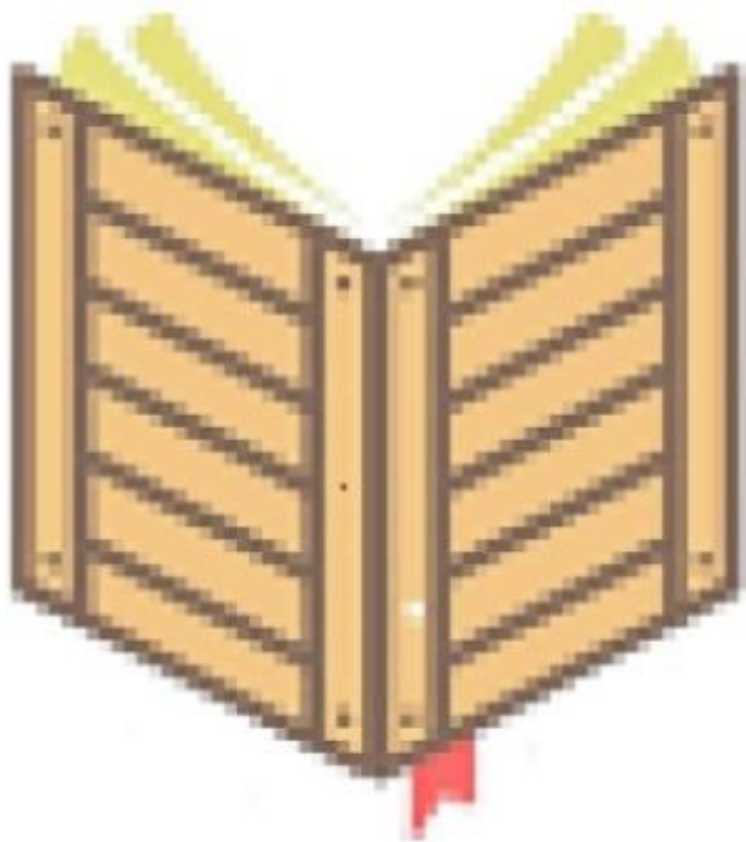
As soon as her lunch break started, Mosi stood up and grabbed her bag, already rushing out. She had to pick her daughter from school because Nathan couldn't do it. He was on a business trip and would be back after three days.

Her tight pencil skirt restricted her from moving fast and the high heels did not help either but she went as fast as she could. She only had 45 minutes. Her cab guy was already outside, she used him on rare occasions because she couldn't really afford him. She paid rent and paid her daughter's school fees. Nathan couldn't do it because he was saving money for their wedding and also was taking care of his sick mother and the rest of his siblings.

"Hurry," she told the driver as soon as she was settled. Arriving at the school, her 7 year old daughter was waiting right by the gate and looked nothing like the girl she had taken time preparing that morning.

Mosi felt her anger rise while her daughter got in the car. Her white shirt was brown and her skirt was too dirty she feared the mess she would rub off on the car seat. The hair she had taken time fixing was now looking at all directions, soil posed.

"What happened? You look very dirty! I'm going to beat you today!" She shouted. Farrah timorously glanced over her mother moving slightly away but Mosi was not moved. She had been singing the same song for months now and now a little beating was going to do the trick.



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She was soft with Farrah, Nathan always complained that Mosi spoiled her daughter but this was her child. The child her late husband's brother had left. She had given birth to another child who was two years old when the mine crushed on him too, the same mine which had crushed her husband killing him and her first born daughter.

Sometimes Mosi dreamt of her late daughter crying and begging for help. She always woke up sweating then. Nathan would grumble and give her his back. Mosi had met Nathan at church and when he approached her, she could not say no. He looked decent and worked for a decent company. That was five years ago and now five years later, Nathan did not go to church and screamed and shouted more than he laughed. He wanted a child but Mosi wanted to get married. Some days Mosi felt he did not love her daughter because of the way he always referred to Farrah as 'your daughter' instead of 'our daughter' each and every single day.

But she couldn't leave. It was rare to find a good man this days. At her flat, the maid was already waiting by the gate. Due to her long hours sometimes, she had to hire a full time maid who would help with Farrah and cook.

"Bye bye mama,"

"Bye." She responded in a terse manner.

Back at work, she worked counting hours till she knocked off so she would call Nick. At least to just wish her sister a happy birthday.

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"Mosi, I need to see you in my office." Mr. Warda said walking inside his premises. Mr. Warda was a short chubby man with a potbelly and a tall wife who tried by all means to look modern but still failed.

He was flirty and Mosi knew he had slept with almost every female in the firm including Nekesa and was glad he never tried anything with her.

"Yes sir,"

She stood up and followed after him with his messages. Mr. Warda was rich and he would make sure everyone knew. He drove a big black jeep and sometimes a Mercedes Benz or a Volvo. It all depended on the day. He owned a lot of other businesses but still came to the law firm each and every day.

In his office, Mosi stood by the table and watched him seat. "Um, you can sit."

He pointed at the chair where clients sat. She sat down and looked at him carefully. She had never had to sit on those chairs and she could catch the weird energy that roamed inside the office or maybe it was the smirk Mr. Warda had on his face that made her skin crawl.

"I have called you here to tell you that I have been watching you closely. You are a germ to this company and I am very honored to have you work for me."

"Thank you sir."

"Oh no it's ok, thank your efforts." He cleared his throat. "That's why I have decided to promote you. From now on, you are our new secretary."

Mosi looked at him for a while trying to see if he was joking. She did not have the qualifications to be secretary, what she had was a diploma of being a counselor. "Sir... me?"

"Oh yes, yes. You. Besides, you will do good, you deserve the job and you know, Cynthia has taken maternity leave. To avoid the expenses of hiring someone new, why not just hire one of our own."

"But I have no qualifications."

"I have appointed someone to show you the ropes. Nekesa will be our only receptionist, either way, we never needed two of you."

"Thank you very much sir, thank you so much. Thank you." He laughed proudly.

"Oh it's nothing Mosi. You deserve it."

"Thank you very much."

"How is your boyfriend?" He asked with normal face as if he had not just asked a personal question.

"He's fine Sir." She emphasized the word 'sir' hoping he would let her leave.

"I heard he works for a steel company. Due to serious competition, the company he works for must be suffering."

"Umm..."

He looked his watch briefly. "Well, you can go. Your new office is ready. You are a very smart girl. You will go far, you are beautiful. Beautiful girls go far with life."

Mosi stood up and walked out. *Beautiful girls go far.* Mosi refused to read much into it but the truth was staring right back at her. Nothing was for free. You take, you give. That was the rule and everyone knew it.

As soon as she was back at the reception, her phone rang. She picked it up mindlessly. "Hello?"

"Hi, it's Nick."

She froze. She didn't like his tone or perhaps she was just imagining things. Her heart was beating too fast and her palms were sweating.

"Yes, is everything ok?"

Nothing was ok yet she found herself asking the question. He didn't reply almost immediately as he usually did and Mosi screamed inwardly.

"Sir, is everything ok?"

"Um no, call me Nick. Your sister passed on yesterday morning."

She sat still trying to make sense of the words, trying to get

it to sink. *Your sister passed on yesterday morning.* She opened her mouth to speak but words failed her. She felt numb, everything in her had switched off.

"She said she wanted to come back to Kenya, to her mother. I'm going to fix her documents then bring her. It will take a couple of days though."

She refused to believe his words, refused to accept that her sister was dead. Nelima was alive and she was coming back and she was going to tell her all about London and her man. They were going to bond again and be happy.

"No..."

"I'm really sorry." He said before the line went dead.

It couldn't be. She suddenly felt too small, too tiny, the world became too big for her. The void in her heart grew and the little flame of happiness she had burnt down.

Mosi shook her head, still in denial. Nelima was out there. She couldn't be dead. Mosi remembered how she had cried when her father married her off. Maybe had she stayed then... she started mumbling incoherently.

She felt as if she were stuck in a bad dream and she wanted to wake up. She dialed Nathan's number. His phone rang twice, then thrice then finally he answered.

"Mosi, I'm busy right now. I will call you later."

"My sister passed on yesterday." The words even shocked her to say.

"Oh, sorry. Maybe if she did not run away from home, God is punishing her." Heat rose to her face. She felt too angry. How could he say that? How dare he?

"She was sick!"

"This is why I always say why go to foreign countries where you will die because of diseases? It's stupid. Mosi, I'm in a meeting right now. We will talk when I get back. I think I'm going to come after four days. My boss is demanding. We will talk." She held the phone to her ear in shock not believing he had said all that. Tears blurred her vision. Was that all he had to say? He of all people knew how she loved her sister? How could he be so insensitive. "Mosi, are you ok?" Mr. Warda asked leaning over at her. He was holding his briefcase, probably going for a meeting. She couldn't place her thoughts or emotions.

"Stop crying. Come to daddy. Come here." He said taking her hand and handbag. He led her outside and to the black jeep. The driver opened the backdoor and he helped her inside. She sat inside the fancy car listlessly.

"Don't worry. Whatever it is, daddy will make it fine. Huh?" Mr. Warda put his hand over her shoulder making her inhale his cologne which was now mixed with sweat. She couldn't tell if it was a bad smell or not.

Mosi had completely detached from her body. Her mind had frozen and his voice still played in her head, over and over.

"Your sister passed on yesterday morning."

Nelima couldn't be dead. She couldn't lose another person she dearly loved. Mosi was vaguely aware that the jeep had stopped and that Mr. Warda was leading her inside a hotel. The new hotel Nekesa always spoke of.

Mr. Warda led her to a room and made her seat on the bed. "What's wrong? Drink this." He handed her a bottle of water. With shaky hands she gulped half the contents and gave it to him.

"Now tell me, what's wrong?" My sister is dead. Dead. She's

never coming back, she wanted to yell but rather just looked at him and started crying. She sobbed and tears covered her face. All she wanted was her sister. She wanted her sister alive and smiling and happy.

"Don't cry. Let me make you feel better."

Mr. Warda started unbuttoning her shirt then took it off while she cried. The pain kept slashing her in pieces over and over. Perhaps God was punishing her, she should have made more effort to find her sister.

Mr. Warda lay her on the bed, her bra already off. He pulled her skirt down together with her panties.

"Don't worry, I will make it go away."

She put her hand over her mouth while something deep in her screamed. Like a needle, she felt his finger jab between her soft folds inside her vagina.

"Stop!" She managed.

"Oh no, don't worry. This will make you feel good." "No." She cried. "Stop!"

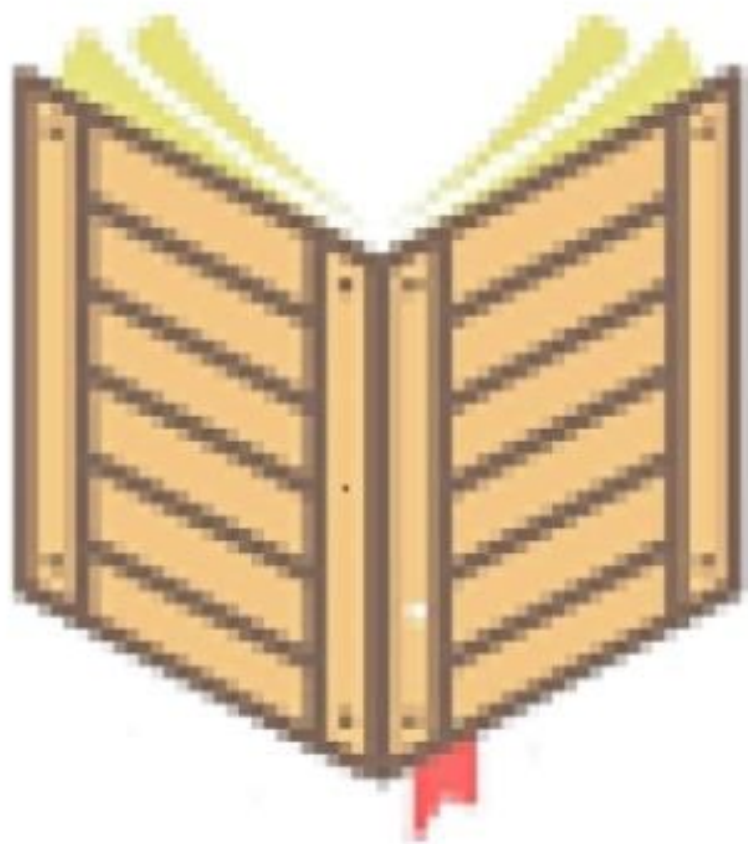
She tried pushing him off but surprised herself on how she felt too weak. It's like all the energy had been drained out of her body.

"Relax. It's ok. It will make you feel better."

Something was wrong. She felt dizzy. "Stop! Stop!" Her voice was weak. She tried raising her head but felt heavy.

"You will like this." He said lustfully rubbing her. "You are so beautiful."

Mosi couldn't hear all the sounds around her properly, it sounded muffled. She sighed closing her heavy eye lids and all she could think is *RAPE!*



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Chapter Seventeen

Nick looked at his father, keeping an impassive look. The bastard probably knew and wanted to rub it on his face. Santino put his glass of whisky down bringing his cigar to his lips. Nick was getting fed up as each second passed. He wanted to start the process of having Nelima transported to her mother. When he spoke with her sister yesterday he could almost feel her grief over the phone.

He knew how exactly she felt. He, himself, was finding it hard to deal with it.

"I called you here to talk about the company and Wendy. We have to get the ball rolling." Nick tried to keep calm. Lord knew just what he wanted to do to the man sitting opposite him. "I'm not marrying Wendy. Forget it. There's nothing you can do about it."

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"You foolish boy!"

"Count me out. Marry her yourself!"

"You have your mother's attitude. That's why she never got anywhere with life." "Don't you dare talk about my mother!" Nick roared up on his feet.

"Your mother was a drunkard. A whore! Yes! I found her in a strip club. She had no brains! What do you expect from a mere prostitute?"

Nick launched at him and grabbed his collar. "One more word against her, I'm going to punch you."

He laughed. "If you have the balls do it, you foolish boy."

The door opened and Nick let Santino go watching his new wife walk in. "I heard noise, everything ok?"

"Bitch I said get the fuck out of my house!" He screeched his face darkening with anger. Miranda stared at Santino looking confused.

"Baby, what are you saying?"

"I need you to get the fuck out of my house you bloody whore!"

Nick turned and started walking out. "And where do you think you are going?" "I'm leaving. What does it look like?"

"Then you won't hear what I wanted to say."

Nick laughed. "Shove it in your dick, maybe it will give it the boost it needs and maybe actually make a woman come, you wack old man."

Nick walked out and left Santino curse and swear and scream. He had his marriage certificate with him and giving him full rights to Nelima. He was glad he had made their marriage legal and now Edward couldn't really do anything about it. The divorce papers were genuine and he had signed them, unknowingly.

He was going to give her the funeral she deserved. All he had to do was get the approval from Mosi. Nelima would have

wanted that.

Mosi slowly opened her eyes. She felt disoriented and her head was aching. She felt funny and out of it. Her eyes scanned the room she was in and everything started coming back. The promotion. Nick. Nelima. Mr. Warda. Rape. She quickly sat up and climbed down the bed ignoring the soreness between her legs. She jumped stepping on something slimy. Looking down she stared at the condom. Two of them.

He had raped her. He had taken advantage of her. She said no. No meant to make him stop. No meant to say she did not want him. Pushing him meant to say she needed him to stop. Tears filled her eyes but she refused to cry. She quickly dressed up and left the hotel, head held high and shoulders squared.

Her phone rang as soon as she arrived at her flat. "Imani,"
"I tried calling you yesterday."

"I'm sorry my friend." She apologized walking inside her bedroom ignoring the maid's greeting. "I just got busy."

"Finally decided to leave Nathan?" Imani never liked Nathan and Mosi was now over it. Her friend didn't like anyone, even her own family members. She said they would bewitch her if they saw how well she was doing for herself.

"Huh?"

"I spoke to your helper last night and she said you had not yet arrived. I've always knew you had it in you. I'm glad you can now see how useless Nathan is."

Mosi's brows furrowed. What business did her helper have telling her friends about her whereabouts?

"I was just working late." Mosi lied. "I got promoted."

"Finally! Mr. Warda is a good looking man. If you play your cards right and stop being so righteous, you can score yourself a very good future."

"I am not a prostitute!" Mosi surprised herself by how her voice had risen. *What do you call being promoted to a position that you do not deserve as you have no qualification for it?* "And who said you have to be a prostitute? This is how the world works now suger, you need to know who to socialize with to get where you want to be."

Mosi got so angry and hung up on her friend. So her being raped was the sacrifice for the promotion. She felt sick to her stomach. Her phone rang again and she knew it was Imani. Mosi had met Imani when she first arrived in Nairobi at college and since then, they had gotten so close but that didn't mean Mosi didn't get annoyed most of the time. Imani was persistent and didn't know the boundaries. She was one of those woman who would take off her heels and earrings just to fight in the street.

"Me, I don't play Mosi. I don't play." She would say most of the time.

"Imani I don't want to play any cards! I just want to keep a stable job and be able to provide for my daughter! I don't want the promotion if it means my body has to be the sacrifice. He raped me yesterday and I am forced to keep quiet just because I need the promotion and I need the pay because Nathan can't take care of me! Please, stop it." She said, tears accompanying her entire speech. She felt too

emotional and that was unlike her. She just felt too sad that she wished to sleep and never wake up.

Imani didn't reply as usual. She was quiet. It angered Modi even more. Why was she quiet? She always had something to say.

"Look," Mosi started more calmly. "I am tired. I need to rest. Nelima is dead. I just have a lot to deal with so don't come to my house." She said about to end the call.

"It's me. Nick."

She gasped then bit her lower lip. She couldn't understand why this was happening to her. She took a deep breath fighting to get hold of herself. She could not let such weakness embrace her. She hoped he didn't understand Swahili.

"I'm sorry. I thought it was... how can I help you?"

"Well I was thinking to get Nelima a coffin here. I can sponsor her funeral if you let me." "Oh no, I know you are already spending a lot to have her transported here. I will make a plan."

She already had a list of things she could sell. "Um Mosi, it's ok. I can afford it, trust me." There was something about the way he said "trust me" that made her calm down.

"Ok. I still have to tell mama. I... I.." "It's ok. I will call when I'm coming." "Ok, thank you very much."

"Ok, bye."

She waited for him to end the line but he didn't. Maybe he had forgotten to but Mosi could still hear him breathe on the phone. She kept quiet too, the phone on her ear and waited. When a minute passed she finally hung up and put the phone away. She had to break the news to her mother.

She managed to peel off her clothes and walk to the bathroom naked. She stood under the cold water with her eyes closed realizing she had a funeral to plan. She had to ask for leave at work but she did not want to see Mr. Warda. She was disgusted, he had drugged her and taken advantage of her and what hurt more was that, nothing was going to happen to him. He was going to carry on with his life.

Walking out she bumped into Malaika by her door. Mosi watched her helper move her eyes all over but not at her. She probably didn't want to stare at her boss's nakedness and would probably gossip about how Mosi parades naked with her friends but Mosi couldn't care less. "Malaika, did Farrah sleep well?"

"Yes mam," she answered too quickly.

"I hope you packed her a fruit in her lunch box." "Yes mam."

"Did Mr. Muthoni call?"

"No mam."

"Ok."

She walked inside her bedroom leaving Malaika standing there still in shock. Mosi wondered if it was the first time to see a naked woman before. She grabbed her phone, Nathan hadn't called to check on her or even send a text. She closed her eyes briefly deciding to call her mother that second.

Her mother answered after a while.

"Mosi, I spoke to your sister. She said she's coming soon. She's going to stay with me. I already told your father."

"Mama... Nelima passed on. She's dead." And she was coming back. Only dead. Her mother dropped the call and Mosi didn't call back till the following day.

Nick held the paper in his hands. He found it yesterday and it was addressed with his name in bold letters. She had left a note for him but he wasn't ready to read it yet his eyes kept wondering off to it. He was curious to what she had written.

Finally he opened it. It hit him that he never realized she had a beautiful cursive handwriting. Maybe he should have realized it and given her a compliment and now it was just too late. It was too late for anything. Nick sighed as it rained loudly.

Nick Bradley

I have been trying to write this for the last few days but couldn't seem to find the right words. The perfect words. But then it hit me last night that our story is no story that has perfect words or right words.

Thing is that, I love you. Words can't even begin to explain. I know you want us to be forever but like you said, someone always have to leave first and ours, it's me. I don't know, maybe I should apologize for leaving but darling, if I could, I would stay.

So instead, I'm going to write a letter to the universe on your letter. It's not an everyday thing that you get to see someone write a letter to the universe but it's me and one of the perks of being me is that I can do almost anything. Isn't that just exciting?

Dear universe,
I'm writing this letter to notify you about a man called Nick Bradley. He's tall and very handsome and super sexy. He has this gleam that forever stays in his eyes and lives his life on the run. He's more of a free wild animal and has no regrets. I love that about him.

He is an amazing soul and I love him so much. I get that perhaps there is someone out there for him but I just want to thank you for giving me a chance with him. Each day I spend with him, I keep counting. Right now we are on our 31st day and I'm happy. He makes me happy.

Ours end with a tragedy, just like Titanic, but the ride has been so amazing. I would not trade it for anything. I only have one wish though, please let him be able to move on and love again. Let him get his forever. I'm praying that I will be able to watch over him but if I'm not able to, can you do it for me?

Your
s
Neli
ma

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Nick reread the letter over and over. *Ours end with a tragedy, just like Titanic, but the ride has been so amazing. I would not trade it for anything.* She was right. He too would not trade it for anything. He would give anything to do it over and over again.

A loud knock on his door made him slide the letter in his pocket and get on his feet. The door opened and Edward

walked in, his eyes burning with unexplainable rage.

"You have no right over my wife!" He yelled, drunk.

Nick wondered why he was so upset. When he was married to her, he didn't love her and now that she was gone, he was starting to bark unnecessarily.

"She's my wife!" "Was."

Nick snarled.

"You... —"

Nick punched him making Edward stagger backwards.

Nick threw another punch again. "Get out of my house."

"You are one piece of shit!"

He stumbled out. Nick was still going to make him pay for all the pain he put Neli through. His thoughts diverted to Mosi but quickly shook his head. He could tell something was wrong but it wasn't his business. He had already purchased a coffin. He was just waiting for everything to be cleared.

"Get everything cleared quickly and fast. I need that boy back in the game but he's stubborn." Santino said over the phone then put it on the table. He watched the two whores he had organized for himself make out.

"That's it!" He cheered rubbing his hands together. They were putting on a great show, worth his money, not that money mattered to him. He was Santino Bradley and he had more money than anyone could ever guess.

Miranda walked inside his office dressed in nothing. Santino had lost interest, she was nosy and did not know how to mind her own goddamn business. Instead of spending money like a

whore she was, she was sticking her nose in his business and trying to trap him with a child. Again! And now she had slept with that bastard child.

"Baby..." She purred.

For someone who had just had abortion, she had too much energy. "Get out." His tone was ice cold but Miranda didn't flinch. She had to play her cards right, she couldn't afford losing Santino. She had to maintain her good life, everything she had was tied to him. The cars, houses, money, everything.

She looked over at the girls and noting they looked younger than her, probably in their late twenties. He liked the fresh meat but Miranda didn't let that derail her plan. She was determined to get her man back.

She sat on his table and kissed him. "Baby, I'm sorry. I swear, from this day onwards, I will be a very very good girl." She batted her eyelashes, her hand already on his crouch. He was small and couldn't get it up most of time and when it was up, he couldn't do the job. But Miranda knew how to fake it. How to scream and urge him on. He liked that.

"I told you to get the fuck out of my house!" "Look, let me fix everything."

Santino stood up and put his hand on her neck and started strangling her. The two whores were just staring now. Bloody sluts! Miranda's eyes popped while Santino continued strangling her.

"You bloody whore! You think I don't know you are sleeping with Keith!" He roared, enjoying watching fear brighten in her eyes. No one betrayed him and got away with it. She started kicking but Santino didn't stop till he watched her soul leave her body.

"Bloody whore!"

Santino watched her fall to the ground then opened the second drawer of his table and took out his gun. He shot her in the head then shot the two girls.

His entire study smelt of death and he relished in it taking his cigar. He would call his boys to clean up.

He thought of Adelaide. She was a whore too and thought she could double cross him. Bitch! No one, NO ONE double crossed Santino.

Mosi had received a call from Nick that he was on his way days later. As much as she too was grieving, she figured she was the only one who could get the proceedings going for her sister's funeral. Her mother was devastated, her blood pressure was high that she was always at the local clinic where she really didn't get the needed help. Nathan was still not back though it was a week later. Mosi had always suspected he was cheating since months back. The late work hours, the unexplainable business trips. Imani told her that apparently Nathan's ex was back in town but Mosi knew not to accuse. She still warmed his food whenever he came home late, still packed his suitcase every time he went for his trips, didn't complain whenever he spent most of his time on his phone than with her.

Mosi had already spoken to her priest from her church and he had agreed to lead the funeral ceremony. She had used almost all her savings to get food for the funeral, she knew the community was going to come, even those who didn't know Nelima. She just hoped it would be up to her mother's satisfaction. A place where Nelima was going to be buried had already been located by her mother.

Mosi waited at the airport wearing her long black dress. He was arriving in his private jet, that's what he had said. Mosi suspected he was rich but had not overlooked the fact that perhaps he was really rich to afford his own private jet.

She sighed when her phone started ringing. Nathan. "Hello?"

"I am back. Where are you?"

"I'm waiting for my sister at the airport."

He was silent for a while. "Where did you get the money to have her body transported?" There was a careless manner in which he had said 'body' that angered Mosi so much. This, was the man she had been with for over 5 years, but still managed to be insensitive with her. "Her boyfriend is covering it."

"And what is he getting in return?"

"Nathan what are you trying to say? I am grieving my sister and you.. I can't believe you!" "Mosi I'm not stupid!" He raised his voice.

"And who is? I know you are cheating on me with your ex and you stand there and assume that I can sleep with my sister's boyfriend!"

"Then why don't you leave?"

Mosi opened her mouth to respond but closed it. Why? Why didn't she leave? The question rang in her head. Why exactly didn't she leave? Because she was 32 years old and most of her age mates were married. Because her mother kept asking when she was getting married. Because her mother's friends never stopped talking about their married daughters.

Because she could not seem to be able to ignore the looks her married friends gave her just because she was not married. She could not ignore it. She too wanted to settle.

"I will not be at the funeral, I'm busy."

Tears stung her eyes. "Nathan, what do you mean? My sister is dead. She's getting buried today. Can't you make

time?"

"So what should I do when I'm busy?" He was so cold, her knees weakened. "I have to go. Bye."

He hung up. Mosi looked up taking a deep breath. She would not cry. Not in the midst of people. Her phone rang again a second later and looking at the screen, it was an unknown number. With shaky hands, she answered.

"Hello?"

"Hi, it's Nick, I have arrived. Where are you?"

She looked ahead. "Umm, I'm by the waiting area. I'm wearing a black dress." She stopped then chuckled as a tear ran down her cheek. She probably was not the only one wearing a black dress. "What are you wearing? I will be able to spot you easily." Because he was white. She looked at the flood of people who walking, passing her by.

"I'm wearing black too. I see you."

"Ummh... you do?"

She looked around searching for a white man, he had to be the only white man. "Yeah. Hi,"

She was about to respond when a tall male figure stood in front of her. He took off his hat and smiled. Mosi's heart skipped as she stepped back. His three piece custom made suit had her holding her breath though it was more of his cologne. Strong and masculine. She winced as her eyes reached his face, he was handsome and now she couldn't blame Nelima for saying he was more than just a boyfriend.

"I'm Nick," he said smoothly extending his hand. Her stomach fluttered while she swallowed hard. He was what you would see inside the men's magazine.

Breathe! She urged herself. She met his hand with hers, her heart pounded hard against her chest, it threatened to leap out. She quickly withdraw her hand after a very brief handshake, if there was any.

"Mosi. Mosi Niji."

He stared at her and Mosi wondered what he was thinking. Did she look too poor for him? His suit only could buy someone's life.

"Let's go. A car is waiting for us at the entrance." "Nelima?"

"At the entrance."

"Uhh ok."

She began walking and he followed behind her. She secretly wondered how she looked. Stepping out, indeed there was a car waiting for them. A black Range Rover. It was those types that even Mr. Warda didn't use. They were too expensive and Mosi wondered if he brought it with from London. Behind it, a black limousine was parked.

"Nelima?" She asked looking at it. "Yeah.."

A man in a black formal suit opened the rear door of the Range Rover for them and they slid in the back seat together though she kept distance, scooting far away from him.

She watched him as he glanced at his expensive watch, a silver Rolex. When he had called saying he would be arriving this morning, Mosi figured the funeral be held that very same day because she knew men like him had to be busy.

Farrah was at Imani's house, Mosi had asked Imani to stay

with her as she made sure Nelima's funeral went smoothly. Everyone was waiting for them back at the village and she knew they were going to be very shocked to see Nick though she had explained to mama that Nelima's white boyfriend was also coming.

"She always spoke of you."

He said softly. Mosi looked

at him. "She did?"

"Yes. She loved you."

"I love her too." She said then looked through the window.

"I do. When I left, I... I felt I had left a part of me behind. They got me married when I was only 18 and he never allowed me to visit her."

He didn't say anything after that and neither did Mosi. She was locked in her own thoughts. Her first husband was a cruel man. There had been million times where she prayed he would die and when he finally did, it was like someone had slapped her hard on her cheek. Soon after his death and the death of her daughter, his family decided his brother takes over. The brother had a two wives already and so Mosi became his third wife. Her life was hell on earth. She got pregnant immediately and two years later, the mine crushed again killing the brother leaving her with a two year old baby girl.

The family started accusing her of witchery and were going to kill her and that's when she ran away.

When Mosi finally snapped out of it, they were driving inside her village. She looked at Nick. "How..."

He gave her a smile.

"Navigation." "Oh.."

She now directed the driver who she found out was local and was just hired to their house. It had been months since she had last come. She hated visiting because of her father. The man never changed, he was ruthless and wicked.

People were gathered in the compound as she had suspected and they all stared as the Range Rover and limousine drove in the yard.

"I... my father, he's.. well.." She looked for the right word to say 'unmannered' and smiled catching him staring at her with a smile too.

"It's ok. Neli explained. She said tell him she's forgiven him though she doubts he cares." "He does not."

"Well, then let's do this."

They climbed down the car. Mosi ignored the eyes then led him inside her mother's kitchen where she knew that's where she was sitting with other relatives. Her mother was weeping loudly, Mosi hadn't expected to find her crying like that as she walked in, tears streamed down her face. She knelt before her mother and hugged her. She understood why her mother cried, she blamed herself but truth of the matter was that, it wasn't her fault. "Mama. "

"My daughter Lord what did I do to deserve this." Her mother cried. For a while she forgot everything and wept her sister with her mother.

After a while she sat beside her mother and looked at Nick who had been given a wooden chair to sit on. He looked out of place. If anything, he looked too white.

"Mama, that is Nick, Nelima's boyfriend in London, UK." She introduced.

"Thank you son, Mosi has explained everything. Thank you." Her mother special ke pure English.

"It's ok mam."

"Your father is outside."

Mosi looked at her. "And he will not be a part of this." Her words were too sharp and loud. Everyone heard them.

"You will not speak to my brother like that!" Aunt Cynthia said. She was her father's younger sister. Mosi stood up, if they thought she would keep quiet, they had another thing coming.

"I said he will not be a part of Nelima's funeral." She repeated and ignored the look her mother gave her. She was tired of always keeping quiet.

Aunt Cynthia stood up and walked outside. "After everything my brother did for you, you stand here and disrespect him in the midst of people."

"Mosi!" Her mother warned when she followed behind Aunt Cynthia. "Your brother did not do anything for me!"

"Lord! What am I seeing!"

Her father approached them. "Mosi!"

"Don't talk to me. You are not my father. You think everyone doesn't know we are your brother's kids?"

The entire compound went silent in shock. "I know you are infertile! Yes! Infertile! We are your brother's kids! You failed to give my mother kids and failed to parent your brother's kids! You are an evil man and that is why God didn't give you any kids. Today it's my sister's funeral and you and your sister are not part of it! Take road and make dust."

"Mosi!" Her mother screamed from behind then grabbed her hand slapping her hard across the face. "Mosi!"

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Tears pooled to her eyes feeling the strong sting of the slap. Her own mother's tears made her heart crumble.

"Child! Know your battles."

"Mama...—"

"Mosi!" She yelled silencing her.

Nick stood a few feet from Nelima's sister and mother as they cried holding each other while Nelima's coffin sank. He swallowed hard and wished he would have a last moment with her. Even just for seconds. He wanted to see her eyes. There's a lot he wanted. Burying his hands deep in his pocket he felt the letter she had left for her sister.

The priest had not dragged and even though Nick couldn't understand a word he said, he felt soothed by whatever he had said. He had not talked to anyone expect Nelima's mother and sister. It seemed as if they were scared of him. He now wondered if he should have brought with Sean when he asked but at the same time felt the last moments were personal and didn't need his friend hovering.

The little drama that had occurred in the morning still haunted him. He had not heard most things Mosi said but he had heard 'infertile' and quickly had put the dots together. Mosi and Neli weren't the crude's man children.

He stared at Mosi as she wept. Her pain was too evident and wondered how far deep it ran. He fought the edge to approach her and hug her. Lord knew she needed it. As the men started shoving soil inside the grave, she let out a loud, doleful wail. It rang in his head.

After it was all over, Nick saw everyone bow heads and he followed suit. He figured they were praying. Minutes later, he heard Amen. Raising his head, people were dispersing,

walking back to the house.

"Hi, ummh, now we are going to eat. But I have been banned, so I am going back." Mosisaid wiping tears from her face.

"Banned?"

"Yes. My father... that man, he is the chief so he banned me." Nick looked at her mother who looked close to death. "What about your mother?"

"She has to stay behind and perform the last rites for her late daughter. I can not stay. But thank you very much for the coffin. It was very beautiful." There was a way that caught his attention in the way she spoke calmly and slowly. He could swear she was not Nelima's sister. There was no resemblance, not even a tiny bit.

"Ok. I'm leaving too. I am leaving tonight. Can I just have a moment." He said looking over at the grave. "You can wait for me by the car."

"Thank you."

Nick watched her walk away then turned and walked closer to the grave. "I love you. Always." He swallowed. "I love you so much. And so does your sister and mother. We all love you."

He felt her presence too tense and wondered if she was watching. He turned and walked to the car. Mosi was already inside. He climbed in and found her staring through the window lost in her thoughts.

He didn't need to say anything as the car moved. He respected her emotions.

"Thank you once again, for everything." Mosi said when the Range Rover was finally parked in front of her flat. Nick took a deep breath staring at the house, it looked small and old.

"It's ok. No need to thank me."

"Ummh, you can come in. You have not eaten. I can cook." "No, I'm ok."

"I insist. You can come in." She got off the car and walked inside her yard to her door. Nick sighed inwardly stepping out of the car. He followed to her house and walking inside he looked around.

"It is nothing fancy. Please come and seat."

She led him to her sitting room where he sat down on the sofa with African print throw. "What can I give you? Juice?"

"Water please."

"Ok."

Her house was tiny, his bedroom was bigger than her sitting room and probably kitchen combined. She walked back in with a glass of water.

"Thanks."

"I will start cooking."

He took a sip of the water taking out the letter from his pocket. He wanted to give it to her and leave but figured it would be rude. He remembered a life lesson Miriam had once given him about people being different and living differently.

Two hours later, Mosi was handing him his plate of food. "It's just rice and beef stew, I do not have any chicken." She said embarrassed.

He smiled. "It's ok. I eat rice and beef too. It's actually better than what I can cook."

They chuckled. She sat on the opposite couch and nibbled on her food. Nick could tell she was nervous and scared, probably thought he wouldn't like the food. As much as his

intestines were in knots, he forced himself to finish the entire plate. She was good.

"Thank you, it was delicious." She smiled genuinely and that's when he noticed just how higher eyes were and the faint dimple on her left cheek.

"I hope you not just saying it." "No. It was really nice."

"Thank you."

She took the plates while he finished his water. When she came back he was already up. "Your sister left a letter for you." He handed it to her. "She wanted me to give it to you." She held it in her hands, the sadness back and the smile gone. "Thank you."

"She didn't want you to be this sad. She wanted you to be happy and move on with life. I'm not trying to be insensitive but, that's what she wanted. I don't understand how she would not want us to be sad but.."

"Was she angry with me?" She whispered.

"No. No she was not. She was just happy. Though she knew she was going to come back lifeless, she was happy nevertheless. She was happy she was coming back to you and her mother."

"She did not call. I waited." Tears filled her eyes. "I waited and waited. Why did she not allow me hear her voice one last time? Why?" She was now crying uncontrollably. "I waited."

Involuntary he pulled her in his arms and let her cry on his chest. Wrapping her arms around his waist her cries turned into heartfelt sobs. Nick felt his own tears fill his eyes and when a tear fell, he quickly wiped it off clenching his jaws.

She stepped back suddenly trying to quieten her cries and wiping her wet face. "I am sorry. I just, I do not.. sorry.." Her speech was incoherent.

"Hey... it's ok." He cupped her face and gently wiped her tears with his thumb. "It's ok to cry."

"I just, I am not..." She sighed. "I am just..."

He hugged her again and let her breathe on his neck calmly. His body shivered and he suddenly was more aware of her arms around his neck, more alert of the way her warm breath hit his neck. He could feel her breast against his chest, firm and round. Her hips, her soft skin.

Nick slowly let her go and they stared at each other. He tried diverting his thoughts away from her wet purplish lips but found his eyes staring at them. Looking in her eyes, she was staring at him breathing a little too hard.

He leaned over and brushed his lips on hers. A second passed then they were kissing. Nick was not sure who started it but felt a spark ignite his body when his tongue met with hers. He pulled her closer, rubbing his body against hers. She moaned and that threw him off.

Everything switched off and what mattered was the fire his body was on. He found himself unzipping her dress and let it fall to the ground. Putting one arm over her tiny waist he picked her up, his lips still on hers.

"Left door.." She said breathlessly against his lips.

He moved to the door and opening it, from the corner of his eyes, he caught sight of her bed. Laying her on the bed he ripped her panties and bra. He wanted to taste every part of her body but that was overpowered by the thought of being inside her. In a lightning speed, he was naked and already sinking inside her flesh. She was tight, too tight he groaned as her vagina lips clamped all around him.

Once buried to the hilt, he started moving, slow and deep.

She was too sweet, too tight and he couldn't stop. She started moving beneath him, swirling her waist, her hips moving with his movements. She moaned loudly digging her nails on his back. Over and over, he pounded, her hands all over his body. She was close, he could feel it. She arched her back and let out a loud cry and seconds later, Nick buried his head on her shoulder blade releasing deep inside her. His body shook violently while he let out a sound of an injured wild animal. They lay still, trying to catch their breaths. Her warm breath on his neck made him twitch.

Stop Nick! She's Neli's sister! Get off her! Now! The voice at the back of his head screamed. He slowly pulled out and got off her. She stood up and picked her torn bra while Nick struggled to dress back to his clothes. He stared at her and like a wild fire, it was already too late. He threw his shirt down and kissed her again. She didn't protest.



Chapter Eighteen

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Nick sat in the plane trying to focus on his laptop but the same thoughts kept haunting him. Her touch, her body, how she felt and how she moaned. He couldn't get her out his head and he badly wanted to. He wanted to forget her, to forget last night ever happened. Guilt was strangling him. How could he sleep with Neli's sister? On the day of her funeral. Nick was sure she was turning in her grave. How could he do that to her? He should have given her the letter and left but rather he had stayed the entire night devouring her over and over. How much of an asshole could he possibly be? Nick wondered what Mosi thought of him. Moreover he left early morning, leaving her still sleeping. He didn't use a condom throughout. He rubbed his eyes, what could be more worse!

"Sir, what can I get you?" The air hostess asked. Nick had noticed her indirect hints and perhaps he thought she was fine on his way to Kenya but now she just disgusted him. "A glass of brandy." He told her dismissively.

He looked back at his laptop. His little free love affair was over, he had to move on. Nelima was gone and never coming back. Just like his mother. When his brandy came back, he took a sip. He still wasn't going to let Edward go nor his father.

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Mosi sighed pulling her tight pencil down a bit. She hated what she saw in her eyes on the mirror and could not seem to escape any of it. The truth of the matter was that, she had slept with her late sister's boyfriend whom she dearly loved. She had betrayed her sister. It all happened too quick but still it happened. She wished to go back in time and fix everything

but that was impossible.

"So? Look, what happened has happened. You regretting it will not change anything." Imani had said. What did she expect from someone who was sleeping with another woman's husband. The wife knew that Imani was the mistress and they had been times were they fought. Imani had proven she was not going anywhere and was even willing to be the second wife if needed be.

Mosi walked out of the bathroom back to her new office. It was tiny and suffocating but still, she managed. She had brought in her own fan and had tried rearranging it to make space for everything. Mr. Warda had not showed his face to her since he raped her. She was still angry but all his touch had now been replaced with Nick's touch that she kept dreaming about.

Sometimes she found herself praying that God forgives her for she had slept with Nick. It was stupid but she could not help it.

Three weeks after the promotion, she still had heaps of work to do, the previous secretary obviously had been slacking and as much as Mosi thought she would enjoy the job, she wasn't. She wanted to quit and leave but her daughter always stopped her.

Nathan was cheating and he did not bother even hiding it. The female scent around him and his clothes, the hickeys, the lipstick smudge on his shirts, the phone calls. He no longer ate at home either, no longer spoke to her unless needed. She was quiet and was not questioning him either. Whenever he came home late, she never asked anything rather she warmed his food.

The day went in a blur and by the time she knocked off, she could not feel her feet anymore.

"How is the new office?" Nekesa asked catching up with her leaving the building. Mosi wondered if she had waited three weeks to ask her that.

"It's fine."

"There are rumors."

Mosi did not want to hear anything, she knew the rumors and knew it was Nekesa spreading them. She had overheard her while inside the toilet last week.

"She did not get job fairly. She slept with Mr. Warda." She had told her colleagues and now Mosi looked at her sharply.

"People who talk about other people have no shame. Perhaps they talk about other people because when they talk about themselves, no one listens. They talk about another woman instead of talking to their husbands so they stop cheating with younger slender girls." She said coldly, she was tired of the fake friendship. But the truth was, the rumors haunted her. She had not gotten the job fairly. She had a diploma in counseling. She was nowhere close to being a secretary.

Mosi had started going to college when she realized her new husband spent most of his time at the mine with his first wife than her who stayed kilometers away. One thing she was happy about was that they all stayed at different places but in the same town.

She used the money that had been paid out by the mine to compensate for his loss to pay the rest of the college fees after moving to Nairobi. She hustled to keep going and through pain, sweat and hardwork, she got the diploma but could not find a job. So now she couldn't blame people like Nekesa for gossiping about her because the reality of the matter was, she was not qualified to be a secretary.

Arriving at her flat, she found Nathan packing his clothes. "Nathan, where are

you going?"

"I have a business trip. My boss wants me to accompany him. It will take a while." "But—"

"Mosi, I'm not in the mood for you today." He zipped his bag and walked out. The red flags were all there. Why was it so hard for her to leave?

She lay on the bed refusing to cry.

Where will I go if I leave? What will people say?

They will gossip about me. Get over yourself

Mosi! He doesn't want you anymore.

He's just busy. He will come back to me. I know he will. Mosi catch up. He doesn't want you.

She closed her eyes listening to her argue with herself. Her phone vibrated and she took it in her hands wondering if she had to answer or not.

"Imani," she said tiredly. She really was emotionally tired, all she wanted was to sleep. "Let's go out today. It's Friday."

"Imani I am tired and I have a daughter in case you don't notice."

"Where is Malaika? She knocks off tomorrow. Come on." Imani begged. "You need it. I'm coming to pick you up in 20 minutes. Prepare."

"Imani I am exhausted." "I

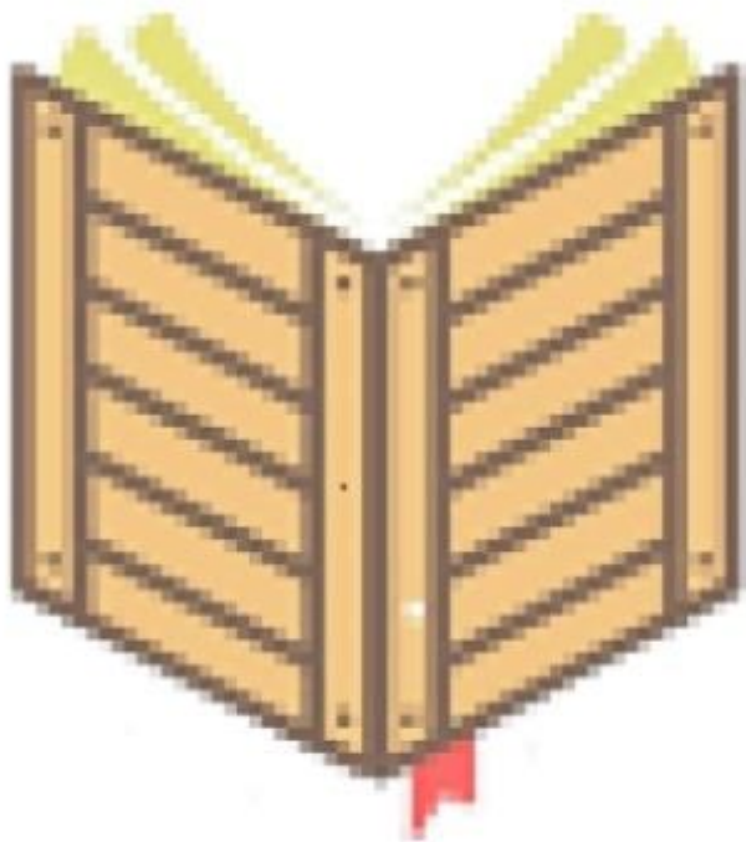
am still coming."

She hung up.

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Going out with Imani meant going to a club and drinking your life away usually. But not that day. Mosi was surprised

when Imani suggested a quiet bar but at the same time was glad.



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"What's wrong?" Imani asked after the waiter brought their beers. She shrugged.

"Nathan left."

"You lie!"

"He packed most of his clothes. I do not think he is coming back. He said he went for a business trip."

"Maybe it's time you called it quits."

Mosi looked at her friend. She was 29 years old sleeping with a 54 year old man. "You don't understand."

"Isn't that what most unhappy people say? You don't understand? You are right. I don't understand how you stay with someone who doesn't love you nor your daughter. He told Farrah he is not his father, who does that?"

She opened her mouth to defend him but failed to get the words out of her mouth. "I can't just leave Imani."

"Yes you can. Has he called? I mean Nick."

She shook her head drinking her beer. He had not expected him to call after he left while she still slept. Her guess was that he regretted it as much as she did.

"Maybe you should call him." Imani suggested with a snarky tone. "Imani, he is Nelima's lover."

"Look, I'm not trying to be insensitive but... Mosi, she is gone."

She looked up batting her tears away. "I know. It's been a month. Only a month. I can't be calling her man because of a mistake that happened. It is wrong."

"We both know that was not a mistake. You know it and so does he." "It was. It should not have happened to begin with. It was wrong."

"Destiny is never wrong."

Mosi rolled her eyes. "Destiny? What do you know about destiny? Sometimes I do not understand you. Is you sleeping with a married man destiny?"

Imani laughed. "No. But me loving him is." "You need to grow up."
"Tell me about your job."

Mosi woke up the following day to her phone ringing. Last night's details filled her mind. Imani. They had gone to the club after all though Mosi had left early.

She picked it up and answered. "Hello?" "Mosi!"

Imani screamed.

"Can you stop screaming?" "He's getting married."

Still sleepy and confused, Mosi closed her eyes. "Who?" "Nathan. He's getting married. Today. I'm coming."

She was now awake. "Nathan is getting married today. Get ready I'm coming."

"Imani, are you sure?" Mosi was shaking. Imani parked her boyfriend's car in front of the church entrance.

"Let's go."

"You can't park your car here." Mosi said, the truth was she didn't want to find out what was going on inside the church. She was still in denial.

"Let us go!" Imani was already out of the car. Mosi followed suit but her knees couldn't carry her. She took off her heels and leaned against the car.

"Imani..."

"Let's get inside."

She pulled Mosi to the double doors. Pushing the doors open they walked inside. Mosi's eyes locked with Nathan's. He was wearing a suit she had bought for him months ago when he had to attend a business dinner. She remembered buying it with so much love. Tears filled her eyes as he stared back with fear.

Couldn't he have just told her?

"Is there anyone who is against this union? Speak now or forever hold your peace." The pastor said looking at Imani and Mosi as if prompting them to say something.

"Yes!" Imani voiced out. Mosi felt suffocated. Looking at his bride she wanted to cry. That should have been her, getting married to him.

"Imani... let's go."

"No! How can he stay with you for good five years and yet marry another woman right before your nose?"

Mosi began retreating. "Let's go."

"No! Mr. Reverend or apostle or pastor, that man over there has been staying with my friend for the last 5 years. She has been practically taking care of him. He left last night saying he's going on a business trip. Now all that doesn't bother me, I always knew had no backbone and was nothing but a weak whore, my only problem is the years my friend wasted on him. The money. Energy. Go ahead and get married but remember this, you will remember this day. Trust me. I will make sure you remember it."

Monday evening, Nick pored over the sketch over and over

again listening to music on full blast like he had been doing for four weeks. He puffed out smoke detailing his sketch.

You can call it Adelaide... she is proud of you.

Nick sighed. Adelaide wasn't bad. He slowly raised his head as his steel door opened, no one could open it from the outside without the key. He stared at Santino enter with his guard right by his side.

"You call me weak yet you can't even go anywhere without that fucker!"

Santino waved his guard out then looked at the car which was almost done. Anyone who could look at it would think it was finished but in Nick's eyes it was far from being finished, just like some lingering unfinished business he had around him.

"Turn it down!"

Santino yelled. Nick smirked and shook his head. "We need to talk!" He yelled again.

Annoyed, Nick turned it down. "What? This is my space, who let you in still remains a mystery to me."

"This is by far the best we have ever came up with." "What do you want? This is my space."

His warehouse was located underground and he liked it like that. Away from everything. Just his own little world.

"I see you are almost done."

Nick stood up and walked to his father. Puffing out smoke on his face he chuckled. "So you finally killed her? Took you long enough."

Santino stepped back. "Mind your—"

"Funny how your wife turns up dead, shot in the head, by a river. You couldn't even dispose her with respect."

"Respect is earned, boy."

"And you think you earned it? Fear and respect are two different things." "I'm proud of you. I like this. Edington is starting to put pressure."

Nick walked back to his desk and sat down, putting his feet on the table. "So?" "You are getting married to Wendy and it's final!"

"What exactly can you do to me if I refuse?"

"You idiot!" Santino hit the table angrily. "Do you know what's on the line?" "I don't care."

"Well you should. Your life is on the line." Nick laughed. "So you will kill your own son?" "If needed be."

"I hope we don't find you dead soon. You are pushing it."

"Me?" Santino chuckled. "You little fool! No one can ever kill Santino unless you are God. You don't know me and what I can do."

"Fuck you!"

"And I won't start with you. I will kill that whore you went and slept with in Africa. It will be so easy to."

Nick raged with anger recalling Mosi. "Fuck you!"

"I own you. Tomorrow we will have a family dinner with Wendy and her mother and father, you better show up if you know what's good for you."

Nick picked his gun from the table and aimed at his father, his hand shaking.

"Do it." Santino pressed. "Do it, what are you waiting for? You weak bitch! You surely got it from your mother. Put that away, and you better show up. I wouldn't want to punish you."

Santino walked out.

Nick threw the gun against the wall angrily. The

motherfucker just had to have a hold on him. Walking out, he knew where exactly he was going.

In his car, he sped to where he usually went to blow off some steam. At the club, he parked his car and walked to the entrance. They let him in with no questions asked.

He walked through the darkness, surrounded by women in lingerie and some naked and went up the stairs to the VIP section.

"Nick! It's been time!" A man appeared from nowhere. Nick looked at him and gave him a bump on the shoulder.

"Bill, make it worthy my while."

"You know I got you man, go to your usual room and they will be there in two minutes." "Good."

Nick walked to the bartender and already his drink was ready. He drank it all in one go. "Another one."

The bartender in red lingerie and red fake hair poured him another glass. He gulped it again staring at her.

"I want you too."

"And she's all yours." Bill said from behind him.

Nick walked over to the stairs leading to the rooms where it all took place. From the outside, it looked like just a normal strip club.



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In his room he took off his shirt and poured himself another drink. Today he wasn't going to think of Nelima or her sister or Santino. Taking a sip of his drink, the door opened and two girls walked in. The bartender and two other beautiful girls with legs that seemed to start right by their waists.

"Undress." He ordered. He wasn't going to hold back. He was in full no mercy motion.

Nick walked inside his house and went straight to the kitchen. Pouring himself a glass of water, he heard footsteps behind him. He turned and came face to face with Wendy. "What are you doing in my house, do you know what time it is?"

"I thought we could spend time together last night."

He scowled at her putting the glass down. It was too early for him to be dealing with such nonsense!

"So you trespassed?"

"I'm your fiance Nick!"

"My fiance? You?"

"I know what I did with Keith was wrong and I'm not going to give excuses but I was drunk Nick. He took advantage of me and you know it only happened once. I love you, I have always loved you. You know it. Everything I do is centered around you. Can you just give us a chance? We used to be close."

"And you broke whatever that was between us."

"You pushed me away. I tried but you went to college and you sidelined me. You treated me like an outsider. You got married to some girl. I kept quiet. You got married again, for the second time.." She wiped away her tears. "You always

pushed me away and I still stayed and just because of one single mistake you punish me so severely. Don't I deserve a break?"

"I don't want you anymore."

She went down on her knees and right there, the confident woman Nick always knew disappeared. "Please, I love you. Can you just give us a chance. How do you know I can't be what you need if you have never really given me a chance?" Her ocean blue eyes sparkled with tears.

"I'm begging you. Just give me a chance to prove myself to you. I will give it all up for you. I will do anything for you. I love you so much. It all means nothing without you."

"I don't love you. If I ever did, I don't anymore."

"It's ok. You will learn to. I love you. All I'm asking for is a chance."

He sighed. He wasn't used to her crying and begging. It threw him off. "Look, I am exhausted. I'm going to take a shower."

Stripping off his clothes, he discarded them in the bathroom stepping under the cold water. The headache proved he had had too much too drink last night but it was all worth it. The sex was great too. Great enough to take his mind off things.

He took a deep breath trying to figure out a way to deal with Wendy. They had been friends since he could remember, even when he still stayed in Brazil. She visited during holidays. They were good friends, more like best friends and when they were a bit older, they knew their fate, only Nick lost interest. He couldn't quite remember when but it was before Keith happened.

Shit. He felt her behind him. She hugged him from behind ignoring how tense he got at her touch. Nick wondered if she was oblivion to it or was just ignoring it. She pressed her breast against his back.

"Wendy.."

"Please..." She whispered with some relish then moved round him. He looked at her, she was still beautiful, he could not deny her that. She pushed her wet her back going down on her knees.

"Just relax."

She took him in her hand and moving her fingers down his length. As she put him in his mouth, Nick recalled the bartender from last night, timid yet dirty as fuck. She had taken him all the way on his command.

He looked down and watched Wendy please him, trying to get most of him inside her mouth. She swirled her tongue around his tip just like the bartender had done making him groan. The water cascaded on her while she pleased him, it was quite a view.

He pulled her abruptly and pulled her out of the bathroom. He didn't care about how wet she was. He threw her on the bed while taking out a condom.

"Kneel on the bed."

She didn't need to be told twice. She was more than willing to oblige to his command, just like the three girls last night.

He took her from behind, roughly thrusting inside her slickness and warmth. She moaned pulling the sheets. He pulled her hair making her arch her back while he went deeper and deeper in her. Feeling her body begin to stiffen, he pulled out and let her mewl with want. He walked to his closet and came back with his belt.

She silently watched him tie her hands to each corner of the headboard. Picking up her panties on the floor, he put them in her mouth gagging her. He crawled over her, placing himself between her legs and thrust into her over and over again, watching her gag and struggle to breathe. Putting both her legs on one shoulder, he pressed her

thighs together and continued with his ruthless yet fierce movements.

Her sounds grew louder and louder, Nick knew she was close and so was he. He pushed into her harder and harder till they both came apart. As soon as it was over, he got off her already untying her. He took off the condom and threw it down while she lay there, breathing hard.

Walking back inside the bathroom, he took a quick shower, the headache was still there and the sooner he dealt with it, the better. Stepping out, Wendy was now dressed in his T-shirt. "Can my clothes remain mine?" He hated her wearing his clothes. Only one woman had worn his clothes and no one else could.

She blushed. "I'm sorry."

He walked to his closet and quickly dressed. He had a mission needing accomplishment. "I will marry you only on one condition."

She got off the bed. "Whatever it is."

"Allow me to buy you out. I was still going to buy you out the hard way but now I figure we can do this nicely. Let me buy you out and we can get married."

She blinked a couple of times. "I have to discuss this with Daddy first." "Take it or leave it. It's your choice."

He put on his cap and grabbed some car keys. "Ok ok. I will sell my shares to you." "I will speak to my lawyer."

"Only if we get married in 5 months." She demanded. "Deal."

She smiled.

"Really?"

"Yeah."

He walked out but only to come back a second later. "Take off my shirt and get out. You and I won't stay together."

"Yeah.. I know, I will start looking for a house that we will stay when we get married. I will speak to Daddy. You know he has some contacts with real estate people."

"Whatever. Get out."

Wow! The apple really does not fall far from the tree. I'm nothing like that animal!

You sure sound like him, jerk!

He walked to his garage, his phone in his hands. He made a call to June. His right hand partner in business.

"Nick, I'm busy, what do you want?" "What time is it?"

"I'm hanging up."

"I need a favor. I need you to send that money to Mosi, Nelima's sister." "I thought you said I should wait."

"Yeah but.. send it now." "Can I tell you something?"

He pressed the key and the Audi R8 came to life.

"Will anything stop you?" "No." He could almost see her smirk.

"Then shoot!"

"You loved Neli." Nick flinched at the mention of her name. "You never introduced her to me but Sean told me. You loved her. She was your first love. You fell in love with her and you finding out that she was going to die, you wanted to get the feel of love as much as you could. Her sickness made you love her even more."

"Will you get to the point?"

"Yes. Neli probably

loved you too." "She did."

"Neli is gone. That's the truth. She's never coming back and she would not want you to cling to her like this. You need to let her go Nick. I know it's too soon but the moment you start living, the moment her soul will actually rest in peace."

He knew she was right but he could not help it. "Are you done?"

"No. You need to move on. I lost Lily, she was amazing and she loved me but after a long while I realized something."

"When did you start being a therapist?"

"Fuck you. Listen. I realized that maybe I loved Lily too much because she was there for me and because she was my first love. I also realized Lily was just there to show me what love is like, to try make me see what I love about love. She was a lesson I needed about love and forever she will have place in my heart."

"Point being?"

"Point being you have not met your true love yet and when you do, you won't even realize it. She will be nothing you are used to, in other words, she probably won't be a model. And you won't know it immediately that she's the one. It will hit you one day and when it does, you will immediately know that this is the woman you want to share the rest of your life with, the woman you want to have children with, the woman who will help build your empire. It will hit you with a bang and trust me, it will be that person you least expected." Nick chuckled. "Maybe it's you."

"Fuck off! I have a beautiful wife and soon, we will be expecting. Anyway, I will send the money."

"Thanks."

She chuckled. "Anytime... dickhead."

He got in the car and drove out. He suspected Joshua was already waiting. The law firm was 45 minutes away but due to traffic, he took almost an hour to arrive.

"Mr. Bradley, Joshua is already waiting, right this way please." The receptionist said already leading the way to the elevator. He didn't need to be escorted but still said nothing.

"Would you like anything, water, juice or tea? We also have coffee." She asked as soon as they stepped out.

"No but thanks."

She opened Joshua's door and let him walk in before closing it behind him softly. He was standing by his glass wall. "Nick," he twirled.

"Joshua, sorry I'm late."

"It's ok. Your father already called." Nick sat down. "I figured."

"Don't worry. I got it covered."

"Look, I'm not here for Santino. I'm here for Edward." "What can I do for you?"

"I want you to call your friends and let them pull out. A scandal is going to break out in a couple of hours. Convince them the company is sinking."

"And what are you going to archive from that?"

"He's going to want investors and I will be there to dig him out." "All for that girl?"

"No. All for the women. The world will be a much better place without men like him." "I'm on it."

"Thanks."

Nick stood up and left. The countdown had begun. Once in his

car, he sent out a text.

The show is on!

Shock jolted Mosi up from her sleep. She looked around the darkness surrounding her, pain and grief aired inside the room. Everything was closing in on her.

Mosi pushed herself out of bed and walked to the bathroom. She looked at herself on the bathroom mirror long and hard. What was wrong with her? She opened the tap by the sink and splashed her face with water.

She still could not erase the image of Nathan getting married to his bride. She laughed hard, till her ribs hurt.

"You are such a fool Mosi. You are stupid." She said to herself to the mirror. "An idiot. The biggest idiot!"

The signs were there. Was she that desperate? What was wrong with her? Was this the woman she wanted to turn into? Tears pricked her eyes.

"Mosi!" She heard Imani call out. She walked over to the door and stood against it. "I'm coming." She called out as boldly as she could be.

"It's an emergency. Open up!"

Mosi screwed her eyes shut.

"Imani please..." "Come out. You have to see this."

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"Imani, can I have a quiet morning?" "Mosi! Out!"

She sighed then opened the door sliding on the floor behind it. Imani walked in and closed the door.

"Where is Farrah?"

"Sleeping and you are making noise."

"It's Wednesday in case your brain is not on full function. You need to go to work but first, I saw this on your phone last night." She said showing Mosi the screen of her phone.

"What am I looking at?"

"You are looking at the money paid to your bank account."

Mosi looked at the figures and read twice to understand.

Then it clicked. "Oh my... this is a mistake. I think the bank—"

"There's a message."

"From?"

"Look for yourself."

Mosi took her phone from Imani and read the message.

Hey, take that money and replace the one you used for Neli's funeral. Please don't take offense into it, just take the money. Consider it as a gift for your hospitality. Thank you for letting me be part of the funeral and thank your mother for accepting me in her home.

Nick.

Chapter Nineteen

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"Are you crazy? You, my friend, you are the stupidest person on earth." Imani said sitting on top of the tiny coffee table.

"I can not keep so much money! It is wrong."

"You are what's wrong. You heard what he said. He said it's compensation for the money you used."

Mosi laughed. "For the money I used or for sex?"

"Whatever you may feel like putting it. Point remains, the money is already in your bank account. It needs to be used."

"No! I work hard for my money!"

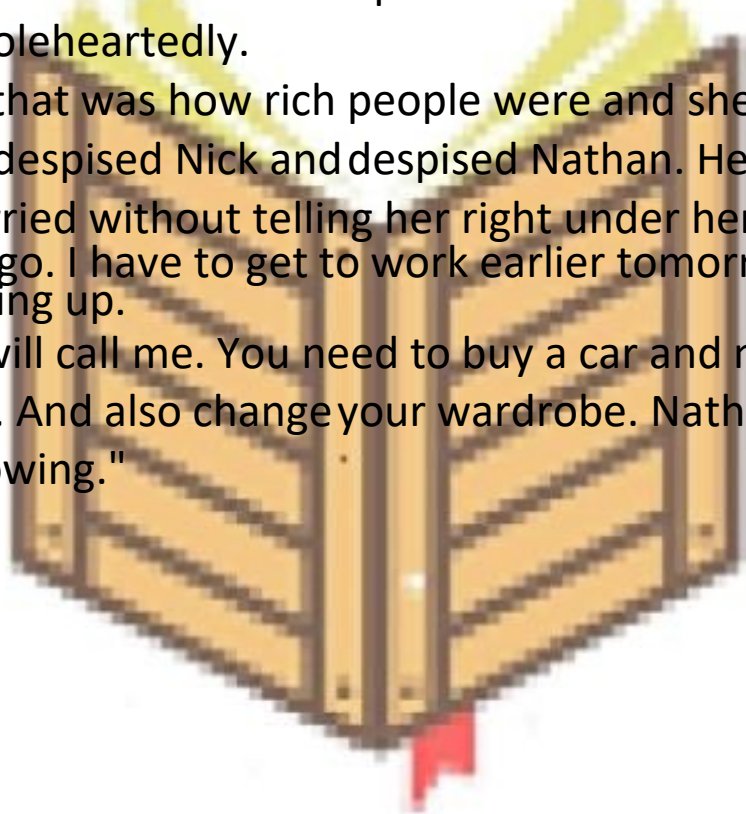
"Clearly you did. What did you say? He went on the entire night."

Mosi stared at Imani, not even blinking. Her friend didn't find anything wrong, matter of fact, she was overjoyed. Mosi had been holding off calling him and demanding he take his money back for an entire week. It was a lot and she did not need it. She could afford her life, always had. So she was offended he would send so much money to her as compensation to the money she had used for Nelima's funeral. She didn't need to be paid back that money, she had done it wholeheartedly.

But then, that was how rich people were and she despised them. She despised Nick and despised Nathan. He had gotten married without telling her right under her nose.

"I have to go. I have to get to work earlier tomorrow." She said standing up.

"Ok. You will call me. You need to buy a car and move to a nice house. And also change your wardrobe. Nathan has to see you glowing."



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Mosi walked out. She certainly did not need a new car or move to a new house or change her wardrobe. She loved what she had.

Back at her house she decided to call him and free herself the heavy burden. She was going to keep the conversation brief and short, calling international was costly. His phone rang and rang, when he finally answered, a female voice spoke.

"Hi, Nick is not here at the moment." The English accent dripped from the voice so easily. Nick did not have the accent.

Mosi took a deep breath. "It's ok. Tell him Mosi called. And that—"

"Who?"

"Mosi." She repeated slowly. "Tell him I do not need his money. My sister's funeral was—" The line dropped. She chuckled taking the phone off her ear. She needed to recharge so to call again.

Putting her phone away, she looked at her wardrobe. Nathan had left some of his things. She got up and went to the kitchen where she came back with a black bag. She threw whatever he had left inside then threw the bag outside in the bin.

As she walked back inside the house, she met Farrah in the sitting room. "Mama, I'm done with my homework."

Mosi smiled. "Good girl. I will start cooking now now." "Teacher said I am number 1"

"Yes baby, you are." She said switching on the TV and putting on cartoons. "Watch TV." "I want to play games on your phone."

"Ok. Go and take it."

Mosi moved to the kitchen

where Malaika was. "Malaika, today I will cook. Go and watch TV." "Ahh madam, I don't mind."

"No. Go and watch TV. I will cook today. How is your mother?" "She is fine. The pastor healed her."

Mosi nodded. Malaika was a big believer of prophets. Mosi never believed, she could just pray in her own without needing to pay someone to do it for her.

Mosi cooked spaghetti, Farrah's favourite. As she dished, Farrah walked in holding her phone to her ear.

"Yes." She said to the phone in English. "Tell her Uncle Nick wants..." Her tiny voice trailed as she frowned.

Mosi snatched the phone from her. "Hello?" "Hey, I heard you called. A friend answered it."

She gestured Farrah walk away and with a pout she did. "You do not have to explain yourself to me."

"Uhh.. look, I'm not trying to offend you or anything, I just thought well... I thought it would a noble thing to do."

"Nelima was my sister. I paid for most things at her funeral because I love her and wanted her to have a dignified farewell. You do not need to pay me for that, I was her sister and it was my duty."

"I understand, I apologize."

"I do not want the money." Her voice was firm.

"Well that's going to be a problem because you can't return it."

"Mr. Nick, I appreciate everything you did. I really do. I do not need nor want your money or anyone's money. You may be rich but that does not give you the right to think you can

just do as you please. I may be below you by several levels but I will not let you do as you please with my life. I know men like you and how you think you can just do as you want because no one can do anything about it. Well not with me!"

"Whooooaaa! Hey, calm down. Relax ok?"

"I do not want your money! If it's payment for the sex then—"

"What the fuck?" He interrupted. "What are you talking about? Mosi, listen to me. Listen ok?"

"I—"

"Shhh... listen. Just listen for a second ok?"

Mosi looked up at the ceiling with her eyes closed. "I'm not trying to buy you or anything. And yes, I am guilty for giving you that money because I just had a feeling you had used a lot. I didn't want you finding yourself in debts. I'm guilty, I am sorry. I'm so so sorry. But initially, it was not my money either, it was your sister's. That's why you will keep it. It was Neli's money. I have no reason to lie."

Mosi remained silent. "And I would never..." He sighed.

"What happened.. well, I would not pay you as if you are a whore. I was wrong, I took advantage of your—"

"No. We are both at fault."

"Yeah. But, I don't want you think that I think you are some whore. You are not." "It should not have happened."

"Yep! Ummh, please keep your sister's money. She would have wanted you to have it." "I am sorry."

"No it's ok. I had to hear that."

Mosi didn't know what to say anymore. "Ok, bye." "You have a smart daughter."

"She wanted to play games."

"It was great talking to her. Look, I know this may be inappropriate but... how are you holding up?"

No one had asked her how she was feeling. Her mother was angry with her and all Imanidid was talk about money. "I am fine."

"You don't have to be fine you know..""What do you mean?"

"I mean, if you are not fine, you don't have to say you are fine."

Mosi laughed. "Maybe we say we are fine because we badly want to be fine." "Exactly my point. Sometimes you don't have to be fine."

"Ok."

"I'm going to ask again, how are you holding up?"

She thought for a while. She was dealing with her sister's death, Nathan's marriage, her mother's anger, the rape.

"I am sad. I feel suffocated. I feel depressed." "Me too."

"But I have daughter and I need to be strong for her. She still needs me." "Where is her father?"

"He passed away seven years ago. Two years before that, I lost my first one." "Damn!"

"I know. But you learn to be strong when you realize you have no other option." "Yeah, tell me about it! I didn't see your daughter at the funeral."

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"She was at my friend's house. My father, he said he will never accept her. My late husband's family said it was not their son's child."

"Your father and my father would get along." "He is unmannered too?"

Nick laughed. "No. He's not unmannered.

He's just evil. Plain evil." "My father too."

"So your father is not your biological father?"

"Yes. We are his brother's kids. God will never bless him with kids because he is too wicked."

"If that's how God works, I fear for most of us." "Are you a bad man?"

"I think I am."

"I do not think you are." "Because you don't know me."

"Well, now I know enough. I am really sorry about the way I spoke to you." "Don't be. I have to go."

"Ok, bye."

"Yeah."

He hung up. Mosi tried not to smile but she couldn't help it. She even felt better. Walking out of the kitchen, she gave Malaika and Farrah their food before sitting down opposite them.

"Mama, when is uncle Nathan coming?"

Mosi looked at her daughter wondering if she should lie or not. "Ummh, baby, Uncle Nathan is not coming. He had to go far away."

"When is he coming? I'm going to sing, he has to be there. Uncle Nick said he will be there." Mosi had completely forgotten about the play that was going to be held at Farrah's school. She was playing Mary. What Mosi couldn't

understand was why the school did such a show at this time of the year, wasn't it supposed to be in December?

"Uncle Nathan is not going to come back." The truth in her words hurt her. "And uncle Nick, he's busy."

"He said he's coming." "No he is not. Eat!"

Mosi sighed, Nick didn't have any right telling her child such things. For crying out loud! He didn't even know her.

After eating, she lay on her bed thinking of the money. She could give it all to her mother but that man she called a husband would take it all. He did not deserve a dime from Nelima's money so she was going to hold on to it. Just for a little while.

The following day, she found Mr. Warda in her office. Her heart skipped seeing his figure sited on her chair.

"Ahh, Mosi. You are here." She faked a smile.

"Sir."

"I have to say, I'm impressed. You have been working hard." "Thank you."

"You are a bright woman. I know how the world is like on women. It's very cruel and unfair."

Mosi stared trying to see where he was taking his story to. She ignored the uneasy feeling in her gut and stood still.

"I will be going to South Africa soon and I have to take a member of the staff with to see how we live in the corporation world and I thought of you. It will be good for you." "Uhh.."

"Think about it but you know what this can do for you right? It can open doors for you. It can motivate you."

She swallowed hard. She didn't want to go anywhere with a rapist. He stood up and walked to the door.

"We leave in two days. You have a passport right?" She couldn't help but nod. "Good. Good."

He walked out and Mosi took a deep breath. His smell lingered and Mosi widened the door. She wondered if she could say no but with the way Mr. Warda had spoken, she doubted there was any room for no. What if he raped her again?

This time around you will be sober and alert.

She sat down rubbing her hands together. What could she do? Why take her? There were lawyers in the company, qualified people for such trips. Why her? She took out her phone to call Imani but only to put it back. Not Imani. Imani would just encourage her.

She felt her letter in the bag. She hadn't read it yet. She feared whatever Nelima had written.

She took it out slowly. It was in an envelope. She opened it then took out the letter. She urged herself to open it and the first word written made her laugh.

Moses.

Nelima used to call her Moses whenever she was angry with her. The memory was bitter to remember.

I just remembered your nickname and I can't stop laughing. It just made me realize how love doesn't care. It's just forever there. The memories, the laughter, tears, love is all in them. It sucks that you were my first real love and forever you shall remain my first love.

Mosi put the letter down and started crying. Reading it felt like she was right there staring at her. Smiling.

"Lord, give me the strength please." She sobbed. Her heart was just too heavy. The pain refused to leave her. Taking deep breaths, she took the letter again.

I know you must be upset. But don't be. Don't be too sad. I lived. Good or bad, you know every story has to have an ending. Mine is not the greatest but I'm glad I managed to live. You should live too, not survive. I don't want you regretting not living in the future. You have always been uptight, I think you are still uptight, loosen up.

Mosi laughed. She didn't think she was uptight, just focused. There was a difference.

You need to go out more. I heard your husband died. I'm sorry but I never liked him but still, sorry. Please don't cry for I am free. Free of pain. The torture. One day, take mama away from that cruel man. When I ran away I always thought I would come back and rescue her. Seems like I never got opportunity but you can do it. She deserves better.

Last thing, be happy. Please. Someone once told me being happy is a choice. So please choose to be happy. That's the best option, trust me. I love you so much Mosi.

Mosi folded the letter carefully and put it back in the envelope and wiped her face. She took out her mirror and fixed her face. Standing up, she walked to Mr. Warda's office and knocked once.

"Come in." She heard him say.

Walking in, she cleared her throat. She hated his smile and how his teeth were arranged. "Mosi, what can I do for you?"

"You raped me."

"What?"

"You raped me!"

"Who? I never raped you. You wanted it."

"Wanted it? You sick man! You drugged me and raped me." "I didn't force you to come with at the hotel."

"You are a cheap man. Disgusting. I feel sorry for your kids." "Mosi, you are a sweet girl and—"

"I am not a girl. I am a woman and I know my stand. I quit this job and I'm going to tell the newspapers what a rapist you are."

He laughed wickedly. "And you think they will believe you?"

"Believe me or not, they will print the story.

Anything to get the paper selling." He stood up, his eyes darkening. "You little girl, you will regret this!"

"Oh wait and watch!"

Kali picked up her dress and slipped it on. Nick lighted his cigarette watching her dress. "You know, you can always call."

"I did last night."

She giggled loudly. "You know what I mean Nick. I heard you are getting married. Again?" "Mind your own business."

She rolled her eyes picking up her handbag from the floor. "Call me, loverboy."

Nick sighed with relief as soon as she walked out. His phone vibrated and he didn't need to check to know who it was. He hadn't seen her in three days and he knew she was mad. He had to see her before she went off to report him to Santino. *You need to get your act right if you want her to to allow you to buy her out!*

He climbed off bed throwing his cigarette in the ash tray. He walked inside the bathroom and took a quick shower. He couldn't stop thinking about Mosi. He had not had a woman stand up to him like that before, she had been so feisty yet calm. Either way, he was glad she had bought the lie. It was not Nelima's money but he knew if hadn't he said that, she would not have let the issue go.

Walking out of the hotel, he kept his attention out for paparazzi. These days they seemed to follow him around that he couldn't even party freely. Driving back to his house he thoughtfully diverted the route. He couldn't avoid her forever.

He knocked on her door. A lady opened the door with a straight face, or maybe she looked pissed. Nick couldn't be too sure.

"Ummh, hey?"

"Hello."

"Is
Wendy
in?"

"Wendy?"

"

"Miss Diamond." He corrected.

"Oh, who are you."

Definitely Latino. "Nick.

Her.. fiance."

"Oh." She opened the door and Nick walked in. She was definitely upset about something. "Backyard." She said behind him.

Nick nodded and walked to the backyard hoping Wendy was alone, he had fucked her best friend last week, he didn't want awkward situations.

He found her lying on a launcher.

"Hi," he said sitting on the launcher beside hers.

She sat upright taking off her sunglasses.

"I have been calling." "I was busy."

"Busy? You are fucking lying! I know you are still fucking around! I'm your fiance Nick!" She snapped.

"Ok, maybe you need to chill."

"Chill? Nick, we are getting married and you are out there sticking your dick in everything that has a vagina and two legs."

He opened his mouth but then laughed. "I am not doing that." "Yes you are! Who the heck is Barbara?"

"How am I supposed to know?" "Because you were with her!"

He didn't remember who he was with two nights ago. "I'm sorry." "Nick..." She sighed tearfully.

"I'm sorry."

She hugged him. "I know you are stressed and busy but please." "Yeah.."

Letting go, she stood up and sat on his lap. "I spoke to Daddy, there's a potential house we can stay in. I'm going to see it later, want to come with?"

"I'm going to work."

"It's ok. There's a party tomorrow and I need you to come with. I think it's time we announced to the world that we are getting married. I bumped into Randy, he said you didn't tell him we are getting married."

"I have been busy."

"It's ok. Tomorrow should be the day we come out in the open." "When am I buying you out?"

"The lawyer is drawing up the documents."

Nick looked at his watch. He had to meet Joshua. "I have to go. I have a meeting."

"Ok. Nick I love you. And I'm excited. I have never been this happy before. Well expect the time Laura was hit by a car and lost both her legs." He chuckled. "You remember her right? The girl who used to bully me back in high school."

"Yeah, I think I do." "I love you."

He nodded then placed her aside standing up. "I have to go. We will talk." "Ok."

He walked out passing the upset lady. In the car, Randy called. "Randy.."

"Duuuudeee! Guess who I bumped into?"

Nick chuckled. He was high, Nick could tell from the way he spoke. "What are you smocking?"

"She said, y'all are getting hitched and I was like... whaaat? I mean, dude, the fuck is going on with you? Are you married or single? I don't fucken understand. But I told her if she wants, I can give it to her, we can give it to her."

"Get up. Bath. Drink water."

"Nahhh, I'm with this hot baby. She's a wild animal. Those titties! Fuuuck!" "Randy, get up!"

Nick commanded. "Now!"

"I told her I'm a movie star, she bought it. Now she wants to meet Brad Pitt." "What?"

He laughed. "Well, I told her Brad Pitt and I are buddies. She still believes I'm somehow related to Tom Cruiser."

"You bastard! Tell her to leave!" "She really gives the best blow jobs." "I'm coming over there."

Nick sped to Randy's house. He just had to make sure he was ok, the last time he found him close to death in his bathroom due to cocaine overdose.

Walking inside the house, he was welcomed by a mess.

"Randy!"

Nick met a naked girl in the kitchen cooking. She turned to look at him then smiled. "Hi.."

"Hey and you need to leave.

Right this minute." She smiled.

"I'm cooking."

"Lady, leave. Now!"

"No! Randy promised to introduce me to Brad Pitt. I'm an actress. I just need—" "Well Randy doesn't know Brad Pitt. Get the fuck out!"

He strode to the bedroom. Inside, Randy was smoking weed.

"Dude, what the fuck?" "Heeeey! Nick, let me tell you something, you—"

"Give me that!" Nick took it then threw on the floor. "I need you to get up and take a bath. I'm going to arrange for some cleaning services and after that, I'm forcing you to rehab facility."

"Niiick, calm down dude!" "Go and bath!"

"I'm going to need my money!" The naked lady said walking inside the bedroom now dressed.

Nick threw a couple of bills at her before she stalked off.

"She's not even pretty. Did you see those tattoos?"

Randy shrugged walking to the bathroom. "Big titties."

As soon as he was out of sight, Nick started searching for any weed, cocaine or just any drug in his bedroom. He got rid of everything he managed to set his eyes on. In the kitchen, he threw every bottle of liquor in a black garbage bin.

"Dude, where's my shit?" Randy asked after bathing.

"I'm going for my meeting. I better find you here when I come back. I've called for a cleaning team. Your place stinks."

"Dude, relax. I don't know what's going on with you, you need help."

"I need help? You are the one who..." He shook his head.

"Look, I'm coming. I need to sort out something. Don't do anything stupid and don't call anyone."

"Ok ok."

Nick left Randy's place. He needed to go to a rehab and fast. He was getting out of hand and Nick wasn't ready to lose anyone else as yet.

In Joshua's office, Nick listened carefully. "The investors are pulling out, like you wanted. The video really is costing him."

"Like it should."

It was a video of Edward beating some poor girl while fucking her. He was really doing some unimaginable things to her and the world wasn't really responding well to everything since the video went viral.

"I already have someone who will play front."

"Good. Tell that person to persuade Edward to let him buy some shares." "She's already on it."

"She?"

"Yes. Lisa Spencer."

"And what does she want in return?"

"She just wants to see the motherfucker crumble. Seems like they are college sweethearts. Catlet broke her heart when he took over the empire, they are in the same circle but you know how it is."

"And how far sure are you that she's not working for him?" "Because we are close."

Nick looked at Joshua carefully.

"Close you say?" "Look, all you need to know is that she will do the job."

"I'm not entirely sure if I should trust your mistress but if you insist. She fucks up or decides to play both teams, she will go down with him. Don't join them."

"You know I got you." "Ain't I glad? Thanks man,"

Joshua just nodded. Nick knew Lisa Spencer. He had

researched her after the dinner where he met Nelima. Her father owned a oil business. Rich but old man. She was to take over as soon as he threw in the towel. The question was, why exactly was she doing this?

He did a quick call to Sean so they meet at Randy's house.

Mosi paced in her bedroom, a lot of thoughts filling her head. She was a shivering mess.

I should not have done that, I should not have quit my job! But it was too late. She couldn't dismiss the threat Mr. Warda made. *You don't know who you are messing with, think of your daughter. You wouldn't want to lose another child.*

Of cause he knew everything about her. Mosi wondered why she never thought of it. She could not have anything happening to her daughter, her daughter was her life.

She sat on the edge of her bed with her face in her hands. What had she done? She was just tired of Mr. Warda thinking he could just sleep with her. She knew the trip to South Africa was just a cover up.

She took her phone and called Imani. It was time she told someone.

"Mosi, I have been calling! Anyways, I wanted to tell you that I'm going to Mauritius." "Imani Mr. Warda, he raped me. He drugged me."

"What?"

"And I quit my job because he said he wanted to take me with to South Africa on a business trip. I know there's no business trip."

"God! What are you going to do now?"

"I told him I'm going to report him at the newspapers." "No you didn't!"

"He said he will kill Farrah. He sent a note to my house. Imani I'm scared. He already sees me as a threat."

"Do you know that man is friends with the former president?"

Mosi put her hand over her mouth. She was doomed. "I have heard about people who just disappear. You should have just kept quiet."

"And let him get away with rape?"

"There's nothing you could have done! If you think reporting worked, why don't you think a lot of people don't do it. We get abused and raped everyday!"

"I'm not going to be one of those women! I refuse to be!"

"Mrs holier than thou, see what happened now? What are you going to do? Mr. Warda is your ticket to good life. Go back and—"

"I'm not going back. Imani, I will not live like you. I'm taking my child and going away." "Where are you going?" "Bye."

She hung up and stood up. She took out her suitcase and started throwing her things inside while her phone rang. It wouldn't stop so she finally picked up.

"What?"

"I can help."

"Thank you."

"Yeah. You and Farrah need passports. I know someone who can do it for you real quick." "Imani I can't afford going to stay in another country."

"Let me tell you something Mosi, men like Mr. Warda are dangerous men with power. You on the other hand, you are a lose end. The newspaper will print out news, do you know

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how much that will implicate Mr. Warda and his friends? They don't want such publicity following them around. So they will take care of you. They will kill you and your child and you will end up buried somewhere. We will never find you and you will just be past tense."

"I don't want my daughter dying."

"Then we are getting you and Farrah passports.

You are going to London." "Are you crazy?"

"Where do you want to go? France? You can't even speak French. Or you want to go to Spain? You... just follow suit where Nelima went. It worked out for her. Your sister was a well known person there."

"What are you talking about?"

"Yeah. She just changed her name to Neli. She got married to a rich man who she left for Nick who seems richer than her ex."

"I don't want to go that far, what about my mother?"

"Maybe you should put yourself first because your life is on the line. We need to get you passports and visas."

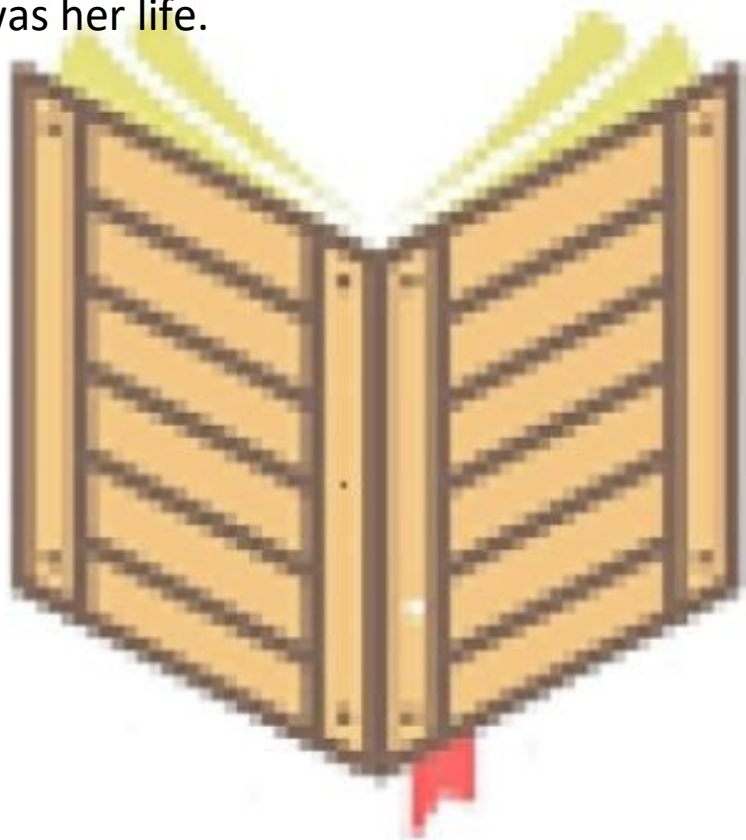
"All I want is to just move to another part of the country. Nothing dramatic."

"He will come after you. You need to leave. There's a country called... ummm... Botswana!" "I know but..." Mosi sighed.

"I will be there in the morning. Don't leave the house. I hope you asked Malaika to leave." Hanging up, Farrah walked in. "Mama? Where are we going?"

Mosi looked at her suitcase. Where were they going? She didn't have a plan but anything for her daughter she would do. Even if it meant running away to Botswana or London. She didn't care. Imani was right, she had to put herself first for once.

Kneeling before her daughter, she smiled. "Well, we are going to stay somewhere else. It will only be you and me. We will be happy, I promise." She was going to take all her money from the bank, change it to pounds or dollars. Her daughter was her life.

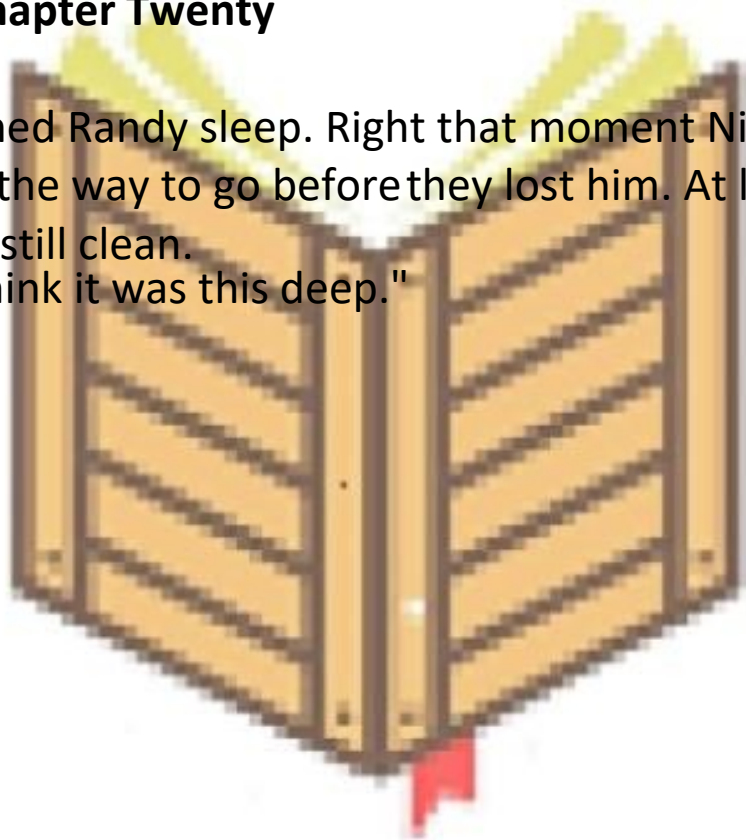


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Chapter Twenty

Sean watched Randy sleep. Right that moment Nick knew rehab was the way to go before they lost him. At least the house was still clean.

"I didn't think it was this deep."



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Nick chuckled. "You must be fucking with me! This guy never used to drink and use drugs like this. Surely you should have noticed that something was wrong."

"Ok. I'm from the kitchen looking for a drink because this situation is fucked up but guess what? There's nothing. Don't tell me this guy drank everything!" Conrad said walking back in the living room.

"I threw it away."

Conrad threw himself on the couch.

"Should have known." "Ok, I think the rehab idea is a good idea."

Nick looked at Sean. "You think?"

"Dude! Chill!" Sean said motioning he calms down. "It's a good idea. Do we drop him there or he takes himself?"

"I will take him." "I got a job."

They turned to look at Conrad. "What?" He laughed. "Yeah. Something better."

"Does your job require you to fuck twice a day?" Sean teased. "Shut up! No it doesn't. A high-tech company in New York." "Shit man! Take me with you."

Randy said then fell asleep again.

"Congrats man. Though I think they should put fucking twice as part of the job." "Sean the fuck man?" Conrad laughed. "Anyways, six figures!"

"Yeah congratulations dude, when are you leaving?" "In two days."

"Ok. Steep." Nick sighed. "But still we can arrange something!" "I knew you would!"

"Nick so Wendy called me." Sean said getting up on his feet. "Shit! She did?"

"Yeah. Said you are getting married. Again."

"I can't escape her, not with Santino breathing down my neck."

"I feel you. Wendy is pretty but you are going to be stuck with someone you don't love for your entire life."

"Since when do you believe in love Sean?" Conrad asked laughing.

"Since forever. My parents love each other and they are still together. You wouldn't tolerate her in a year, trust me."

"Where are your parents? Might give them a visit when I arrive in America." Conrad was laughing.

"Philadelphia. Fuck you!"

They all laughed. Nick finally stood up too. "Stay with him. I'm going to work and I will talk to a rehab facility and see if they can take him."

"Cool! And start organizing my farewell party, organize hot girls."

Nick shook his head and walked out. He drove to his little heaven and arriving, he took one look at his sketch then back at the car. He knew what had to be done. Blasting his music he immediately started working. He couldn't stop thinking about what Sean had said. He didn't love Wendy but didn't want to break her heart.

She was happy and he had not seen her like that in the longest time. He knew if he called it off, she would just breakdown. It was not her fault that Keith had taken advantage of her.

She was just human. He didn't love anyone, sighing he decided he would learn. It wouldn't be hard.

Now he wondered if his mother ever loved Santino or she just stayed with him because he could provide for her. Did he even love her? Or he just took advantage of the fact that she needed him.

Nick felt sorry for Miranda. He knew Santino killed her, no doubt. Same way he killed his mother. Or Keith's mother. Keith's mother lied about Keith, he wasn't Santino's child. All these women died at the hands of one man and Nick wondered how many more had to die. The day went too quick, he had to finish his baby. He wanted to launch her as soon as he could.

"Detective! It better be important." Santino said walking in his study.

Detective Parker followed behind him, Santino hated such surprise visits. Where the hell was Steve?

"It is, trust me."

Santino gestured the new detective takes a sit. Detective Parker's eyes moved around the entire office before averting his eyes back to Santino sitting down.

"Whisky?" Santino asked pouring himself some.

Detective Parker shook his head. "No. Let's get over it, shall we?"

"Well, shoot! What can I do for you?"

Detective Parker carefully studied Santino. "I'm sorry about your wife." "Such things happen. My poor Riri."

"Yeah. Such an unfortunate thing to happen. Did Miranda have any enemies?" "My sweet Miranda could never hurt a fly."

"So she didn't have any enemies?"

"As far as I'm concerned, no, she didn't, but you never know."

"True. Your wife was found in a river, shot though there

were signs of her being strangled and raped. She died before she was shot." Detective Parker took a look at his watch.

"Autopsy report shows she died between 2000hrs and 2030hrs. We spoke to her friends, seems like she had canceled their girls night to spend time with you. But your alibi shows you were not anywhere near London meaning she could have meant to follow you wherever you were. Right?"

"I can't be sure but I suppose. She didn't call to tell me she was coming like she usually does."

"Yes. I had an interesting talk with one of my colleagues, your first wife, Rachel Field, a Mexican singer and actress. Committed suicide because of depression and was found in her bathtub, wrists slit."

"What does Rachel has to do with anything?" Santino was getting agitated.

"Apparently friends and family didn't know she was depressed because she seemed happy and her career was taking a positive turn, she had just been signed by a recording label and also, she was shooting a movie in which she was the main character. She was happy then suddenly she commits suicide because she was depressed. You said she was depressed." "Yes. Because she was. She wasn't coping."

"Of course. Your second wife, Elaine Simpsons, her house burnt down with her inside and she was burnt beyond recognition. They said she started the fire, but what I fail to understand is why she would, she was happy. Had you and her son. But then, you already had a girlfriend that everyone knew about, former stripper, Adelaide Nkosi. Maybe she couldn't bare her husband with another woman who reportedly was pregnant by then.

Elaine's case was ruled as suicide. Then Adelaide, she had an accident. She drove into another car, head on. Or did she? She died. Then today, Miranda. Found dead. Bad luck seems to follow you around."

"Maybe it's time I went to church."

Detective Parker laughed. "Yes. But I don't think God will help you." "Detective, what are you doing here?"

"It's simple actually." Detective Parker stood up. "I'm going to find who killed your wives. It's a promise."

"I will hold you to that."

"And yeah, by the way, did you know that your wife was having an affair with your son?" "She was?"

He laughed. "See you around, Mr. Bradley."

As soon as he left Santino hit the table angrily! Who the hell was he? Who did he work for? He didn't like people snooping around on his business, especially the police. He took his phone and called Steve.

"Santino,"

"Where the fuck are you? I got a tail!" "I'm visiting my sister. What tail?"

"You better come back!" He roared.

"Who the fuck is Parker?" "Oh, he was transferred here months ago."

"I don't like him." **NOVELSGURU.COM**

"I will take care of him." "Do so, and fast."

The whores were proving to be trouble even when dead. He sat down taking his cigar. He was still going to deal with Keith, he was going to regret ever touching what's his. Bastard son!

"Detective, how can I help?" Nick said opening the door wider for Detective Parker. He hadn't expected company so early in the morning.

They walked inside his house to the kitchen. Nick took out a bottle of water in his fridge and looked at the detective. He looked nothing like a detective but the sharpness his eyes had set an alarm.

"I apologize for just showing up. Your father's wife, Miranda, was found dead days ago." "Yeah."

"Were you close?"

Nick shook his head. "No." Nick was surprised because Parker wasn't holding anything, no notebook to note down anything.

"Was she fighting with your father?" Nick looked at him recalling the time he had been in his father's house and how he was screaming she should leave.

"I know your father is a feared man but how many more women have to die? You know he killed his first and second wife, he killed your mother."

"First wife?"

"Yes.

Rachel."

"Who?"

"You don't know her. But yes. She was killed. At least get justice for your mother." "My mother died in an accident."

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"Did she?"

"Yes. And I don't know if Santino and Miranda were fighting. I barely go to that house." "You're sure about that?"

"Yes, I'm sure."

"Was she seeing anyone expect your father?" "Why are you asking me? I don't know."

"Where were you on the night she was murdered?" "You must be kidding me!"

"I'm just doing my job."

"I don't remember but possibly here." "Thank you for your time, Mr. Bradley."

Nick watched Detective Parker walk out. Santino's days were numbered. All he had to do was help Parker without anyone realizing. Santino had to go to jail and Nick was going to make sure of it.

Nick parked his car in front of Braad. The building was tall and glassy. One of the tallest buildings in London. He stepped out and headed in.

"Welcome, Mr. Bradley." The receptionist said softly batting her eyelashes while he passed. He nodded walking to the elevator. As the doors closed, someone rushed in. June.

"Dickhead." She said hitting him with her Gucci handbag playfully. "Honour seeing you here today."

"Does Kim let you dress like this?" He said staring at blue jumpsuit that held on tight to her body. She was sexy and beautiful, Nick once slept with her and actually wanted to try out a relationship till he found out she was seriously into women.

"Yeah. Santino retired?"

Nick laughed. "I suppose you can say that."

"Jeans, T-shirt and a blazer. Wow! So much for looking formal Mr. CEO." "Fuck off."

Stepping out, June followed him to his father's office.

Santino had retired the previous week after he found out that Nick and Wendy were serious about getting married but he still had the shares and would give them to Nick as soon as he signed on the dotted line.

"I swear this office can be someone's house." June said looking at the paintings on the wall. "I have an interview with some magazine. I have to do it here."

"Should have known! You never leave your little hole."

"I need you to look for a good rehab center that Randy can go to." "I'm not your PA."

"Who said you are?"

Please!" "Ok but I'm getting you a PA." "Thanks."

The office phone rang and Nick took it. "Yah?" "Um, people from Reid Magazine are here." "Let them up!"

"I will see you later." June said walking out.

"If you and Kim ever need a third party, you know who to call!" "Fuck you!"

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Nick waited patiently in his office. He knew what they were going to ask and sooner he got over it, the better.

The door opened and Nick looked up surprised, so quick? Keith walked in with a smirk. Great!

"Ah, if it isn't the golden boy!" "What are you doing here Keith?" "I came to see Santino."

"He's not here."

"I can see, you have taken over." "I have no—"

"So you and your father think you can just do as you please huh?" Nick shook his head. So much for a morning. "What do you want?" "I want what's rightfully mine. All this! It's mine!"

"You are talking to the wrong person."

He laughed. "Wait and watch. You and your father are going to pay. You are going to pay dearly, trust me."

"You have serious issues."

"You haven't seen nothing as yet. Just wait."

He turned and walked out. He didn't like the tone Keith had used with him and he knew just how serious his brother was. Nick had always tried getting close to Keith growing up but Keith just didn't want to. He hated Nick and still did all because of Nick's mother.

"Mr. Bradley, morning." A lady said walking in. The journalist. "Uhh..."

"Tracy Kennedy from Reid Magazine." "Please sit."

She sat down and set up her recorder. "Thank you for seeing me Mr. Bradley, I know you probably have a busy schedule."

"No I don't have but go on."

She chuckled. "You are going to be the new face of Braad, how do you feel about that?" He looked at her and sighed. Same remote questions. "I've always knew one day I would take over the company but of cause I'm thrilled."

"Braad has grown ever since it started,do you have any plans for expansion?" "Yes. I do plan on expanding. Business is all about expansion after all."

"You launched some trains a few years ago and some were taken down because they were considered not safe to the environment nor to the people. How has that affected the business?"

"We launched trains and they were taken down for reasons that we had not looked into deeply before we put the trains out there. We have managed to look into the matters again and create something more environmentally friendly and it's out there being use. We faced some loses but at the end if the day, it didn't matter because the safety of people and the environment comes first."

"How do you manage to separate your personal life from the business?"

Nick frowned. "What? My personal life is my personal life and business is business." "It was reported that you were seeing Neli Catlet, Edward Catlet's wife who is late." "Are we discussing my personal life or business?"

She giggled. "Everything."

"She's not here to defend herself in case I say something she would oppose to."

"Ok, are you getting married to Wendy Diamond?" "Why don't you ask her? But yes. I am."

"Congratulations are in order. If there's anything you can change, what would it be?" "Time."

"We heard that Braad will soon be launching something that is going to take us by surprise."

"Yes. Just wait for it."

"Well thank you Mr. Bradley." "You are welcome."

She stood up and left. Nick sighed as June walked in.

"Were you waiting by the door?" She rolled her eyes.

"Funny. I hope you didn't say anything that may put the company in unnecessary spotlight." June was the company's PR.

"I'm not dumb."

"Then what do you call marrying a woman you don't love?" "So you were standing by the door."

"You are making a grave mistake, trust me. Anyways, I'm out!" "I'm leaving too."

"Whatever." She was already walking out.

Mosi avoided looking at the security guards holding a bag full of money. *Don't stare. You didn't steal.* She repeatedly told herself as she walked out. It always felt weird how they looked at you making you feel as if you've done something wrong.

She got inside her cab and he immediately started driving. Her intestines were in knots, she couldn't shake off the uneasiness. She felt as if she was being watched.

No one is watching, Mosi, you are just being paranoid. She sighed. Now she had the money. She hoped it would be enough, enough to get plane tickets and to have a fresh start.

Nelima did it, what's stopping you? The cab stopped in front of her house and she stepped out. All she was waiting for now was the passports and visas. Imani was sorting that out. She knew a friend who knew a friend.

"Mam, you are back." Malaika said.

Mosi held the bag tightly. "You can now leave Malaika." "Ok mam."

Mosi watched her walk out then locked the door. Inside her bedroom, she pushed the bag under her bed.

"No..." She muttered pulling it out then putting it in her wardrobe. Her heart was pounding too fast she felt dizzy. Taking it out of the closet, she put it under her bed again.

"Stop it. You are going crazy!" She muttered staring at her bed. She felt as if she was losing it.

She wished she was not running away, that she was still working as a receptionist, that her child's life was not in danger.

Her heart skipped. Door knock. She rushed out of her bedroom and walked inside Farrah's tiny bedroom. She was sleeping. The knock got louder and louder. Mosi pressed her lips together slowly sitting on the bed.

Go away. Go away. She

silently prayed. "Mosi!"

She closed her eyes sighing in relief.

"What's wrong?" Imani asked as soon as she opened the door. "I thought... I'm so scared. Lord, why is this happening to me?" Imani sat on the couch and threw a black small bag at Mosi. "What's... passports. Oh thank God!"

Imani smiled proudly. "Now you going to apply for both your visas. Inside that bag, there are documents. I spoke to a friend of mine in UK. She stays in Broadstairs. You are going to stay with her. She said there is a job at the nearby hospital. I told her you have a diploma, that you are a counselor. She said you can get a job. There's also a school for Farrah somewhere close by."

Tears filled her eyes as words deserted her. "Don't cry. Did you change the money?" She nodded.

"Ok. Tomorrow morning you will go and apply for a British visa. You have to pay more so that your visas comes out after a week."

"I'm scared."

"You should be."

Mosi rolled her eyes, so much for making her feel better. "Thanks." "If you were not scared I would be worried."

"I'm taking my daughter to a place I've never been before. I'm scared. It's not even safe here. Yesterday, someone came, he was lost. I thought it was Mr. Warda's people. I had my period right then and there."

Imani laughed. "Your period was supposed to come yesterday." "No. It was supposed to come next week."

"Don't worry. You

will be fine."

"Nekesa called."

"That Bitch! What did she want?" Imani never liked anyone, Mosi sighed. "She said I have been replaced at work."

"Tell that fat whore to lose weight next time."

"Stop it. I just want to be free. Is that too much to ask for?" "You will be.

Soon. You can even call—"

"No! Imani stop it. I won't call him. It's wrong but of course knowing you, you blur every line you come across with."

Who is it now? Mosi wondered hearing another knock. Imani looked at her. "Expecting someone?"

No. She wasn't. She looked at Imani, her heart starting to race. Imani stood up and walked to the door in her heels. Imani had been the one who taught her to wear heels, said they boosted a woman's confidence.

"What do you want?" Imani yelled.

"Where's she? I'm here for my things!" Nathan. Mosi stood up.

"Your things are in the bin." She told him standing beside Imani. He looked good, well groomed. Mosi looked at her gate, he had bought a car finally. He hadn't bought one during their time together because he claimed to have too many responsibilities. Mosi wondered if really he had the siblings he said he had or it was just a lie.

"What do you mean? Do you realize that—"

"She doesn't realize anything you bastard! I hope you please your new wife because you failed pleasing my friend."

Mosi grunted silently. She shouldn't have told Imani that. She had never reached climax with Nathan or any of her ex husbands. With her ex husbands, she thought it was normal but

when she met Nathan, Imani told her she was supposed to cum. She never did. She would rub her clit most of time. Nick was the only one who... *Stop it Mosi. Stop! It shouldn't have happened.* She reprimanded herself at the direction of her thoughts.

"Maybe if your friend didn't have such a loose vagina she would come!" Nathan spat bitterly. Imani's loud evil laugh startled Mosi. "Oh please, you are too small, like a five year old."

"I threw your things away." Mosi intervened. "If you want them, go and look for them inside the bin. Beside that, leave."

"I want my couch."

Mosi looked at him in shock. He never bought anything. Nothing! Not even a spoon. It was all Mosi. She laughed. The small radio in her bedroom. He bought it.

"Wait here, I'm coming."

She walked back inside the house and came back holding the radio. She handed it to him. "That's all you bought."

"Boy bye!" Imani closed the door on his face.

"What did you ever see in him? His face looks like that of a chimpanzee. A very black chimpanzee. Imagine having kids with that. God forbid!"

Mosi shook her head. Imani was mean. Generally.

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Mosi looked at the TV screen. A movie had been playing for over an hour and she still didn't know the direction. She couldn't sleep. She had tried after dinner, she tried sleeping but woke up minutes later and sat in front of her TV. Imani's presence had relaxed her a bit but as soon as she left, the tension came back.

She took her phone and called her mother. They hadn't spoken since the funeral. It was late but she needed to speak

to her. It rang for a while.

"Mosi,"

"Mama.."

"How are you?"

"I'm sorry." Tears filled her eyes. "It's ok. How are you and Farrah?"

"I'm in trouble. We are going away."

She was silent for a while. "I will pray for you. God shall lead you wherever you will go." "Thank you."

"Call me."

"I wish we can go together."

"I will stay here. It's my home. I will stay with my daughter. She has no one but me." Tears wet her cheeks.

"He doesn't love you."

"I long stopped staying for love. I stay for you and Nelima. Be strong." "I'm trying."

"Try harder. Goodnight."

Closing her eyes she gave herself a pep talk about being strong but tears wouldn't stop. She couldn't understand why she was torturing herself over broken glasses.

"Mommy!" Farrah yelled waking Mosi up. She had fallen asleep on the couch, staring at her phone screen she groaned. Sleeping on the couch was becoming a routine.

"I have bathed, brushed my teeth and wore my uniform just you taught me."

She smiled looking at her daughter. It was funny how time flew. "Good baby, your cab will be—"

"It's the play today!"

"Shit!" She mumbled beneath her breath. "Um yes. I will make you breakfast then you will eat while I bath."

"Ok."

She took the remote and changed the channel. Spongebob. Farrah's favourite cartoon. Mosi walked to the kitchen stretching. Quickly, she fixed Farrah cereals and placing it before her, she rushed to the bathroom.

Looking at herself on the mirror after putting on her red dress with a tiny slit on the front, left leg, she sighed. It had become a bit loose, didn't hug her figure as tight as it used to.

She put on her red stilettos, Imani had bought them for her sometime when they were spending her sugar daddy's money. Her braids looked old but she still tied them into a ponytail and made a bun.

She knew makeup would do it. Sitting in front of her mirror, she took her time. She was not going to embarrass her daughter. Grabbing her handbag, she walked back to her sitting room. Farrah had spit a bit of milk on her skirt.

"Come, let me wipe that."

She cleaned Farrah and on her way to the school in the cab, she thought carefully of everything and by the time they arrived, Mosi was convinced she was doing the right thing, right for her daughter.

"Farrah, come!" Her teacher said as soon as they walked inside the hall. "Good morning Mam."

Mosi smiled. "Morning, how is she?" "She's a bright girl. You are blessed."

Mosi smiled then walked to the front seats. "Hello."

A lady beside her greeted. "Morning."

"My son, he is playing Joseph. He was so excited, I had to remind him this was all a play." Mosi smiled. They were always like this, trying to make conversation. "How old is your child? He or she must be young. I have a daughter your age. She just finished at university." Mosi looked at the lady. "Oh,"

"I'm so glad she didn't get pregnant when she was still a teenager. It must have been hard for you. Is her father present in her life?"

Mosi, too stunned to respond, shook her head. The woman sighed audibly.

"That's how they are. They impregnate and just leave. Do you have a degree? Girls your age sleep with older married men for money. You should get a degree. You are must be 22, but you can still get a degree. Education doesn't care about age."

Mosi looked at the stage, shocked.

When the play started, she clapped and took out her phone. Farrah spoke too loudly over the mic with confidence dripping. She knew her words and when she had to say them.

As soon as the play ended, she stood up and applauded, everyone joined her.

Parents walked out with their kids. Mosi was glad. As soon as they reached outside, Mosi picked Farrah up and twirled with her before placing her down.

"You did great my love."

"I was Mary mommy, did you see?"

Mosi smiled. "Yes baby. I saw. You were very good." "The teacher said she's going to buy me sweets."

"I'm going to buy you a teddy bear." "Yes!"

They walked to the cab. Mosi was glad he came quickly, she had texted him 20 minutes ago. He was always on time and Mosi couldn't blame him, she paid him enough to always be there on time.

Inside the cab, her phone rang, foreign number. Her heart skipped, she knew who it was and wondered why he was calling.

"Hello?"

"Hey," he said. Mosi pressed her lips together trying not smile. "Hi, how can I help? Is everything ok?"

"Yeah, everything is ok. Can I speak to the princess? It was her play today." Mosi was shocked he remembered.

"Um yes."

"Can I please speak to her."

"Yes."

She gave Farrah the phone and she immediately smiled.

"Hello?" Mosi watched her daughter's smile brighten her face. "I am fine. Yes, I was Mary. Teacher said she will buy me sweets." Mosi smiled while Farrah shook her head to whatever Nick was saying to her. "Yey! Yes. Mommy said she will buy me a... a teddy bear. Ok.

Mommy said we are going away." Mosi rolled her eyes, she should have told her not to tell anyone about that, it was too late now. Farrah shrugged then giggled. "Bye. Ok."

She gave back the phone.

"Hello."

"Hey, thanks for letting me talk to her." "It's ok."

"So where are you going?"

"I just said it but I will take her to the mall." She lied. "Ok. How are you?"

"I am fine."

"Me too in case you want to know. I'm doing great." Mosi chuckled.

"Good for you."

"Would it be wrong if I buy her gift?" "Ummh..."

"Something small." "Ok."

"Thanks."

"You are welcome."

"Bye."

"Bye."

Looking at her daughter, she smiled. "Farrah, who did you tell that we are going away?" "Oh, I told my friends. And teacher."

"It's a secret. You should not tell anyone." "Why?"

"Because it's a secret." "Ok."

"Good."

Her phone vibrated. A text came in.



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"You sounded a little off over the phone, everything ok?"

Mosi wondered why he cared. After all, he was just a stranger who happened to have been dating her sister. She even questioned the reason Nelima left her husband, was it because of Nick?

"I am fine."

She replied hesitantly. He quickly responded making Mosi's heart skip. Why was he even talking to her?

"Are you sure? Remember what I said, it's ok not to be fine. Kinda normal too."

Of course she remembered. The conversation still rang in her head from time to time. She put her phone away. She had things to worry about. Bigger things like applying for the visas. She was willing to pay extra. Farrah paged through her story book giggling alone, she was innocent and didn't know anything. Mosi could not stop thinking about how everything was going to affect her daughter.

Mr. Warda hadn't sent another note nor had anything happened to them, maybe he was just bluffing but she couldn't take that chance. Or maybe he had just been trying to scare her off because it had really worked. Or maybe he was serious and if she didn't leave she and her daughter were just going to disappear from the face of earth.

Her stomach grumbled. She hadn't ate since yesterday morning. Last night, she hadn't ate, with everything going on it was hard to even swallow water.

As soon as the cab stopped by her house, she grabbed her daughter and hurried inside locking the doors immediately.

"Switch on the tv." She told Farrah rushing to her bedroom. The money was still there. She sighed with relief.

You need to relax Mosi. No one is coming after you. You are being paranoid. Mr. Warda does not even care. He was just scaring you off. Relax.

She listened to the voice in her head and slowly, her body

relaxed.

"Mommy.." Farrah walked in her bedroom holding a box wrapped with red paper. "What is this?"

"It was on the sofa."

Mosi took it and Farrah ran back to the TV. She slowly teared the paper then opened the box. With a loud scream, she jumped, throwing the box on the floor.

Imani looked inside the box while Mosi stood feet from her, her entire body shivering. "I can't believe this."

Imani muttered.

Tears filled Mosi's eyes. She put her hand over her mouth to conceal her sob and watched her friend dart away from the box which was still on the floor.

"Did you apply for the visas?"

She hadn't. She went to the play to watch her daughter.

Imani popped her eyes as Mosi shook her head responding to her question. "Why?" "Farrah's play."

"First thing tomorrow morning, you are going to apply for the visas or else, you see that fresh human finger in that box oozing blood? It will be yours, worse, your daughter's." Imani said, voice filled with promise

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Chapter Twenty-One

Mosi watched Imani fold clothes into the big suitcase. She kept tossing some on the side and folding only the nice ones.

"No. Farrah loves that dress." Mosi complained when Imani threw the red dress on the side of the 'not going because it's too old or not nice'.

Imani looked at it with a face that said 'that trashy dress?' "She loves it.

Please."

"Mosi, not everything can go."

"Farrah loves it."

"Mosi..."

"She loves it." She pressed.

Imani sighed rolling her eyes then grabbed the dress. "I hope you remember what I said. Your plane leaves tonight." She put the dress in the suitcase. "Rose will be waiting at the airport. She will have your name written on a board. I sent you a picture. Look at it carefully."

"I have looked at it. Short chubby lady, short hair and wears spectacles."

"She works at the hospital there. Apparently she started off as a nurse though she's a qualified doctor, the owner finally gave her the rightful position after a year but the owner is nice." Imani said as if Rose working as a nurse for an entire year and finally being promoted to what she studied for 6 or 7 years was an achievement.

"I have only a diploma. Why on earth would they hire someone with a diploma when they could hire a degree owner? They failed to hire Rose as a doctor yet she had a degree." "There!" Imani said loudly closing the suitcase. Mosi sat quietly eying her black long skirt. She liked it. It was one of her favourite and it hadn't made it in the suitcase.

"What's going on with you Mosi? This is not you. Where's the confidence? You are giving Mr. Warda too much power. You know it. You can't report him yes, but you can show the entire world what you are made of. You came from the lowest point in life into Nairobi, worked hard, got a diploma, got a job, managed to get a flat, paid rent on time throughout, even took care of a grown man! Girl! You are a force to be reckoned with. Did you buy his underwear too?"

"Stop. I'm not going to discuss Nathan with anyone. He is good as dead. And no, I have not lost my confidence. I am just stating facts. Facts that are staring right back at us. I'm realistic and I won't be sorry for saying the truth."

"So you bought him briefs?"

"Stop."

She laughed. "I wonder how it's going with the new wife. That lady is only with him for the money."

"I don't care anymore."

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"And we are done! You are ready to go." She stood up looking at the suitcase she had packed. "You are good to go."

"I'm going to miss you."

"Me too. Don't forget, show Rose your qualifications. I told her but show her." "I will Imani."

"Perfect."

The phone vibrated in Mosi's hands. He was calling, again. She had been ignoring him for two weeks now.

"Nick? Why are you ignoring his calls? Mosi you—" "No. I have no business with him. Not now, not ever."

"Ok." She said with her hands up, sign of defeat. "I'm glad you are leaving alive." "What a friend!" Imani laughed. "I'm serious. That finger—" "I don't want to talk about that."

Imani took a glance at her watch and put on her shoes. "I have to go home. I wish I can escort you to the airport but Daddy is coming tonight and I need to cook for him. I haven't been seeing him much this days, I think he has found new fresh meat. He needs to be reminded of a lot tonight."

"You still want the BMW?"

"Yes. My car is old and either way, I don't want to use a Toyota hilux anymore." "Next time, have sex with the president."

"Daddy is taking me to an event. There will be high profile people and there's this minister I have been eyeing. He likes me too."

"Did he say that?"

"He bought me a perfume."

Mosi laughed. "You really don't waste time do you?"

"No. You should learn from me. Look what being stuck with... you know who did to you. When things become a bore, run."

"Aids is real."

She rolled her eyes grabbing her bag from Mosi's bed. "Let me kiss my little angel. Don't forget to call as soon as you land."

"I heard you Imani." They hugged tightly and Imani softly whispered in her ear. "You will be fine. I know it."

Nick stopped the car in front of Santino's house. As he sat in his car, he groaned slamming the steering wheel. Everything he was supposed to do was simple and he was ready to do it but why was it so hard? Why couldn't he shake off the feeling that he was digging himself a deeper grave? Listening to Nelima's audios and rereading her letter made him question and doubt his decision. Was the company really worth it?

Be happy. She had said in one of the audios. Life is a journey. Don't worry about the following 10 meters. They don't matter. Worry about the meter you are walking. Don't settle for less.

She didn't understand. She could never understand, not after she refused treatment. He was starting to hate her. If she really had loved him, she would have done the treatment. Even if it bought her just a year, it was enough. Lord knew he didn't want that much.

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Sometimes he dreamt of her. Her soft voice. Beautiful eyes. Her smile. *You will tell your grandkids about me one day. You will make our story so beautiful and you will store our memories very safe in your heart. You will love again and you will be happy. It won't be with me but I will always be right there.*

He wanted to be able to hold her and love her. He still kept her in his dreams, in everything he did. He didn't want anyone else but her.

Willing himself to focus, he stepped out of the car and walked to the door. Inside, he heard Santino's voice first, loud and full of cockiness. He prepared himself before walking inside the dining room. A new woman was sitting on his side. Was she above 18? She looked below.

"Ah Nick! You are here. Come son." Santino said getting on his feet.

Edington smiled proudly and Nick wondered why the old man really wanted him to marry Wendy, she deserved better but then he figured, it must have been her putting pressure.

Nick stared at her. She was smiling. Nick knew her happiness depended on him and he didn't want to hurt her anymore. He had promised to try.

"Yeah.." He sat down beside his fiance.

She kissed his cheek. "I'm so glad you are here."

"Yeah.."

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Edington started asking about business. Nick hated business talk, it bored him but still he answered the questions.

"Should I dish for you?"

Wendy softly asked. "No."

"I was thinking we do an engagement party. We have less than four months to go." "Whatever makes you happy." She smiled moving her hair to one side. "I love you."

"So Nick, Santino tells me you are bringing something new for the business."

Santino chuckled while his company giggled kissing him. Nick wanted to get up and leave but that was not an option.

"Yeah, something I have been working on for a while now."

Nick caught Santino's new thing sucking his earlobe.

Could it get worse? Wendy leaned close to Nick.

"I'm going to visit my mother in two weeks. The hospital was being extended. Now it's done. As soon as she comes back from New Zealand, I have to go see her."

Nick nodded. He only remembered Wendy's mother from childhood memories. Tall slender blonde and controlling.

"You can come with."

"I have deadline, I will be busy."

"Oh, I will send your love." She sounded a bit disappointed but Nick couldn't bring himself to be as excited as she was.

Nick walked inside his house, he was drained. The dinner had drained every last bit of energy he had. Walking into his kitchen, he found Sean eating from the fridge.

"I'm calling the police."

Sean turned and looked at him. "You are back!"

He took out his phone and stared at the screen. She was staring back at him wearing sunglasses. He put his phone away and grabbed a bottle of whisky and walked out.

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"Conrad called, he's found a girl!" Sean shouted. "Tell him to act right. I'm going out."

Nick got in his car and drove out. He knew Sean was going to wipe out his fridge in his absence and even steal some to his house. Driving where the road led him, he found himself headed to Broadstairs. Feeling her bucket list in his pocket, he took it out.

Most things were ticked expect only 12, 12 wishes unfulfilled. 12 wishes she wanted him to fulfill.

He put the bucket list back in his pocket. The drive to Broadstairs was shorter than the last time he had went there. He drove to the beach where they had sat for hours. The moonlight made the water glisten. He wondered what she would have thought or what she would have said. Stepping out of the car, he sat on the bonnet, bottle of whisky in his hand. Taking out his cigarettes from his pocket, he heard her faint voice. *"Maybe you should stop. Quit. And live."*

He threw the cigarettes on the ground then opened the bottle of whisky. If she couldn't allow him to smoke even from the grave, surely he could drink. Bringing the bottle to his lips, he gulped some down. It was too strong and burnt his throat, and that's what he needed.

Miriam had called yesterday. She had heard about Neli.

"She was a nice girl." She said, her voice filled with sadness. He didn't respond. He didn't even know what to say.

"But take heart child. It's not easy. She knew and you knew. She prepared you and now it's time to heal. Don't rush it, take your time but don't take forever. Some people in life were meant to be lessons."

"Like my mother?" The question burnt his tongue.

"Yes. Your mother was a wonderful woman. She was beautiful, confident and fierce. She was just like you, even

naughty like you. She was a lesson and a beautiful one and she will forever live in our hearts."

"But you were sleeping with her husband." Nick had suspected it for the longest time but never tried finding out because Miriam was like a mother to him.

"No. That's not true. I never slept with your father son, never. Your father loved women. Beautiful women. Your mother was very beautiful and pure. She might had been an exotic dancer but she was pure and innocent. Your father approached her but she refused him, he was still married to your brother's mother. She rejected him over and over. He did not take the rejection well, he raped her. After that, your mother just gave in. In all the years they were together, I stayed far away. I never liked Santino. They had been something in his eyes, something dangerous. When things started getting shaky, he started pursuing me. I moved and never saw him again till your mother passed on. Even then, I was just fighting for what your mother left. Nothing more. She was like a sister to me."

"So I am a product of rape?"

"No. She lost that baby. Had a miscarriage. Don't think about all this. You—" "He killed her and you know it."

"Yes. He did but I never had enough evidence to point it out but I knew he did. Your mother was going to run away with you. Santino was beating her and cheating. She was scared he would kill her because he kept threatening her. I told her to pack only the important things and move to my brother's place. He stayed in Brazil by then. Your father locked your mother inside the house with you when he found out the plan. You were still young, you didn't even know what was going on. When she managed to break free, she took you with, she was

going to report Santino to the police. She knew a lot, things that could end him. But she never got anywhere."

"What did she know?"

"She knew who killed your brother's mother. It had happened in front of her. A lot of people had died in front of her. She was going to tell the police everything, even testify against Santino. She was willing to do anything, all for you."

"He killed..." He sighed. "He's going to pay."

"Be careful son, he won't hesitate killing you. Anything that stands in his way, he always manages to eliminate it."

"He's met his match."

"There was a man. His name was Robert. Robert Gasto. He was your mother's close special friend. Talk to him if he's still alive. I last heard of him decades ago. He may be able to help."

Nick brought the bottle to his lips again. Santino was going to pay and he was going to make sure of it. Somehow, he knew Miranda had been killed inside the house, and there were camera's. He was going to look into the CCTV. There had to be something. And he was going to find Robert.

"Mama, are we in the aeroplane?" Farrah asked, it was the fifth time she asked the same question.

"Yes baby."

She clapped her hands excitedly. "Is Aunt Imani coming too?" "No baby, but she will visit."

Mosi took a deep breath as the flight attendant announced they all put on their seatbelts. She secured her daughter then herself chanting in her head. *This is the right thing. You are doing the right thing. You are putting your daughter's safety first.*

She was running away from her problems, life threatening problems. Farrah grabbed on to her mother's hand as the plane took off. This was both their first time flying and she wanted her daughter to have the best time of her life.

Hours later, she received a glass of juice from the air hostess while Farrah slept. Mosi couldn't sleep though she could see most people were sleeping. She couldn't, she had tried to but failed. Farrah had been chatting for the entire first hour, she couldn't stop talking and to free her mind, Mosi had listened attentively till Farrah had fallen asleep.

Now she only had her brain overthinking. What if it didn't work out? What if she didn't get a job? What if - A lot of what if's had filled her head. She had the money, the pounds. She would survive on them but till when? What if Farrah didn't get placement at any school? She decided if after two weeks, she hadn't found a job and Farrah had not found placement, she would buy plane tickets and go back home. She would hide at the corner of the country.

Mosi wondered how Nelima had been feeling when she ran away from home with money only for transport to reach Nairobi. Where did she sleep when she arrived? How did she go to London? Was she scared all alone?

Mosi smiled. She was proud of her sister even if she was dead. She had made it even though she was now gone. She had made history.

Mosi stared at Farrah, she deserved a lot she herself had not received. Mosi was willing to do anything for her daughter. Gulping down the juice, she grabbed a magazine and started paging through. Nothing interesting but enough to keep her mind off stressful things.

She eventually fell asleep but woke up feeling the plane shake. Farrah was awake too, crying. *We are dying.* Mosi thought panicking. Why was it bouncing like this?

"Mama.."

Mosi looked around. Where were the flight attendants? Surely something was wrong! "Relax baby." She said calmly. Everyone was calm it baffled Mosi. How could they stay calm while the plane threatened to fall.

"It's shaking."

"Just relax. Hold my hand."

Farrah gripped her mother's hand tightly and never let go till the plane stopped moving. The air attendants finally came out, offering some snacks. Mosi narrowed her eyes, they could offer snacks but went missing when the plane was threatening to fall. What service! Mosi gently wiped Farrah's tears and chuckled. "Don't cry, we are fine."

"Some snacks and juice?" The air hostess asked with a smile.

"Yes please," Mosi responded then asked.

"What was happening?" "Oh, we were flying over mountains. Are you ok Mam?"

"Yes." She responded quickly enough with a tone which implied she had known that the plane shaking was because it was going over mountains and that she was just a concerned passenger though in actual fact, she had been terrified she was going to die together with Farrah.

The air hostess gave them each a cup of juice and snacks before asking the people behind them.

"Mommy, we have arrived?"

Mosi's eyes scanned through the floods of people searching for a short chubby lady holding a board with her name. Her heart was beating too fast, if it could, it would leap out of her chest and land right on her feet. There were too many white

people and countable black people. Farrah clung closer to her while Mosi continued to frantically search for Rose.

MOSA in bold letters caught her eye. She blinked wondering if that was her or not then looking at the face of the person holding the board, she sighed with relief not even caring if it was written Mosa not Mosi. It didn't matter. Dragging her suitcase with one hand and the other hand with Farrah, she walked to Rose who had noticed them now and was smiling.

The pictures had not shown the acne that coated her face like lotion or just how chubby she was or thick. Rose wore spectacles which made her eyes seem bigger.

"Mosa and Farrah," she said warmly looking at both of them. "How was your flight? Let's go. I need to get home, I have a night shift."

She said offering to take the bag from Mosi who gladly gave it to her picking up Farrah. "The flight was fine, thank you."

"I'm sure you are exhausted. I slept for hours the first time I came here."

Mosi just nodded as they walked out. Rose led them to a small car. Mosi figured it was hers in the way Rose drove, carefully and slowly.

"So, Imani tells me you are friends." Mosi smiled.

"Yes. We met 5 years ago."

"I've known Imani from school. We've been friends since then. You are lucky to have her as your friend. I long told her to come here but I guess she's still caught up on depending on men." Mosi remained silent. She had heard that disapproval and disgust tone in Rose's voice and Mosi wondered why she would say that about Imani though they were friends.

"How old is your daughter?" Rose asked while Mosi looked out through the window. It was beautiful and clean. Too beautiful.

"She's 7."

"She's doing third grade right?" "No, second grade."

Mosi met Rose's eyes on the mirror and Rose's were filled with horror. "second?" she shrieked. "Why?"

As if there had to be a reason, Mosi blankly looked at Rose. "Children here her age are doing third grade some even fourth. The problem with you African people is that you are slow. You need to keep up with the times. That's why white will always remain smarter than you and more civilized."

Mosi was shocked. Rose had spoken as if she was white. 'You' meant to say every African including Mosi expect her because well, she resided in London and now considered herself white though just trapped in black skin. Mosi couldn't see anything wrong with the fact that her daughter was doing second grade, and that her daughter had graduated from pre-school when she was five and started her first grade when she was 6. Mosi held her tongue from telling Rose that maybe Africa would get better if African people who worked overseas actually worked back in their countries so that African governments can stop hiring people from overseas to perform certain duties for them.

"We will just see, I hope they will take her for second grade."

Mosi remained in silence and watched the city of London. She was fascinated by almost everything because it all seemed beautiful in her eyes.

"I stay in Broadstairs, it's a some distance from here."

Farrah was asleep on Mosi's lap. She felt sleepy too and had a headache for days but still kept awake. She thought of Nick

and where he stayed. Probably somewhere fancy. Now that she thought of it, Rose had a British accent. She spoke like a white person.

When the car finally stopped, Mosi stared at the house from outside. Bigger than her flat back home and more beautiful. Mosi knew staying with Rose was not going to be fun and comfortable and so she had to get the job and move out.

Probably get a room, a cheap one. "Come in."

"Farrah, wake up." Mosi shook Farrah gently. "Let's go."

Rose didn't help with the bag, she just walked to the doorstep and pushed the glass door. Mosi followed behind with the bags and her sleepy daughter and chuckled silently walking inside. Bottles of beer welcomed them and the house smelt of weed. The volume on the TV was too loud, it filled the entire sitting room which looked like a dumping site. Clothes were all over.

"Rose, where are my beers? I told you to get them!" A man sitting on the couch full of clothes looking like a serious drug addict and woman beater screamed, voice too loud.

Mosi watched Rose smile too brightly, Mosi almost felt sorry for her. He was probably abusing her, both emotionally and physically. The house was Rose's and Mr. Drug addict and abusive probably was just staying with her and benefited from whatever he made. And oh, he didn't have a job and every beer bought was with Rose's money.

Mosi saw herself in Rose's eyes. It hurt to think that she had been like that, praying and worshipping a man who expected you to do everything for him in the name of love and it hurt even more because she's still hurt over Nathan. How she had loved him, cared for him and did everything by the book only to have him get married right under her nose. "And who the fuck is this Rose?"

"They are my friends Shane." Rose responded softly.

"And why didn't you tell me? You are a fucking foolish bitch. I don't want them here!" "They have nowhere to go. I will get your beer."

Shane continued cursing while flipping the channels. Rose motioned they follow her and Mosi tightly held Farrah's hand.

"You will sleep here." Rose said opening a door. Mosi walked inside and gave Rose a smile. "Thank you."

"You are welcome."

Rose walked out while Mosi pushed the suitcase inside and closed the door. The room was not that big and not so clean but it was better than nothing.

"Mommy, are we going to stay here?"

"Yes. Just for a while. I'm going to find a nice school for you. You will love it and make great friends."

"But I want my old friends."

"They are not here. You will make new ones. Come here."

Mosi picked Farrah up and placed her on the bed then knelt before her.

"We are in London and we are going to stay here. You are going to go to school, a new school with new people. I'm going to find a new job. After that, we will look for our own house and stay there. Ok?"

"Is Uncle Nathan coming?"

Mosi closed her eyes for a second taking a deep breath.

"Farrah, Uncle Nathan is never going to come. It will be me and you now. Just you and me."

Mosi took off her shoes then her jacket before laying her on the bed. "Sleep now." "Goodnight."

"Goodnight baby."

Mosi knew it was just a few hours before 6 a. m. She slowly took off her shoes then lay beside Farrah. Exhaustion was beginning to catch up with her. Just as she began to fall asleep, noise started. Voices screaming and shouting. Mosi pressed her lips together pulling her daughter into her arms.

"You fat bitch! You are a fucken whore! Ugly fat bitch!" "Don't talk to me like that!"

"Or what? Huh? Or what? I fucken made you! If it wasn't for me, you wouldn't be here! Where the fuck where you?"

"I already told you. Shane let go of me!"

"I fucken own you! Who told you that you can leave?"

Rose screamed and Mosi knew she was being beaten. Rose screamed even louder and Mosi froze.

"Mommy, she is crying." Farrah said, her tears filling her eyes.

"You bitch!" Mosi heard Shane shout followed by a something breaking. "You fucken bitch!"

"Stop!" Rose screamed and Mosi was immediately up on her feet. She was shaking. Another scream, she gripped the door and opened it.

"Stay here ok? Stay." She firmly said then walked out.

She took a few steps then heard the door open and close with a bang. She slowly walked till she was in the sitting room. The TV was on the floor and Rose was picking up glasses silently. Mosi quickly turned back to the room and got on bed.

"Sleep Farrah." Her voice shook with her entire body. This was not what she had expected.



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Mosi woke up with a jolt, her heart racing, the bright light filled the room. She quickly looked at Farrah who was sleeping with her leg thrown over Mosi's waist and her head facing the opposite direction.

She took a second holding her breath then finally exhaled. She was in UK. It felt somehow surreal but she couldn't help her smile. She was in London. Getting up she put on her shoes then walked out. The TV was back on position, the house was clean and a delicious aroma had filled the house. She could hear Rose humming from the kitchen.

"Oh, you are awake. How are you feeling?"

Mosi forced a smile pretending not to see the long sleeved turtleneck top Rose wore accompanied by jeans. Her make-up was overly done though her acne still stood out. "I'm fine, thank you."

"I'm cooking breakfast. You can go take a bath. Imani tells me you have a diploma in counseling."

"Yes."

"I work at the hospital here, it's a big hospital, I'm a doctor. They have enough counselors with degrees. I doubt you will get a job there but I think there's an opening for a cleaner."

"That's ok too."

"Ok. There's a school here. I hope you came with all necessary documents for Farrah." "I did. I'm going to bath."

As soon as Mosi walked back in the room, she found Farrah awake. "Let's go and bath."

Mosi dressed Farrah in her red dress then combed her short hair. "I'm going to school?"

Mosi laughed. "No, but soon. Don't worry." "I'm hungry."

They walked to the kitchen. Rose had dished. "If you are going to apply for a job, I doubt what you are wearing would do." Rose ridiculed.

Mosi looked at her jeans and T-shirt. As far as she was concerned, there was nothing wrong with the way she was dressed but because she desperately needed a job, she nodded. "I will change."

Rose looked at Farrah with a frown then sighed. "I've dished." "Thank you."

Mosi took a plate and handed it to Farrah who gingerly took the plate with both hands. "Should I eat mommy?"

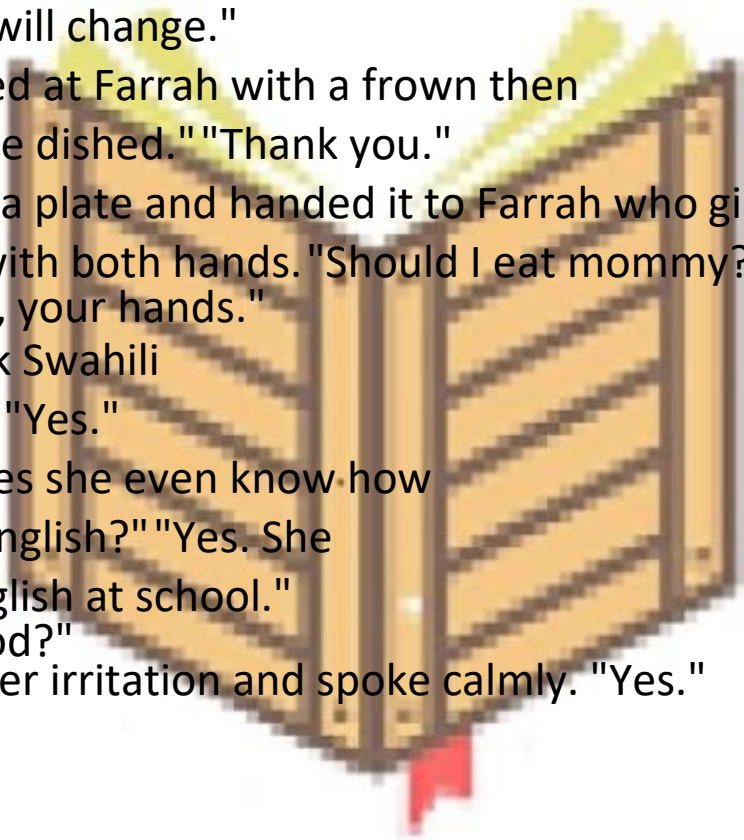
"Yes. Wait, your hands."

"You speak Swahili with her?" "Yes."

"Why? Does she even know how to speak English?" "Yes. She speaks English at school."

"Is she good?"

Mosi hid her irritation and spoke calmly. "Yes."



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Nick walked to the door and softly knocked. The door immediately opened and an attractive woman who resembled Miranda stepped out. She took off her sunglasses, Nick had never met her before.

"Kamryn,"

She smiled. "Nick Bradley." "Can we talk?"

"Yeah sure, come in."

Nick stole a glance at his watch walking behind Miranda's sister. He had twenty minutes before his flight took off.

"You can sit, anything to drink?"

"No. I'm here to talk about your sister. My condolences." "Thanks."

"I believe your sister told you." "Told me what?"

"About her unstable marriage with Santino. I want to help you."

Kamryn stared at Nick momentarily before opening her purse and taking out a cigarette. Placing it between her lips, she took the lighter and lighted it.

"Yeah," she said puffing out smoke. "Your old man isn't exactly the fairytale. I'm sure you know that."

"I do. She must have told you something."

"Yeah. That your father is a fucking abusive tart with a small dick that barely gets erection." She smiled naughtily. "I hope that's not the case with you. It will be such a waste of good looks."

On a normal day, Nick would have flirted back, hooked up with her. He liked them naughty and ready for anything.

"What else? Did she mention they were fighting?"

"If you are here to cover for your father, too late the cops were here and I told them everything. Miranda told me they

were fighting and that she knew he killed a lot of people, blackmailed people, and also his selling of illegal firearms. Everything! The cops know so it's too late. I know Santino killed her. I'm not scared of death but he's going to jail."

"Yeah, that will be a problem. Santino can pay anyone off." "Look rich guy, what are you doing here?"

"Did she tell you anything about someone called Adelaide?" Kamryn smoked silently then finally nodded. "Yeah but the cops... I didn't tell them shit about that."

"What did Miranda say?"

"There's a file."

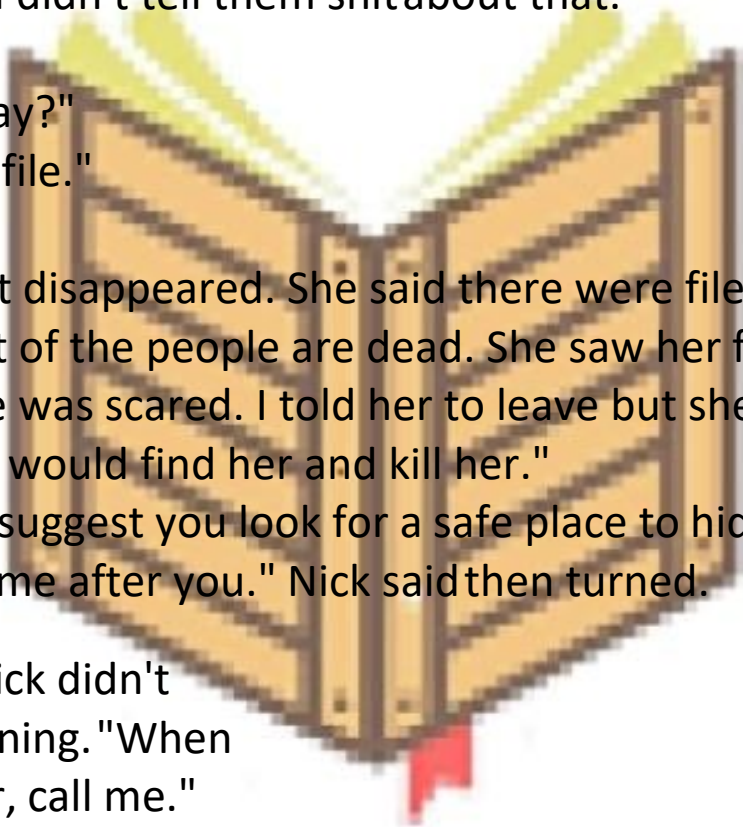
"Where?"

"She said it disappeared. She said there were files. A lot of them. Most of the people are dead. She saw her file too and stole it. She was scared. I told her to leave but she said it was useless. He would find her and kill her."

"Thanks. I suggest you look for a safe place to hide. He's going to come after you." Nick said then turned.

"Wait!"

"Yeah?" Nick didn't bother turning. "When it's all over, call me."



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Nick didn't bother asking what she meant by when it was all over but just walked out to his car. He had exactly 12 minutes.

Santino gulped down his drink as the detective walked in his office. He wondered what Steve was doing. He had told the fucker that he hated such attention from the police, he killed people. Mostly because he could and some for fun, but not the police. He respected them and he hated to kill the Parker fool.

"Well well, what have we got here!"

Santino exclaimed. "Drink?" Detective Parker shook his head. "No thanks."

"Then what can I do for you detective?"

"How about you start telling me about Thomas Rodriguez." Santino chuckled lightly. "He's my business associate. Officer, did I break the law?"

"I don't know, did you? If I were you, I would be careful. You wouldn't want to move that small piece to the puzzle that will cost you a lot. You have to be careful, I hate arresting innocent people. Didn't you say you are innocent?" Santino hated everything about Parker and he needed him gone. Together with that whore's sister.

Chapter Twenty-Two

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Mosi sat quietly by the waiting area. She couldn't understand why she had to be interviewed for being a cleaner. She had answered all the questions asked confidently and the lady had kept an uninterested face throughout.

"Are you going to work here mommy?"

Mosi glanced at Farrah with a smile. "Yes. It's a big hospital." It was a very big hospital and was very clean. Mosi put her arm over Farrah's shoulder thinking of the pay. It was enough

to at least get a room. She planned to look for a room somewhere to stay then pay the lease with the cash she had brought with. It had to be enough for rent, the rest she would see but first she needed to secure placement for Farrah. Everything was moving fast and she hoped to get the job. She was willing to work as anything, as long as she got money from it.

"You can come in." The lady who had interviewed her said listlessly. "I'm coming."
Mosi followed inside her office and resumed her seat.

"You got the job. We don't have a choice, we do need a cleaner. You can start in 2 days. There's the contract. And there's your documents."

Mosi took the contract and her document which the lady had demanded then quickly signed the contract.

"Thank you so much."

The lady just nodded and Mosi took it as her cue to leave. "Let's go sweetie."

Outside, Rose was in her car. "Did you get it? If you didn't, I heard there's a hairdresser needed. Do you know how to braid?"

"Yes. And yes, I got the job."



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Rose started the car. "The salary is not enough, you need a second and third job to keep you going. I know a restaurant, they need a waitress. I will take you there."

Mosi wondered how Rose expected her to keep up with three jobs. In the contract it had stated she starts work in the morning till mid day. She could be a hairdresser from mid day till late then go back home.

"I don't think with time —"

"I already spoke with owner. He said you can start tomorrow. Your shift starts from six till eight."

"I can't, what about Farrah?"

"You will have to get a cheap nanny to look after her. You need every cent." Mosi hated to admit that Rose was right. She needed every cent.

"Ok. But I need accommodation."

"There's an apartment I found, you will be sharing, it's a three bed apartment so you will get the other room. I found. It's cheap. Fully furnished. Imani says you have some money. You will use that to pay the rent."

"Thank you."

"It's ok. Imani said I should help you." "Can I talk to her?"

"Yes. I will call her. She's been asking about you."

Rose drove them to the restaurant. It was one big fancy restaurant. Another interview. She spoke carefully, pronouncing each word fully. Another waitress had interviewed her chewing a gum throughout and smiling at customers.

"We already have a waiter so you can do the dishes, and clean up the area." "Ok."

"You can start tomorrow. Bye."

Mosi walked out and went back to the car. "And?" Rose asked as soon as Mosi settled beside Farrah.

"I start tomorrow."

"Good. I already spoke to the owner of the salon, she says you can start tomorrow." "Ok. Thank you."

Rose didn't respond. Mosi wanted to ask if she was ok but held her tongue. Rose was caring on like nothing had happened. Mosi knew the bruises were bad. She didn't need to see to know.

"Shane is a good man." Rose said. "He used to work in the military force but had a little accident and broke his leg. They had to let him go but they gave him a very good package. He loves me."

Mosi nodded, Rose was a reflection of her old self. She remembered how she'd always defend Nathan. She painted him perfect and didn't care if he was burden on her or not. In her mind she had always thought they would get married and they would both contribute to their family and that Nathan would love Farrah.

"If it weren't for him, I really wouldn't be here. He's a wonderful man. I'm blessed. He loves me a lot."

Mosi hoped one day Rose would just wake up and leave. He wasn't worth it. As much as it hurt, that was the truth. Back at the house, they found some lady leaving with her daughter probably Farrah's age. White with black long hair.

"Jean, hi," Rose said.

"I was just here to check on you. My husband said he heard noise yesterday."

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Mosi watched Rose grow uncomfortable. "Oh, I always tell Shane to reduce the volume of the TV." She said with a chuckle. Jean smiled nodding but from her eyes, Mosi knew she didn't believe.

"Hello," Jean greeted Mosi.

"Hi."

"This is my friend. I'm helping her get a job. She just came from Africa."

"Oh, it's a pleasure meeting you. My name is Jean and this is my daughter, Anna." She said with a smile that Mosi returned.

"My name is Mosi, and this is my daughter, Farrah. Pleasure is all mine."

"Such beautiful names." Mosi blinked with surprise, she was sure Jean didn't know what her name meant for her to rule it as 'beautiful'.

"Come in for a cup of tea Jean." Rose offered opening her door. They all stepped in and Mosi watched Anna introduce herself to Farrah who looked partly scared. Mosi understood, Farrah had been distant the entire day. She was finding everything overwhelming but Mosi knew she would adjust.

As Jean settled in Rose's kitchen, Rose gave Mosi her phone. "It's ringing." "Hello? Rose?" Imani's voice. Mosi quickly excused herself.

"Imani, it's me."

"Mosi! I told you to call as soon as you land."

Mosi smiled. Imani still sounded the same. "How was I supposed to call?" "Anyway, how is everything?"

"I got jobs today. Three."

"Good. I told you, Rose is a good person."

Mosi wanted to tell Imani about the abuse but felt it was none of her business. "Yes. I'm going to try getting Farrah registered at a school tomorrow."

"Do that. All the things that you left for sale, they have been bought. I will send you the money."

"Thank you."

Imani laughed. "Just don't forget me when you become a big thing out there. I bumped into Madam." Madam was her sugar daddy's wife.

"I hope you didn't fight."

"Fight? If she tries me, I will snatch her husband and let her be single and ugly. Can you believe it, she said maybe I should stop being a mistress and just be a second wife. Me? Second wife? She's testing me. I don't want her boring husband anymore, I told her." "What? The minister said he wants you?"

"Yes and we are going for dinner tomorrow. He said he can get me a better house and even the jeep."

"What Jeep?"

"I want a Jeep. How is Farrah."

"Farrah is fine. Stop sleeping with people's husbands. One day it will be you crying." "Oh please! I'm helping those boring wives. If they could please their husbands, we wouldn't be doing the job for them."

"Wow!"

"Don't wow. Look, I have to go. Greet Farrah for me. I saw Nathan." "Don't talk about Nathan with me."

Imani laughed then hung up. Getting back to the kitchen, she found Rose and Jean drinking tea.

"Mosi, Rose tells me you are going to be working at the hospital." Mosi looked at Rose. "Um yeah. I got a job."

"Don't you have a degree?" "A diploma."
"Oh."

Rose started talking about the hospital with Jean while Mosi just stood there. She wanted to leave as soon as she could. She had never felt more unwelcome and deep in her heart, she hoped she wouldn't turn into a Rose one day.

"Nick, you are back. Boy you should just move back!" Ricardo said chuckling. Nick looked at his goons then back at him.

"Boys, this is my hoy! My son. Excuse us."

They nodded and walked out while Nick sat down. The office hadn't changed that much. Nick had spent most his time in that office every time he visited and now it felt like home. "I suspect this is not a social visit? Something to drink?"

"Yeah."

Ricardo poured them drinks then handed a glass to Nick.

"Ok, tell me, what's wrong? Where's your girl?"

"Dead. I'm looking for something." "They killed her?"

"No. She had cancer." He said dismissively. He didn't want to discuss Neli. "I'm looking for Robert Gasto."

Ricardo took a sip of his drink. "Robert Gasto... no, never heard of him." "I have to find him."

"Look, I will get my boys to look into it but if I may ask, what

do you need him for?" "Santino."

"Be careful. You know what that bastard can do."

"Someone is going to go down." Nick stood up.

"And it's not going to be me." "Call me when you need anything. You know I got you."

"Thanks."

"You should come by, your aunt misses you." "I will."

He walked out and as he got in his car, a car parked behind his and he immediately knew. Nick waited impatiently till Sergio knocked by his window.

"What do you want?" Nick asked opening the window. "A rematch."

Nick started the ignition. "I don't have time for this." "You are weak, you can never win fairly."

Nick chuckled. "How is your sister?"

Furry flew into Sergio's eyes and Nick enjoyed every bit of it. "Don't you—" "Tell her I said hi. Now move along, remove your car or I will crush it."

"I heard your whore is dead."

Nick opened the door and stepped out while Sergio laughed.

"Oh, hit a nerve."

"Ok. You want a rematch? You are going to get it. Now. If you lose, I'm going to fuck your sister, record it then send it to you."

Sergio walked to his car.

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"You boys have started."

Nick looked over at Ricardo then got back in his car. He drove his car to Sergio's who now had a smirk on his face. Without warning, he sped away leaving Nick shaking his head. "You will never change, bastard."

Nick stepped on the gas and the Ferrari moved forward, pushing him back on his seat.

"Don't worry, I won't fuck your sister." Sergio's jaw tightened. "I will kill you."

"I will wait till then but I don't want her. Not anymore at least." Nick said with a smug then drove away. *You are a bastard Nick Bradley.*

Nick sighed when he finally parked his car in front of the hotel. "Hello." Nick said to the receptionist who smiled brightly.

"Mr. Bradley, welcome, how can I help you?" "I need the penthouse."

"Yes, Mr. Bradley." She grabbed the phone and made a quick phone call. Looking back at Nick, she handed him the card.

"You may go up."

"Thanks."

Stepping inside the elevator, Nick couldn't help but worry about Kamryn. She had to be dead by now, Nick was sure. Santino always took care of loose ends. She happened to be one. Inside the penthouse he threw himself on the couch and opened his backpack. It was the same one he had used with Nelima. He took out the digital camera and could almost see her clicking pictures at everything she saw.

Taking a deep breath, he started going through the pictures. Again. There was a picture of them together, he

had asked someone to take it though Neli had been unaware. She was laughing at something, her eyes twinkling and her face radiating with happiness.

He played the video he had taken when they did the sky diving.

"Hi, I'm Nelima and I'm about to sky dive. At how many feet, Nick?" She asked, her voice filled with excitement.

"15 000 feet."

"Yes that." She laughed. She had been over excited. Nick stood up and walked to the balcony. The pain still felt fresh. He still woke up in the middle of the night expecting her to be right by her side.

"Fuck!" He muttered rubbing his face. He could almost hear her whispering that he moves on. He didn't want to. He wanted to hold on to her and the memories for as long as he could. Back inside the penthouse, Nick ordered a bottle of whisky.

Nick slowly opened his eyes. His head was banging and his phone was ringing somewhere. He looked around taking a moment to register. He had fallen asleep on the couch, blacked out and now morning had come. He stood up searching for his phone. It took him seconds to realize it was in his pocket.

"Ricardo."

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"Nick. My boys have found him."

He staggered back. "Shit... they have?"

"Yes. I've sent you the location. You want my boys to—"

"No. I'm good. I will do this one."

Nick parked his car beside an old Chevy open truck. Immediately he regretted not bringing any weapon. Stepping out of the car he looked at the small house that was located in an isolated tiny town. He walked to the door and knocked softly. A lady opened the door seconds later.

"Hi, my name is Nick and I'm here to see Robert Gasto." "Who are you?"

"My name is—"

"Leave! Adele, get inside!"

Nick looked at the man holding a pistol. "Uhh..."

"Leave my property!" He said cocking the good. Nick figured it was Robert himself and something in his eyes told Nick he wasn't bluffing.

"Look I just—"

A gun shot interrupted Nick instantly. Robert had fired. "Sir, I

Robert pulled the trigger again, this time right at Nick. Before Nick could think of his next move, he was on the ground.

"I said get out of my property. Now!" He had missed.

"If I were you, I would be careful about what I say." A female voice said and that moment, Nick felt someone get off him.

The woman had pushed him to the ground saving him. He stood up and looked at the red haired lady. She had a gun in her hand facing Robert.

"Try anything funny and say goodbye to the lady inside the house." Both the woman and Nick watched Robert give in.

"What do you want?"

The woman put the gun in her handbag smiling. Nick could never guess that she had a gun if he met her in the street. She was too beautiful, too elegant.

"I need to talk to you." Nick said staring at the lady. He was trying to place where he had seen her before. He

looked back at Robert. "Now."

"And you?" Robert asked the woman.

"Nothing. Yet." She walked off. Nick wanted to go after her but remained rooted to the ground. He wasn't leaving till he spoke to Robert.

"Come in."

They walked inside where he stared at Adele holding a baby. Nick wondered if it was Robert's child and if that was his wife.

They sat in the sitting room while

Adele excused herself. "What do you want?"

"I'm Nick. Adelaide's son."

Robert's face changed. He looked as if he'd just seen a ghost. "Santino's son?" "Yes."

"Oh. I'm sorry about... just safety cautions." "Miriam said I should talk to you."

"Miriam?" He smiled. "She's alive."

"Yeah. How do you know Adelaide?"

He smiled. "Well, she was my friend. Why exactly are you here?" "Santino killed her.

He deserves to be in jail."

He nodded then stood up. "Come here, let me show you something."



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Nick stood up and followed after him. He walked over to the wall. "This here, is your mother. She was only twenty here." Robert gave Nick a picture frame. Looking at it, Nick focused on her face. He wished he remembered her.

"I met her when she was 17, she was vibrant, jolly, talkative. She was a ball full of energy and hopes. She wanted to be a singer. She constantly listened to Etta James. We were close friends." Robert looked at Nick. "I fell in love with your mother. I didn't realize it at first and when I did, it hit me like lightning. She was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen. That's why I never thought I would fall for her. And it was more of a shock when I found out she felt the same. We were going to get married. Then meet her Aunt. Then after a while, her parents. We got married first because we knew her Aunt wouldn't approve the relationship. A black woman and... We knew they wouldn't just let us be.

"They never accepted us. I got a job in New York City. I had to move. The plan was that I go first then settle. After settling, she would follow and we would start a family. I left, I couldn't come back as soon as I anticipated, 6 months later when I finally came back, she had a baby. A baby girl. I didn't know she was pregnant. She said she didn't tell me because she knew how badly I wanted to go to New York. The baby was too young and Adelaide's visa had expired. She said she would go back with the baby so her family meets the baby then come back. I gave her money, she was supposed to come back a month later but she didn't. I was already back in New York. I thought maybe she just didn't want to come back and I made the biggest mistake of my life.

"I found a woman."

"That's bullshitting. You already was cheating."

Robert nodded. "Yes. Yes I was. I had met Beverly. When I went back to New York. I married Beverly. A year later, one

day I was at home with my son with Beverly when Adelaide walked in. I don't know who told her where I stayed but I can never forget the happiness in her eyes. She had our daughter in her hands. She said she wanted to surprise me."

"How did you marry another woman when you were already married to my mother?" Nick asked calmly but calm was the last thing he felt.

"I filed for divorce and the court granted it because your mother wasn't there." "So you just used her and tossed her?"

"I.. She was hurt to find out that I had moved on. Devastated. I could understand why. She left that same day. I will never forgive myself for what I did."

"You are a bastard."

Robert sighed. "Two years later, I moved back to Brazil. I heard she was seeing a married man. I was angry and jealous. She kept my daughter from me."

"Do you blame her?"

"No. I don't. A year later she dumped our daughter on my door step. She said she couldn't do it anymore. That she was tired. She was crying and I tried apologizing. I told her we could be a family again. That I loved her. She didn't believe me. She left. But.. I could see the pain in her eyes. She didn't want to leave but she did." Robert wiped away a tear that had fallen. "A year later, she was married. To Santino. He was rich. He could take care of your mother. Well, I thought he could. Years later, you were already born. She came back. She wanted to see our daughter who by then, was big. She said she couldn't stay, Santino would get angry and hurt her and me. She was being abused. I told her she could leave but she said she couldn't. Said he would kill her. I confronted Santino and he killed my son. Right before me. He threw him in his pool."

"He was going to kill her too. I knew it. So we planned that she leaves. She was going to. She was supposed to drive to the train station. Get in. She was going to stay with Miriam's relative for a while then after that, we fly to New York."

"The plan didn't work."

"Yes. He messed with her brakes then had someone collide into her. But your mother had reported Santino countless times at the police though they never took action. She once reported he killed a man. She saw it happen. No one took action."

"There are reports?"

"Yes. And I have them. When Adelaide was killed. I went to the police station and stole them wanting to prove he had killed her."

"What happened?"

"The prosecutor was found dead and so was the judge. We had a case but it was dismissed when the new judge took over the case."

"But you still have them?" "Yes. I do have the reports."

"Can I have them?"

"Of course."

"Adele, she's..."

"Yes. Your sister." "Hi."

Nick turned while Robert walked out, she still had the baby in her hands. "Hi."

"I'm sorry about earlier. We are just... keeping safe." She said smiling. Now Nick could see the resemblance between Adele and his mother's pictures.



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"It's ok."

"I've always known you were there. Well, one day I was going to look for you." Nick nodded, bashed by the sincerity in he voice but even more, the resemblance. "This is my daughter, Tanya."

"Beautiful. I have to go. Nice meeting you, Adele. And Tanya." She smiled. "You can always visit."

"Will do."

"There you go." Robert handed Nick the files.

"Everything is in there." "Thanks."

"You are welcome."

Walking out, his eyes searched for the lady who had saved him. She wasn't there. Nick got in his car, closed his eyes resting his head of the steering wheel. He prayed if Kamryn was dead, they had killed her in her house. If so, the camera's set in her house would capture everything.

Driving to the airport, his furry continued building up. Jail was too easy for Santino. He deserved to die a slow painful death full of nothing but torture just like his mother had and Nick was going to do it.

"We bump into each other, again."

Nick quickly looked beside him. The red haired lady. Nick stared at her for seconds then it finally clicked. "You..."

Edward's PI."

"Isn't that lovely?"

"It won't be, trust me."

She laughed. "Nick, relax. I don't kill my prey immediately. A little torture turns me on." "If I were you I will be careful. I would hate it if you join your employer in prison."

"I quit."

Nick put on his earphones only for her to snatch them.

"Nick. Look, I wanted to surprise you. Well, I have been...

Nick, it's me."

"I don't know if I'm supposed to know you but I really don't care." "It's me. Ingrid.

Remember?"

Nick looked at her. The red hair. Wasn't it orange?

Whatever the case was, it was her. "Wow!"

"I know. I never thought I would see you again, till a year ago." "You are working

for that fucker?"

She chuckled. "Used to. He fired me. He wanted me to bring his wife who happened to be your girlfriend back." She

shrugged. "She was happy so I decided not."

"Where are your parents?"

"Well they divorced some time after we moved. I stayed with my mother. She got married again. We moved in with her rich husband who used to rape me. I moved with my dad and since then, I don't know where she is and her husband was found dead days after I moved in with my dad."

"You have red hair."

"Yeah. And you... are tall. You have grown." She shook her head. "It's been... wow! Really long!"

"How did you end up working for—"

"Edward? Odd but I didn't work for Edward exactly." "Who do—"

"Santino."

"Could have guessed."

"I'm just trying to make a living, Nick."

"Never knew he used woman to do his dirty work."

"He's my employer. I was right to follow you. I knew you were up to something. You are always up to something."

Nick looked at her. "Do you still use Ingrid?"

"No. I'm not the Ingrid you remember. You should stop. Santino won't —"

"Santino will never kill his only son. Get that through your skull. But he won't hesitate taking you out."

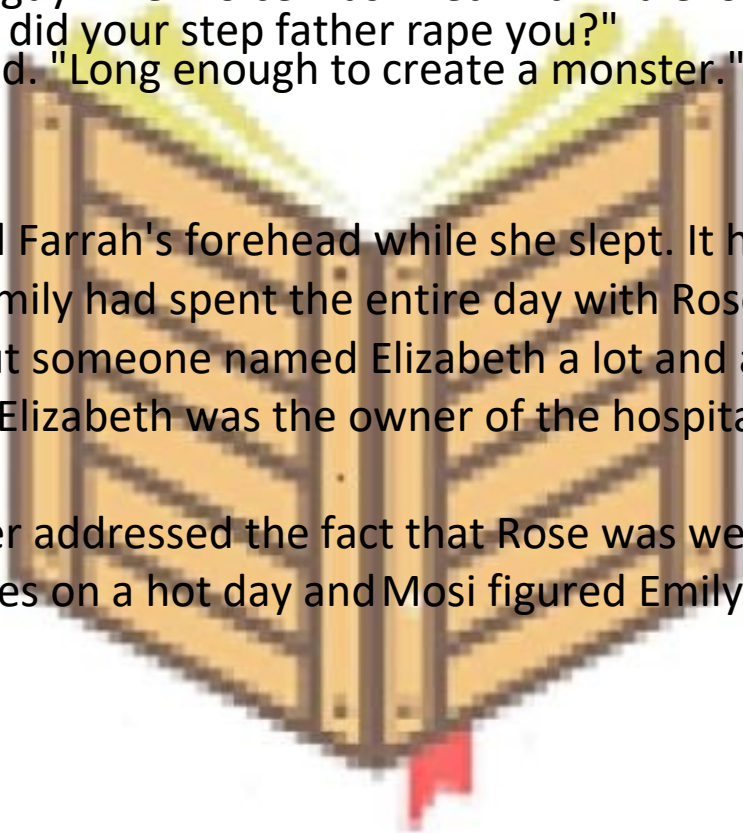
She laughed. "Of course. You are right. Wait till I put every piece of the puzzle. I hope I don't have to kill Robert. He seems like a good guy." Her voice was filled with malevolent.

"How long did your step father rape you?"

She grinned. "Long enough to create a monster."

Mosi kissed Farrah's forehead while she slept. It had been long day. Emily had spent the entire day with Rose. They spoke about someone named Elizabeth a lot and at the end, Mosi knew Elizabeth was the owner of the hospital. Rich widow.

Emily never addressed the fact that Rose was wearing too many clothes on a hot day and Mosi figured Emily was used to it.



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Mosi heard the door bang , startled, she pulled Farrah in her arms. Seconds later, the screaming started. Followed by the things smashing. Rose kept screaming, louder and louder.

Mosi sighed then stepped down the bed and walked out. She gasped walking on the scene. Shane had his hands on Rose's neck.

"Let her go!" Mosi heard herself scream. He let her go then looked at Mosi, his eyes reddish proved he was drunk.

"She's still here! Didn't I fucken tell you she needs to leave?" He yelled then kicked Rose who now was on the floor.

Mosi winced. She had to do something. Walking to the kitchen, she grabbed a knife. *Just scare him. Scare him.* Back in the sitting room, she pushed the knife against Shane's throat, hands shaking.

"You do not know me and you do not want to, trust me. If I were you, I would carry my stinking ass out through that door this moment or else I will slit your throat, get my kid and get in the next plane home. Your stinking alcoholic ass will never find me though your grave will surely find your body." Mosi didn't know what came over her but she was not going to watch Rose die right before her eyes.

"Fucken bitch!" He said leaving. Mosi threw the knife down as soon he walked out.

"What have you done?" Rose yelled. She was now up on her feet with a bleeding nose and swollen face.

"What?"

"Who told you to do that? You are supposed to mind your own business and behave like the guest you are."

Mosi laughed

incredulously. "What?"

"Stay out of my business

Mosa!"

"I was only trying to help! He was going to kill you." "And how's that your business?"

"I can not believe this!" She was now angry. Angry with herself. Angry with Rose. "I want you out of my house!"

"I will be out of here first thing in the morning." "Good!"

"I hope you do not leave in a coffin. It will be such a tragedy. " Rose just stared silently and Mosa knew that Rose knew she was right. It was either Rose left now or as a dead body.



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Chapter Twenty-Three

"Do not worry ok? You will meet new friends today. Be nice." Mosi said softly kneeling before Farrah who was looking at her tearfully.

"Do not cry. Big girls do no what?" "Cry."

Farrah whispered.

Mosi didn't want to leave her daughter in the big school which was full of white children. She wished to go back to the apartment with her daughter.

"You are going to be fine. Do not speak Swahili with them. They will not understand ok? Just speak English. I love you."

"I love you too." Farrah said, tears filling her eyes. "Shhh... no crying."

Mosi got up. The principal was standing right by the door smiling. Her smile made Mosi feel better.

"Ok, ready to go young lady?"

Farrah nodded then turned to look at Mosi waving. "Bye mommy."

"Bye."

The principal opened the classroom door and ushered Farrah in first with her behind. As soon as the door closed, Mosi sighed and started walking. She was relieved Farrah had found placement at a good school.

"This is a very good school, she will like it." Rose had said. Mosi couldn't argue. The school was huge, beautiful and everything Farrah's old school wasn't. She paid the fees with cash, the principal had looked at her momentarily with a questioning look.

Now that her daughter had started school, she could breathe. She had three jobs and Emily had gotten her a nanny. Courtney, an 18 year old girl. Emily said Courtney used to babysit her kids at some point too. Plus Courtney was cheap. She had started two days ago and Farrah had not complained, apparently Courtney was always on her phone. Imani said it didn't matter, as long as she could take care of Farrah.

"I don't like leaving my daughter with a total stranger at night. I wish I didn't need the third job but the room, it's a bit expensive and Farrah needs transport money for the school bus then there's food." Mosi had said to Imani over the phone.

"Look, it doesn't matter. You used to leave her with Malaika. Farrah will be fine. As long as that girl looks after Farrah, the rest don't matter. You don't really need the third job, you have lots of money Mosi."

"That money is Nelima's. It belongs to mama. I'm not going to use it and part of it that I have used, I'm going to replace it."

"Whatever but at least if things get hard, you will still have that money. Minister gave me his card today. You should see what I bought. I have the new Chanel purse that I wanted and I got the new iPhone. My Gucci handbag is so beautiful." Mosi chuckled. "The way you love money..."

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"Girl, spending money that you didn't work for is fun. I got this perfume, it can buy someone's life. Minister is going to buy me the Jeep." Mosi hoped Imani would be happy in the long run.

She got in the bus thinking about the apartment. It was a three bedroom apartment and Rose had been right. It was fully furnished and beautiful. She liked it because she shared with two medicine students who shared a room and one fresh graduate who stayed alone. Mosi barely saw them, they all left the house early morning since she had moved in three days ago.

What she loved the most about the apartment was that she could sleep peacefully without expecting to hear screams and things breaking. She still worried about Rose but there was nothing she could do.

She had seen Rose a few times at the hospital yesterday on her first day and Rose had carried on as if she didn't know her.

"Hello," a man said sitting beside her. She smiled politely before looking out through the window. She still couldn't believe it, she was in UK. She had never dreamt of it.

Getting off the bus, she walked towards the hospital. She was twenty minutes early but didn't mind. There was free WiFi. She sat by the waiting area near the reception and watched YouTube videos on things to do in UK. It was silly yet she found herself concentrating hard, trying to grasp every word said.

"Hey.." She looked up. A tall man was standing in front of her. Was he a doctor? Mosi stood up.

"Hello."

"I want to see Ms. likeson but the receptionist is not there. Do you work here?"

He was tall, chocolate skinned with full lips. Mosi smiled,

he was black, just like her and didn't have the British accent.

"Yes but I'm just a cleaner."

He smiled. "Why do I feel like I have seen you somewhere.."

Mosi's smile evaporated. He wasn't that handsome, just clean. And smart. And cocky. Probably full of himself too.

Mosi quickly got annoyed.

"Is that your pick up line? Too weak."

He laughed. "No. Though I do feel like I have met you before."

"I do not know you and trust me, you do not either." Mosi took out her phone and checked the time. Ten minutes to go. She started walking away.

"No wait. Ok fine. Weak pick up line. You caught me. I'm Miguel."

"Well Miguel, you can sit right there, the receptionist will be back soon."

He walked beside her. "And how do you know that? Didn't you say you are the cleaner?" Mosi chuckled then stopped walking. "I do not know anything about the whereabouts of the receptionist. I am not the person you should be talking to either. Have yourself a good day."

She continued walking. "Wait, what's your name?"

Mosi didn't turn or respond. She immediately decided, she didn't like him.

Detective Parker rubbed his mustache. "Without enough evidence, we won't get anywhere." He looked at the files. "These are resourceful but we need more."

"What about me?" Kamaryn asked. "I can testify."

"He thinks you are dead. Next time he won't make a mistake, trust me." Nick said getting up.

"What about the video? CCTV in his house?"

"There's nothing." Nick sighed. "There is someone who can help but..." "Who?"

"Charlize Jones. Or we can say Ingrid Johanness. His right hand woman. All along I thought it was a man. It's a woman." Detective Parker looked at Nick. "How do you know her?"

"She followed me to Brazil. Knows about Robert. I used to know her. Childhood friends." "Lure her in."

"She's loyal."

Kamaryn laughed. "Look Nicky boy, infatuation is stronger than any kind of loyalty, expect good money that is."

"She has a point."

"She's not stupid. I hope."

"Possibly not immune to good looks I hope." Kamaryn had a smirk on now. Nick didn't have a problem with sex with her red haired hot woman, but he just wasn't interested. He sighed, they had a point.

"Ok. I have a dinner to attend." And he was out. He wasn't worried. Ingrid had been following him from his apartment. Her disguise hadn't helped either. He could pinpoint her from anywhere.

Getting in Sean's car, his phone rang.

"Sean. Hope you did what you were supposed to do." "I did. The bitch followed me around the entire day." "You are at—"

"The rehab center."

"How's Randy?"

"Sober."

Nick chuckled. "Tell him to

keep it that way." "Cool. What did you say was going on again?" "I will tell you when we meet."

Nick drove to Wendy's house. She had decided they have dinner together and he was late. He knocked gently on the door staring at his watch. Thirty minutes late. Wendy opened the door with a smile.

"Hey, you are here."

"Yeah." He walked in and she led him to her backyard set up. A picnic. "I wanted to do something a little different."

His phone vibrated from his pocket. Wendy looked at him with a smile. "Check while I pour us wine. We got the house." He nodded taking out his phone.

Hi, this is Imani. Mosi's friend.

Nick had tried calling her a couple of times and the phone had just rang unanswered. He had stopped trying then.

He walked back inside the house as the phone rang. A voice in his head mocked him, why was he calling this girl he didn't even know, hell he didn't even know Mosi!

"Nick, thank you for calling."

She said carefully. "How can I help you Ima..ni."

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"No. It's Imani. Totally African. Not English. Mosi told me what happened."

He chuckled. Should have known she would. "I hope she's not getting any ideas. That was a pure mistake, one I regret and one that will never ever happen again."

"Look here Mr. Rich, no, she doesn't want you. I can't believe I even called you. You are nothing but a snob."

"You shouldn't call people you don't know."

"That's the attitude you carry when you don't have anything from hardwork but rather because of daddy."

Nick boiled with rage. Who did she think she was? "You—"

"Save it, daddy's boy. I wonder what Nelima saw in you. A beautiful black woman. She probably felt sorry for you. You are such an ass, you used Mosi though you knew she was grieving, took advantage of her. She won't see it but I do."

"I don't have time for this."

She laughed loudly. "If you didn't have time for this then you would have long hung up. Run along to daddy, I guess that's all you know since you have no balls. White people!" She dropped the call before he could say anything. Nick laughed staring at his phone. He couldn't believe it.

Calling Mosi, he paced around. Number unavailable. He chuckled, the entire conversation still shook him.

"Everything ok?"

He looked at Wendy. The dress was gone and all he could see was the red lingerie. She held two glasses of wine in her hands.

"Yeah."

Sean snored loudly lying on the couch. Nick sighed, his fridge was probably empty. "Sean!" He yelled waking him up immediately.

"What? Where? Huh?"

"Get up. You need to leave." "The fuck! What time is it?" "Time for you to leave."

Sean sat up and looked at his watch. "Nope. Tell me what's going on first then I will leave. I had someone follow me the entire day yesterday."

Nick walked to the kitchen. *Run along to daddy, I guess that's all you know since you have no balls.*

He drank water then put the bottle down. Sean had followed him. "I had Mosi's friend call me yesterday. Mosi told her we fucked."

Sean laughed. "That used to happen to me. Did she want too?"

Nick shook his head. "She said I have no balls, and I am daddy's boy. Had to add white people at the end of it all."

Sean laughed harder.

"That's cold man." "I can't believe she even said that to me."

"Definitely seems like she does have balls. She should have borrowed you some." "Fuck you!"

"I like her."

"Santino has his right hand woman following me." "You got to be fucking with me!"

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"No shit. I'm working with a cop. I want him jailed." "Are you sure you want to be crossing Santino?"

"This is something I have to take care of."

"And working with a cop is the way to go?"

"I'm not a murderer." He didn't have it in him to take life. "What if the plan fails?"

Nick stared at Sean. "Then I'm screwed." "You were with Wendy?"

"Yah.. I'm not feeling this man."

"I told you." Sean took out a beer from fridge. "You got the company, what else do you want?"

"I can't just drop her."

"How many girls have you dropped before? Take this Mosi girl for instance. You just disappeared. That was a coward move if you ask me. What if she's pregnant? You never used protection."

"I don't need you guilt tripping me even further and if she didn't want, she could have stopped me."

"She was grieving. You should hook me up with her friend. I like her." "Fuck you and leave my house."

"She's probably pregnant. And you are here, getting married. Conrad said we should fly to NYC, he got girls waiting."

Nick chuckled. "Motherfucker."

"Look I'm leaving. Don't get caught and tell that friend of Mosi's that you know someone with balls." Sean said grinning. "But most of all, do the right thing."

As soon as he was gone, Nick tried calling Mosi again but the number was still unavailable. Sean was right and so was

that Imani woman. What if she was pregnant? He had used her and left. He tried calling again and again but same response. He needed to go to Kenya, but after getting Santino in jail.

His phone rang and he quickly answered. "Yah?" "It's Joshua. He's in jail."

Nick sighed. Edward. He had been going to court for the tape and domestic violence and now he was in it for murder. Nick had made sure Joshua pays the girl in the video enough money to give a testimony against Edward but she had been found dead a week ago and Nick immediately knew who had killed her.

"Good."

"Will talk."

A week later, Mosi had a routine and she was falling in tune. Wake up at 5a. m, prepare yourself then Farrah. Farrah's school bus will be by the bus stop by half six so she should be there already. Catch a bus to work. A ten minutes journey and always 20 minutes early. Use the hospital WiFi then start work. By lunch, you are at the salon. Make sure you eat lunch in the bus to the salon. By six, be at the restaurant and start with the dishes. By nine, you are done, catch a late bus back home.

Everyday she arrived, Farrah would be sleeping. She cooked her dinner in the morning together with the breakfast that all Courtney had to do is warm it and give it to her. By the

end of the first week, Farrah had made friends at school, she said she played football. It shook Mosi because Farrah never played any sport back at home.

"Imani, what's wrong?" Mosi asked sitting at the waiting area at the hospital. She was early, as usual.

"Can't I just call my friend? Anyways, Minister bought the jeep." Mosi laughed.

"I know. I saw the pictures on Facebook."

"And I broke up with that fossil. He's begging me. I spoke to Nick." Mosi immediately felt sick. "You what?"

"I spoke to Nick." Imani repeated casually.

"Stop playing." Mosi said flatly. She badly wanted to believe that Imani was just playing with her but knowing Imani, she never joked like that.

"I'm serious. I called him."

"Why?" Mosi's voice was barely audible. She suddenly felt too tired. "I wanted to tell him you are there."

"But Imani..." She didn't even know what to say. "I know. I'm sorry. You were right."

"Oh my God! What have you done?" She whispered not believing Imani had actually gone behind her back.

"I didn't tell him anything. Well, I never got the chance." "Wow!"

"I just thought—"

"Imani, I told you I don't want him. He was my sister's boyfriend. She may be dead but I respect and love her. I told you I don't want him but yet you still went behind my back. I'm not surprised. I have to go to work."

"I just thought you needed a friend. You don't know anyone there."

"What was the purpose of me coming here? To start

afresh. Why are you so hell bent on setting me up with someone my sister used to love so much? Is it the money? It must be. You and I are two different people. I work hard for my money and I love spending money that I have worked hard for. Let me be, please."

"Ok. I'm sorry
Mosi." "Bye."

Upset was an understatement. She was livid. She wanted to scream but then remembered how badly she needed the job.

"What on earth is wrong with you people!" A soft firm voice said making Mosi raise her head, her breath caught. If ever, she had been intimidated by a fellow woman, today was it. She was staring at a beautiful skinny woman in a fabric knitted pencil skirt, silky turtleneck top with a scarf tied around her neck and sky-high stilettos. She was something from a magazine.

Mosi watched the receptionist rush in. She usually came late, everyday.

"Ms. Benson," she said hurriedly. The beautiful woman looked at her with utter disgust mixed with disinterest.

"And what is your name?"

"Ummh.. my name is Juan. I'm Juan." The receptionist was out of breath. "Right. Juan, you are fired. Pack your things and leave. Now!"

Mosi stood up in shock. She couldn't believe it. The woman put on her sunglasses and walked away from Juan without a single turn. Mosi's breath skipped when the woman stopped right in front of her.

"Good morning, are you a patient?" Mosi quickly shook her head.

"No." "You work here?"

"Yes. I'm a cleaner."

"I see. I thought as much. I need a cleaner at my house. Today. Now."

Mosi squared her shoulders. Confidence was always key. She had learnt this from young age.

"I'm sorry but I already have a job and my shift starts in ten minutes." "Then you are fired."

Mosi kept a straight face and looked straight at the woman. Mosi was sure this was Elizabeth, the owner of the hospital.

"Do you not know how to answer? I said you are fired."

"I heard you. When can I start being a cleaner at your house?" "Stay here. I'm coming."

She resumed walking. Juan was still standing right at the desk like a wet puppy. Perhaps she still couldn't understand what had just happened. Mosi too was in mild confusion but then, that was how people with enough money mostly behaved. The woman did smell money. Out of everyone, she had chosen Mosi to be her cleaner. Perhaps it was the braids, they were a bit old or maybe it was just because of the skin shade. She was fairly dark in complexion, melanin.

Almost an hour later, Elizabeth finally walked back, still poised. She gestured with her eyes that Mosi followed her. Mosi settled at the backseat of her expensive car. The entire journey was filled with silence till the car stopped in front of a huge mansion. They stepped out and walked to the house.

The interior design itself made Mosi dizzy. It was too beautiful, not to talk about the furniture. The woman carried elegance both in her house and in the way she dressed and acted.

"You are hired. Impress me and I will pay you five times whatever you got at the hospital. My daughter's engagement party will be done here. Clean up. The decorators will be here. Can you do it?"

"Yes I can."

"Good. Yvette!" She called out and immediately, a woman walked in. Another blackwoman. "Get to cleaning!"

As soon as she walked out, Yvette smiled.

"Hi, I'm Yvette, you are?" "Mosi."

"Well, pleasure meeting you. We look alike."

Mosi smiled. "I noticed." They both were black with braids. "Where are you from?"

"Kenya."

"Nigeria. I worked with another woman, she got fired after breaking a water glass this morning so rule number one, don't break anything." Yvette said with a chuckle.

Hours later, Mosi found out that Yvette came to London two years ago just after graduating and since then, being Elizabeth's cleaner was the best and highest paying job she had ever got. Just before lunch time, the house looked totally different.

Elizabeth didn't say anything but from her eyes, Mosi could tell she was impressed as she accessed everything.

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"I have to go for my second job." Mosi said while Yvette looked at her as if she had dropped a glass. Elizabeth took off her sunglasses.

"I will pay you ten times whatever you got at wherever your second job is. You also have a third job?"

"Yes I do."

"Good. I will also pay you for that. Now that is out of the way, Yvette, give her the uniform." Yvette hugged Mosi as soon as Elizabeth walked out of the house. "She likes you."

"I can tell."

"I think you and I will make good friends. Come, let me show you everything."

Mosi couldn't turn down the job. The three jobs she had wore her out and now she only had one which paid even more than all the three jobs combined.

She wore the uniform and sighed. *Not bad for a start Mosi. Not bad.*

"She will expect us to stay away during the party of cause because only high profile people will be there though she will expect us to be there as soon as the party ends. Elizabeth loves punctuality. Don't call her Ms. Benson. You will get fired. Arrive here at seven. Not later not earlier. Arrive a minute late, you are fired."

"Wow!"

"I know. I have been here for six months. It's the worst job in a way but at the same time, better than anything you can possibly get. The pay is good."

"Yes."

"Her daughter, she's barely here so don't worry. And oh, knocking off time is eight but it usually depends. If she has a party or gathering, she will expect you to stay. She's hell."

Yvette giggled. "Don't get in her way."

"Thanks."

"You are welcome. Let's go."

They walked back and started fixing the glasses. A young woman walked in. "Where's my mother?"

Yvette smiled. "We don't know mam."

She walked up the stairs taking out her phone. "And that's Elizabeth's daughter, Wendy."

"Oh.."

"She's barely here. Stays at one of her father's houses." "Is Ms. Be— Elizabeth a widow?"

"Oh, she is. She long divorced Wendy's father to marry a richer man who died years back." "How old is Elizabeth exactly?"

Yvette laughed. "You don't want to know. Let's wrap up. They are about to start."

Nick listened carefully as Miriam spoke on the payphone.

"Do what makes you happy. If marrying this girl is it, then so be it. I just want you to make the rightful decision. I told your mother the same thing. Do what makes you happy. If it's right thing, do it."

"What if it's the right decision but doesn't make me happy?" Nick could almost understand why his mother had married Santino.

"Your happiness should come first. Pop by the wine store. I will make you your favourite." Nick smiled. Of course she would. "Why didn't you tell me about Adele?"

"I didn't want to burden you with stress. But now you know."

"Ok bye."

"Do visit. And do what makes you happy." "Yeah."

He hung up and walked out. Today was his engagement party and lord knew, he didn't even want to attend it. He couldn't dodge it though, the media was going to be there and the last thing he wanted was to embarrass Wendy.

He got in his car and like he had anticipated, he saw Ingrid get in hers too, two cars behind his. The entire week, she had been following him around and all Nick was waiting for was an opportunity.

Starting the ignition, he eased the car back in the road and drove to Randy's house. A few minutes late for his own engagement party couldn't hurt anybody. Parking on the driveway, he walked inside Randy's house. It looked clean, a position Randy couldn't keep it in. He glanced over at his watch then stood by the window.

"Come on..."

Seconds later, Ingrid's car slowly passed by the gate. He immediately took out his phone and called the number. It rang twice.

"Charlize."

"Don't pass. Come in." He said then hung up.

He watched Ingrid park her car beside his then stepped out. She didn't bother knocking but just walked in.

"Well well well, what have we got here." She said looking at Nick who was now sitting on the couch in Randy's sitting room.

Nick stood up. "I think I'm getting tired of hide and seek. We should just come out and play Charlize, or should I say Ingrid?"

She smiled. "Whatever you may feel like calling me is fine Nick." "I like Ingrid.

Sounds original."

"So do I."

"How much is Santino paying you?"

"Depends. I think I'm going to get a lot for killing you."

Nick laughed. "I guess." He closed the distance between them. "You grew beautiful. The braces really made you look scary."

She shook her head slightly chuckling. "I doubt. You had a fetish for my braces." "Not anymore though I still have a fetish for orange or red hair."

"Do you want to call Kali?"

He wasn't surprised she knew Kali. She probably knew everyone in his line. He stepped closer to her, brushing his body against hers. "If I wanted to call Kali, I would have long done so."

"You want to fuck?" "Yes, but not you."

Nick thought he saw disappointment in her eyes but it quickly disappeared. "So what do you want? I'm watching you Nicky boy. Closely."

"How can I forget if I always see you in my rear-view mirror. Not much about laying low. You act like an unprofessional at this Charlize Jones. You should be smart." He leaned over till his lips were inches from hers. "Maybe your sloppiness is what attracted Santino to you or perhaps he just found someone who can take the blame when things turn south. You are not exactly the most intelligent person out there."

Nick watched her burn with anger. "You don't know me you fucken —"

"Shhh.." He whispered brushing his lips against hers.
"Don't be too angry. Truth always hurts."

Nick kissed her and she didn't protest. With her rage shooting to the sky, she kissed him back, hungrily and angrily. He ripped her shirt throwing it on the floor before picking her up and laying her on the couch. Nick knew the connection was still there, the bond and he planned to take advantage of it.

Pulling her jeans down her long legs, Nick stared at her erotica body settling between her legs and pressing his body on hers.

"You are late!" Wendy whispered smiling then kissed him as a journalist clicked a photo. She was upset.

"Work. Got held up."

Nick was glad he had changed. Randy's clothes were a bit tight on him but still fit. He looked around, the house was filled and he didn't even know most people. His mood changed when his eyes fell on Santino who kept smiling with Elizabeth. The woman never grew old and Nick knew she did multiple plastic surgeries every year, and so did her daughter.

"You promised you would be on time." She said through gritted teeth, still keeping her smile in place.

"I'm sorry."

"Oh Nick! How are you?" Elizabeth said charmingly hugging him. "It's been time. Look at you! So handsome."

"Elizabeth, good to see you."

She stepped back still smiling. "Wendy was telling me that you got a house." "Mom! It's our engagement party today. We will talk about that some other day."

"The house is beautiful." Nick commented though he hadn't seen it yet.

Elizabeth giggled. "I'm glad you love it."
"A picture?" A photographer asked and they all posed.
"Wonderful!" Elizabeth said as the photographer walked away. "Give my son in-law a glass of wine." The usher that was passing immediately tried handing Nick a glass but Wendy snatched it, spilling some wine on Nick's suit.

"Sorry. You can't drink that."

Nick looked at her in surprise. "Why?" "It's our engagement party Nick."

"Yes so what?"

"I don't want you getting drunk?"

"When did I ever get drunk?"

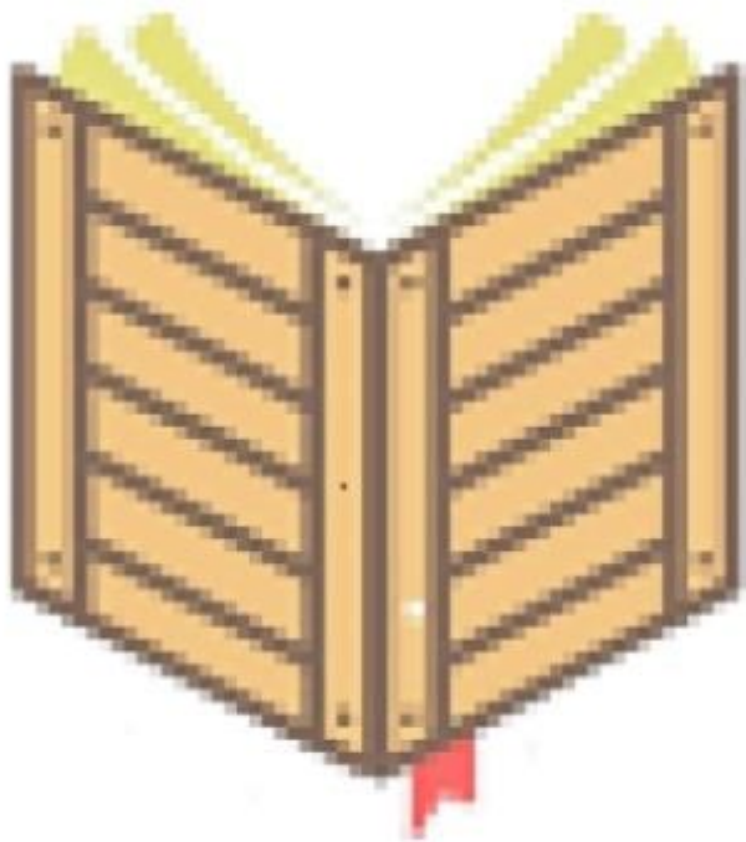
"You are always drunk at parties. Today is our day." "Our day or just yours?" He was annoyed.

"Nick, I'm just trying —"

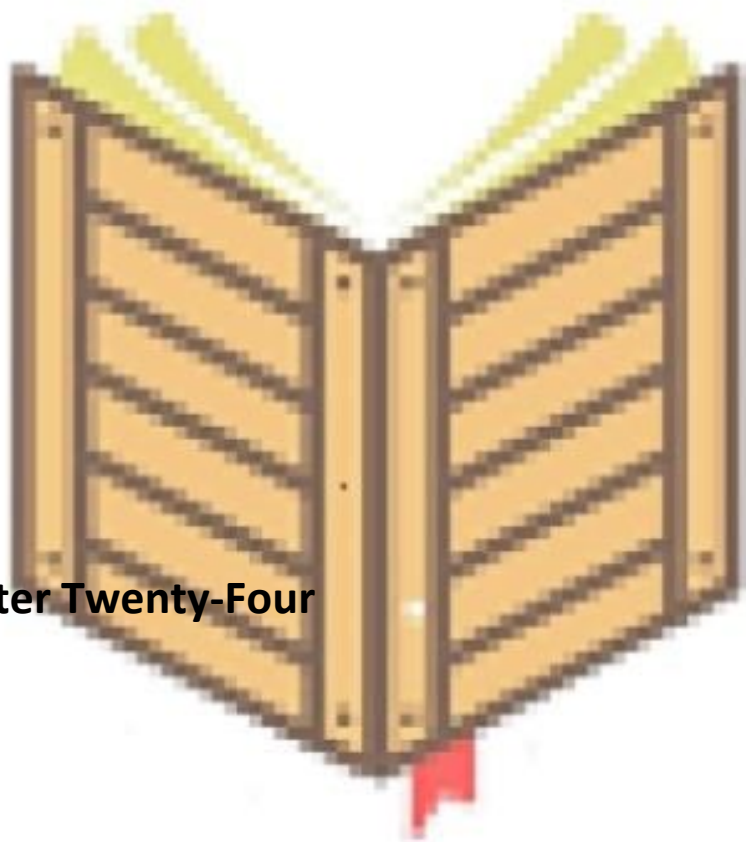
He walked off leaving her standing there. He walked up the stairs, he needed the bathroom. The first door upstairs was locked so he tried the second one.

"The bathroom is down the hall. First door on your right." A thick feminine voice said slowly. His entire body tensed and his heart skipped. It couldn't be!

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Chapter Twenty-Four

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Mosi had been told not to talk to any of the guest, and she was not going to but the man looked lost going from room to room.

"I can show you." She added when he didn't turn.

Ok. Now you have done it. He's going to tell Elizabeth and you my darling, is fired. She briefly closed her eyes.

The man turned and looked at her while she already was pointing the direction of the toilet. Her heart raced while her skin shivered. What was he...?

"Mosi." He said, quietly. She wrecked her brain for something to say but she couldn't get a single word out.

"What are you doing here?" He broached. He didn't seem shocked nor surprised to see her. He didn't seem moved.

"Working." Her answer was cold. She wanted to step back, turn around and run out of the huge mansion.

"I thought you were in Kenya."

She nodded. "Yes. I was." *But I moved. I ran away.* She wanted to say. *My child's life was on the line.*

"So you came all the way from Kenya to be a maid?" The way he said it made Mosi press her lips together.

"I came to make a living."

"And who did you leave your child with?" He questioned sounding upset.

"My child is not your concern but I brought her with." She responded, her voice bold. "You brought her with?" He was really upset. "How can you just bring a child to a country you yourself don't even know?"

"Farrah is my concern, not yours!"

"So much for being a parent." He muttered loud enough.

"You do not know me! I am not a bad mother!" She almost yelled.

"I don't need to know you to understand your poor decision making." He walked back to the stairs. Nick had been so angry, Mosi couldn't even understand why he was angry. Farrah wasn't his concern.

"Who was it?" Yvette asked as soon Nick walked away. "You know you are not supposed to speak to any of the guests right?"

Mosi nodded. She was angry but most of all hurt. Nick was partly right, she had put her daughter through a lot but what could she do?

"Are you ok?"

"Yes. I am fine. Thanks." She responded feeling a pang in her stomach. She was sad but at the same time knew she was doing what any mother would do for her daughter. If she could turn back the hands of time, she wouldn't change anything.

"Ok. Who were you speaking to?"

Mosi was getting fed up with Yvette's questions. She thought a little of what Imani would say. She was still upset and disappointed but now she really started to wonder what Imani had told Nick.

"I do not know." She said and walked back to the laundry room. The more she convinced herself Nick's words didn't matter to her because she didn't even know him, the more his words cut into her heart. Maybe it was the way he had insinuated she was a bad mother after everything she had been through. Or maybe it was just how rude he was to her.

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Hours later, the party was finished and almost everyone was gone. Mosi cleaned up beside Yvette, clearing things. Elizabeth was laughing with some old man, maybe in his late sixties or early seventies though he looked younger. Mosi was still shocked on the fact that Elizabeth was actually 56, she looked 30 if not less.

Secretly, she searched for Nick but could not find him anywhere. Now she wanted to know what he was doing here. Was he friends with Wendy or her fiance? From the corner of her eye, she saw Wendy. She was beautiful but not like her mother. Mosi admired her gown and continued working.

Minutes later, she heard Elizabeth laugh and couldn't help it but turn. There Nick stood, smiling with Elizabeth with Wendy in his arms. Where they friends? Did friends hold each other like that?

"Is that Wendy's fiance?" Mosi asked softly. Yvette looked at Nick then back at Mosi with a smile.

"Yes. They are getting married in less than 4 months if not 3." Her heart broke, how long had it been since Nelima passed on? Wasn't it too soon? She was now too despondent to reply or say anything. She continued working though she could feel his eyes on her. More minutes later she heard Elizabeth say goodbye and by the time she turned to look, they were all gone.

It took hours to clean the huge house. Mosi's feet were numb by the time they finished. Yvette stayed the other side of Broadstairs. She went to a different bus stop after directing Mosi to a different one too. It was late and even though this was UK, she still got scared.

A car stopped by the bus stop and Mosi held her handbag tightly. Her heart was beating fast threatening to leap out from her chest. The driver's door opened and Nick stepped out. "Let's go."

"No thank you."

He chuckled. "Do you know what time it is? Who's with Farrah?"

She was now fed up. Perhaps he had misplaced her quietness for stupidity. "What's my name?" She asked.

"What?"

"What is my name?"

"Look, are you —"

"You do not know me. I am Mosi Niji. I do not know you either expect the fact that you were sleeping with my sister while she was married. Farrah is not your concern because she is not your child nor will she ever be your child. My reasons for being here are all mine. They have nothing to do with you. You are not anywhere near my concerns or worries, matter of fact, you are nothing to me. I would appreciate it if you stay in your lane. Go and make a child of your own. Other people's children are not your concern because they are not yours." She said evenly.

He stared at her for a while with a blank expression but Mosi was too pissed to care. "Are you done?" He asked after a while.

"Are you still here?"

He chuckled. "Get in. I have to go somewhere."

When she remained rooted where she was standing, he walked towards her. "Please."

He was staring deep in her eyes, she stared back challenging only to lose. His look was too intense.

"Ok."

He walked to the car and opened the passenger door for her. She got in silently and watched him close her door.

He drove in silence constantly stealing glances at her. She too didn't say a word. A voice in her head told her it was best if stayed away from him, far away from him. She was surprised when he parked in front of her apartment.

"How—"

"It doesn't matter."

She sighed. "Thank you."

"You are welcome." He stepped out of the car with her. "I want to see Farrah."

She opened her mouth to tell him no but closed her mouth when his eyes fell on hers, pleading.

"Just for a minute. She's probably sleeping." "It's ok."

They walked inside and Mosi led him to her room. She opened the door then walked in. Courtney was sleeping on the double bed with Farrah who was in her arms. The room was small but Mosi didn't mind. It was what she could afford and she was happy with it. The room had a closet too, big enough for both her and Farrah's clothes.

She watched Nick walk to the bed. He stared at Farrah with a smile. "Your daughter is beautiful."

"Thanks."

Farrah was darker than her but never seemed to be bothered by it. It made Mosi happy and every time she told her daughter how much of a melanin queen she was.

Nick looked around the room. "Nice place."

This was the Nick she knew or the one she thought she knew, not the one who had spoken to her hours ago. She put her handbag on the bed then quietly woke Courtney up.

"Hey, I am m sorry for being late. I can give you extra for staying up late."

Courtney got off the bed. "No, it's ok. I like spending time with Farrah. She's been teaching me some Swahili."

Mosi smiled. "Thank you for taking good care of her." "It's ok. I will leave now."

"It's late. I can walk you."

Courtney laughed. "I stay right next door. It's ok. Bye."

She walked out after glancing at Nick. "When did you come here?" "Two weeks ago I think."

"Why?"

She looked at him taking off her shoes. "For a good job." "But you had a job."

"And congratulations on your wedding. She is beautiful. I'm sure Nelima is happy." Nick looked at her. "Thanks. And she is." Mosi's heart sank. He was supposed to be mourning her sister not getting married.

"Yeah. I'm tired, you have to go."

He ran his hands in his hair. "Mosi I can't mourn your sister forever." "Did you even love her?"

"What kind of a question is that? I loved your sister so much. She's the only woman I have ever loved like that and probably will be the only one."

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"I am sorry. I just thought it was too soon but eventually one has to move on. Thank you for the lift."

"I tried calling. You never answered."

"I.. I felt guilty and didn't want to continue being a bother in your life." "I'm sorry I just left. I—"

"It is ok. It was for the best. It was a mistake. It will never happen again."

"And I'm sorry for calling you a bad mother. I think you are quite phenomenal." Mosi laughed. "Oh please!"

"I'm serious. You have been here for two weeks and already you have a job, it's crappy but still, it's a job, you have a room, and Farrah is going to school." He pointed at her uniform. "I think that's quite phenomenal."

"Thank you."

He walked out and Mosi walked behind him. He looked around the huge sitting room. "Beautiful."

"I barely use this."

He turned to face her. "It was good seeing you."

"Imani said she called you, my friend, I'm sorry for whatever she said." "No it's ok. She's a straight talker."

"Yeah."

Nick stared at her for a while and Mosi wondered if maybe he was looking at her old braids or her oily face.

"Ok. Bye." He said opening the main door and walked out. Mosi walked to the window and watched him drive away. She finally stepped back when his car was out of sight then felt her tears fill her eyes. She didn't understand where the sudden wave of emotions came from but it was too much, it overwhelmed her, choked her, smothered her.

Wendy had left a voicemail telling Nick to call her as soon as he arrived though now it was morning. Nick knew she wanted to talk about some event she wanted him to accompany her to or the house or the wedding and he really wasn't in the mood. Wendy expected to get everything she wanted because that's how she was raised.

He drank his coffee thinking of Mosi. He had not expected to see her but he was glad she wasn't pregnant. At least in his eyes she didn't look pregnant. A loud knock on his door had him up on his feet.

"Ingrid." He opened the door wider and let her walk in. Her hair was now black and short, she looked different too. More exquisite and beautiful.

"Nicky boy, I guess you outplayed yourself yesterday." He shrugged.

"You wanted it."

"For someone who's getting married, you sure hell know how to behave." She looked around his house. "But then I put the puzzle pieces together. You don't love Wendy, the company tied you to her and you couldn't escape it. So you decided to agree to the conditions so that you can convince Wendy to sell which she did. Poor thing, she did it because she loves you and she does. Now you don't want to get married because you realize you just can't pretend. Your engagement party went well yesterday. Has Robert called?" Nick sat down grabbing his coffee. "I'm not expecting his call."

"Maybe you should consider doing so and check how your sister is doing."

He chuckled. "I like your hair. Your original hair. I like the original Ingrid. Where's she?"

She sat down. "I like to think she's dead." "You know that's not true."

"Yeah. But wherever she is, she's broken. I like Charlize. She's more in control."

"What if I want to fix her." *Easy.* He told himself. He had to be careful, this was an extremely smart woman.

"This is not a car you can fix." She stood up. He wasn't sure if she was annoyed or angry. "You have been digging on Adelaide's death."

He was surprised she hadn't told Santino yet but still, maybe she had and Santino was just waiting to strike. Nick did keep his steps clean but he couldn't be too sure. "She was my mother."

"Don't dig your own grave."

He stood up and took off the wig. Her red hair was braided. Staring deep in her eyes, he saw grief, anger and lust. Just looking at her, he knew how he would paint her. He slowly unzipped her jacket. He knew what he wanted and he was going to get it. Today.

"I want to paint you. Naked."

"Why?"

"Because you are mysterious." Like Mosi. Or maybe Ingrid wasn't mysterious, just hiding from her emotions. Mosi was hard to read. She barely smiled, spoke quietly with her thick feminine voice. He couldn't read her.

"Ok." Ingrid agreed carelessly. "Now."

He led her to his studio. A room he had turned into a studio. Watching her undress, he set his canvas and his paints. It had been a while since he painted such, he dipped his brush into the paint and started. She lay motionless and he worked in

silence, fast with calculation.

He finally stopped, hours later when she started to move her body slightly in discomfort. Now the lust in her eyes was so visible, she wanted him, he saw it in the way she looked at him.

He didn't want her as much as he did the day before, he didn't want anyone. There was a sudden disinterest in him but he needed her on his side. He unzipped his pants and without taking them off, was buried deep in her. He grinded deep in her till they both dissolved in pleasure.

Nick walked to the door and knocked. He knew Elizabeth was around but still knocked on the door. A lady opened the door, in a uniform he had seen Mosi wearing a week ago. She was shorter though, and thin.

"Sir, please come in."

"Thanks." He muttered walking inside the house. He ignored the voice at the back of his head which told him to go back that very moment. The short lady disappeared somewhere while Nick looked around, searching for her.

"Oh, Nick! What a splendid surprise. To what do I owe such a visit? Uhh... Melissa!" Elizabeth called out walking towards Nick and kissing him on both cheeks. Seconds later Mosi walked in. Nick watched her slow down when their eyes met but quickly she focused her attention on Elizabeth.

"Get us my favourite drink." Elizabeth said dismissively and Mosi quickly turned and walked away.

"Wendy tells me the wedding plans are coming up great."

Nick smiled. "Yes. They are."

"That's good to know. You are a very good young man, you and Wendy would make a wonderful couple. I'm so glad she went for someone in her level."

Forever worried about social class, Nick mused, why wasn't he surprised? Mosi walked back in with a bottle of wine and glasses.

"Put it there."

They both sat down. Nick watched Mosi walk away.

"Wait, can she show me the bathroom." He was already up on his feet.

"Yes. Melissa, show him the bathroom." "Yes, Elizabeth."

Nick followed behind her. The uniform slightly hugged her hips and her narrow waist. She was tall and only inches shorter than him.

"This is the bathroom." She pointed at a door then attempted walking away. He quickly blocked her way, pushing her inside the bathroom and closing the door.

"I need this job, for my daughter."

"I know. I can get you a better job." He couldn't believe his own words but knew he was serious. He had thought about it. All week. Just like he had tried to stay away from her, all week. He seemed overeager but it was too late to do anything about it now. He was in the bathroom, his body almost flushed against hers, looking at the beautiful woman, he hadn't realized her beauty till that moment. It still surprised him that she looked nothing like Nelima, more darker and beautiful.

"Thank you but I do not need anything from you. I am doing well and I want to keep it that way."

He slowly touched her short afro then looked into her big eyes. Big they made her look more beautiful.

When he lowered his mouth unto hers, the voices in his head rang louder and louder. She was Nelima's sister. She was wrong for him, she was just wrong but he couldn't understand why he couldn't bring himself to stop. To move away. To respect his late lover. He could still see her eyes in his dreams, hear her laugh but that didn't stop anything.

His body heated as their lips met. Hearing her sigh, he claimed her mouth, wanting more of her. His fingers were in her hair, surprised at the softness. He stroked her tongue with his as she gave in, drawing him closer to him, seducing him with her mouth. He breathed in her scent and let it intoxicate him. Her body was soft, fragile, agile and she possessed every single part of him.

"Nick..." She tried to speak but he gave unto her again, his mouth on hers. She was driving him wild and couldn't seem to stop.

She pushed him back, weakly and his lips left hers. She looked flushed, lost and in pain. "You.. Nelima." She said then dashed out without looking back.

"Fuck! Fuck! What are you doing Nick? She's Neli's fucking sister!" He said leaning against the wall. He couldn't understand why he had kissed her, that had not been his intention. "Ahh! I just talked to a friend. He knows a very good designer in Italy. He will do your suit. I'm sure you will love it." Elizabeth said as soon as Nick sat down. He seemed calm, in control but that was the opposite of what he felt like inside.

"I'm sure. I have to go, I just wanted to say hi."

Elizabeth chuckled. "Such a sweet boy. You can always come."

Driving away from Elizabeth's house, Nick wondered how Mosi was feeling. Did she resent him? Was she angry? She was driving him crazy, in a way anyone had ever done.

He drove back to his warehouse, perhaps he needed to focus on his work. Wendy was in America, sometimes he forgot she was a model or maybe he just chose to ignore that. She was shooting for a magazine, said it was a big thing. She had left two days ago and Nick was glad.

In his warehouse, he stared at the car. It was done. But not ready. He knew it wouldn't be ready till Santino was in jail. He started to sketch. Something new. It took him the entire day to see the direction he was going. He didn't mind sleeping in the warehouse. By nine in the evening, he had already finished four glasses of his scotch.

Taking out his phone he thought to call Ingrid, they had become casual fuck buddies now and the plan was to get her to trust him enough to tell him what she knew about Santino and it was taking long. She had issues, serious issues and Nick didn't want to be the one dealing with them. He thought of a couple of fuck buddies he could turn to but groaned with anger.

He didn't want any of them.

Mosi sat at the back of the bus, and the entire journey went in haze. The kiss played in her head, she could see it, feel his lips against hers, his hard body, the way he looked at her. She was drowning in guilty. She couldn't believe she had not wanted to him to stop, ever. She couldn't make sense of anything, why did she react the way she did, why hadn't she pushed him away?

Getting home took longer than it did on normal days. *I kissed him. My late sister's boyfriend. What kind of a person am I?* It tormented her. Eventually she got home and all she wanted was to talk to Imani. She was still angry,

she had to remind herself but did it matter now?

She walked in her room, Courtney was on her phone while Farrah lay on the bed asleep. "Courtney, thank you. I hope your mother doesn't mind you staying here up late."

Courtney shrugged. "She's barely there but she doesn't. See you tomorrow."

Mosi watched her walk out then closed and locked the door. She took off her shoes and socks. Pulling her jeans down, she watched Farrah mutter something in her sleep. After taking off her T-shirt and bra, she heard a knock on the main door. She waited trying to hear if someone opened the door. Two minutes later, she heard the door opening then sighed.

She walked to the closet and grabbed her toiletry bag, a hot shower would sooth her aching muscles. She froze when she heard a soft knock on her door. Looking around, she quickly put on her gown and walked the door.

"Eveni—"

Nick stood right by the door, his eyes reddish. He was drunk, Mosi could tell. "What are you doing here?" She whispered.

"I love your sister." "Ok. You need to go."

"I want you." He surprised her with his words. "You are drunk."

"No. You.. I can't stop thinking about you."

Mosi walked out and closed the door behind him. She dragged him to the sitting room. "You need to leave. Go back to your house and sleep. Or go to Elizabeth's house."

"I have to marry her. She loves me. I don't. I have to. I don't want to hurt her." He slurred. "You need to sleep."

She couldn't think of what to do. Calling Elizabeth was out of the question. She couldn't call anyone because she didn't know anyone who knew him.

"Did you drive here like this?" "I want you."

"Come.."

They staggered back to her room. There was no where he could sleep expect on the bed. "Sleep!" She commanded firmly but with a low voice.

He obliged without a single protest then lay on the bed, face up. She took off his shoes and cap. Grabbing her toiletry bag, she quickly rushed out and went to the bathroom.

Hair everywhere. Mosi cringed. This was what she had to deal with every night. She looked around the dirty bathroom. She had to take the shower as quick as she could then go back to her room.

Ten minutes later, she was back in her room and already putting on her pajamas. Nick was sleeping. He looked innocent in his sleep. Mosi could almost believe he was harmless.

She lay between him and Farrah. Exhaustion slowly took over and in seconds, she had drifted off to sleep.

Mosi groaned hearing her alarm ring, she felt she hadn't slept for more than ten minutes. She tried to ignore it but it kept on ringing. Opening her eyes, she looked around. No. It wasn't her alarm. It was something else. A phone ringing. She looked beside her, Nick was still sleeping and it was his phone. She took it out from his pocket. Wendy was calling.

"Nick.." She whispered shaking him.

"Huh..."

"Wake up! Your phone."

Lazily he opened his eyes. "Shit!" "Your phone."

He took it from her then dropped the call before switching it off. It was just after three. He closed his eyes.

"Nick.."

"Sleep." He said draping his arm around her waist. She wanted to move away but there was no where to move to.

"What are you doing here?"

He didn't respond and now Mosi couldn't sleep. Not with her fully aware he was right beside her. She looked up at the ceiling, his hand was warm, her mind took her back to that time in her bedroom, the day of Nelima's funeral. The guilty was beginning to smother her. She took a deep breath but it didn't make her feel any better. Carefully, she took off his arm from her waist then climbed down the bed. She knelt down wanting to pray but she didn't even know where to start.

So she sat on the floor till her alarm finally rang. She got up and woke Nick up. He had to leave.

"Shit!" He said sitting up right. He probably had a hangover. "You need to leave. I need to get myself and Farrah ready." "I'm sorry about last night."

"It's ok."

He looked at her. "Mosi I'm really sorry. For everything."

"You do not have to apologize. Good luck, on your wedding. I mean it. Nelima would want you happy and moving on." She smiled. "And you are doing just that. She is happy."

He nodded. "I guess." he got off bed and put on his shoes. "If there's anything you need, you know you can always call right?"

She nodded. "Thank you."

He stared at her then moved closer to her, backing her up against the door.

"I have to go to work." She whispered. It was just half four and she still had time but she wanted him to leave. Her body was beginning to react. Growing more alert to his presence. "Ok.."

But he didn't move his eyes from her. Desire spread throughout her body. Looking at his lips, she wanted him. Badly. She had never wanted anyone like that. It was a new foreign feeling and it excited her body.

"Nick.."

"Mosi.."

He leaned over and kissed her, tenderly. She couldn't stop him. She wanted him just as much. Pressing his body on hers, she shuddered. He wrapped his arms around her, pulling her closer to him. She was vaguely aware of him picking her up and placing her on the bed. He took her top off and rhythmically kneaded her firm full breasts.

She threw her head back with a soft moan. "Shh.." He whispered before completely shutting her up with a lush wet kiss.

"Nick..."

He sucked her nipples and her body jerked. He drove her crazy while she tried to keep it low. Her daughter was laying right beside her.

He went to her pajama pants and pulled them down her legs. She had no panties on, she hated sleeping with her

them on.

"You are wet.." He murmured parting her with his fingers, his voice filled with want. Mosi closed her eyes as pushed one finger in her slowly. She moved her waist in circular motions as he continued moving his finger in and out of her. He slid in another finger and she moaned squeezing her breast. The pad of his thumb brushed over her clitoris gently over and over. Her body tensed and a moan broke through her lips but he immediately caught it with his mouth on hers while she climaxed pumping her hips against his fingers.

He moved from her while she tried to calm down then covered her kitty with his mouth. Her body tightened while he moved his tongue on her, in her. It was too much. He sucked her clit gently then pushed a finger in her. Her climax came too quickly and unexpected. She put the pillow on her face silencing the moans. She had never had anyone do that to her.

He stood up and wiped his face with her pajama pants before grabbing his phone and walking out.

Nick walked inside the bar and spotted Sean immediately. At least he was alone. "You look fucked up!"

He sat beside Sean and ordered water.

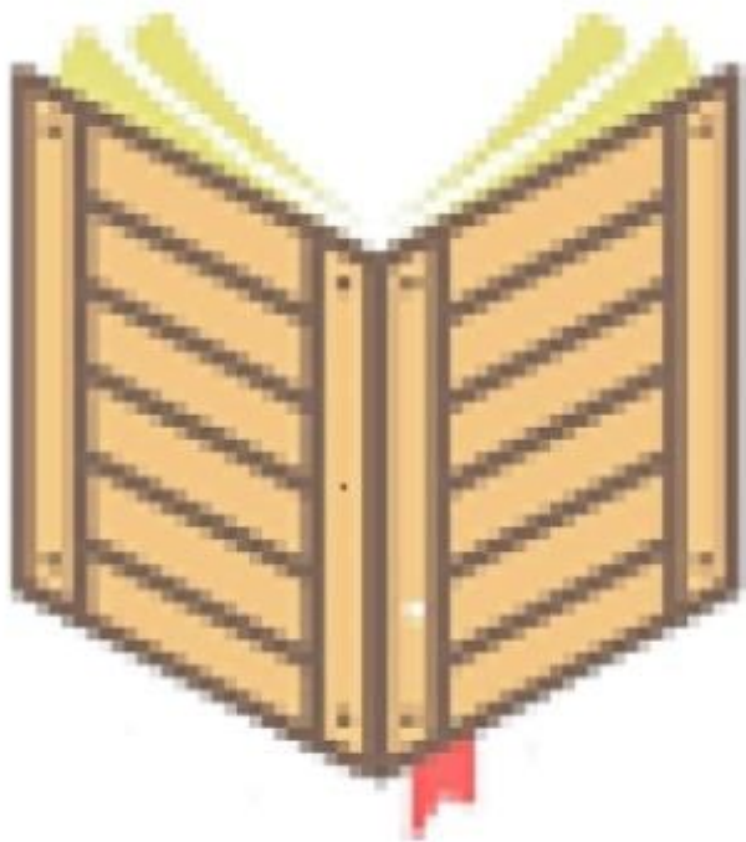
"At least you are still alive, your father hasn't killed you yet." Nick shook his head. "Not yet. Ingrid likes it rough."

Sean laughed.

"Feisty?" "She will—"

"You are here!" Nick looked up. "Look at this!" She threw the

magazine in front of him.



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He read a couple of sentences then shrugged. "What?"
"What? Can't you see? Nick how could you tell them or comment about that accident? You know that accident is still costing us."

"June, calm down. She asked about the trains, not commenting will make us look even more guilty. Give them something to print. Relax. I like your jumpsuit."

She narrowed her eyes at him. Sean cleared his throat then waved at June who completely ignored him. "Next time, avoid it. Don't talk about... Neli. See what they have printed, they said you are still grieving her yet you are getting married."

He took a sip of his water. "That's a lie. I never said anything about Neli." "Now I have to deal with this!"

"Don't give them the attention they are looking for." Nick glanced at the magazine. "Either way, they said I'm sexy." Sean chuckled. "You know they don't mean it. Hi June, I'm July, in case you forgot."

June rolled her eyes grabbing the magazine. "I will see you at the office tomorrow. You need to show up. Even at the company's warehouse. You are the brains of the company and Santino is good as dead."

"Where's Douglas?" Douglas was the appointed part time CEO, strict and never smiled with anyone.

"I'm sick and tired of that fucker! Can you believe it? He fired me!" "Want me to take care of him babe?"

Nick chuckled, Sean didn't give up. "I just need sometime but I will be back soon. You know me."

She smiled.

"Thanks."

"You look beautiful."

"My wife told me so in the morning. Bye."

She walked out leaving Sean with a smirk. "Damn she is hot!" "She doesn't want you. She has a wife."

"Yet she fucked you."

"We were drunk."

"Man fuck out of here! She's straight, just needs a good dick." "Mosi is here." He announced finishing his water.

"That's why you look fucked up!" "She's not pregnant."

"And?"

Nick looked at him.

"And nothing." "Then why are you panicking?" "Because I want her."

"Want or need? Ever since you slept with her, you changed. Not even Nelima changed you like that."

"Leave Neli out of this one."

"She's already part of it. You want her sister. How about you just stay away from her?"

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Chapter Twenty-Five

Mosi listened as Imani's phone rang. She stared at Elizabeth's big pool wondering how it would feel to dip her body inside.

"Mosi!" The thrill in Imani's voice made her smile. "I'm so glad you called. I was so worried. Can you believe it? That fool is leaving his wife for me. I don't understand why he can't get the message but he bought me a house."

Mosi rolled her eyes. "I'm fine, thank you."

"How are you? How is Farrah? It's been two weeks, the last time you were angry with me it lasted for two months."

"We are fine. I got a new job which pays more than all my three jobs."

"I'm happy for you. I should visit you sometime. I keep bumping into Nathan. He's fat now. I did tell him where to get off."

"What did you tell Nick?"

"I called him a bitch." She said unapologetically. "Why?"

"Because he's one."

"I hope you never call him again. He's getting married." "Whatever. You deserve better."

"I never.." She sighed defeated. "I miss home. And my job."

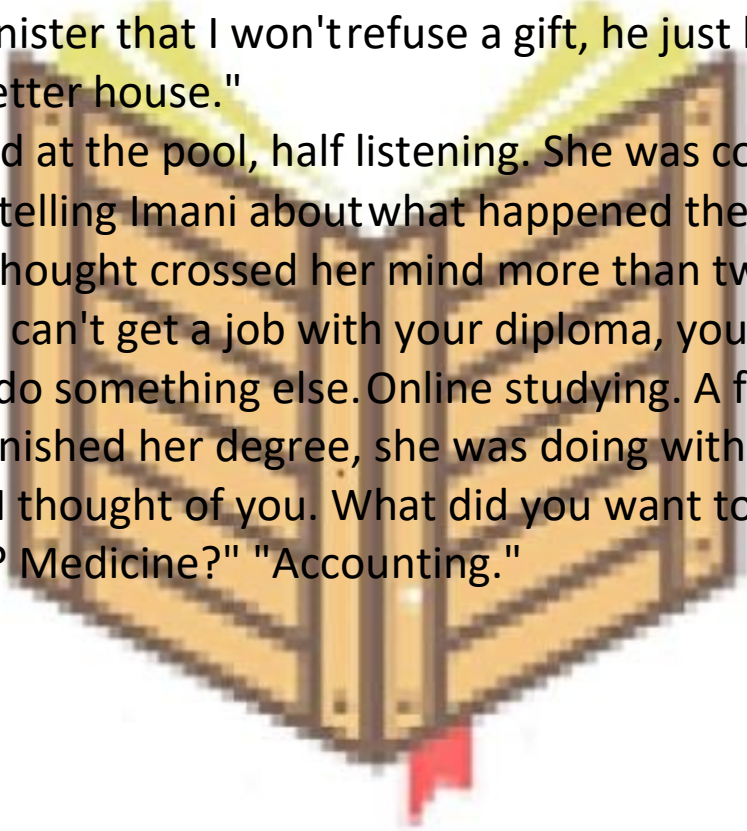
"You will stop missing it. I'm preparing to go to a wedding, minister invited me. You know a girl got to do what she has to do. I don't even know the girl but she's some rich man's daughter."

"What about Daddy?"

"Daddy bought me a house. It's beautiful and I'm keeping it. I told Minister that I won't refuse a gift, he just has to get me a better house."

Mosi stared at the pool, half listening. She was confused, she thought of telling Imani about what happened the previous week, the thought crossed her mind more than twice.

"Since you can't get a job with your diploma, you should register to do something else. Online studying. A friend of mine just finished her degree, she was doing with oxford university. I thought of you. What did you want to do two years back? Medicine?" "Accounting."



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"Yes. Do accounting. Online studying."

"Imani you do realize that it needs money right?" "Yes, just budget properly and apply."

"I will think about it."

"Don't think. Do. I have to go, we will talk."

Mosi had found oxford online study on the Internet days later and Imani had been right. Without thinking twice, she had applied. If they didn't take her then that was that. Two weeks later, they responded and her application had been accepted. Calculating her budget, she could pay for her tuition fees, in installments. It was a relief they took installments too. "Soft hair.. It's rare to see natural soft hair. I always tell the black people who keep hair natural to relax, natural hair is just costly and most of you don't have edges to begin with. I used to keep mine natural too but I realized relaxed hair is best." The hairdresser said combing Mosi's hair. It shook Mosi on how she spoke. "Anyways, what kind of braids do you want?"

"I want a curly bob weave installation." "A wavy Bob would look good on you."

"I want a curly bob. Loose curls."

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"Do what she want, Ellen." Another black woman said standing behind Mosi smiling at her on the mirror. The authority she carried told Mosi she was the owner of the salon.

"Yes Laura." Ellen said with a slight roll of eyes. If ever Mosi had to come back to the salon, she was sure she wouldn't want Ellen to be her hairdresser again.

An hour and 30 minutes later, Mosi was done. She stood up with a smile. She liked the weave and maybe she had underestimated Ellen before.

"Thanks."

Ellen shrugged. "Next time we will do the wavy one."

Mosi just nodded and walked out. She could spare three hours on her day because Elizabeth was not around, she was in Italy trying to get her daughter's gown designed for her wedding. Mosi had now accepted the situation, what had happened between her and Nick had been a mistake, another mistake and since it had been weeks since she last saw him, she figured he thought the same.

"Wow, you look.. beautiful. I guess the braids hid the beauty too well." Yvette said with a smile.

"Thank you."

"Elizabeth is coming back today. There's a party that's being held here today so I guess its a busy night for us. It's one of those parties she hosts but not wholeheartedly and will keep with the fake smiles throughout. The—" A knock interrupted Yvette. "I will get it."

Mosi stood still till Yvette came back and behind her was Nick. Mosi's heart immediately skipped but she kept a poker face on.

"Mr. Bradley is here to see you." The curiosity in Yvette's eyes rendered Mosi's emotions. "Call me Nick." He said then looked at Mosi, his eyes locking with hers.

"Ummh, excuse me." Yvette walked away leaving both of them staring at each other. "We need to talk."

"I am at work. I told you how important this job is to me." "Elizabeth is not here, let's go out for lunch."

"Are you listening to yourself? I am at work!"

"Mosi we need to talk."

Mosi hushed her voice taking strides towards Nick. "What happened was a mistake! I understand that! You are getting married and I am at work! I need this job!"

"I only need a few minutes of your time. Please." "I cannot just leave! I already used 3 hours—"

"You look beautiful."

Mosi opened her mouth to respond then sighed. "Thank you." "I only need ten minutes."

"It's ok. You can go." Yvette walked back in. "You can take her for 30 minutes." "Thanks."

Nick took Mosi's hand and led her outside. He opened the door to his car.

"Do you realize what you have done? How will I explain to Elizabeth what I was doing with you?"

"I need to talk to you. Now. Get in."

She climbed in and sat still. Her heart was beating frantically. If she lost her job, what was going to happen to her? How was she going to pay for the tuition fees? A snug voice reminded her of the money she had in her suitcase.

Mosi watched him gracefully move round the car and settled beside her. Easing the car from the parking space, Mosi watched Yvette look from the window inside the house and her intestines twisted painfully.

People stared as they drove through, perhaps everyone just happened to know Nick. Minutes later, Nick drove in an underground garage then looked at her.

Mosi stared back then she saw the decision in his eyes. She could drift away, tell him no, protest but she didn't. Her mind argued she did, told her no. The air around them had thickened and Mosi knew she wanted him. He lowered his

mouth unto hers, his mouth was demanding in a slow manner.

He moved back slightly and Mosi knew she was taking a dangerous road. The feelings she felt were too foreign and she wanted to stop feeling like that.

"What are you doing?" She sounded angry. Hell, she was angry. "You can not just do as you please, play with my emotions like that. You are getting married!" She suddenly remembered how Nathan had treated her. "The least you can do is be faithful to your fiance."

Nick stared at her looking confused and didn't response.

That fueled her anger. "I am not your play thing."

"No you are not."

"Then stop!" Her voice had dropped. "I'm trying."

"Try harder. I can not... You are my sister's lover." "Was."

She looked in his eyes. "Yes. She loved you. This is wrong." "I want to make love to you."

She fell speechless. No man had ever been direct with her like that. Her lady parts fluttered and she felt her panties wet. He was beautiful, sexy. She couldn't help but notice. He lifted his hands to her face, bringing his lips to hers.

"You and Farrah can come to my house today. We can have dinner." He whispered against her lips.

"I do not want to —"

"Please.."

"Ok."

Huge mistake!

It was too late to take back her words and she knew even if given the opportunity, she wouldn't.

Nick's house was big, spacious with manly furniture. The colors were manly too and it was too clean, Mosi wondered if he had OCD or just had a maid. She chose the latter. Farrah squeezed her hand with excitement when her eyes fell on the huge teddy bear in the sitting room but she never made a move.

Rule number 1, never ask for anything at people's houses unless offered and never accept without mommy's permission. That's one rule Mosi never let Farrah break. Nick knelt before Farrah with a smile.

"Hey, your mommy told me about your show.

She said you did great." Farrah shyly smiled. "I was Mary."

"Damn! That's big. So your Uncle Nick decided to get you something." He stood up and walked to the teddy bear. "This is yours."

Farrah screamed jumping up and down with nothing but pure happiness. Mosi couldn't remember when last she had made her daughter that happy or when Nathan had ever bought her daughter anything. It hit Mosi like thunder, Nathan never loved her daughter, or her. He had used her for five years.

"Mommy, can I please have it?"

Mosi smiled away her tears. "Yes baby. What do we say?" "Thank you Uncle Nick."

"Keep up the goodness and I will gift you more things." He

handed Farrah the teddy bear which was almost her size.

"Want a glass of wine?"

Mosi looked at him.

"Yes, please." "Come."

She followed after him till they were in the kitchen. "I am not going to sleep with you. I am sorry if that is what you were hoping for." She couldn't let another man use her.

"No. I was not hoping for that and I'm not going to use this dinner to sleep with you. You guys never got a welcoming party to London."

She raised her brow and he shrugged. "I know it's hard to believe but I have thought about it. I am not going to take advantage of you anymore. I'm not going to be like... my father." He poured her wine and gave her the glass. "Even Nelima wouldn't forgive me."

She took a sip of the wine. "Your house is beautiful. What are we having for dinner?" "I didn't cook." He confessed with a smile Mosi thought of as cute. "But I ordered something. It's on its way."

"It's ok. We can wait."

He chuckled. "A lot of women would have offered to cook." "Good to know I'm not part of 'a lot of women'."

He was now looking at her, an unabashed open look. Whatever he saw intrigued him, Mosi could see from his eyes.

"Why did you come here?"

She took another sip of her wine. "For my safety and my daughter's."

He frowned. "Does someone want to hurt you?" "Not anymore."

"Are you ok?"

Mosi smiled shaking her head.

"No. I am not ok." "I know I'm not your friend but you can tell me."

She kept quiet for the longest time then told him about her first husband. The beatings. The rape. The verbal abuse. Tiny details till a full story was made. She couldn't remember most of the things but remembered the mine crushing on them. Remembered the last words she had said to her daughter. Getting to the part where she couldn't find her daughter, she just shrugged. "We couldn't find her. The rescue team couldn't find her. She was swallowed by the mine. Just like that."

She didn't cry or get teary. She had accepted it and had moved on. She even stopped thinking about it years ago when she met Nathan. She told him about the second husband. The wives he had. His death. Running away. Farrah. She even told him about Nathan then her boss who had raped her. "He sent me a finger. Oozing with blood."

Nick's face was now hard. He looked angry. Mosi finished her wine and smiled. "But I'm here for a new start. If Nelima did it, what can stop me?"

"If you could, what would you do to him?" He asked quietly. "Expose him and the other men like him."

The doorbell interrupted them. "I guess our dinner is here." While Nick walked to the door, Mosi went to the sitting room where Farrah was playing with her teddy bear.

"Will I take it home

mommy?" "Yes."

Nick had picked them up from the apartment. Mosi still feared Elizabeth would know and she couldn't find a suitable explanation she would give.

"Our dinner is here!" Nick put the box of pizza on the couch. "Pizza?" Mosi questioned.

"Yep! Want a slice

Farrah?" "Yes."

"Come! Let's take plates and dish for you and I and mommy."

They walked to the kitchen while Mosi's eyes got fixed on the painting on the wall. It was a woman and in her eyes Mosi could see the pain, the fear, courage and joy in them.

"My mother." Nick said walking back in the sitting room with Farrah. "Neli always stared at it every chance she got."

"It's beautiful. She's beautiful."

"Was." He sat beside her then dished for them. As they ate, Farrah told Nick about her new school and new friends. Mosi listened carefully while Farrah demonstrated how you play soccer. She was fitting in well, the coach had made her the goalkeeper.

"Mommy said I will have swimming lessons so I swim with Becca."

"I will come and watch you." Nick responded and Farrah's smile widened. "Mommy, can Uncle Nick come and watch?"

She nodded. "Yes baby."

"Ok. Let's play snakes and ladders." Farrah screamed. "Yes!"

"I will get the game. I got it for you only." "Can I go with it?"

"Yes. Give me a minute." Nick stood up and disappeared somewhere. Mosi took the plates and returned them to the kitchen where she quickly washed them. Nick was still not back, she sat beside Farrah.

"Farrah what did I say about asking? Uncle Nick is nice but that does not mean—"

"She can have it. I bought it for her." He was back holding the game. "You need to loosen up."

Mosi sighed, in minutes, they were playing the game and Nick and Farrah had teamed up. "We won!" Farrah screamed a while later. "We won! We won! We won!"

Mosi giggled. "You were cheating."

"Don't be a sour loser." Nick smiled.

"Let's watch a movie." "I want to watch Home!"

Mosi sighed. Farrah's favorite movie. If it wasn't Moana, it was Home. Mosi even knew the movies backwards now, knew every song. Farrah never got tired.

"And guess what? Uncle Nick has it!"

Nick looked at Mosi and Farrah. The movie was halfway through and now they were both sleeping, Farrah lying her head on her mother's chest snoring lightly. Nick stared at Mosi's slightly parted lips. His brain kept going back to what he had put off. He still wanted her, very much. Maybe if he just slept with her, he would get rid of the sexual frustration he had with her. Not Ingrid or Wendy could keep his mind off her. It was beginning to haunt him, he even dreamt her, dreamt having sex with her.

He stood up, switched off the TV then picked Farrah up. He walked to a guest room and lay her there, putting the teddy bear right next to her. Back in the sitting room, he contemplated waking Mosi up or not but then shook her

lightly.

"Hey, wake up."

She slowly opened her eyes. "I am sorry. We should go." "No. You can sleep here. There is enough room."

She started shaking her head. "I can't. Farrah has school tomorrow. I have to go to work. Elizabeth will be back by morning. She canceled her party today though I am sure she will have it tomorrow."

Nick briefly closed his eyes. She was difficult to convince. "I will have you back at the apartment by five."

"Nick, I cannot —"

"Please. Farrah is already sleeping. We can't disturb her sleep."

Nick wished he could read her, wished he could hear what she was thinking. Reading women had always been an easy task till he met Mosi. She was a closed book, barely put out her emotions. Even when she told him about her misfortunes, she kept an impassive look through out.

"Please. I promise, by five you will be at your house." "Ok. Just for tonight."

"Yes. Just for tonight."

Nick stood still feeling the attraction between them coerce him to her. He was trying, he was trying really hard but the attraction sparked like electric shock. He could almost grasp it with his bare hands. He looked at her lips, she was sweet. Soft. He fought the thought to taste her lips but found himself moving closer to her. When she didn't move back, he kissed her. Mindlessly, he pulled her against his body and she didn't resist.

He unbuttoned her dress then pulled it down her shoulders and lower into her arms then kept it there. She couldn't move her arms. He trailed kisses from her collarbone down her breasts. She pulled her bra cups down then closed his mouth on her nipple. She pushed her nipple more into his mouth and he sucked delicately.

A slight moan escaped her lips and he felt his body get more excited. He let the dress fall to her feet then took off the bra. He touched her, everywhere and so did she. It drove him crazy. Everything in him focused on her and only her. She woke something in him, something he never knew existed, and he wished it would never die down. Pulling her lace panty down her legs, he relished on her beauty. He laid her on the couch putting her legs on her shoulders then kissed her, his tongue going in circles and inside her. Her body vibrated while she pushed his head off and Nick could tell she was close. He dipped his tongue in her slowly while he massaged her clit with his thumb. Seconds later she was moaning his name softly.

Moving from her, he stood up unbuttoning his jeans then pulled the fly down. "Kneel."

She slowly slid to her knees before him. She took hold of him in her hands and squeezed him. Nick groaned and watched her put him in his mouth. He cupped her head and pushed himself further into her mouth.

He hissed through his teeth wondering why her mouth was so warm. He thrust into her mouth watching her while she moved her hand up and down his base and the other other massaging his balls. When last had he had a woman this good with her mouth? She swirled her tongue on the tip then took him deeper till he hit her throat.

He pulled out of her mouth then picked her up and lay her

back on the couch opening her legs wide. Pushing through her folds then flaps, he grunted till he was fully in. He began moving, thrusting in and out of her, she felt too tight, too snug. She softly moaned as he pushed in and bottomed out, she felt too good he deepened his thrust. Pulling out, he quickly took his T-shirt then picked her up and went over to the wall where he pulled her body down to his erection.

He watched her gasp for air as he went in mercilessly. She whimpered softly in his ears and Nick knew he had her right where he wanted her. Her body began tensing and he didn't slow down till she moaned loudly tightening her legs around him. He moved with her to his bedroom and put her at the edge of the bed.

Hanging each of her legs on his shoulders, he went in full force now chasing his own pleasure. Reaching his peak, he watched her body convulse while she threw her head back. She came around him and he followed, her name on his lips.

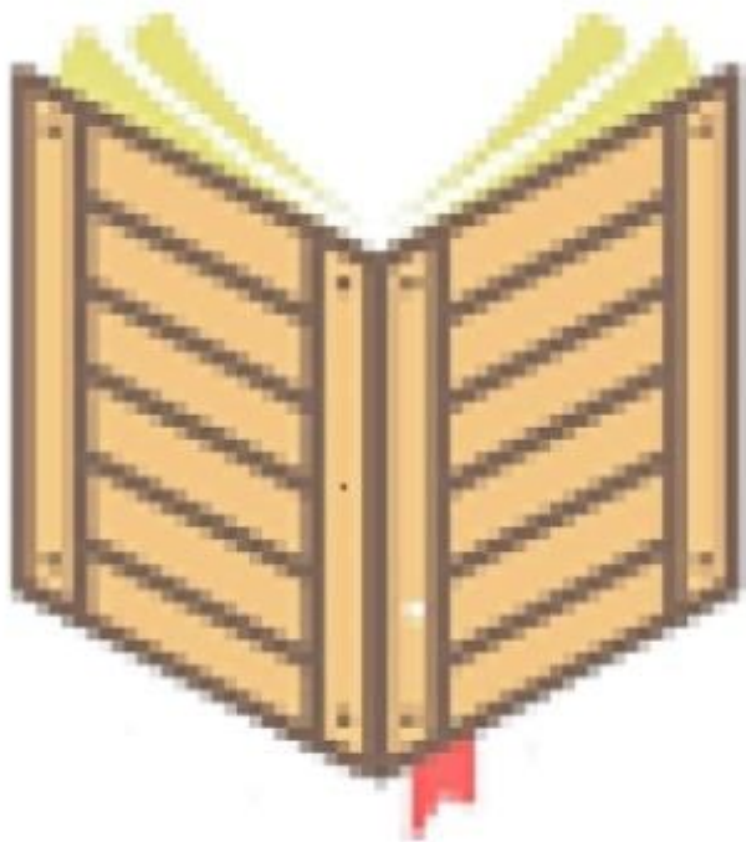
Easing out of her, he watched her pant softly, her chest rising and going down. He wanted to cup her breast and massage them but then kissed her. She breathlessly looked at him. "This was not a mistake." He told her then kissed her forehead. "Sleep."

Mosi watched as Nick parked the car in front of the apartment. She fixed her dress then sighed looking at him.

"Thank you for the dinner and... for letting us sleep at your house."

He just stared at her and Mosi struggled with curiosity. What did he see in her? Perhaps he saw Nelima in her but Mosi knew she looked nothing like Mosi. Before she was married off, a lot of people refused to believe they were actually sisters. Or maybe being with her made him feel close

to Nelima. Mosi felt her throat clog.



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"And thank you for bringing us back on time." She opened the door but he grabbed her hand.

"Farrah, why don't you wait for mummy by the door. Don't forget your teddy bear."

As soon as Farrah was out, Nick pulled her closer. "Maybe what happened last night was supposed to happen. You can't rule that as a mistake. What about this morning? That was not a mistake too."

Mosi pressed her legs together feeling her wet panties. Her entire body felt too sticky, all she wanted was a shower. "I am not going to turn into someone you randomly have sex with. I am more than just a sex toy. Maybe being with me makes you feel closer to Nelima but I am not going to compromise my sanity for that. I do not know why I feel this way, same way I do not know why a lot of misfortunes keep falling on me, what I do know is my worth. I may be at the bottom right now but believe me, I am not. I am rising. As always."

She stepped out of his car. "And maybe you might want to mourn Nelima properly. Grief is not something you can escape."

He climbed out of his car and walked round to her. "I'm not with you because you make me feel closer to Nelima. I have her letter and recordings to do that job. I also don't know why I feel this way about you, trust me, it's not just sex. You have to believe me on that."

"You are getting married."

"I have no choice. I don't... I know it's going to sound shitty and make me seem like a jerk but I don't love her. I long stopped. I stopped about 15 years ago."

"That is not my issue. I am sorry. I do not want to drag Farrah into another mist of confusion. I refuse to be part of that confusion too."

Nick pulled Mosi closer and kissed her. A passionate beseeching and intense kiss which left her knees weak. "There's something. We both know if. Avoiding it won't make it go away. It's already there. I will see you tonight." "Farrah and I are not coming to your house." She whispered. He chuckled then kissed her one last time. "I'm coming here." He walked off to his car and drove away.

Mosi put her hands on her face, this was not happening to her. It couldn't!

"Mommy, you were doing that thing, that thing Uncle Nathan and Aunt Malaika used to do."

Mosi turned. "What?"

Farrah nodded. "Uncle Nathan used to ki..."

to do that to Malaika?" "Yes."

Mosi chuckled. Malaika had worked for her for a year and now she wondered when the affair had started. Not that she cared but it made her realize just how trust could blind. "Let's go inside."

She unlocked the door and they walked in and went straight to their room. Mosi prepared herself and Farrah. After ensuring that Farrah was in the school bus, she got in her own bus and was headed to Elizabeth's house. She could use a train but it started running from seven. Elizabeth said she could start work at half seven because of the distance. Mosi plugged in her earphones and stared out of the window. She felt vulnerable, as if her walls had been broken. By the time she arrived at the mansion, her emotions were all over, she wanted to cry. It felt stupid but her tears were already filling her eyes.

"Morning. Elizabeth is on her way." Yvette said as soon as Mosi walked inside their changing room.

"Oh."

Mosi changed into her uniform while Yvette watched. "Mosi?" "Yes?"

"I just wanted to say you don't have to be scared. You and Nick seemed as if you knew each other from somewhere and I could sense the connection between you two. Poor guy looks as if he's being forced to get married. Sometimes your soul mate is someone's fiance or lover." She chuckled. "Don't be scared. I have been there. It was my friend's husband."

Mosi laughed. "You slept with him?"

"I took him and made him mine. I always felt guilty and every time she would call and cry on how he wasn't coming back to her anymore."

"So you broke up with him?"

"I was pregnant and I guess I was selfish. We are still married. He works for a construction company here and we stay with our daughter."

"He's here? In London?"

She smiled. "Yes. My son is ten. And don't ask, I am 38 years old." "Wow! You look... young. Younger than me."

"Oh please! When I first saw you, I thought you were 22 and turns out you are a decade plus that." Yvette took Mosi's hand. "I don't know the relationship you share with Nick but if it's meant to be, it will be."

"I will lose my job. My daughter depends on it. I recently got accepted at oxford for my accounting degree. I need this job."

"Do you believe in Him? The power up there. I do Mosi. It will work out. I promise you." Mosi looked up at the ceiling. "He's my sister's... was my sister's partner. I feel... guilty. I feel like I'm hurting her."

Yvette hugged Mosi tightly who fought to keep her tears at check. "I think your sister is happy. She is. You stress too much."

Mosi rested her head on Yvette's shoulder. The hug comforted her in ways she could not imagine.

"He knows I'm not dead. He bombed the hotel I was in. Two scary man were following me. I ran to the hotel and used the backdoor to leave. Seconds later it was in flames!" Kamaryn was panicking. Nick could see the fear in her eyes. "He's going to kill me. I don't want to die." "Where's your phone?"

"I lost it."

"He thinks you are dead. We have little time. My team is still gathering information." Nick looked at Detective Parker in disbelief. "You have insiders?"

"Yes. They are doing a great job."

"You think? Santino is always two steps ahead." Detective

Parker smirked. "Not this time." "What am going to do?"

"We can take you in police custody for safety."

"He probably has insiders. People on his payroll." Nick said taking out a cigarette. He felt sorry for Kamaryn. "Maybe you need a little vacation. Get you out of the country. With a false identity. He's watching all the airports. Railways. Every hotel. He's not sure if you are dead yet. Killing you has a become a personal game and will probably do it personally.

Where can you go? Not a hotel obviously. Perhaps a lodge so he's waiting for that bank transaction. You are probably going to use your card. Or maybe you are going to go to your

family's house. People are already waiting there for your arrival. You only have one option, one he won't see coming. Fly out with a false identity."

"Ok. I will go."

Nick stood up puffing out smoke. "Be careful." Walking out of the bar, Nick's phone rang. "Bradley."

"Fuck you! You just dumped me in here and left. The fuck am I supposed to be here doing anyways? But on the good side, duuudeeee! There's this girl. She likes me and we are fucking."

Nick laughed getting in his car. "Who did you tell her you were related to?" "Tina Turner. She wants to be Beyonce's back up singer."

"You are going to hell."

"And you are going to drive us there. Look, this bitch has an ass for days. Who cares if it's real or not. You should come and see her. What I don't understand is why she chooses to be a therapist. I mean, she could go down the poll with her pussy."

"Fuck! It's the therapist?"

Randy laughed. "And I'm the joker." "Stay away from her!"

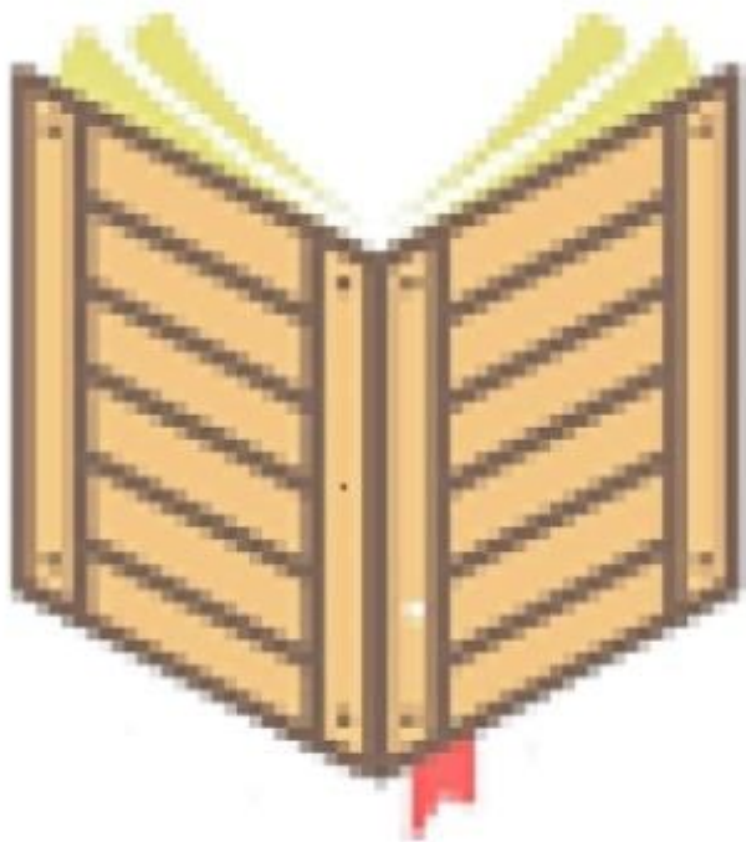
"I told her my boy is coming over for a threesome. In her office." "I'm not—"

"She does anal. She does anything doable. Literally." "You are never going to leave that place if—"

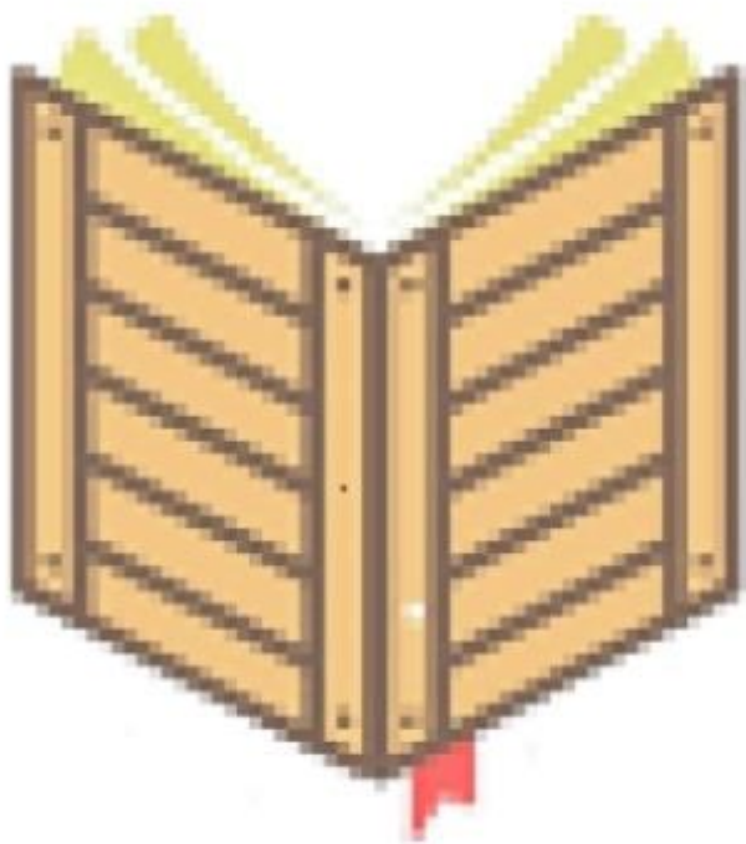
"I told her you will be here in three hours. Don't be late."

Randy hung up and Nick sighed. If only there was a rehab center for sex addicts.

From the corner of his eye, Nick caught Kamaryn walk out of the bar in an oversized hoodie. He felt sorry for her. Santino wasn't going to stop till she was dead. She was a loose end. He looked at his phone when a message alert came through.
We need to talk. It's urgent. Ingrid.



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Chapter Twenty-Six

Mosi stood by the door, her heart beating fast. Dinner was ready and she was wearing her backless red bondage dress. A tiny voice at the back of her head questioned her sanity, she was even wearing the red bottoms which she only reserved for special occasions. Farrah had told her she looked beautiful assuming she was going out.

"Mosi, you are making a fool of yourself. Take off the dress and shoes. It's almost ten p. m, wear your normal clothes." She whispered to herself then sat on her bed ready to take off her shoes.

Farah rushed to the door when they heard a knock and Mosi prepared herself for the humiliation. She couldn't believe she had even put on makeup.

"Uncle Nick!" Farrah yelled while Nick picked her up. "Hey, you look... wow!"

Mosi's subconscious gave her a disapproving look, did she have to dress up her daughter too? Put her as part of her charade. She remained sited busking in her embarrassment.

Nick put her down and looked at Mosi. "You look beautiful." She stood up kicking her shoes off. "Farrah and I were playing. We will change and —" "No. You guys look beautiful. Let's go out." She thought of her pots in the kitchen. "I cooked."

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"We can eat and go out. For ice cream."

"Yey!" Farrah jumped around with excitement. "Ok."

They all sat in the sitting room eating and like the previous day, Mosi listened to Nick and Farrah talk. They laughed and giggled together. It felt as if they had known each other for a long time. As soon as they finished eating, Farrah wanted to go for ice cream.

"I will wash this quickly then we can go."

"I will help. Farrah you can get mommy's bag and shoes." Farrah ran off while Mosi carried the plates to the kitchen. "You don't have to help. I can do it."

"It's ok. I want to." He took off his jacket and placed it on the kitchen counters. "How was your day?"

She continued washing. "It was ok. Elizabeth's party ended earlier so I got to come back home earlier too. Yours?"

"It was ok."

Mosi just nodded. As soon as they finished with the dishes, they went to the nearby mall where Nick decided they watch an animated movie and Mosi had to sit throughout for what felt like hours. When they walked out, Farrah was talking about Disney world, even if she had never been there, she spoke as if she had once been there.

"I will take you there."

"You will?" Farrah's eyes sparkled with hope. "Yes. I will take you."

"Promise?"

"I promise." He kissed her forehead. "I promise."

"Nick.." Mosi started. She didn't want her daughter's heart broken. "I will take her there. I always keep my promises."

In his eyes she could see he meant it. She smiled. "Ok." "Uncle Nick, can we get ice creams now?"

"Yes my princess, we can get ice creams."

After getting their ice creams, they sat on the car bonnet. Mosi had never felt that happy in a long time. She laughed at Nick's jokes, listened to him talk, watched him fall in love with her daughter and her daughter fall in love with him.

"Ok mommy. Listen. Knock knock."

Mosi sighed. This one never got old. Ever since the movie was released but still, Mosi acted all new. "Who is there."

"The interrupting cow." "The interrupting—"

"Mooooo!"

"I ha—"

"Mooooo!"

They all laughed. "That was a good one princess." "Mommy can—"

"Mooooo!"

Farrah laughed. "Mommy!"

"Do you work on weekends?" Nick asked jumping down the bonnet then helping Farrah down.

"No. Just week days."



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"Then you guys can sleep at my house."

Mosi smiled as he helped her down and let her body rub against his. "What about—" "Shhh, let me worry."
"Ok."

Perhaps it was the recklessness that made it all fun, it made her feel like a teenager. Nick threw her the keys.
"You can drive."

Maybe the car was faster than anything she'd ever driven but she loved it. The navigation led her right to his garage where she was met with different kinds of cars.

"Wow! A collection."

They stepped out of the car. "Beautiful isn't it?" The pride in his voice made Mosi chuckle. "Yes."

They took the stairs up to his house, Farrah was already sleeping in Nick's arms. Mosi couldn't blame her, it was way past her bedtime. He put her in the same room she had slept the previous night then looked at Mosi like a wrapped gift that he couldn't wait to unwrap. "Wanna see my room properly?"

She knew what meant. "I think I will sleep here." He took a step closer. "Are you sure?"

Yes! Yes! And we need to stop this!

Her mouth remained shut. She wanted him. He tilted her chin and kissed her gently. "Are you sure?" He whispered.

"No."

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Mosi woke up first. She had slept with him, again. She had made a choice and it was just childish to regret it. Now she looked at him peacefully sleeping, facedown and sprawled naked on the bed though tangled by the duvet. Slowly, she got off bed, picked her panties. They were torn and were her favorite. She put on her dress then stepped inside his

ensuite and splashed her face with water. She looked a mess, a thoroughly fucked kind of mess.

Reaching for the only toothbrush in the bathroom, she brushed her teeth and walked out. Farrah was still sleeping too. Mosi decided to make breakfast for them and opening the fridge, she slowly nodded. It was full. Had it always been full? Was it full yesterday? She couldn't remember.

An hour later, she was setting the table. Farrah was the first one to wake up followed by Nick.

"Wow! You made all of this?"

"It's not five star food.

But edible." "It looks amazing."

"Can I have a muffin mommy?" Mosi nodded. "Yes."

Nick pulled out a chair for her then let Mosi sit. "You look edible." He whispered softly in her ear before sitting next to Farrah.

A knock on the door froze Mosi. What if it was Wendy? She looked at Nick who was already walking to the door. Looking around the kitchen, she looked for a possible escape route. There was none. Just the pantry.

A minute later, Nick walked back in the kitchen. He resumed eating and chatting with Farrah. She swallowed the lump on her throat. "Juice anyone?"

"Yeah. This is good by the way."

She poured them the juice but her heart was still pounding. What if it had been her?

Mosi's days full of impulsiveness began. They were full of excitement and joy. Her heart always skipped each night he could make it to her room and spend it with her and Farrah. The late night talks and laughter filled her heart or how he would hold her every time after making love. How he would kiss her. The weekends they had road trips to his lake house, it all made her happy. Farrah loved the house, she loved her room. Nick had decorated it according to her taste and bought her all the dolls she liked. Mosi didn't complain anymore. Her heart darkened with jealousy every time she thought of Wendy and she wondered if he touched and loved his fiance the way he did with her. Did he give her the same amount of uninterrupted pleasure, did he have her scream his name like she did. Did he hold her like he held her most nights.

But those thoughts always vanished whenever he showed up on her threshold, holding a flower or a chocolate or any tiny gift that would have her blushing like a teenager.

She didn't feel guilty anymore and she finally understood what Yvette had meant about being selfish. She wanted him all to herself. The feelings were now too strong but what scared her was the question she always left unanswered. Did he feel the same? Of course he had said there was something special going on between them but it wasn't enough. She wanted more and was scared he didn't want that.

Mosi walked inside the bathroom answering her phone. "I am at work. I told you not to call when I am at work."

"Breaking the rules is always fun." The naughtiness in his voice had her giggling. Being mischievous was his middle name. Anything illegal like not following road laws, having sex in no go areas, breaking any particular rule in overall was his addiction.

"Tell Elizabeth you are sick. I want to see you." "No! I need the money. I need to pay tuition fees." "I told you, I can do that for you."

Mosi sat on the toilet seat sighing. They had had that talk multiple times and she was still resisting. He wanted to do a lot for her. He offered to get them a house because the room was just too small. He also offered to get her a car and a good job but Mosi wanted to do things her own way.

"I can manage. But thanks." "I

miss you."

She giggled. "We were together this morning."

"Still. I won't be around this weekend. You and Farrah can come with. I'm going to Dubai." Her smile slowly disappeared from her face. "Nick, we can't just up and leave."

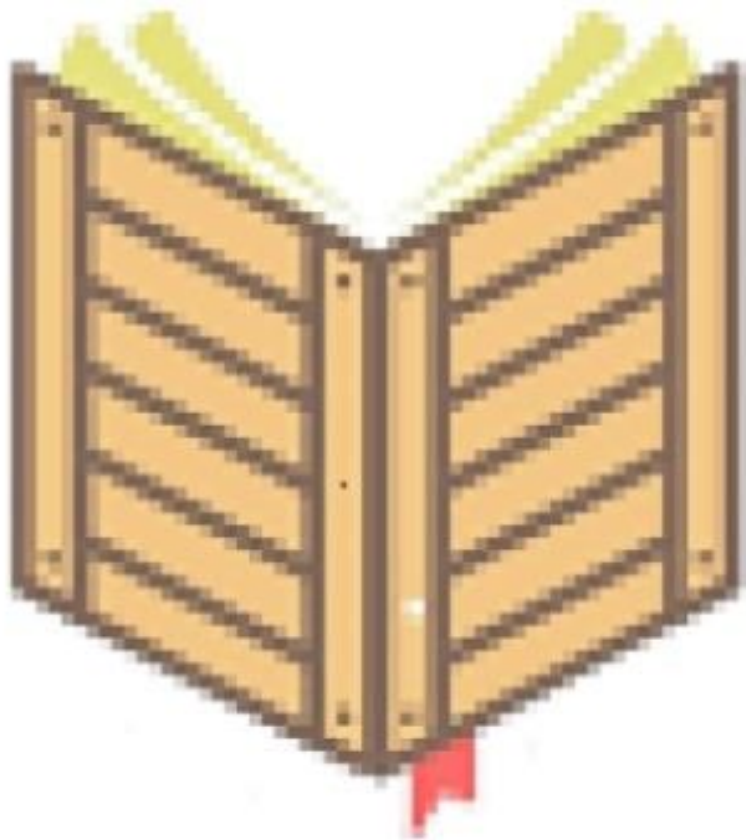
"Yes we can and we are. We will take an evening flight tomorrow. I will come and pick you up. Be ready."

She laughed. "I can't believe I am agreeing to this. It feels reckless." "I won't be with you tonight. I will see you."

She nodded filling in the unsaid. He was going to be with her tonight. He knew the nights he couldn't make it were the nights he spent with Wendy. It had only been a month and she felt too attached to him.

"Ok."

"Bye."



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Mosi hung up and walked out of the bathroom. She continued ironing the clothes though she felt despondent now. Yvette was polishing Elizabeth's furniture, they polished the furniture each and every single day. It was part of the rules.

Taking a break, she went downstairs to the kitchen, the house felt too quiet during the day because it was only her and Yvette. As she poured herself water, Wendy walked in, in suede pants that hugged her thighs and hips exposing her thin figure. She was too thin, Mosi wondered if maybe she suffered from anorexia.

"Where's Elizabeth?"

"She said she's going to the boutique." "Get me a glass of my favourite drink." "Yes mam."

Mosi quickly walked to the bar and poured her the wine. Giving it to her, she quickly walked away with her glass of water but stopped feet away when she heard Wendy talk.

"I don't know, he's barely there but tonight, tonight I have to win him over. Our wedding is in less than two months. I know he's still punishing me for sleeping with his brother but that was ages ago. I just wish we can move on from that. I want a big wedding, everyone important should be there. I love him Deby, I just wish he loved me back. Santino said he will come around, I just need to have a week where it's only us. I will prove to him that I love him. And this baby, this baby is going to do wonders."

Mosi walked away but she couldn't get rid of Wendy's voice. What baby? Was she pregnant? Back in the laundry room, she called Imani.

"I swear dick has stolen you from me. We rarely talk this days. How's Nick? I always knew he was your match. I will

definitely mention it on your wedding." Imani said laughing.

"Imani, I think Wendy is pregnant."

"So?"

"What do you mean 'so'?"

"Mosi, come on, you know he's getting married to her." "Wow!"

"Baby girl, I told you, these things take time. He explained to you everything. Be patient." "He said he can't break her heart."

"Let him do the thinking. Why are you so worried?" "Because I love him! I love him Imani."

Nick stared out the window at the cars down the road. He felt unexplainable excitement, he hadn't thought of taking Mosi and Farrah with to Dubai but when the idea hit him, he couldn't think of any reason not to take them along.

"Hey, let's get down to it." Sean said walking inside the office. Nick walked to his chair and sat down. When they were not being foolish and getting drunk, Sean was Braad's auditor. He owned his own small auditing company and when not drunk, he focused on the growth of it. Nick had invested in the company so it gets off the ground. "Yeah. Let me call—sorry." He picked up his ringing phone and answered. "I'm in a meeting right now."

"Nick, I was thinking we go to Hawaii during the weekend. We need some time to ourselves. Santino said business is not that busy since you haven't released your new collection as yet. I booked our tickets for tomorrow and—"

"I can't. I have a business trip to Dubai."

"That's ok. I will come with."

"Wendy, which part of business trip don't you get." "Nick, I'm just trying —"

"I'm in a meeting right now. I will call you later." He put his phone down.

"You are playing a very dangerous game. Someone is going to get hurt and it's Mosi and her kid. Maybe you should just let her go because at the end of the day, you are still getting married. You can't expect her to remain your mistress."

Nick sighed. "She makes me happy." "Then choose."

"Santino won't... fuck! Can we just go back to business?" "Yeah."

Nick walked inside the restaurant later in the evening. Wendy had booked the restaurant to themselves.

"Hey. I missed you."

She hugged him and surprisingly he couldn't brush away the irritation. "Sit down. I had them make your favorite."

He looked at her, his favorite was the lasagna Mosi always made and the cheese macaroni. Farrah liked them too.

"That Italian meal you have always liked. I spoke Santino, you can take me with to your trip."

Nick pressed his lips together. That's what she always did, went behind his back and reported every single matter to Santino.

"I have to work on finishing the new collection tonight. The company is pressing for a release date. I have to work on it tonight. I hope you don't mind."

"It's ok. Santino said you are really trying hard because you have taken over the company. I'm proud of you. Who could have thought that one day you and I will be together building our empire." She giggled. "I'm so happy. I love you. The trip will do us good."

"Wendy I have to tell you something. I can't go on with this wedding." He watched her face freeze. "I'm sorry, I really am but..."

"There's someone right? There's always someone. You don't love them. I can give you what—"

"There's no one. I just feel you deserve much better."

"I want you Nick." She stood up. "We are going to have a baby Nick." "What?"

"I'm pregnant. We are going to have a baby."

Nick moved back then got up from

his chair. "How?" She gave him a naughty smile. "You know how."

"No. We used protection at all times Wendy!" Now he wondered how many times it had been, not more than five, he was sure.

"Nick, what are you trying to say?" She asked tearfully.

"I'm not trying to say anything, I'm just trying to understand." "I don't know how but I'm pregnant."

"That's impossible." Nick looked at her carefully. "Unless..." He remembered the last time he had slept with her, almost two months ago. She had brought the condoms. "Did... you do something to the condoms."

"Nick, what are you talking about?"

"Wendy, it's impossible. I have always use condoms with you. You can't be pregnant."

"I am Nick." She started crying. "What do you want me to say. You think I wanted the baby? I have a career. That is ruined. My entire life is over. I'm really trying to be positive! I didn't want this baby! I was going to sign a deal with Victoria Secret Show. That's all gone! That would have put me on the map!"

"Shit! This can't be happening!" He mumbled. "How far are you?" "Two months."

"Fuck!"

"I'm sorry. I have to go."

She took her bag. "Wait. I'm sorry. I'm just..."

"It's ok. We will deal with this together. We are having a baby. They say babies have ways to change things. I don't blame you for wanting to cancel the wedding. I have... messed up. Sleeping with Keith was the mistake I made and the fact that I kept sleeping with him destroyed our love. I am taking responsibility for it." She knelt down before him. "I am sorry for every single thing I have ever done. But I'm going to be the best wife you can ever wish for. We are going to be great parents to our baby. Give me a chance to prove myself."

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Nick knocked and waited. *I'm pregnant. We are going to have a baby.* He shut his eyes close and inhaled deeply. He couldn't rid the confusion and stress. She was pregnant. She looked sincere but Nick knew better. If she was pregnant then she had wanted to be pregnant. He always used

protection with her but that didn't matter now. She was pregnant, with his child.

Mosi opened the door in only her nightdress. She wasn't smiling as usual and Nick wanted to know what was wrong but first he had to tell her. He couldn't have her hear the news from anyone else.

"Can we talk?"

She stepped out and closed the door. "Yes."

"I can't take you with to Dubai tomorrow.

Wendy... she.. —""Ok."

"I'm sorry."

She just nodded. Nick wished she could show some emotion but she kept a straight face and he couldn't tell how she felt.

"Wendy is pregnant."

She looked at him for a while then

nodded. "Congratulations." "Mosi... I..."

"Focus on your wedding and baby. It was nice knowing you." "We don't have to—"

"Are you going to cancel the wedding?"

He looked into her eyes and when he kept in silence, she just nodded and walked back inside her apartment without a single word. Nick wanted to go after her and say something but what? He was going to have a baby. Wendy needed him. At least till she gave birth.

Driving away from her apartment, he suddenly felt too empty. What made him different from Nathan or the man who had raped her or her husband who abused her? He was even worse, he had made her believe and now he was going to start a family with someone else,

be happy. Nick felt like his father, a man who took and took but never gave back. A man who never cared about anyone else except himself.

In his house, Nick reread Neli's letter.

Nick Bradley

I have been trying to write this for the last few days but couldn't seem to find the right words. The perfect words. But then it hit me last night that our story is no story that has perfect words or right words.

Thing is that, I love you. Words can't even begin to explain. I know you want us to be forever but like you said, someone always has to leave first and ours, it's me. I don't know, maybe I should apologize for leaving but darling, if I could, I would stay.

So instead, I'm going to write a letter to the universe on your letter. It's not an everyday thing that you get to see someone write a letter to the universe but it's me and one of the perks of being me is that I can do almost anything. Isn't that just exciting?

Dear universe, **NOVELSGURU.COM**

I'm writing this letter to notify you about a man called Nick Bradley. He's tall and very handsome and super sexy. He has this gleam that forever stays in his eyes and lives his life on the run. He's more of a free wild animal and has no regrets. I love that about him.

He is an amazing soul and I love him so much. I get that perhaps there is someone out there for him but I just want to thank you for giving me a chance with him. Each day I spend with him, I keep counting. Right now we are on our 31st day and I'm happy. He makes me happy.

Ours end with a tragedy, just like Titanic, but the ride has been so amazing. I would not trade it for anything. I only have one wish though, please let him be able to move on and love again. Let him get his forever. I'm praying that I will be able to watch over him but if I'm not able to, can you do it for me?

Your

s

Neli

ma

He gulped down his vodka. He felt like the world's worst man. "You are probably turning in your grave." He mumbled. "I'm sorry."

The rain hit the windowpanes sideways and all Nick wished for was to be outside. His friend, the girl who stayed opposite his house had moved and now he played with the twins who stayed next door. Mama didn't like them but Nick did. They were now his only friends when he was not at school and they played ball with him.

"Nick!" His mother screamed and he quickly moved back. She smiled picking him up. He liked her hair. It was curly, almost like his. "Boy, we are going to uhh to.. to the shop. Mama is going to get you the toy. You want it."

He nodded. He'd been wanting it for a while now. "Good. Now uhh—" a loud knock interrupted her and she quickly stood up. Nick knew daddy was back and so he stayed in mama's wardrobe. Inside the wardrobe he sat still like mama had told him with his fingers inside his ears. That's what good boys did. He could barely hear anything only muffled screams. Mama always screamed because she was happy. She said daddy made her happy. It felt like ages had passed when mama finally opened the wardrobe doors for him. He quickly ran to the window. It had stopped raining.

"Can I go now?"

She nodded. "Yes. But first, let's get you the toy."

There was a red thing on her lip but she smiled then opened the window.

"You can get out through here right?" There were burglars but Nick could get through the holes. It took seconds and he was outside.

"Go and open the door for mommy then we go."

He didn't need to be told twice. He opened the door then mama led him to the car. It was getting dark but he didn't care, as long as he got his toy. He sat at the back while she took the front seat and started driving. He looked out through the window then he heard screaming. His mother was screaming.

"Oh my God!"

He started crying. "Don't cry. You are going to be ok."

Then everything started spinning, harder and harder and when it stopped, he couldn't move and mama was screaming.

Nick opened his eyes with panic, the dream was already fading. He closed his eyes trying to catch the tiny fragments before he totally lost it but groaned realizing it was too late. He got up from the couch and staggered to his room. He had finished the entire bottle.

He stood under the cold shower trying to think. He couldn't come up with anything.

"So she's pregnant?"

"That's what I said."

"Dudeeee!"

"Yes."

"But wait. Dude, if you were using protection, how is she pregnant?"

"Good question Randy boy. It always take a while to figure it all out." Nick turned and Ingrid walked in.

"What—"

"Detective Johanness." Ingrid took out her badge.

"Good to see you again, Nick." Nick chuckled. "Don't tell me you are working with Parker."

"I am, unfortunately for you. We are a team."

"Damn if every lady cop was like you, I wouldn't mind breaking the law each and every day. Hey babe, I'm Randy."

Ingrid rolled her eyes. "We thought maybe you knew some of your father's dealings." "Is that why you did a sloppy job following me around? So you can get close to me?" "Yes. I was just doing my job."

"Is sleeping with me part of your job?"

She looked away. "I have been undercover for a year now, trying to get inside Santino's dealings."

"You are lucky to be still alive."

"It's called acting smart. Everything he does is water tight. Parker and I thought we could use a different approach."

"Me? Sorry it didn't work out."

"That's all good. We are working on a new plan."

"How about bugging his office?" Randy asked. "I've seen that work in movies. Baby girl, you and I can be partners in this."

"Unfortunately this is no movie. He always checks for bugs every hour in his house and everywhere else. We know of all the crimes he commits. The murders. We just can't prove it."

"What do you know about Wendy's pregnancy?" Nick asked staring at Ingrid.

"A few months back, your fiance came crying to your father about you because of your late ex or late wife. Your father told her not to worry and well, comforted her."

"Bastard!" Nick hit the table standing up. "He took advantage of her?"

"Calm down. Maybe he did but then they didn't stop there. Till a month ago." Randy laughed. "Whaaaaat the actual fuck?"

"Yes. When they found out she was pregnant. It couldn't be you because well... listen to this. Obviously we couldn't bug your father but we could bug Wendy."

She played a recorder and Wendy started talking. "It can't be Nick. He barely touches me and always uses a condom. It's yours Santino."

"Get rid of it!" Santino roared angrily and Nick chuckled. Typical Santino.

"I can't! I won't! I'm not going to do that. This pregnancy... Nick will love me for it. There's no way he will know it's not his."

"He's not stupid. My son is one smart son of a bitch!"

"I will handle him. How about you back off? Nick and I are going to have this baby and he's ours. You try to ruin this for me, then the entire world including your son will know just the monster you are. I have those files. Let anything happen to me, the entire world will know with immediate effect. Like you said, Nick is smart. He will kill you and you know it. Back off!"

Ingrid put her recording device back in her pocket. "And the interesting part of all this is, she knows once you think the pregnancy is yours, you will do anything to protect her."

"I knew there was something fishy about that bitch. How do you get such women?" Nick ignored Randy.

"When was this?"

"A month ago."

"Kamaryn said Miranda spoke of some files. Files of people, some dead." "Your fiancé is intelligent. She has them."

"Santino wouldn't... he's going to kill her. It won't even affect him."

"No it won't. But he can't do anything to her because if he does, then he's exposed. She's not just saying it. If anything happens to her, he's exposed."

Nick laughed shaking her head. "You are her back up?"

"Yes. Parker doesn't know. I promised her no one will know but I need you." "Why can't you arrest him?"

"It's not enough. He will get a good lawyer and just get a slap on the wrist. Nick, I need his confession. His words. I want enough evidence to have him locked up for good."

"You want me to do it?"

"He won't tell you anything. He knows you are digging up on your mother's death and is convinced you won't get anything. And really, you won't. But I got a loophole." She smiled. "Surprisingly the man who messed up with your mother's car is still alive. Together with the doctor who finished her off. She didn't die right on the spot. Your father killed his brother so he gets all the inheritance. Your father's brother didn't die fortunately. And he will be the one to expose him. It's going to take a while initiating the plan but I need your patience.

Keep believing Wendy, we need her alive." "Why is Parker not part of this?"

"Santino offered him a million pounds to throw the case away. I don't think I will trust him fully. He's already talking about losing hope. You should also keep the act with him. Act like you believe whatever he says. Play along but know, he's not to be trusted."

"I underestimated you."

She chuckled. "You know I used to beat your ass even when we were young. Once all this is over, you and I can still be friends. We come a long way."

"And I can be your husband. My brother is... —" Ingrid interrupted Randy

"Shut up! Nick, I'm going to have to ask you to stay away from Mosi for a while together with her kid. For their safety. Santino is now watching you."

Nick nodded. "Yeah."

"And keep Wendy happy. Take her to Dubai. Let Santino think you have come around." "I know."

"Good. See you."

"Baby, you know where to find me. I will be right here waiting for you."

"I'm sure your right hand still functions. Go ahead and

overuse it." She said walking out. "I have to go. Stay away from the therapist. Use your hand for crying out loud!"

Chapter Twenty-Seven

The living room was dark and silent. Mosi blinked a couple of times, her heart beating frantically and heavily. She listened for any sounds but it was just too quiet, the air felt toothick like something had died.

She walked to her bedroom and opened the door. Courtney was on her phone giggling while Farrah slept on the bed with her huge teddy bear. Mosi forced a smile on.

"Hey,"

"Hi," she stood up. "Farrah was crying for Uncle Nick. I had to give her some candy, I hope you don't mind."

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"No. It's ok.

Thank you."

"Ok, good
night." "Night."

She walked out closing the door gently behind her. A week now and Farrah still cried every night for Nick. Mosi said he was traveling on business but Farrah kept on crying edging her to call him. Mosi couldn't call him. She finally read the magazine where Nick and Wendy were featured. The it couple, they had called them. They were pregnant, happy and preparing for their wedding.

Mosi had wanted to cry but held it in. She couldn't cry for him. He was never hers to begin with. She put her bag down then undressed and lay on the bed. Mostly she imagined him walking through the door, hugging her like he usually did then kissing her. He would go and kiss Farrah's forehead, place a toy on bedside then make love to Mosi before cuddling with her all night.

She only had herself to blame so she took the heartbreak like a big girl. She pulled her daughter in her arms sighing. One day they would forget him and not feel unassailable loss and pain.

A loud knock on the door woke Mosi up. She laid still on her bed but the knock persisted forcing her up. She grabbed her gown and walked out to the main door. Opening it, she came face to face with Rose who looked badly beaten.

"Can I come in?"

Mosi nodded opening the door wider. She led Rose to her room and they sat on the edge of the bed.

"Shane is a good man."

Mosi sighed. If he was such a good man then why did she look butchered?

"He lost his job a year ago. He had an injury and lost his job. That's when it all started. The first time it happened I had a night shift and my phone was off throughout the night. As soon as I arrived, he was drunk and just lost it. He apologized, said he would never do it again. I believed him. He promised to stop drinking and look for a job. But... it never stopped. I love him. I keep going back."

"Maybe you should remember the Rose you were before all this." Mosi said taking Rose's hand into hers.

Rose laughed. Loud. "Isn't it funny you say that to me? Remember the Rose you were before all that. I was only 28, new and in love. I fell in love with a man in military, he was sexy, beautiful. Everything you need in a man. Caring. Loving. Kind. Our memories are mixed. Some are beautiful, so beautiful I wish they can stay in my heart forever. Some are bad. They are the worst memories ever. I cry thinking of them. He used to hate it when I cried but today he has turned to be my reason for them. He doesn't care anymore. Is it a bruise or a cut, I can freely say he's comfortable with it. But I can't leave. I love him."

"One day he will kill you.

You know it." "Yes. He will."

"I won't tell you to leave. You are the only one who can do that."

"How do you walk away from someone you love?

How do you do that?" "When you start loving yourself more. Want to take a shower?"

"Yes, please. I'm sorry for just... showing up." "It's ok. I should be waking up soon."

Rose stood up and looked at Mosi. "Thank you for not telling Imani." "It wasn't my place to."

"Still, thank you." "You are welcome."

Mosi showed Rose the bathroom and left her to bath while she sat on her bed. She could almost wonder how you would love someone who abuses you but she understood. Slightly. That was love. If we all had a button to press to stop, she knew a lot would have pressed it. A lot who die in the hands of those who they love. A lot who stay in emotional abusive relationships because of love. A lot who stay in physical abusive relationships all in the name of love.

When Rose finally came out, she looked better but still swollen. "Thank you for listening. I have to go."

"Is he still there?"

"Yes."

"You are going back to him?"

Rose was silent for a few seconds then smiled. "No. He's leaving. I'm going to open a case of domestic violence."

"If you need me, I'm here." "I

know. Thank you."

As soon as she was gone, the alarm rang. Mosi stood under the shower talking to herself like she had been doing all week.

"I am strong. I am beautiful. I know my worth. I am intelligent. I am smart. I can sail through anything. I am an alpha."

By the time she stepped out, she felt confident and was ready for anything. An hour later, she and Farrah were walking out of their room. As they approached the main door, there was a knock.

"Mummy, it's Uncle Nick?"

Mosi opened the door and some man stood in a suit. "Good morning." He smiled. "Morning.

Delivery for Ms. Niji."

Mosi frowned. "You are looking at her."

"I have brought your delivery. Please sign here."

Perplexed, she signed for the package then she got a small box.

"What is this?" She shook it and heard a sound. There was something inside.

"It's out here." The man said pointing at the driveway where a car was parked, Mosi hadn't seen it before but suspected it was maybe a friend's of her housemates.

"What?"

"Everything is already inside. In case you want to change anything, the number you should call is inside. Have a good day."

"Wait!" He was already walking away. "Mommy, who was it?"

"I don't know baby."

She quickly opened the box then dazed, took out a key. Audi RS 7 car keys. Her heart skipped as she looked at the white car. She pressed the button and the car beeped to life. She took a deep breath trying to keep calm.

"Stay here baby." She walked to the car, opened the doors then saw a handwritten card. *I know you are probably angry. We agreed that I wouldn't but I just think you need it. You can't return it. I'm going to come back, I promise.*

She took a deep breath but her anger was tipping over. She got out of the car then looked at her daughter who now had her thumb inside her mouth.

"Farrah, let's go."

She slowly walked over. "Is it your car?"

"No. A friend borrowed us. I will drop you at school today."

She opened the backseat for her.

"Mommy look!" Her entire mood had changed as she showed her mother her new toy. "Uncle Nick!"

"See? I told you. If you keep crying then he won't come back." "I won't ever cry. I promise."

"Good girl. Put on your seat belt."

Mosi hurried back to the house and grabbed her license before getting back in the car. Starting the car, the engine came to life and she eased the car out of the driveway then drove Farrah to her school.

"I love you, I will not cry."

Mosi smiled. "Good girl. I love you too."

Mosi parked the car in front of Nick's house then climbed down. She was now late but thank God, Elizabeth had traveled to France. Yvette could cover for her as she dealt with her personal problem. She rang the doorbell and waited.

A half asleep Nick opened the door only in sweatpants while rubbing his eyes. "Who Mosi?"

"You came into my life, turned it upside down knowing deep down what your intentions were. I am wrong too, I let you do as you please. I had one goal. Focusing on my daughter and myself. You came and had us believe we could actually be happy with you. Made us fall in love with you. I let my daughter believe too, I put aside my fears and let myself fall

in love with you."

Nick looked surprised and Mosi knew why. "I am not going to lie to you or myself all because of pride. I fell for you, I know I should not have but it happened. I will deal with it. I have been through so much worse. But my daughter cries for you every night. Every morning. I let my guard down. And it's ok. She will forget you one day and so will I. We do not need anything from you. The car, thank you so much but I do not need it." She put the car keys in his hand. "Please just stay away from us. We are trying to pick the pieces. It is my fault. You told me you would never leave her. I am accepting it. Now please stay away from my daughter and I. We were doing fine without you. You are not her father —"

He pulled her closer, abruptly crushing his body against hers before smashing his lips against hers. There was a clash of teeth but it faded quickly as his tongue slid through her lips. She surprised herself kissing him back, matching his ardor.

Her body melted in his arms as he claimed her lips, seduced her with his tongue, made love to her mouth. Picking her up, he walked back inside his house closing the door with his foot. The voice in her head screamed when she let him undress her but her mind had switched off. She couldn't think anymore. It was fast and quick. When she came, it hit her violently taking her by surprise. She couldn't even feel her own limbs as her body convulsed over and over. He followed after her, stroking her deeper and faster.

Slowing down, he kissed her. "I love watching you come. You look beautiful. Always."

Mosi looked at him and closed her eyes. It seemed as if her brain was functioning properly now.

"I can not keep doing this with you."

"I'm sorting it out. It will be all over. Soon." "She's pregnant."

He rolled off her laying beside her.

"Yes but it's not mine." "You have not been sleeping with her?"

"I long stopped. Before you came here. She's been sleeping with my father." "What?"

"I have to play along. There's something I am doing, I am working with police to have my father arrested. I need to play along because Wendy has all the evidence. It will be over before the wedding. I promise. But I can't keep seeing you and Farrah in the mean time. It's too dangerous. I don't want anything happening to you. That's why I got you the car. You leave work very late, you need the car or I can get you a chauffeur."

Mosi felt her entire body relax. "I do not even know what to say."

"Shhh.." He put his finger on her lips. "You don't have to say anything. I'm going to come back. I promise. You have to trust me. Please. Keep the car. Only till everything is back to normal."

"Why do you want your father arrested?"

"He killed my mother but he's going down for more. No need for you to worry about that." She nodded. Now she felt silly for the heartbreak she had been enduring all week.

"Ok." "Did my princess like her doll?"

Mosi smiled as his hand moved to her hips then thighs. "Yes. She did. I have to go to work." He kissed her shoulder. "I know. I also know Elizabeth is not around." He swept his lips

down to hers silencing her.

Nick looked at his watch and waited. Edward walked in after a while. He looked lost and had lost weight, grown bearded.

He picked the phone while Nick already had on his ear.

"What are you doing here?" "Don't be angry with me. I didn't tell you to kill anyone."

"Bradley, you are going to pay for this!"

"From inside the glass? Where's your family when you finally need them? I'm sure they were with you while you mistreated Neli."

"I loved her!"

"I find it hard to believe that. You never deserved her." "You came here to gloat?"

"No. To tell you Neli is happy wherever she is. You deserve to be here." "I will come out. You are going to pay!"

"I will wait. I hope you liked your welcoming party." "You fucken bastard!"

Nick walked out. He couldn't wait till Santino was behind bars too. From prison, he drove to Edward's company which Lisa happened to be running. As soon as Santino got arrested, Nick planned to merge the two companies and form one major business.

Lisa was professional and never smiled, not how he remembered her. She had class and maintained it. He decided perhaps she could keep running it till he merged everything.

Late in the evening, he was in the plane sited next to Wendy who was browsing through wedding magazines.

"This is beautiful, what do you think?"

Nick took a glance at the magazine. "Yes. It's beautiful."

She smiled. "I know. I'm so glad we are going together. This is going to be the best time of our lives. I already thought of baby names. If it's a girl, we can always name her after your mother."

Nick couldn't be more surprised, he would have been pleased if he didn't know that the baby wasn't his. Now he sure had to give it to Wendy, she was smart. Knew the buttons to press.

He thought of Mosi. Reserved, smart, intelligent. She knew what she wanted most of the time and was brave enough to tell you. He couldn't stop thinking about what she had said. *I am not going to lie to you or myself all because of pride. I fell for you, I know I should not have but it happened.* She did and he saw it in her eyes for that brief moment. He had been convinced he couldn't feel the way he had for Neli and he didn't, it was something different. "If it's a boy we would name him Jordan. What do you think?"

He smiled. "Yeah.

I like it." "I knew you would."

"Or maybe we can name him Keith. Or Santino." He watched her smile nervously. "Uhh."

"What can I offer you?"

"Wine." Wendy quickly responded to the air hostess. "Pregnant woman drink wine?"

She chuckled. "I forgot. It takes a while getting used to. Orange juice please."

"So you are telling me that you want return a gift?"

Mosi rolled her eyes watching Farrah play with other kids. "It's not a gift." "It is! Take it! Don't be backward."

"No. I am going to return it as soon as everything is back to normal."

Mosi listened as Imani tried convincing her otherwise but her mind was already made up. She was going to freely drive a car she bought with her own hard earned money. Hanging up she looked around, it was Jean's daughter's party, Anna. Mosi had forgotten her and only remembered last night when Rose called inviting her for the party.

She watched Jean talk with some other ladies while she sat alone. Farrah seemed to be having good time so she swallowed the urge to leave. Finally, Rose showed up in pants, a long sleeved silky shirt and sunglasses with a sun hat. She immediately spotted Mosi and walked towards her.

"Hey, I'm a bit late."

Mosi could only wonder why since her and Jean were neighbors. "It's ok. Farrah and I arrived a few minutes ago."

"Oh well, I'm here now. Let me go and say hi to Jean." "Ok."

Mosi sipped her juice staring as Jean hugged Rose then introduced her to the other ladies. Mosi hadn't received such treatment, just a wave and a plastic cup of juice. They chatted, laughing and Mosi knew as soon as Rose left, they would talk about her. Perhaps about her

bruised eye, she had tried making it a smoky eye but it didn't erase the bruise. Or maybe they would talk about her swollen face. Either way, Mosi knew they would talk about her. Her phone vibrated and she looked at the unknown caller for a while before picking up. "Mosi hello?"

"Hey. It's good that I found you."

She quickly stood up but grabbed the plastic table for support when a slight wave of dizziness hit her.

"Who is this?"

"Miguel. We met at the hospital some time ago. It took a while to get your details from the hospital, had to use some of my charm."

"Is that allowed?"

"No it's not. Where are you? Are you free for dinner tonight?" She took a deep breath calming down. "No, I am not."

"Tomorrow? I can do anything. Coffee, lunch. Anything. I just need to see you again." "No. You do not need to see me again. Please do not call me ever again."

"No wait! I'm not a criminal or a serial killer. I'm Miguel Dlamini. A 34 years old who works in loves in London. I like coffee, usually get a cup at a coffee shop downstreet my house. I think you are beautiful. Can we please have dinner or anything some time?"

Mosi kept quiet then heard him sigh. "Damn, I really tried. Now I have to say it. I like chocolate too. I think I'm the only man who does. Is that normal?"

Mosi chuckled. "Pretty much. Do you really like chocolate?" "No. So? Dinner?"

"I have a child who needs me each and every night."

"So? I like kids. I have one. Her name is Maya, she's five. How old is yours?" "Seven."

"Wow! I would suggest they become friends but she stays back at home with my parents." "Back home where?"

"South Africa. Where are you from?" "Kenya."

"So basically you are my home girl. As people of Africa, please let's have dinner." "No."

"Ok.
Coffee."

"Still a no.

Bye."

She hung up shaking her head. Maybe she didn't entirely dislike him. He was funny.

Rose never came back to her. She kept chatting with Jean and her friends. Mosi merely felt sorry for her. She was trying so hard to fit in. Mosi walked to Farrah after an hour.

"Baby, let's go."

"Ok." She turned to her friends and bid them goodbye before following Mosi to their car which was parked two houses away.

"Mommy, are we going to keep the car forever?" "No baby. We will return it then buy our own."

They settled in the car and Mosi quickly drove off. She didn't want Rose seeing the car and having to be discussed.

"Mommy, can we go to Uncle Nick's house?"

Mosi sighed. "He's not around I told you, he traveled.

He's going to come back." "I miss him." Farrah said

tearfully. "I want to go to him."

"I'm going to tell him that you were crying. He won't come back."

Farrah buried her head in her hands and started the loud cry. Mosi wondered when she started crying like this, it was becoming a normality now.

"Farrah!" She tried the no nonsense voice. The 'I'm now going to beat you' voice but it didn't work. Mosi parked on the driveway at the apartment and stepped out of the car. Opening Farrah's door, she hugged her daughter.

"Baby, big girls do not cry."

"He's not coming back? Like Emily's mother. She said her mother went away and is never coming back. Is Uncle Nick never coming back?"

Mosi chuckled looking at Farrah. "He's coming back. He's going to take us to Disney world. You want to go there right?"

Farrah nodded still sobbing. "Yes. Uncle Nick is going to take us there. We are going to go to the lake house and go for ice cream. He will never leave us."

"Call him."

"Tomorrow. I will call him tomorrow. You will talk to him right?" She resumed crying.

"You won't."

"Farrah, baby stop crying. You want to speak to Auntie Imani?" "I want Uncle Nick."

"Farrah, I'm going to beat you if you keep crying for no reason."

Mosi closed her eyes as Farrah cried even louder. Lord knew she never was like that before. At this point, Mosi knew there was nothing she could do. Farrah had adapted to a new attitude of being a spoilt brat and thinking she could cry to get anything she wanted.

Her phone rang from her pocket.

She angrily answered. "Hello?"

"Hey—"

"Look Miguel or whatever you call yourself, stop calling me. I do not want to go out with you!"

"Who's Miguel?"

Mosi blinked a couple of times. "Huh?"

"I can hear Farrah crying. Give her the phone." Mosi now knew how Nick sounded with every emotion and she could tell he was upset. She handed Farrah the phone.

"Hello..." A second later, a smile broke on Farrah's face.

"Uncle Nick. Yes. Yes. I want you to come home. Ok. I miss you too. I want many toys. Ok. I love you too. Ok."

Farrah stretched her hand to hand

Mosi the phone. "Hi," "Who's

Miguel?"

"I do not know."

"Should I find out on my own." Now she was definitely sure. He was upset.

"I met him at hospital one time and today he called. He got my details from the hospital." "Isn't that information confidential?"

"It is."

"I will deal with it."

"He did not do anything wrong." "I'm flying back tonight."

"I thought you were going to spend some time with your fiancé." "Don't pick his calls.

Tomorrow we will go to the lake house."

"You sound jealous right now, for someone who is about to be married you—"

"Don't pick his calls! I will be there early morning."

"I thought you were going to stay away till it is over."

"Not anymore." He said then
dropped the call. Mosi put her
phone away staring at giggling
Farrah. "Happy now?"
"Yes!"
"Next time you cry for no reason, I'm going to beat you and
give you a real reason to cry."

Yawning, Mosi opened the main door. She looked at Nick
who was wearing a three piecesuit, the buttons of his
jacket unbuttoned.

"It's three in the
morning." "So?"

He gently pushed her aside and walked in going straight
to her room. When she finally walked in, he had Farrah in
his arms.

"Bring her teddy
bear. Let's go."

"Wait, I have to
change."

He looked at her pajamas. "You look fine. Let's go."

Mosi picked up the teddy bear and walked out, locking her
bedroom door. In the car, Farrah slept at the backseat
sucking her thumb while Mosi sat beside Nick at the front
seat. He hadn't said anything yet and she wondered if it was
still about Miguel.

Arriving at the lake house, Nick laid Farrah in her room
before walking off the room they usually used whenever
they came over. Momentarily, Mosi stood still watching
Farrah sleep wondering what she should do. Placing the huge
teddy bear on the bed, she walked out and went to the
bedroom where she found Nick sitting on the bed, now
without the jacket.

She couldn't understand why she felt guilty, it's not like she had done anything wrong. "Nick... I do not know Miguel. I met him once and he called out of the blue. He wanted to go out for dinner. I told him no."

She slowly sat beside. "Are you angry?"

He stood up chuckling. "Yeah. Pretty much. At first I just thought I was upset because there's someone actually hitting on you. Someone who wants you. Someone who has taken the courage to ask you out. Something I haven't done. Officially. Then it was jealous. I got really jealous, made me feel cranky. I got jealous enough to cut my trip short. I had a business dinner I had to attend tomorrow but I kept thinking that maybe he finally called again and you said yes. I decided to make up something so I return. And now it hit me, hard. Like a strong slap across my face. I don't want you with anyone but me."

Mosi slowly stood up. "What do you mean?"

"I am in love with you. I love you.

There you have it." "You loved Nelima."

"It's not the same. I will always love Neli. But I have fallen for you. Hard. It angers me. I never thought it would happen again. Not so soon anyway."

"I love you, too. But we can always wait. I do not mind."

"I do not want to wait. I can't stay away from you. It's fucked up." "What now?"

Wendy?"

"She's back too. I don't want to put your life on the line. Santino is watching." She frowned. "Santino?"

"My father. But at the same time, I just don't want to be away from you. Move in here." "What? Nick. I stay in Broadstairs. Farrah schools there. I work there. You cannot want us to move. We are not moving."

"Can't I convince you otherwise?" "No you cannot. Did you eat?"

He shook his head. "Not with all the thoughts that were swimming in my head. What did you say his name was again?"

"Miguel. I can cook, is there food here?"

"No. And I'm not hungry for food." He whispered pulling her in his arms.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

The following morning, Mosi woke up late. The sunlight had filled the entire bedroom and she could hear music all the way from downstairs. Sighing, she remained still feeling too tired to climb down the bed. Her head throbbed and she felt sick, the music didn't stop till she just decided to wake up. She dragged her heavy body to the ensuite and stood under the warm water hoping when she stepped out, she would be feeling much better.

She whizzled walking out of the bathroom. Something was wrong, her body felt foreign. She lay across the bed with her eyes closed feeling too exhausted. Seconds later Nick and Farrah walked in and Mosi lazily opened her eyes. Farrah was holding a glass of juice while Nick held a tray of breakfast.

"Hey... breakfast." **NOVELSGURU.COM**

Mosi sat upright fixing her towel then smiled taking the juice from Farrah. "Thank you."

"We made it." Nick emphasized placing the tray beside her.

"Thank you." Mosi took a bite of the pancake. It did taste good. She ate while they watched. Clearing her plate she stood up but her knees felt weak, her head spun and she immediately sat down.

"Are you ok?" Nick sounded concerned. "Yes. I feel sick."

He put his hand over her forehead.

"Wow! You are burning!" "I will be fine. I just..."

"We need to see a doctor. You shouldn't be burning up like this." "I think it's flu. I will be fine."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes,"

"I will get you medicine. Are you sure?"

"Yes. Do not worry. Thank you for the breakfast."

"It's ok. I will go get your medicine now. I have a doctor friend." He stood up. "And get us food here."

Mosi blinked a couple of times her vision blurring. "You don't have to. We are leaving today."

"Farrah, take care of mommy, I will be back." He kissed her forehead then kissed Mosi. "I will also get something for fever."

"Ok."

He walked out while Mosi went beneath the duvet. She was suddenly cold and too exhausted.

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"Did you eat?"

"Yes. Are you sick mommy?"

"Mommy has flu but I will be fine. Come sleep with me."

"I want to watch Brave. Bye!" And she was out by the door.

Mosi closed her eyes, maybe just a little nap. She woke up minutes later, Farrah shaking her.

"What?"

"There's a knock."

Mosi took a deep breath then rolled out of bed. "There's someone?" "Yes."

Now her heart pounded. What if it was Wendy? Or Nick's father. "Stay here. I'm coming." She re-wrapped the towel around her body walking downstairs. Getting to the door, she stood still and waited for the knock.

"Nick! Open up! It's Sean!" A voice yelled. Nick had mentioned a Sean once. His friend. Mosi opened the door then looked at the black man who was also looking at her with surprise.

"Uhh... wow! You must be Mosi?" Mosi nodded. "Nick is not here."

"Oh, umm well you tell him I came by." "I will."

His eyes moved down her body and Mosi looked at him uncomfortably. Perhaps the towel was a bit too short.

"Ok. I will be on my way." He turned and walked away but kept turning back.

Mosi closed the door with a sigh then walked to the kitchen. She looked at the mess for a while before going to the bedroom.

"Are we going mommy?"

"No. It was Uncle Nick's friend." She said dressing up in her pajamas. "Let's go and clean the kitchen."

When Nick came back, the kitchen was clean. "You didn't have to clean. We were going to. I brought your medicine."

"Thanks. Sean came by." "He did?"

"Yes."

"The doctor said you should take this for five days. If you don't get better, I'm taking you to him. Though he suspects a typical bug that has been going around. Nothing serious to worry about."

"Thanks." She took the medicine from him then coughed.

"Perhaps you should stay here, where I can monitor you. Just for a day or two."

"I have to go to work. I can't skip just because of flu.

Either way, Elizabeth will fire me." Nick cupped her face.

"You have a fever and flu, I'm sure you can get a day off."

She shook her head. "Not with Elizabeth. I will be fine.

And I'm sure Wendy is there tootelling her mother about—"

"We don't talk about Wendy. And I will deal with that. Don't worry."

"I'm going to call my mother." She moved from him. The headache was slowly going away. Getting in the bedroom, she took her phone and called her mother.

"Hello? Mosi?"

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Mosi tried to recall when last she spoke to her mother. Probably two weeks ago. "Mama, how are you?"

"I'm fine my daughter. How are you? How is Farrah?" "We are fine. Did you receive the money I sent you?" "Yes. Thank you."

"I hope you didn't give it to your husband." "Mosi, you will not address your father like that."

Mosi rolled her eyes. "I just called to check up on you." "I am fine. Just my knee."

"I told you to get in the bus and go to Nairobi. Your sister's child is there. Stay there while receiving the doctor's attention."

"I can't just leave Mosi."

"So you would rather die in pain than get help?" "I went to the clinic."

"They won't help you! I'm going to send more money, please, go to Nairobi. Matter of fact, Imani is going to come fetch you."

"Ok my child." "I love you."



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She waited then heard her mother chuckle. "I love you too. Please don't come back in a coffin. I would die. My heart still breaks. I thought I was saving Nelima but I was sweeping her inside the lion's den."

"Mama it's not your fault. Nelima had cancer."

"I should have fought your father when he wanted to marry her off. I should not have sent her away. She was only a

child."

"Mama if you keep stressing, your blood pressure will rise. Nelima would not want that. Nelima loves you and she wouldn't want to see you stressed."

"My child..." Mosi listened as her mother began crying. Her own tears fell to their own accord. "She was only a child. She didn't deserve to die so young. I thought she would go far and her dreams would come true. I did what I thought was right. I did what I thought was best for her. How could I know she would die."

Mosi took a deep breath. "Mama, please don't cry." "Lord forgive me!"

"Mama, I have to go. Bye." She hung up then sat on the bed trying to stop crying but her tears just fell down her cheeks. She deep down wished Nelima was still alive but then a wicked voice in her head told her if Nelima was still alive, Nick wouldn't be with her.

"Thank you for coming, Nick." Detective Parker said as Nick sat down opposite him. He nodded. "Yeah, what's up?"

"Our case doesn't have enough evidence. It's weak. My supervisors are beginning to question me. Maybe Santino didn't kill your mother. It's possible. Maybe it was someone she was having an affair with."

Nick rubbed his hands together. Santino had gotten to him. "Yeah. You are right." "Miranda's death has been cleared. Her killer confessed. And we got him."

"Where is Kamaryn?"

"She flew to Mexico. Your plan worked."

Nick smiled. "Yeah, see you around Detective Parker."

Nick walked out from his hotel room glad he had told Kamaryn to fly to Paris the previous day. He knew probably Santino's people were already in Mexico hunting her down. He drove to Sean's company and found him on a phone call.

"Look, let me call you back." He hung up and smiled. "She's beautiful."

Nick swallowed his annoyance. "I know. What did you want?"

"Why do you sound jealous? She's not even yours." Sean had a smug on his face that pushed Nick over to the edge.

"Don't fucking test me."

Sean laughed. "Relax, I didn't say I want her. She's beautiful. More than anything you have ever fucked. What's going to happen to Wendy?"

"I will deal with her."

"Are you staying with Mosi?"

Nick's annoyance rose. She was too stubborn, he had dropped her off two days ago at her apartment. He wished she never resisted and remained at the lake house. "No."

"So you are in a relationship with her?" "Yes. Can we discuss business?"

"Whatever you want. Your father spoke to a magazine yesterday. Apparently you are releasing the new collection in a week's time."

"What?" This was

news to Nick. "Yep!"

"Bastard!"

"Whatever plan you have with the police better work out."

"It will." Nick was confident. He had spoken to Ingrid the previous day and she had gotten to Santino's brother though she wanted to expose him on the wedding day.

Two hours later, Nick was walking inside Santino's house, his fury slowly rising. He walked straight to his office and barged in. His jaw dropped on the floor with shock and

surprise. Nick watched as Joshua gazed at him, unexplainable panic in his eyes. He quickly moved from Santino already pulling his pants up.

Santino didn't seem moved, he picked his pants from the floor, put them on and sat on his chair already lighting his cigar.

"Nick.. afternoon." Joshua murmured and walked out without looking back. Regaining his posture, Nick walked further into the office which felt stuffed.

"Son, what you just saw is called—" "What did you say to the media?"

"You are releasing that car in a week's time." The arrogance rolled off easily sickening Nick. "I will release it when I feel like it."

"In a week's time. What the fuck are the delays for? The car is being released, you like it or you don't."

"I want to release it with another collection I've been working on." Nick tried a different approach. "It will have us back on top."

Santino grinned. "That's what I want to hear. You have something else in the working?" "Yes. The wedding, the release of the collection, it will give us the publicity we need. The company is mine, let me run it the way I see fit."

"Ok. Have it your way."

"Thanks."

"I don't think you should marry Elizabeth's daughter."

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Nick chuckled. "I thought you liked her."

"She's too cheap. You should get something better." "We are pregnant."

"So what? Who gives a shit?"

"We are going to raise our baby together." "You are a fool."

"Wait till I prove you wrong. Just wait for it."

Santino watched Nick walk out then angrily threw the cigar on the floor. Why didn't security stop him? He hated to have Nick look down on him, he had seen it in his eyes. It was not the hatred and irritant he usually portrayed, today it was pure disgust, a look not to be forgotten.

He picked up his phone and called Joshua. "Santino, we can't keep doing this."

"I'm the one who will decide that. How is your daughter doing? And Lisa. I apologize, I forgot to ask. You should bring Lisa for dinner sometime."

"No. We need to stop."

"Don't forget everything you own is mine. You are nothing without me. Be careful of what you tell Nick. You are a good possession to lose. Your daughter still needs you." He dropped the call grinning. He liked the power he possessed. It drove him crazy knowing he held souls in his hands. He looked around his study wondering how many people had died inside, he had lost count.

Now he needed to deal with that bitch they called Wendy. He knew he would enjoy watching her die. He called her immediately. If she thought she could double cross Santino,

she had another thing coming.

"I told you to never call me!" "Come over. We need to talk." "You are sick. Stay away from me."

"I better see your ass in twenty minutes or else start preparing for your mother's funeral!" Putting his phone down, he knew she would come running. So he waited, patiently and eager till his office door opened. She looked upset yet sexy.

"Strip!"
"What?"
"Strip!"

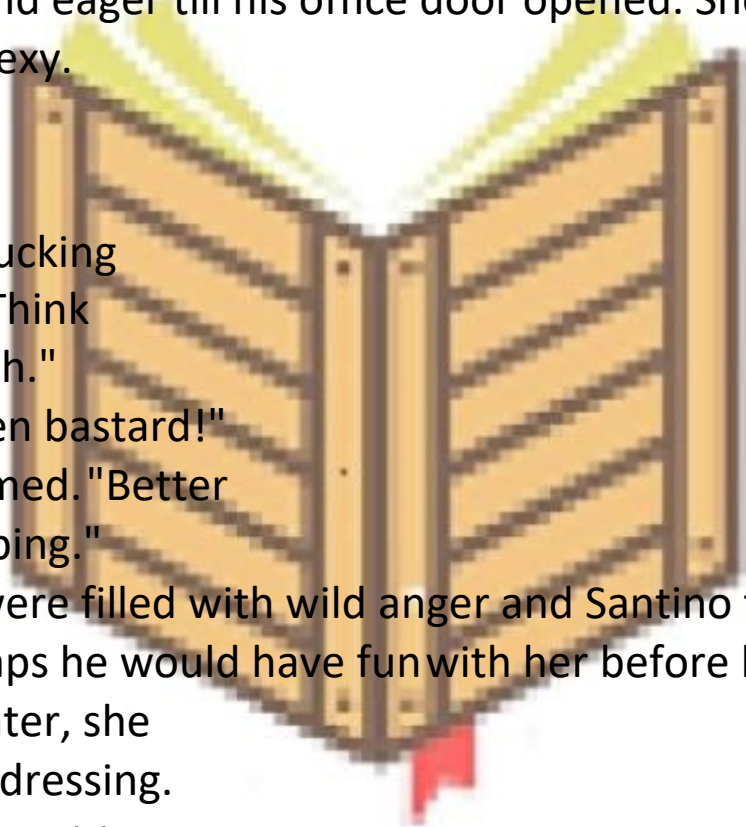
"You are fucking insane!" "Think of Elizabeth."

"You fucken bastard!"
She screamed. "Better start stripping."

Her eyes were filled with wild anger and Santino found it sexy. Perhaps he would have fun with her before killing her. Seconds later, she started undressing.

"Slowly. I want to see you."

"You son of a bitch!"



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Mosi stood still waiting to regain her strength. Now she was convinced, it had to be food poisoning. Maybe the juice she had drank the previous Saturday. At the party. It did taste funny. Finally, she stepped out of the bathroom and walked back to her room and drank the ginger drink. Imani said it would help after saying Jean had wanted to kill her.

Mosi wasn't surprised that Rose was just silent. Now she wondered if really she had went to the police or had just said it. She still had the fever, it never seemed to go away. Her flu usually took two weeks to go away so she hoped next week she would be back to normal. She took her laptop and finished off her assignment before emailing it. So far, everything was still ok.

She looked at Farrah asleep then sighed. She had waited for Nick thinking he would come by but he didn't. Mosi didn't question anything anymore but her heart still pounded whenever she saw Wendy at the mansion.

One thing Mosi knew for sure was she was going to get fired immediately when Elizabeth found out the truth. She already had a plan B and it was going back to the salon and finding a second job. She quietly stood up then packed an overnight bag. Nick had texted minutes back that he was on his way to fetch them. It didn't matter if it was just after five on a Saturday morning.

As soon as she finished packing, her phone rang. She picked it up. "Imani. It's five here."

"I know. I'm sorry. We need to talk." "What?"

"Can you believe it? I'm in newspapers. They are calling me a home wrecker." Mosi sighed. "It was the minister's wife?"

"No. It was Vivian."

Vivian, Imani happened to have dated her husband five years ago though she didn't know. The husband just lied and impregnated Imani then denied everything. Vivian even attacked Imani causing her to miscarry.

"What?"

"She's still bitter. She was at that wedding I attended some time ago. I told you. I went with the minister."

"I'm sorry."

"Ahh! That bitch messing with me the wrong way. I will mop the floor with her ugly face. Talking about being a homewrecker! If she satisfied her husband then he would not have looked at me. Can you believe it? She was pregnant. She's always pregnant."

"Maybe you should calm down and let the minister deal with it."

"He's already dealing with it but I'm going to deal with her. If it's a fight she wants, then it's a fight she will get. I'm not scared to fight. This bitch busy writing dirt about me, talking about I can't afford my own life. Can she afford hers? Looking like a piece of shit! She's going to know me."

"Don't get arrested."

"Arrested? Who? Not me. I've sent my boys. They are going to deal with her." "Didn't you say she was pregnant?"

"I was pregnant when she attacked me." "Imani..."

"Don't talk nonsense Mosi. Anyways, how's Nick?"

"Fine. I hope what you are doing won't come back to bite you."

"Bite who? I have the law on my side! Now I have to deal with the minister's wife."

Mosi laughed. She knew Imani was not going to break it off with the minister. "You are evil."

"Evil? Who? I'm not evil. Sharing is caring. Minister wants to divorce her. I'm going to marry him."

"Are you sure?"

"Haaa! She's begging me to stay away from her husband. He already served her divorce papers. I don't play!"

"You are going to hell."

"Tell me about Nick. Serious boys!"

"He just arrived. We will talk. Don't get arrested."

"Tell him I said hi. And don't worry, I don't get arrested. Not when I'm sleeping with the law."

Mosi put her phone in her pocket walking out of her room to the main door. She found her fresh graduate housemate in front of the door talking to Nick in only a short lace nightdress. If Mosi remembered quite well, her name was Ava.

"Hey," Nick said as he saw her then walked in and gave her a soft kiss on the lips. From the corner of her eyes, Mosi saw Ava walk back to her room.

"Ready to go?"

"Yes."

Mosi stared at herself on the mirror. Third week still sick. Her stomach was forever upset. The dizzy spells. The nausea. The list could go on. She tried not to think about it but a tiny voice in her head was saying, *you know what's going on. You suspected it all along. The unexplainable sickness. The missed periods. You know it but just don't want to deal with it.* She continued staring at herself on the mirror. She still looked the same. Square to oval face, big eyes, full lips. Perhaps she had gained weight, just a bit making her even more voluptuous

and lush. She looked at her not so flat stomach.

She knew she should have went for her shot a week before she got in the plane to fly here. Closing her eyes, she tried to shake off the disappointment but it wouldn't go away. She had been careless, and she wondered why because she always used protection with Nathan. She looked up blinking away her tears. She was pregnant and not even sure of her future. She had wanted to wait till she got married to have her second child.

Continuing to stare at her reflection on the mirror, she carefully observed herself, the white dress hug her figure tightly riding over her mid thighs, it never used to before, just hung on her hips loosely and rode just above her knees. She remembered that Imani had bought it for her when she had traveled with her suger daddy by then. Chanel dress and according to Imani, no one refused anything bought from Chanel.

Mosi had accepted it because it was beautiful and it was off the shoulders with longsleeves. Now that she wore the dress, the confidence she once possessed through it wavered.

"Hey, are you ok?" Courtney asked knocking on the bathroom door. "There's someone here to see you."

"I'm coming."

She rinsed her mouth one last time then walked out. She went straight to the main door stealing a glance at her wrist watch. Nick had said he would arrive at nine and it was just halfeight. Mosi froze looking at the man she had met at the hospital, Miguel.

"How did you —"

"Someone called Rose." He smiled. "You look beautiful."

Mosi tried pulling her dress down but it wouldn't budge so she let it be and gave him a no nonsense face. "Rose?"

"Yes. Rose. Said she knows you."

Mosi briefly closed her eyes. She felt too angry it was not normal. Her hormones were abnormal so she kept her pose.

"What do you want?"

"You refused dinner, coffee even lunch. Now I'm wondering if we can be friends. We can start all over."

"I am sorry but—"

"Let me start. Shhh. I'm Miguel Dlamini, a 34 year old professor at Oxford." "Oxford?"

"Yes. I started six months back. You?"

"Mosi Niji, a 32 year old cleaner and online student at Oxford." "Wow! What are you pursuing?"

"Accounting."

"Impressive. Not a lot of people would do that."

"Yes. I am sorry but my... I am in a..." She sighed. Was she in a relationship? Nick had said he loved her, did that make him her boyfriend?

"I just want friendship. Nothing more.

We can do coffee." "Why?"

He looked at her blankly and confused. "Why?" "Why do you want to be friends?"

"Because friendships last longer."

Mosi chuckled shaking her head. Before she could respond, Nick parked his car behind the Audi and now Mosi wondered where Miguel had parked. She hoped it wasn't next door.

"Where is your car?"

"I like the way you pronounce words fully."

She looked at Nick step out of his car then back at Miguel.

"What?"

"Yes. You barely hear anyone who does that. Your words are

always full. Kind of intriguing." He smiled and Mosi's heart was pounding.

"You have to go."

Miguel looked at Nick approaching.

"Your boyfriend?" She shrugged making him smile. "Coffee?"

She remained quiet and when Nick approached, Miguel innocently smiled greeting him before walking off and disappearing into the darkness of the night.

Nick pulled Mosi in his arms and kissed her. "Who was that?" She looked at him.

"Miguel."

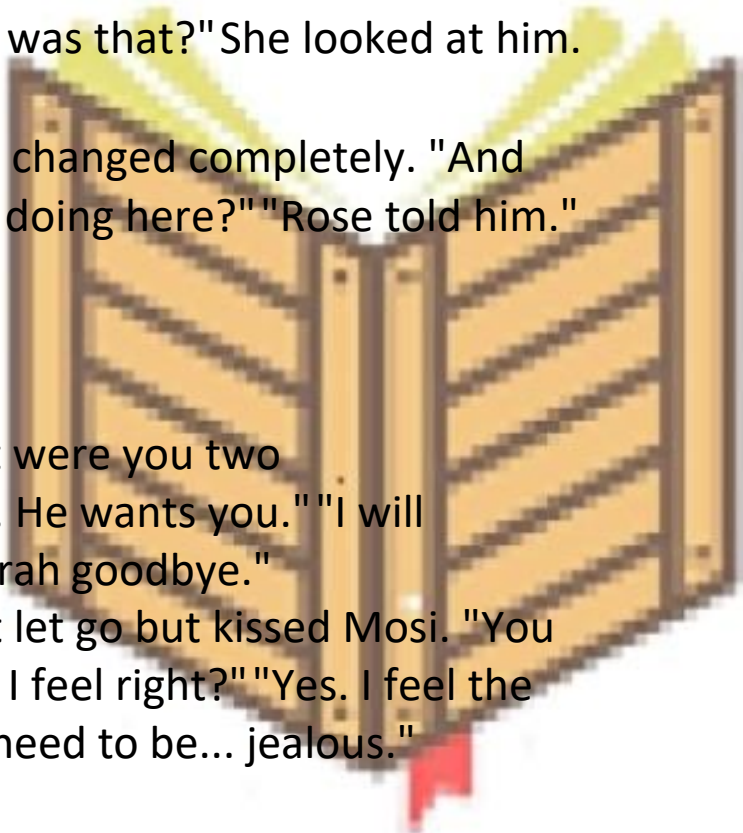
Nick's face changed completely. "And what is he doing here?" "Rose told him."

"The lady who—"

"Yes."

"And what were you two discussing. He wants you." "I will go kiss Farrah goodbye."

Nick didn't let go but kissed Mosi. "You know how I feel right?" "Yes. I feel the same. No need to be... jealous."



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"I don't like sharing."

She looked at him silently as he glowered at her then walked inside the house to her bedroom. Farrah jumped from the bed where she was watching a movie with Courtney on Mosi's laptop. She hugged Nick who picked her up.

"Hey princess."

"Are we going?"

He chuckled. "Tomorrow."

Mosi took her purse then walked out after kissing Farrah. Nick followed behind her to the car.

"You look beautiful." He said opening the door for her. She knew he was dealing with his wrath as he kept the cold tone. "Thanks."

He was taking her out for dinner. Some restaurant a friend of his owned. Getting in the driver's seat, he reversed then sped away. Mosi put on her seatbelt thinking about her pregnancy. She knew she was probably 7 weeks or 8.

More than two hours later, Nick walked to the restaurant's door and held it open for Mosi who looked up at him scrutinizing his face. His expression was unreadable.

"A table for two?" The female host asked as soon as they walked inside the less crowded, fancy looking restaurant. Mosi knew if Imani were in her shoes, she would be over the world with joy. Her eyes flickered briefly to Mosi before landing back at Nick smiling sweetly.

"I booked a table already." He said with disinterest that had the host blinking a couple of times before clearing her throat.

"Right, names please." Her voice remained alluring and definitely aimed at him. Mosi stood beside him silently with

irritant. She had lost her appetite instantly. Perhaps it was his silence to her that annoyed her or the brunette who was seducing him.

"Sean McConnell."

She quickly checked before leading them to another part of the restaurant which had only four tables occupied. Nick pulled out a chair for Mosi as their hostess disappeared probably to welcome other guest. Sitting down she looked around, definitely Imani would enjoy it.

"I already ordered our meal."

She looked at him then nodded. She was glad because staring down at the menu before her, she didn't even know one single thing. Right on cue, the waitress appeared with a carter which had a bottle of wine, glasses and their meal. He quickly put everything on the table before walking off with a smile.

Nick was just staring at her and now Mosi wondered if he knew she was pregnant and was waiting for her to spit it out.

"What?"

"Sometimes I wish I could be inside your head." "Doing what in my head?"

He chuckled. "Listening to your thoughts.

What are you thinking?" "On the scale of ten, how how much you are upset."

He smiled.

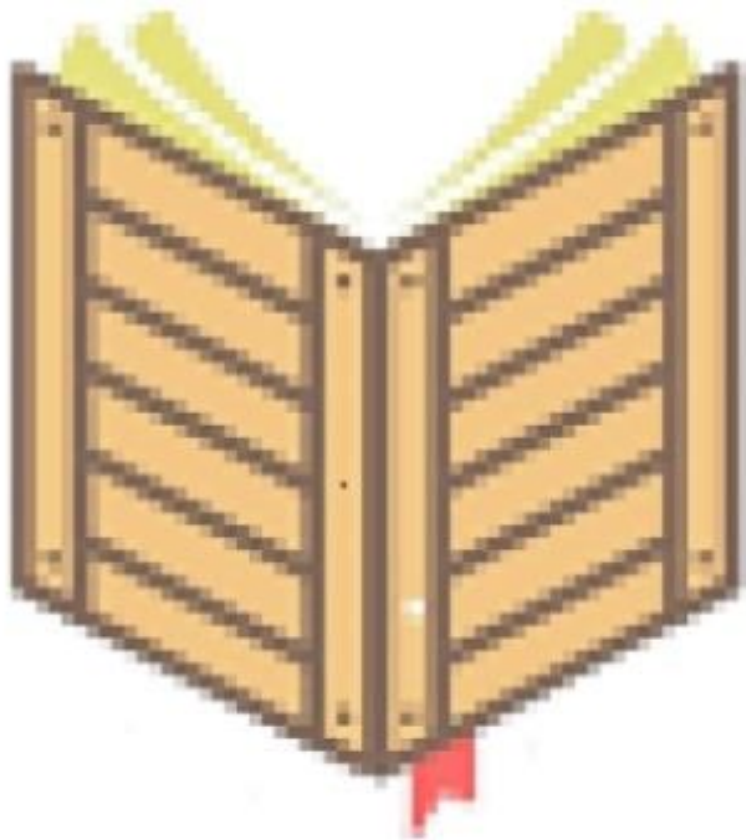
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"15." "Want a cold shower?"

"Hardly. I don't like him." "No one said you should."

"I don't want him anywhere close to you and the fact that I

can't do anything about it drives me mad."
"I am sorry, I cannot help you too."



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"What was he saying?"

"That he likes how I fully pronounce my words." "I like your honesty more."

She shrugged then looked at her meal. "What is this?" "The chef's best. Eat."

She suddenly felt hungry. She started eating while he poured her the wine. "I want juice."

"Ok. Let—"

"What's going on here Nick?" A sharp voice said making Mosi snap her head up. Her entire body went cold and the food in her mouth suddenly lost taste.

"Shit!" Nick stood up and held her waist. "Let's talk outside."

Wendy looked at Mosi with fury and disgust. "Oh my God! She's the maid!" A few people turned to look. "You are cheating with the maid?"

"I said let's talk outside!" He snapped before taking her hand and dragging her out. Uncontrollably, tears filled Mosi's eyes as she watched them walk out. She was pregnant with that man's child. This was the man she loved or maybe she just thought she did. She wasn't sure anymore.

Holding her tears from falling, she stood up then walked to the waiter walking to some table.

"Excuse me, where are the restrooms?"

"What sort of nonsense is going on? Are you cheating on me with that lowlife negro?" Nick's jaw tightened. "Don't you dare ever call her that."

Tears filled Wendy's eyes. "Nick, out of anything you can choose to cheat on me with, it has to be her! What's so

special about a maid? A maid!"

"I love her. She's smart, intelligent, knows her worth. She's original." Wendy laughed with incredulous disbelief. "You love her?"

"Yes. I'm going to tell you this once and only once, you are going to respect her. You are pregnant with Santino's child." Nick watched her iris dilute with shock and fear.

"You have been sleeping with my father. I know about the files too. For your own sake, you will keep with the pretense because if not, Santino is going to kill you."

"Nick..."

"And if she loses her job, consider yourself dead."

He walked back inside the restaurant leaving her crying. He didn't feel sorry for her.

Back at the table, Mosi had disappeared. He looked around panicking then saw her walking back.

"Please take me back to the apartment." "Mosi.. I'm —"

She smiled. "Take me back."

He followed her out till they were standing in front of his car. He was glad Wendy had left. "I'm sorry Mosi. I didn't know she'd be here or follow me here."

"Take me home." Her voice was quiet.

"It's fucked up, trust me, but you know what's going on."

"Nick, I am going to lose my job. Do you understand that part?"

"No. No. You won't lose your job. I promise you. Trust me. You still have your job and you will have it as long as you want."

"So she is just going to clap her hands and applaud me for sleeping with you?"

"Pretty much. I'm entertaining her lies. Look, I know you must be upset and I'm sorry." He cupped her face. "I'm sorry. Let's go back inside."

"I am not a home wrecker."

"You are not. Can never be." He kissed her. "Let's —"

His phone vibrated from his pocket. He took it out and seeing the caller ID, he answered still looking at Mosi.

"What are you doing? Didn't I tell you to stay away from her for a while?" "I will do anything in my power to shield her and her kid."

"Nick.. "

"Anything else you wanted to talk about?" "I don't want you to jinx this case."

"No one is jinxing anything. If she goes back to Santino, he's going to kill her and throw her in a river, she knows that."

He heard Ingrid sigh. He was right. "Be careful." "Yeah."

"Maybe we should have dinner at the lake house. We can always order in." Mosi said as soon as he put his phone away.

"I brought you here and we will eat here."

Sitting on the table, he summoned the waiter and ordered her juice. "Eat."

"I lost my appetite."

"Please."

She stared at him for a while then resumed eating. He wanted to ask about Miguel and if she liked him but held back. He was scared of her response and afraid it would drive him straight to insanity.

"My mother was also from Africa."

She looked up her eyes softening then finally, she laughed. "Where?" "South Africa."

"Is that why your hair is..." She chuckled. "I thought it was some sort of style." "I have African genes in my blood."

"Miguel is also from South Africa."

Of course he knew that. And also the fact that the man had a clean slate. It annoyed him, how could a man be so clean?

"Yeah whatever."

"You two have something in common.

You should be friends." "He wants what's mine. It's only normal I hate him."

"Your characters... they are almost similar." "Don't compare me to him."

She giggled. "You are both tall and your eyes, they are the same color. He even looks like you. Slightly."

He smiled. "If you are trying to get on my nerves, you are winning." "I swear. I would say you are related."

"No. I'm not."

She looked at him. "No. Seriously. There's a possibility. Your mother is South African. He's also South African."

"Adelaide has two kids only."



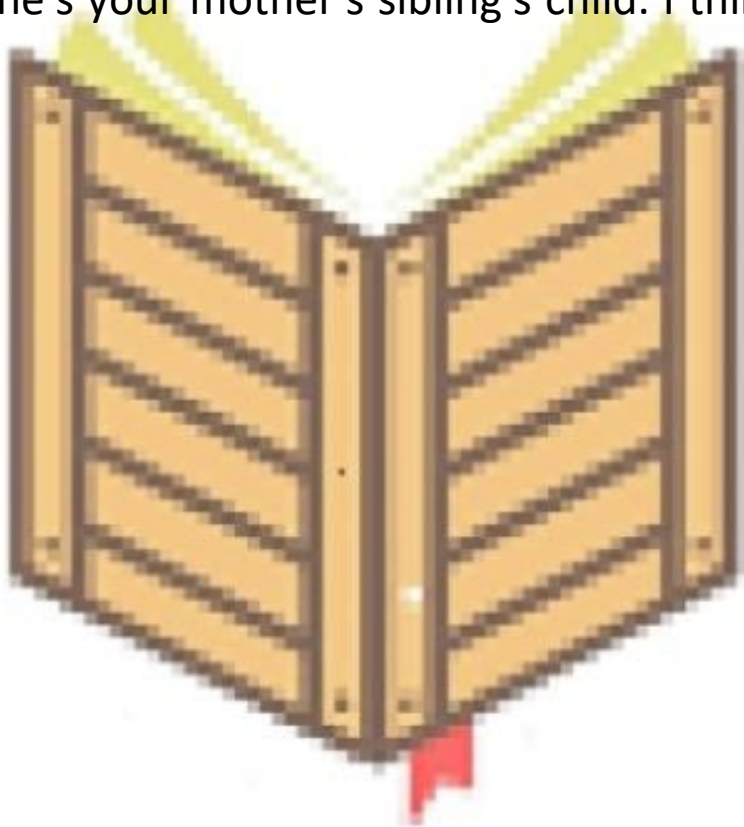
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"Adelaide? Your mother?"

He nodded but now that he thought of it, he knew there was a possibility. "Maybe she's not your mother's child. How old are you?"

"35. In case Neli told you 29, I lied to her. Didn't want her to think I was too grown for her. She was only 27"

"She never did." She shook her head. "You shouldn't have lied to her. She wouldn't have minded. Maybe only surprised that you do behave like a 29 year old. Miguel is 34. Maybe he's your mother's sibling's child. I think you are related."



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Chapter Twenty-Nine

Mosi held her phone to her ear trying to hold it in. Her eyes were fixed on the home pregnancy test hoping maybe the second line will disappear but it stubbornly stuck on. "Hey beautiful, do you know what time it is?" Imani laughed but as Mosi kept quiet she asked. "Mosi, are you ok?"

"I'm pregnant."

Imani didn't respond and Mosi waited for the lecture as tears fell from the corner of her eyes.

"Nick?" She finally asked. Mosi almost rolled her eyes. Even before she left, she hadn't slept with Nathan in five months and Imani knew.

"Yes."



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"At least he's rich and can take care of the baby."

Mosi closed her eyes and sobbed loudly. "Hey, Mosi don't cry. It's scary I know but... babies are blessings from the Lord. Right?"

Mosi shook her head. She didn't want the blessing. Not now. She wasn't ready. "How far are you?"

"9 weeks."

"And when did you find out?"

"Last week but I took the test today." "Are you going to tell him?"

All week that's what she had been thinking. What if he didn't want a baby or he just didn't want a baby with her. She knew she was being crazy but couldn't keep the thought out of her head.

"He has a lot going on right now." "Is that a no?"

"I'm scared."

"He deserves to know. You can't go through pregnancy all alone. You need support. Especially financial support. At least you have a car. Don't return it. It's for the baby."

"Imani I feel so tired."

"Hey, the baby is already here. If he wasn't meant to be then you wouldn't be pregnant." "Stop your nonsense wise talk. I didn't use protection. That's that."

"Ok ok. I'm surprised you still know how to speak Swahili. Can Farrah still speak?" "Yeah." She smiled.

"Yesterday I caught her teaching her nanny how to speak it." "That's my girl."

"Courtney is going to college soon. I don't know what I'm going to do."

"You will get someone new and either way, I don't think Nick will allow you to work as a maid whilst you are pregnant with

his child."

"That's a given if."

"Don't stress. He will want this baby and you. He loves you. He loves Farrah and he will love the new edition to the team. How's work? That white witch still hasn't told her mother?"

"No. She has not."

"She better not. Mosi, I'm going to sleep now. Sleep too. Tomorrow you need to go to work. And you need to tell him. It's his baby."

"Goodnight."

"Love you."

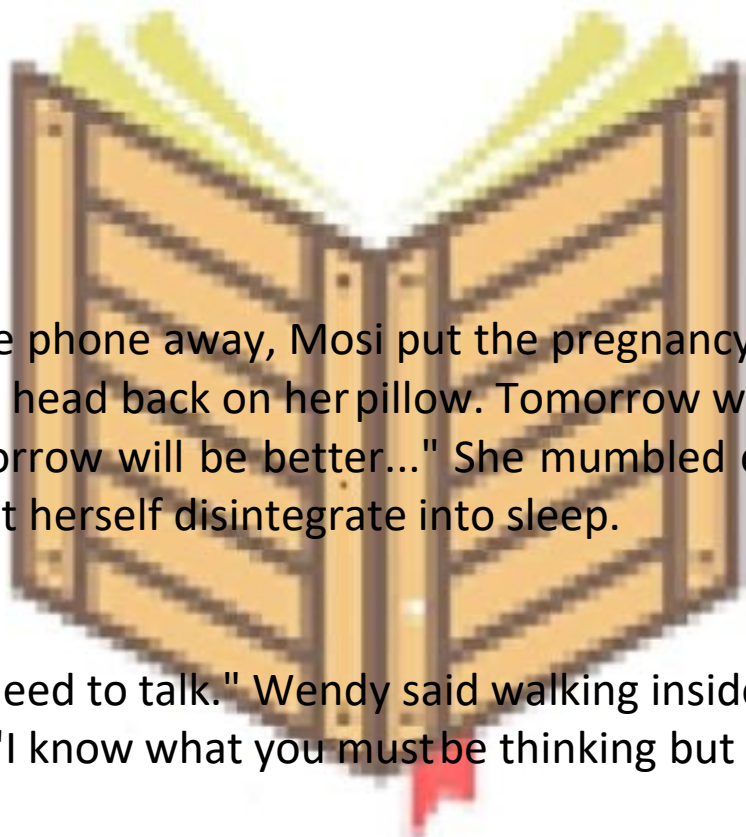
"Love you."

Putting the phone away, Mosi put the pregnancy test away and lay her head back on her pillow. Tomorrow was another day. "Tomorrow will be better..." She mumbled closing her eyes and let herself disintegrate into sleep.

"Nick, we need to talk." Wendy said walking inside Nick's bedroom. "I know what you must be thinking but I can explain."

Nick continued packing his overnight bag, he had a flight to catch that morning. "I love you. What happened with Santino... he forced himself on me. I didn't know how to tell you." "Ok." He simply said and it picked his bag. "I believe you. We will deal with it when I come back."

She smiled. "Where are you going?"



"Southern Korea. I have a business deal to conclude. Just stay away from Santino." Ingrid had told him about controlling the situation. He kissed her cheek then walked out.

"I love you."

Nick sighed then turned with a smile. "So do I."

In his car, he glanced at his watch then drove out. He had twenty minutes to get to the airport. When he arrived, June was already waiting.

"Let's go."

"The media is so excited about the new collection you are releasing." June said picking up a magazine then showed the cover page to Nick. "This is interesting. A month or less to the big wedding."

The cover page was him. Sexiest man in UK. "Yeah.."

"Imagine had you allowed that photographer to shoot you half naked. Now you look sexy and professional. We are bound to get more business." She opened the magazine while the air hostess asked them to put on their seatbelts and switch off phones.

"I want to merge Edward's company with ours." Nick said after the plane took off. "But let them keep the name and brand on the cars."

"You know they have a branch in Africa?" "Yes."

"I think it's a good idea." "I

know. How's

Kim?" "She got a

job in France."

Nick whistled. "That's a leap."

"She wants to go. It's a good

job. Pays well." "More than what I'm giving you?"

She rolled her eyes. "No. But she wants the job. She wants me to move. I can't. I love my job too. The pay is..." She looked at Nick. "Hefty. My home is here. We purchased a home here. I know how important it is to her but..." She sighed exasperated. "I need her here with me."

"What kind of a job is it?"

"She's a chef and will be working with one of her role models." "Why can't she make a name for herself? Start her own thing?"

"She needs good publicity to get off the ground and a lot of money. I can sponsor her but it will be something small. She doesn't want something small."

"Mosi, she's a great cook. She doesn't know it but she's the best and she learns fast." June smiled taking out her notebook. "Mosi? Who's that that?"

"Someone special. She knows how to cook. She's good. I can invest if Kim can work with Mosi."

"Mosi, is that English or some foreign language." "It's Swahili."

June smiled. "Are you sure you should be getting married to Wendy? But I think it's a great idea. We can both invest. I have money put aside. I was going to use it for something else but if it can make Kim stay, then I'm good."

"I will tell Mosi. She could do with something good."

"Great! Now, back to business, I arranged an interview with Lee Eun Ho from the biggest magazine in Southern Korea. They have briefed me on the questions. Let's go through them."

From her tone, he could tell she was now in strict business mode.

Mosi quietly cleaned the living room while Elizabeth spoke on her phone. She could hardly take in what Elizabeth was saying over the phone as her mind focused on the little human growing inside her. Nick had left for Korea the previous day and was only coming back on Friday.

"I don't really care, make it happen. My daughter will get nothing but the best." Elizabeth said then hung up. Mosi hoped her daughter wouldn't show up, at least till Nick came back. "Melissa, call Alice, tell her I need her hear immediately."

"Yes mam." She stopped wiping the furniture then went to make the phone call to her lap dog. That's what Yvette called her, Elizabeth's personal assistant at the boutique and everywhere else generally. Mosi could swear that Elizabeth probably called her late at night if she felt like it and Alice would run to do whatever the queen wanted.

"Alice, this is Mosi and she summons you here immediately." Mosi said as soon as Alice answered the phone.

"What does she want? Is everything ok?"

Mosi fought the edge not to say; "everything is ok Alice. You still have your job and you can still pay your bills end of the month. Elizabeth is alive, unfortunately she just needs someone to diminish for a little while and throw around orders and you happen to be the perfect candidate."

"Everything is fine." "Ok, I'm on my way."

Walking back to the living room, she found Wendy talking to her mother. Mosi almost wished to die that moment and never resurrect.

Wendy looked at her with a smirk then looked at her mother. "What's this maid's name?"

Elizabeth looked at Mosi then back at the magazine she was holding. "Oh, Melissa or something like that."

"What's your name?" Wendy asked getting up on her feet.

"Mosi." Her voice was weak and she silently scolded herself. Fear was weakness. "Who?"

"Mosi." Her subconscious clapped. Much better. "The driveway is dirty. It needs to be cleaned." "Oh no sweetie, there's someone for that."

"No mother. Mosi is a maid. It's her job. Let her do it." "Sweetie, did you see the dress?"

"I did. You, go and make sure the driveway is clean. All the way to the gate. Get me water first."

Mosi turned and went to the kitchen. Coming back with it, Wendy took the glass then dropped it on the floor purposely.

"Look what you have done? Mop that! Now! I hope you will be able to pay for that glass." Without a word, Mosi picked up

the glasses then mopped before walking outside to the driveway. Wendy's shiny red convertible was parked behind her mother's car. Mosi felt the

urge to get anything heavy and smash the car. She knew Wendy was behaving like that on purpose.

"Oh no sweetie, don't look at that car. You can't even dream about affording it. You are nothing but a maid. A cleaner. You probably think Nick is interested in you. He's not. He just wanted someone to fuck and you happened to be available. He's my fiance and we are getting married. We are pregnant. I'm going to make sure you pay for even looking at him. When I'm done with you, you won't be able recognize yourself."

Mosi watched Wendy walk back inside the house and she suddenly felt dizzy. She staggered back but to have hands support her from behind.

"Relax. Come, let's sit." Yvette said already supporting Mosi to the backyard then had her sit on the launcher.

"Are you ok?" "Yes.

I'm fine."

"Maybe you dating Nick wasn't such a great idea."

Mosi took a deep breath. The only bad idea that kept ringing in her head was getting pregnant.

"I am fine."

"She's going to

fire you." "I

know."

Yvette sat beside her. "I am sorry."

Mosi suddenly wanted to cry but after seconds of ridiculing herself, she sat still in silence. There was nothing to cry about. She had to accept the baby and find means to take care of her mini family because she doubted she was going to have her job for too long.

Now that she thought of it, she wondered if coming to London was a mistake. They were a lot of places she could have went and a lot of things could have been avoided.

Later that evening, she waited for him to call. He had promised he would. She stared at her phone while lying beside Farrah who was asleep. An hour later, it finally rang and she quickly answered.

"Hello?"

"Hey, are you home already?" "Yes."

"How are you feeling? Still down with the flu?" "No. I am fine." She sounded convincing.

"Are you sure?"

She said nothing. Perhaps she was tired of pretending to be fine when that was the last emotion she felt.

"Mosi, is everything ok? I can come back tomorrow after my meeting." He sure could.

"I cannot keep seeing you anymore." Her voice was a mere whisper. She wondered if she meant it or was just saying it.

"What?"

She wanted to say she needed a break, like a lot of people would but that's not what she wanted. She wasn't even sure of what she wanted.

"I cannot keep seeing you. We need to stop. Break up."

"What happened?" He asked. There was a lot which had happened. A lot she hadn't planned for.

"I cannot keep doing this. Please, we need to break up." "I'm coming back tomorrow. We need to talk."

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"No. I need to focus on my life. Stay. Your business is important." "Not as important as you."

"You barely know me."

"I know you better than anyone Mosi. I'm coming. I love you."

His declaration made tears fill her eyes. "You loved my sister just a few months ago. You need to—"

"I have mourned her enough. I can't stop living and neither can you."

"Maybe you don't love me but just love the fact that with me you feel closer to her." She was being unfair, she knew that well but she just needed him to stay away from her. From Farrah. Her hand fell to her stomach. She just wanted to run with her daughter and baby and never come back.

"That's not true. I love you for you. You have nothing in common with Neli. Stop pushing me away, it won't work."

"I am sorry. I cannot keep seeing you." She looked up the ceiling blinking her tears away but it was too late. Her tears spilled warming her cheeks.

"I'm coming back. We need to talk, please." "It will not work."

"How do you know that? You haven't given us a chance. Please.. we need to talk. I wish I could fly back right now."

Then it is started raining. She listened to the rain with the phone on her ear. "Maybe if you could let me find myself first. Everything is new— it is overwhelming."

"I will help you find yourself. Please. I love you. I know it's hard to believe and fuck! I wish I knew what you were thinking. Mosi I need you to trust me. We can make it work. Please." She sighed. "Okay."

She lay in her bed for minutes listening to the rain hit the window pan. A ridiculous and stupid thought crossed her mind, she could always take the money she had and fly back

to Kenya. She was sure Mr. Warda had forgotten about her by now.

Mosi woke up the following morning to an overcast with rain morning.

"Mommy I bathed and dressed. Natalie gave her pie. She said I could eat it because she was late."

Mosi quickly grabbed her phone. 06:51. Her heart skipped as she jumped out of bed.

"I am late." She looked at her daughter smartly dressed for school. Her hair looked a bit undone but everything else was just fine.

"I will drop you at the bus stop. I can't drop you at school today. I have to go to work." "Ok."

"Who gave you the pie?"

"Natalie." The other housemate who shared her room with her best friend, Alex. They were nice, one weekend they had all ate lunch together.

"I'm sorry I'm late. Let's go." She put on her shoes and grabbed her phone with her car keys.

It was drizzling and now Mosi regretted not getting Farrah a raincoat. When they arrived by the bus stop 5 minutes later, Farrah waited in the car and a minute later, Mosi realized the bus had long left.

Looking at her phone, she sighed. She could call in sick or say her father was dead. Something. There was no way she could catch the time now that she had to drop off Farrah who looked completely unaware of her lateness.

"Ok baby, I will drop you at school."

"Yes! Rebecca said you have a nice car. I told her you bought it." Mosi laughed already speeding to the school. "You should not lie."

"It was a... a.. a white lie."

Mosi laughed harder. "A what?" "Rebecca says small lies are white lies. "

"A lie is a lie baby."

She parked in front of the gate and watched Farrah jump then run off to her friends. Her phone started ringing as soon as she started the journey back to the apartment.

"Elizabeth, good morning."

"Melissa or whatever your name is, don't bother coming to my house. Your service are not needed anymore. You will receive your money by the end of the day." She said curtly and hung up. Mosi immediately knew what had happened. What she had feared yet anticipated had happened. Now she was officially jobless.

In her room, she counted all the money she had. It was a lot and she could survive for a long time incase she couldn't find another job. She thought of her diploma and figured maybe she could apply at companies which actually needed her services.

Mosi's phone rang as soon as she put the money away. "Hello?"

"Hi, this is Jean. Rose's neighbor."

Mosi immediately grew alarmed. She knew something had happened. "Is everything ok?" "Not quite. Rose's house burnt down. She was inside but managed to get saved. She has suffered second and third-degree burns and is in the hospital. I didn't know anyone to call." "Shane?"

Jean was silent for a moment. "He's in police custody. He set the house on fire." "Ok, thank you for

letting me know."

"Ok, bye."

With her heart beating fast and hard against her chest, Mosi rushed to the bathroom, ignored the wet floors and the hair then took a quick shower. She dressed in her grayish pleated skirt and a white tuck in top. Putting on her heels, she grabbed her make up and took her time working on her face.

Satisfied, she took the envelope with her qualifications and her handbag together with the car keys and left.

Mosi swallowed hard as she walked inside Rose's room. Her face, arms, chest and legs were covered with bandages. She felt her skin crawl as she stepped closer. The beeping sound filled the entire room. She stood still for a very long time just staring, Rose would never go back to herself. She knew it.

Walking out Mosi called Imani. "Hey, I'm at work, everything ok?"

She wanted to tell Imani about the end of her job but rather spoke about Rose. "Rose's boyfriend abuses her. The first day I arrived, he beat her and even the second one. Seems like he never stopped and she never left like she said she would the last time. Now he burnt her house with her inside. She is in hospital with second and third-degree burns. Can you alert her family?"

"Yes. Her brother, uhhh Leslie, he's in Cyprus. I will tell him. Is she going to be ok?" "Physically yes. I doubt she will recover emotionally. She is in London. I had to drive there."

"Mosi?"

"Yes?"

"Thank you. You are wonderful strict person who always has the mean face on." She chuckled. "I do not have a mean face."

"You do. Don't leave Nick. He loves you." "Imani, we will talk."

"He called me."

"What?"

"I know you are scared and disappointed too. But this a blessing. Your baby is going to be cute with curly hair. You don't get a full package twice."

"We will talk."

"You are speaking English." Imani pointed out and Mosi chuckled realizing the entire conversation had been in English then she switched to Swahili.

"I'm used to it now. Even Farrah barely speaks anymore. Unless teaching Courtney." "I have to go. We will talk. And I will give Leslie your number."

"Ok bye."

She walked to the reception and gave her her documents incase something ever came up. She dropped her CV's around and even at a dating site. Hours later, she sat in the car eating a cheese burger.

A knock on her window startled her. Sean, she was pretty sure it was him though he looked different. Perhaps it was the suit. Nick looked different in a suits too.

She rolled down her window swallowing.

He was smiling at her. "Hi!"

She smiled back. "Hello."

"This is the last place I thought I'd see someone at. I thought I was the only who knew it. My mini heaven."

She looked at the burger store and back at him. "Guess you are not the only one now." "Yeah but it's ok. I thought you worked in Broadstairs."

"I do. I was looking for a job." "Oh, maybe I can help."

"No I am fine."

"It's ok. I will help. You have your resume with you?"

"Yes." She put her burger aside then took out her resume from her envelope and handed it to him. He looked at it for a while.

"Is it bad?"

"No. It's good. Let me keep this with me. I think there's something." "You really do—"

"Nick would be happy that I managed to help you after such a long day." "Thank you."

"It's ok."

He stared at her for a while while Mosi wondered what was wrong. Slowly she wiped her mouth thinking maybe there was something.

"You are beautiful. Really beautiful." He didn't blink and she just smiled. "Thanks."

"And you are welcome. Give me your contact details, I will call you as soon as I find something for you."

"Yes. Thank you so much."

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"Hannah also makes the best pies. Incase she didn't tell you." "Who?"

He pointed at the burger store.

"She makes pies." "I will keep that in mind."

"Yeah, we will talk."

"Ok."

Mosi took her burger and resumed eating while he walked inside the store. Maybe she could let her hopes rise, just a bit. God knew she needed a job.

Driving back to the hospital, she now had some cheap flowers she had bought along way. Rose's doctor had reassured her that by now she would be awake.

Indeed Rose was awake and the doctor was busy with her. All Mosi could see were her eyes which were filled with tears.

"Hey." She placed the flowers on the small table then stood beside the bed while the doctor walked out.

"I called Imani. She said she will give your brother my details so he gets in touch with me." The pain in Rose's eyes could choke but Mosi stood still, she had to be strong. "Shane is in police custody. I think he will be arrested for domestic violence, attempted murder and arson."

Mosi didn't know what else to say. She knew nothing was soon going to be fine and she couldn't really say she knew how Rose felt.

"I sympathize with you. I am so sorry but it gets worse before it gets better." She chuckled. "I know that is the last thing you would want to hear right now but believe me, you will lookback on this day years later."

The door opened and two police officers walked in. A woman and a man. The man was in uniform and the woman was not. She looked more like a business woman than

police officer.

"Miss Wanja, I'm Detective Johanness." She took out her badge. "I'm here to ask you a few questions."

"I will leave." Mosi said ready to walk out.

"No no, stay. You must be friends." Detective Johanness said with a straight face. Mosi was intimidated but as usual, she kept her composure.

"Yes."

"Right. Miss Wanja, you will nod if you agree and shake your head in cases of no. Understand?"

Rose slowly nodded and Detective Jones smiled politely.

"Good. Now, was your boyfriend, Shane Sterne, abusing you physically Miss Wanja?"

Mosi looked at Rose and waited. Slowly, she nodded and Mosi sighed with relief. "Ok. Did you ever report him?"

Rose shook her head slightly. "Right. Did he start the fire?"

She nodded and the questions continued for a while till Detective Jones looked at Mosi. "You are Miss Wanja's friend. How well do you know her?"

"I met her a while back through a mutual friend." "Do you happen to know Shane Sterne?"

"Yes."

"Did you ever witness an altercation between him and Miss Wanja?" "Yes, twice then the other time she came to my house after he beat her."

"I see. Well, thank you for cooperation ladies. I will keep you updated and have yourself a quick recovery."

The detective and police officer both walked out. "I will come tomorrow. Bye."

Rose just nodded and Mosi walked out though she wished to stay. She just prayed Imani managed to get in contact with Rose's brother. She needed someone by her side full time, after all, she was all alone.

"That went well. Better than expected." June said as they climbed inside their designated car. "Now one last interview and we are out of here."

"You said I had a phone call."

"Yes, Charlize. Charlize Jones I think.

Johnson. I'm not sure." "Give me the phone."

June handed the phone to Nick who immediately called Ingrid back.

"Nick, took you long enough. I had a little talk with your father's brother. We are set to go." "Good."

"Wendy is miserable. Something is wrong with her. Tried to rule it under depression. But perhaps bipolar. She's crazy Nick. She's a mental case. We need to be careful. You need to be careful."

"No. She can't be."

"She is. It's only her and her mother who knows. She's crazy. I have my people on Mosi, she's safe. At least Elizabeth fired her."

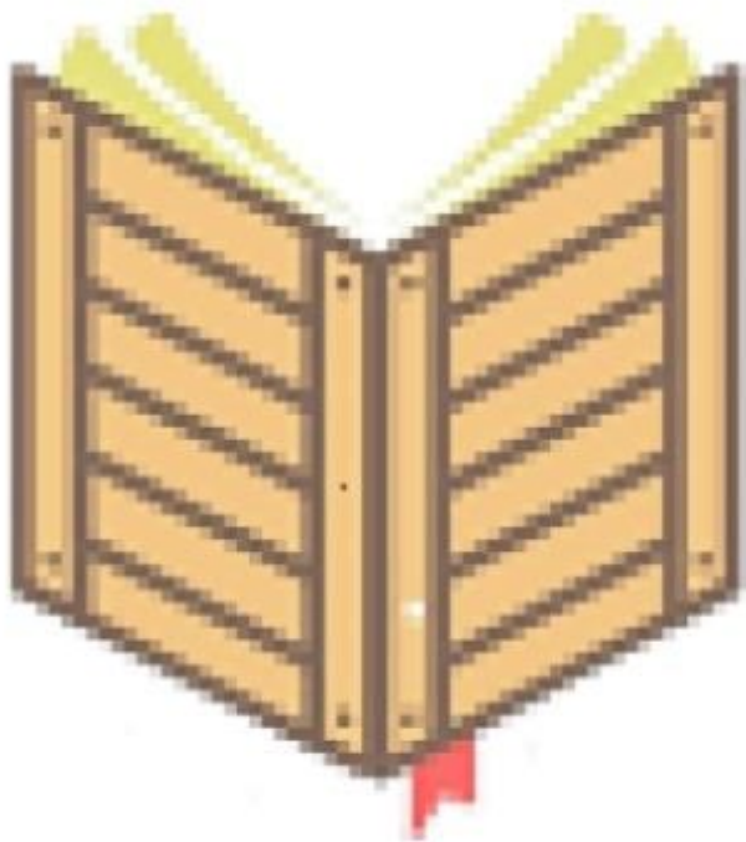
"What?"

"She did it for Mosi. She knows her daughter. Anything can happen. Perhaps she's tired of covering up after her daughter and throwing dead bodies in ditches or burying them at that farm of hers. Nick, she purchased a gun. Mosi is a threat in

her eyes. In her eyes, Mosi stands between her happiness and her."

"I'm coming
back. Now."

"Good choice."



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Chapter Thirty

"You are strong. You are intelligent. You are smart. You are a force to be reckoned with. You are a phenomenal woman. You are beautiful." Mosi muttered looking at the mirror. It was another day and pregnant or not, she was going to tackle it head on. She was going to the salon today and was going to beg for a job. Walking back in her room, she took her handbag and car keys then walked out. It was a Thursday though she was going to treat it like a Monday.

A black car parked behind the Audi and seconds later, Nick climbed out in a royal blue suit though the jacket missing. Mosi's heart skipped recalling the conversation they had had Tuesday night.

"Hi," he murmured.

"You are back."

"I told you I was coming back." "You did not have to come back." "I did."

His eyes went down to her jeans. "You look sexy.

Where are you going?" "To look for a job."

He took her hand then gently pulled back inside her house to her room then locked the door.

"What did Wendy say to you?"

"Nothing."

"I know you are lying."

She sat on the bed putting her bag down. "I lost my job."

"I'm sorry but it was a shitty job. You deserve better and you will get something better." "I do not need any favors from you."

"It's not a favor. You are not breaking up with me." He said coolly and Mosi wondered if he was upset, angry or just tired. He dragged the only chair Mosi had managed to buy and sat down right in front of her.

The intensity his eyes held made her heart skip. Was something wrong? Had something happened? He ran his index finger slowly on his lower lip staring at her as if thinking.

"I just wanted space."

"Space.." He muttered then crossed his legs.

"You wanted space?" Her mouth was dry and for the first time she didn't know what to say.

"Space from what? To do what? Mosi tell me what's going on."

I am pregnant. She wanted to say. It is yours and I am scared. I am scared and very disappointed in myself. I cannot afford a baby at the moment nor can I afford being a mom

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to a new born baby. I do not have the time because I need a job nor do I have the resources because I am not financially stable.

"Everything is just happening too fast. Perhaps you should just deal with one thing at a time."

"Nothing is happening too fast." He sighed getting up on his feet. "I know you are upset over your job and I'm responsible. I promise to get you something good and stable. What's going on between us is real. You know it." He pushed the chair aside then pulled her up cupping her face. "I am here with you because I love you. But I need you to trust me."

She tensed. "I'm not Nathan or any other men out there. You need to see that."

She took her deep breath trying to calm her emotions but she failed. Her tears fell from the corner of her eyes streaming unto her cheeks.

"I know I have that look on my face. And this time, you are the right girl for it. I'm not losing you over anything. This time I'm going to fight."

"I feel like... I'm in a shadow. My sister's shadow. I am scared because I love you, wholeheartedly and I am not sure if you do. I keep thinking of what could have happened had she not died and it occurs to me that you would have never looked at me, let alone love me."

"I know it's hard to believe but I do. Your sister taught me how to love and what love is. She was my second love. My first love was my mother. You... it's different, I know it. I can feel it. You are not in your sister's shadow. That chapter is over and you are who the universe wants me to be with."

An uninvited chuckle escaped Mosi's lips. "Universe?"

"Yes. I know it will take time but I need you to trust me. Might not be now but eventually you will."

He kissed her, slowly and her body reacted almost

immediately. She missed him.

Watching her sleep, he wondered what was wrong. Nick could almost see it in her eyes. It came as a flash from time to time but disappeared too quickly. And either way her friend, Imani, she had spoken as if there was something Mosi needed to tell him.

"Be patient with her. She's a strong person and likes keeping people out of her walls. Give her time, she will tell you and open up then trust you." Imani had said.

Now he wrecked his mind of what might be going on. He got up slowly and dressed. He needed to see Santino, his security told him he came to the warehouse the previous day. Kissing Mosi on the cheek, he walked out. He knew by evening he would be back and this time around he was going to drag them to lake the house if he had to. He felt they would be more safer there.

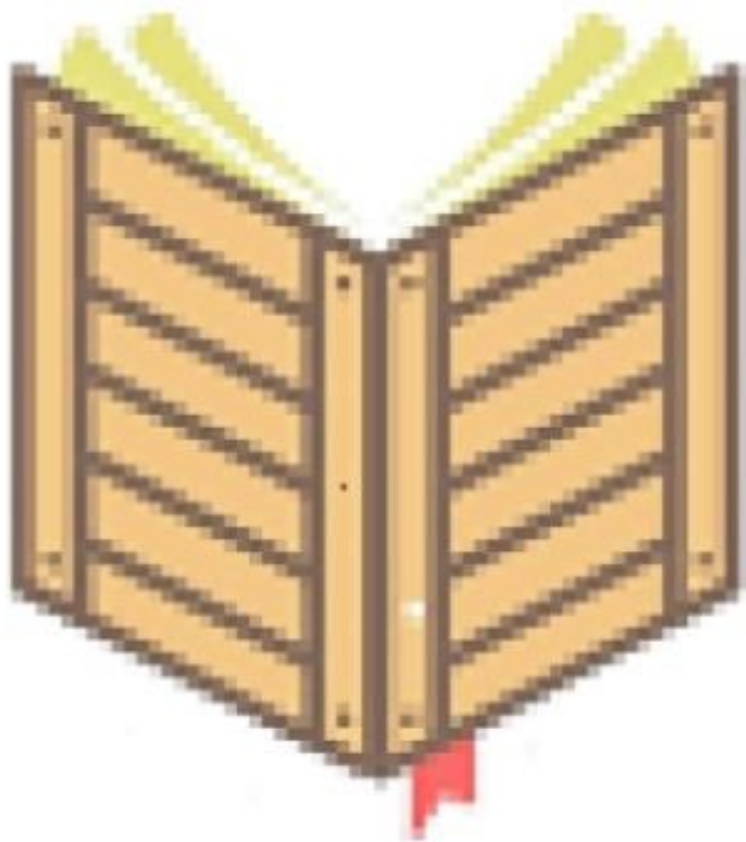
"Hi," a lady said. Nick remembered her, the housemate or something like that.

"Hi." He continued walking. He didn't have time to entertain her, perhaps before Mosi he could settle for a quick meaningless fuck.

Santino's goons let him in and Nick parked in front of the enormous house. Walking inside, Nick thought of Joshua. Till today he just couldn't get the image out of his head, he never knew Joshua was like that. Or perhaps he wasn't, just Santino using him.

Nick walked to the office and barged in, as usual. His entire body grew cold. He had imagined the moment countless times, even dreamt about it and today it stared back at him. His brain turned mash as he looked at Santino laying on his table, blood everywhere. The office felt heavy. Nick noticed

the knife on the floor and the gun.



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It took him a while to get his brain and eyes to register what was going on. Santino was dead. He was murdered.

"Your father was stabbed five times." Detective Brewster said. "Five times. And shot thrice." Nick sat on the couch staring at the bald man, probably his mid dirties, a professional and hell burnt on solving the case for a possible promotion.

"Do you have any idea of who might have done this?" The detective asked peering at him. Nick looked around, he had already called Ingrid and she was just taking too long.

"I don't know. He had a lot of enemies."

"Drew, nothing seems to be missing." A police officer said at the detective. "And looks like there was no forced entry. It means whoever it was, Santino knew him."

"Or her." Ingrid walked in. About time. "I would like to speak with Nick, if you are done." The bald detective stood up. "Yes mam, we are done."

"Search for fingerprints. Everywhere. What did the security say?"

"They didn't see anything mam. No one came here that they saw expect Mr. Bradley here." "There are cameras here."

"All were switched off."

"I need the time of death, get those fingerprints. Nick, let's go." Nick followed after Ingrid to her car then she drove off.

"Do you think it was her?" He asked. There was a possibility. She didn't respond till she parked in front of some building. "Let's go."

They moved quickly till they were inside a flat, her flat he figured or her place of thinking. Pictures were all over the walls. A lot of people.

"This are all your father's enemies." She pointed at some

man. "This is Rico, your father crossed paths with him. Santino killed his wife. This next, Robert, Santino killed his parents. Even here, Amber, her parents were killed by your father. There are a lot of enemies Nick but you see, most of them wouldn't dare come closer to Santino. No matter how angry or hurt. Expect those with guts." She walked over to a board where a web of pictures had been formed. "We have Wendy Diamond. She promised to kill Santino if you ever found out. She was sure he told you. She has guts. Probably shot him then stabbed him. She was a snake, building on rage till she attacked. Not much expected. We have your father's brother." She pointed at the picture. "The man has been feeding on his rage for years, possibly planning his revenge. He might have attacked. Then we have Keith. The bastard son or so your father called him. He has motive, he hates your father. All his life he tried and Santino just never saw it. Then lastly, we have you. The son who was hell burnt on making his father pay for his mother's death."

"Joshua. Santino was raping him. I know he was."

"Incase you haven't received the news, Joshua committed suicide a few days ago." "What?"

"Yes. Slit his wrist and left a letter. But knowing Santino, it might have been murder." "I didn't do it."

"There's high security at your father's house it's impossible to break in. You are the only one who came."

"I know. But it was not me."

"I know but... you are a prime suspect. You are the only thing the police have. They are going to take you in. I know who did it, I just need some few hours."

"Keith right?"

"Yes." Her phone rang and she took a step back answering. Nick studied the pictures, he had to admit, he was impressed. She was good.

"Wendy is on her way to Broadstairs. Go, get Mosi to safety. The police is going to track you down and they will arrest Wendy. Remember, I've got this. The story has a rather boring ending than I wanted but still, he's gone."

"Thanks for everything you have been doing for my sister. I will fly there in two days." "You are welcome."

"Bye."

Mosi hang up. Leslie had finally called, Rose's brother. She felt guilty she hadn't went to see her but hoped that Jean had. She looked at the time, she knew he was coming back. The sincerity that was in his eyes still haunted her.

Tonight she was going to tell him about the baby. She was going to tell him and Farrah. Something in her convinced her he would be happy.

"Mommy, are you going?"

Mosi looked at Farrah who was watching Home on her laptop while sprawled on the bed. "No. Uncle Nick is coming."

"Yipeeee! Is he bringing me a toy?"

Mosi looked down on herself. The dress seemed small. She couldn't believe it, the dress fit perfectly just months ago.

"Farrah, is mommy fat?"

Farrah giggled exposing her missing front tooth. She had lost it three days ago and every night it slept under the pillow waiting for the tooth fairy.

"You are beautiful."

"Ok."

It was just a few minutes before six. Dinner was almost done. She heard a car outside then quickly put on her sandals which made her taller. Rushing to the door, she almost closed it realizing who was standing at the threshold. A shiver ran down her spine when she saw the pistol pointed at her.

"Wendy, can I help you?" She asked brazen though she knew something bad was about to happen. She saw it in Wendy's eyes.

She didn't respond but just continued breathing loudly, panting, anger and hate glistening in her eyes.

"You thought you could be... happy snatching him away from me. Right?"

Mosi knew all her housemates were not in. It was only her and Farrah and she hoped Farrah wouldn't come out.

"Wendy, it—"

"She talks! Nick is mine. Mine! If I can't have him, then you can't too. Do you know how much I waited for him."

"You do not want to do this Wendy."

"You do not know what I want to do you fucken dirty bitch. He's going to find you dead." Think Mosi! She silently thought. "Wendy, I am so sorry. You are right. Nick is yours and can only be yours. He does not want me. He is yours. I am sorry. I am going to stay away from him."

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Wendy stared at Mosi blankly then smiled. "Yes. He wants me. He loves me. He's just a little angry but he loves me."

"Yes. You only. I am such a whore. And I am sorry. Nick is yours." Mosi moved back inside the house, her eyes searching for a weapon or anything she could use as defense.

"You think you are smart." Wendy murmured stepping inside the house. Just then Farrah stepped out, her huge teddy bear in hands.

"Mommy."

"Farrah, go back!"

"Ahh, your daughter." Wendy smiled cunningly pointing the gun at Farrah now. "This is getting exciting."

"Stay away from my daughter!" Now she sounded angry more than scared.

"You see, you have stolen my love from me. Now I will take away something as important from you."

Wendy cocked the gun but before she could anything, Mosi was onto her fighting for the gun.

Nick drove through a red light his feet pressed on the gas. His heart was beating frantically and he couldn't think straight. The police siren went off behind him. Looking through the rear-view mirror, he sped even more. He had to get to Mosi and Farrah.

Parking his car behind Wendy's, he quickly jumped off. As he walked towards the house, gunshots went off weakening his knees. He approached the door and slowly opened. He was met with silence, Farrah looked horrified while tightly holding her doll.

He pulled his legs inside the house, Wendy was on the floor,

blood on her white top. Mosi stood at the far corner just staring at Wendy.

"She... she.."

"Hey, it's ok." He rushed towards her and hugged her. "It's ok."

"She... I tried taking it from her, it went off." She pointed at the wall. There was a hole. "I let go then she... she deliberately shot herself."

"I believe you." He turned to look at Farrah. "Princess, come here. It's ok."

She slowly walked towards him dropping her teddy bear then hugged his leg. He picked her up while Mosi rested her head on her chest.

The police walked in seconds later.

One attended Wendy. "I need an ambulance. There's an injured lady.

Gunfire."

Nick looked at Mosi. "You are going to be fine. They are going to take you with. Don't say anything. I'm getting you a very good lawyer." He took out the lake house keys from his pocket quickly with his free hand and handed them to her.

"Go to the lake house. Stay there after you are released. I will come for you. I promise. I love you."

"Mr. Bradley!" A deep voice said. Nick turned giving Farrah to Mosi. The bald detective had arrived.

"I'm coming back. I promise. Take care of Farrah."

Mosi put Farrah down and grabbed his hand. "You can't leave. You can't leave us. I.. we need you."

"I know and I'm sorry. But I will be back."

"No Nick! I need you to put us first. We need you." Tears filled her eyes. "Farrah needs you. Me... I need you." She put his hand on her stomach. "The baby needs you."

He looked into her eyes then saw it. "What?"

"Yes. The baby. This two months old baby needs you." He slowly caressed her stomach. "There's.. we.. baby.."

She smiled as her tears fell. "Yes Nick. Baby. We are going to have a baby. We need you. I need you. I can't do this alone. Come back. Come back to us."

He kissed her before the detective dragged him out to the car. He hoped Sean was on top of everything. Mosi and Farrah couldn't spend their night being interrogated. He smiled.

Baby. He was having a baby.

Ingrid waited patiently. She knew he would be in any time from now on. Just as she anticipated, the motorbike pulled up and parked inside the garage. She watched him get off then take off his helmet. There was still something about him. The mystery. The edge. The authenticity he carried around him. She followed him inside the elevator. She had to admit, no one could ever suspect it. He stayed in the penthouse, his. Big and expensive. One could swear he would stay in a hideout trying to run from his acts but then why would he if there was nothing linking him to the crimes.

"So you would rather have your brother go down while you... live your life like nothing happened." She said taking out her cigarette and lighting it up.

He turned to look at her. "What do you want?" "Your brother is being interrogated."

"He's not my brother." "He is,

and you know
it."

"What do you
want Ingrid?" "You
killed your father."

He pressed his penthouse number and seconds later, they
were stepping out. Inside his apartment, she looked
around. Dark and beautiful.

"Why?"

He walked to the stairs ignoring her. She followed behind
him and found him undressing. "Why?"

Throwing his T-shirt at her angrily, he backed her up against
the wall. She swallowed staring into his eyes. He was like an
animal closing in on his prey, no time for torture but just for
the kill. She moved her eyes to his tattoos all over his arms
and chest then back to his eyes.

"You keep asking these questions and let me tell you
something, curiosity will kill you and no body will give a shit.
Go and look for criminals." His voice was low and menacing.
Her skin shivered.

"I need to know why."

"Ever asked an alcoholic why he
won't stop drinking?" "Keith, I need
to know why."

He stepped away from her.

"Because it's my job." "Tony?"

"Stay away from it."

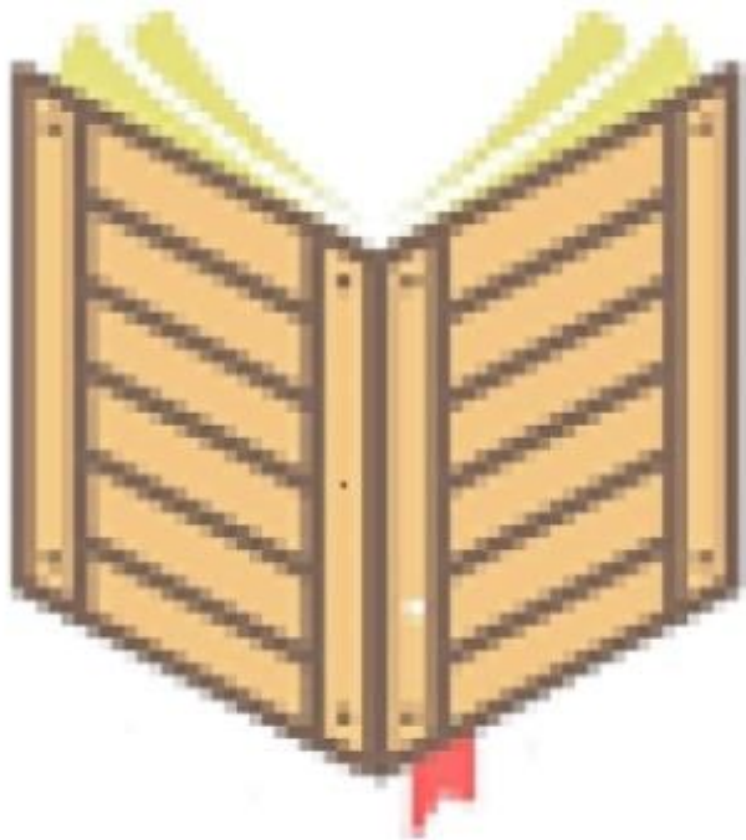
"You work for Tony right?" For a while Ingrid thought Santino
was the most dangerous till she heard of Tony.

"He deserved
to die."

"Someone..."

—"

"I found him stabbed. I just finished it off. You must be satisfied now. Leave!"



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She slowly shook head. "It couldn't have been anyone if not you. Nick... —" Keith took off his pants. "He doesn't have the killing bone in him."

"Then..." She closed her eyes cursing beneath her breath. "Damn it Wendy! She knows every corner of the house. And probably studied how the security works. He probably opened the door for her. She meant to kill him but would never had stabbed him more than thrice. You finished him off."

"Seems you are smart. Ingrid leave. Killing him was part of my job."

He took off his briefs then walked inside his ensuite. Seconds later she heard the shower. She slowly undressed then walked in and stood behind him letting the cold water cascade down her body. More tattoos on his back. He turned and looked down at her. Perhaps he was too tall and enormous than he once was during their varsity years where he proposed and she turned him down.

"What do you want?" "You."

Smacking her body against the shower glass walls, he breathed on her. "Don't fucken test me Ingrid."

"I am not leaving this time around. I was scared back then. You can't blame me."

"Who does?" He closed the tap then dragged her out with her hair. "I want you to dress and get the fuck out!"

"I am not going anywhere! Not again. I'm not walking away from us."

"There's no us! Fucken leave before I throw you out through the balcony." He brought his face closer to hers. "And trust me, you will remain a mystery. Get the fuck out!"

"You love me. You still do. I do too. I am not going anywhere."

She stood on her toes and kissed the raged beast. He put his hands on her waist and squeezed hard, she could swear, he wanted to break her bones. But she was ready for it. She

knew he would take her furiously and roughly and she was ready for it. Her body yearned for him. It had been far too long and she knew if he asked again, she would say yes without hesitation.

"Will you be fine?" Sean asked as soon as he parked in front of the lake house. Farrah was at the backseat sleeping and Mosi felt too exhausted. It was late and all she wanted to do was sleep but not without Nick.

"When are they releasing Nick? He didn't kill him. He was with me."

Sean nodded. "He was. It's just... procedure. He's coming. He always does." She nodded. "Thank you for getting us from the police station."

"It's ok. You can always call incase you need anything." He stepped out then took Farrah from the backseat while Mosi climbed out with her handbag and house keys. She unlocked then led him to Farrah's room. Everything was just the same.

Walking him out, they stood by the door. "I'm really sorry about today but... she's now going to the nuthouse, you don't have to worry anymore."

"Yes."

He hugged her, taking her by surprise. She stood still then smiled as he stepped back. "Ok, see you."

She just nodded then locked the door as soon as he walked out. Her subconscious worked overtime trying to come up with an explanation of why Sean would show such affection to her.

He's just being nice. Nothing more. Shaking her head she walked to the kitchen. She was going to wait for him.

"How long are we going to do this for?"

The bald detective took off his tie. "How about you start talking?"

Nick looked at his watch. "And what exactly have I been doing for hours now?" "A moment." Ingrid said walking in.

"Yes mam."

The detective walked out. "Wendy did it. You are free to go. I hope it's over and doesn't come back to you."

Nick stood up. "She couldn't have done it all alone and you know who finished it off. Whatever reason you are protecting him for better be worth it. And the..." He gestured at her neck. "Is that a bruise?"

She smiled. "Mind your own business. Wendy is going to be ok. I only wonder what Elizabeth is going to do this time around. But I'm already a step ahead."

"Aren't you always?"

"Go. She's probably waiting."

Nick chuckled walking out. "Thanks detective!"

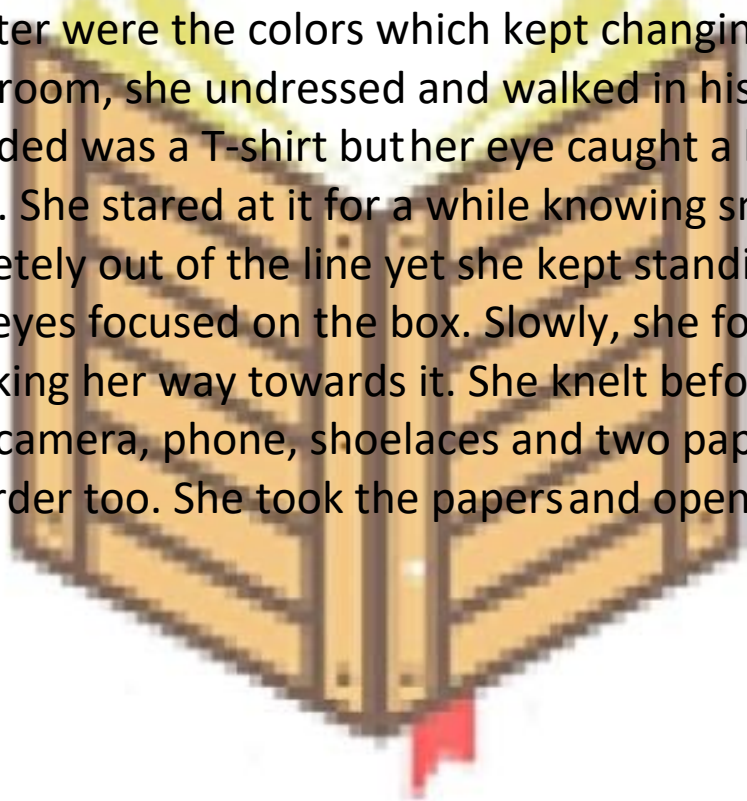
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Chapter Thirty-One

It felt she had waited for years and now she wondered if he had been arrested for the murder of his father. She had kept falling in and out of sleep for the entire night. She knew he would come back to her and their little family but she couldn't help the worry.

It was like a thing around her neck, constantly choking her. Around four, she made her way to the bedroom. The couch was getting more and more uncomfortable and her eyes couldn't keep up with what was playing on the TV. All she could register were the colors which kept changing.

In the bedroom, she undressed and walked in his closet. All she needed was a T-shirt but her eye caught a box at far end corner. She stared at it for a while knowing snooping was completely out of the line yet she kept standing right there, her eyes focused on the box. Slowly, she found herself making her way towards it. She knelt before it then opened. A camera, phone, shoelaces and two papers. There was a recorder too. She took the papers and opened the first one.



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Nelima's bucket list...

1. Go to a bar and just have fun ✓
2. Sleep with a stranger ✓
3. Car race ✓
4. Sky Dive
5. Hot air balloon ride ✓
6. Jet ski
7. Just drive in any direction and see where it takes you ✓
8. Hose riding
9. Take a hike at plitvice water fall, Croatia
10. Paint ✓
11. Record each and every event on a recording tape ✓
12. Purchase a camera ✓
13. Attend a live show!/concert ✓
14. Picnic in the hoods ✓
15. Go to Royal Colorado
16. Go to Ghana, Gorge Bridge
17. Go to Victoria falls, Zimbabwe and Zambia
18. Iguaza falls, Brazil and Argentina ✓
19. Paris, Eiffel tower ✓
20. Go to Mexico ✓
21. Visit a museum ✓
22. Cut your hair really short ✓
23. Mindful meditation
24. Watch penguins
25. See Mosi
26. Go to church ✓
27. Be happy ✓
28. Just be free ✓
29. Bungee jumping
30. Be in my mothers arms

Mosi slowly put back the paper then opened the other one. It was a letter. She almost closed it but found herself reading. Each word brought tears to her eyes.

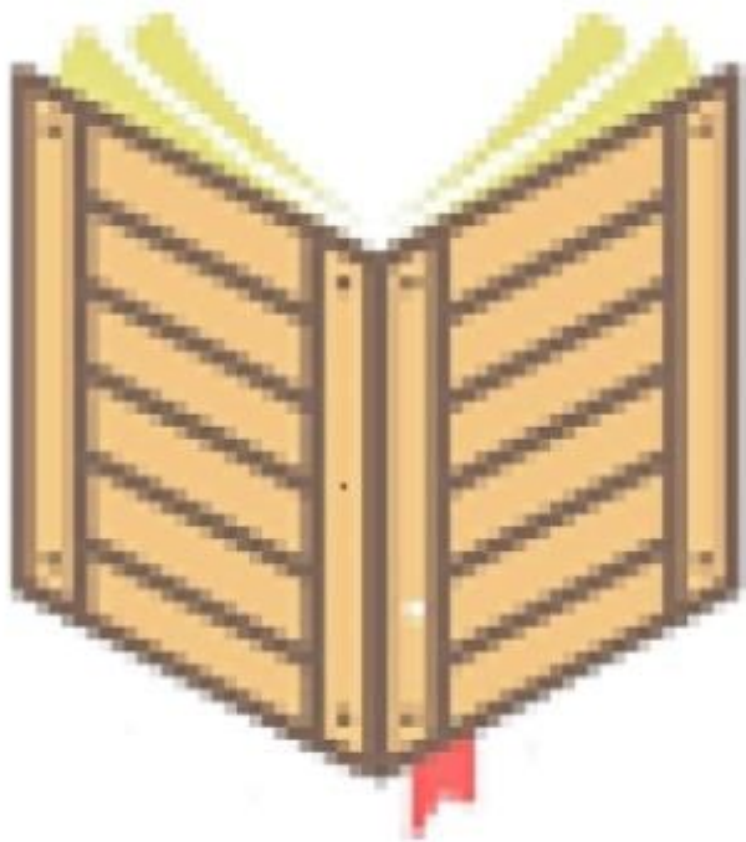
"I was going to show you that, thought it could give you closure. I guess the universe did hear her prayer."

Mosi put the letter back and stood up. "I am sorry."

She felt him getting closer to her and yet she didn't turn. He wrapped her arms around her waist kissing her neck.

"It did end with a tragedy but I got to restart and love again.

Something I never thought could ever happen. After she died, I was so sure I would never move on till you. I didn't want to love you, I fought it everyday. I thought you being in Kenya and I here, the distance... I thought the feelings would go away. They didn't. They haunted me. I dreamt you. God! You even appeared in my wet dreams."



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She turned and looked at him laughing. "Really?"

"Yes. And it would be so amazing then I would wake up." He gently wiped away her tears. "I think you and I are what the universe wants. I think we are meant to be."

She glanced at the box. "She never got to finish the bucket list."

"She said hers was done. That at the end, you and your mother will see her." "Oh.."

"I'm still going to finish my list. With you and Farrah. Create our own brand new memories. We are going to be a family."

He placed his hand on her stomach. "Does it ever move?"

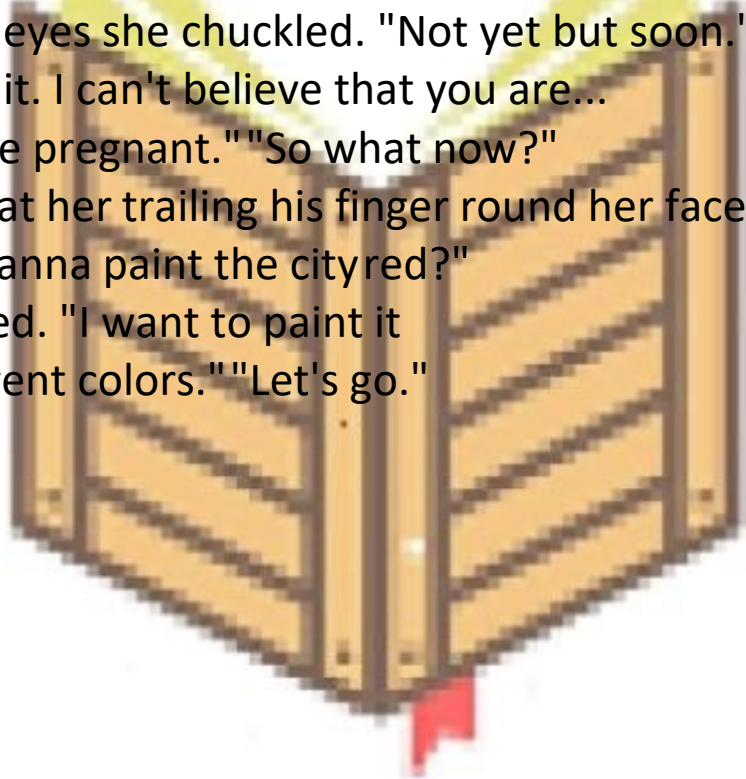
Rolling her eyes she chuckled. "Not yet but soon."

"I can't wait. I can't believe that you are...

that we are pregnant." "So what now?"

He stared at her trailing his finger round her face then finally smiled. "Wanna paint the city red?"

She laughed. "I want to paint it with different colors." "Let's go."



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Chapter Thirty-Two

"I can't believe I allowed you to do this. Look at that!" Mosi said pointing outside standing by the window. "I said I want

something small and intimate."

"Stop panicking. She's here to watch only and is hoping to buy the wedding pictures first." Imani said dragging her from the window then made her stand in front of the mirror. "I look big and like a whale."

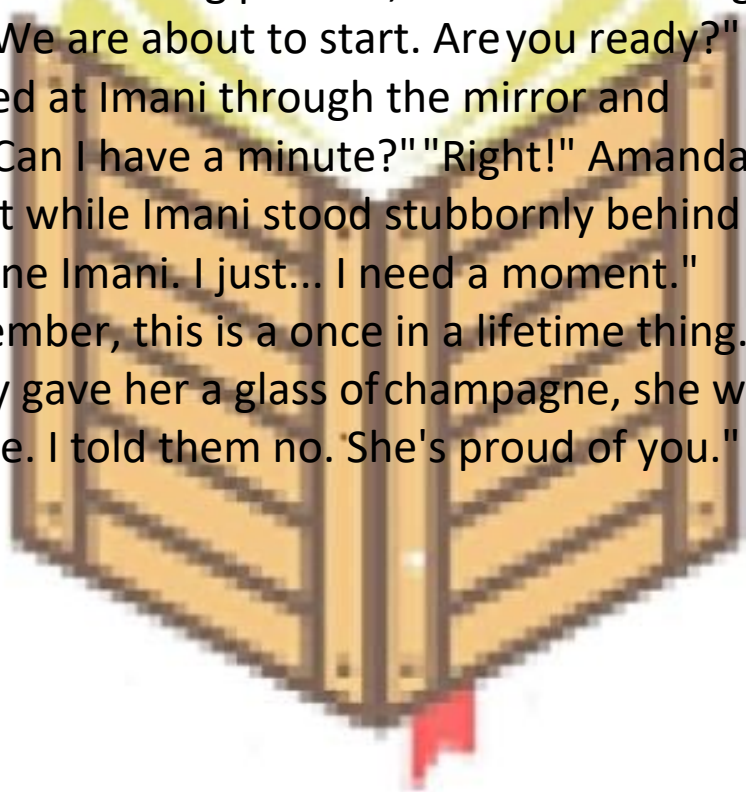
"You look beautiful. Anyone can hardly tell you are pregnant because of the dress. You look like Cinderella or whatever they call her. Like a queen."

Mosi rolled her eyes. "I'm 8 months pregnant. I do look pregnant."

Amanda, her wedding planner, walked in holding her notepad. "We are about to start. Are you ready?"

Mosi looked at Imani through the mirror and nodded. "Can I have a minute?" "Right!" Amanda walked out while Imani stood stubbornly behind Mosi. "Alone Imani. I just... I need a moment."

"Ok. Remember, this is a once in a lifetime thing. Mama is proud, they gave her a glass of champagne, she wants another one. I told them no. She's proud of you."



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"I don't think she ever wants to go back." They laughed. "Yeah but she will."

Mosi sighed. "I know. It's a shame she loves him."

Imani shrugged. "Love is blind. But not with me. Minister and I are happy. I'm happy as his mistress. The moment you try to play wife, he stops giving you money."

"I saw you and Sean yesterday." "That guy needs to get over you." "You have started. Leave."

"He wants you. I can see it. I was just warning him." "He doesn't. Leave."

She walked out laughing. Mosi rubbed her bump. It all seemed to be happening too fast. Just a few months ago she was just Mosi, a receptionist at a law firm staying with a boyfriend of 5 years and her daughter and today she was Mosi, restaurant owner and chef, a mother and about to be a wife.

Nathan had texted her a week ago. It was a silly long message filled with apologies so she had called him.

"I saw you in a magazine. They said you are an alpha female. You now own a restaurant and you are about to get married to a rich man. Your sister's—"

"I heard she left you and took everything." Mosi said cutting him off. Turns out he wasn't that smart. His new wife had been with him for the money and was now in south Africa with a rich Nigerian man or so Imani said.

He was silent then finally cleared his throat. "I am sorry, can we fix things. I love you and miss you."

"I don't love you nor do I miss you. Good luck finding a job, I heard you lost the previous one."

The magazine were printing about her since Wendy shot herself killing her unborn baby. They said she had Bipolar and was safely locked up receiving the much needed help. Mosi was surprised when Elizabeth reached out to her apologizing. Nick had stood beside her the entire time as she apologized, said he didn't trust anyone around her.

The media did drag her, especially after they found out she was Nelima's sister but Nick sorted it out. She wasn't sure what he did though the following day the magazine wrote apologizing and even complimented her. A week later, they named her as a business woman. Nick had bought her a big restaurant.

"I know you are going to refuse but listen," he had said. "This is for our kids. It's ours. Now you can do your online studying while running a proper business. You own 60% of it and Kim, June's wife, owns the rest."

Mosi had met June twice. She was surprised to know she had a wife but she liked her. She was professional and firm.

Mosi took a deep breath staring at her reflection. Everything was going so well she feared something would happen. Something to ruin it all.

Her phone rang from the bed. Imani hadn't switched it off. She quickly took it and looked at the caller ID thinking. A second later she answered.

"Miguel."

"Are you sure you want to do this?" "Yes."

"You don't have to be married to be happy. Marriage is not an achievement." "Miguel, Nick is your cousin."

"We don't know that and who cares?"

They were both refusing to get to the bottom of it. "You are related. And yes, I don't have to be married to be happy. I already am happy, marriage is just a bonus."

"I will always be there."

"Goodbye Miguel."

Mosi still couldn't understand why he never stopped or got tired. She put her phone down then heard a knock.

Final glance at the mirror, she grabbed a bouquet then opened the door.

"My brother has been long waiting. He's even sweating."

Adele said with a smile. She slightly looked like the female version of Nick. Mosi liked her. Beside her stood Ingrid who was giggling. If she wasn't in detective mode, you could have a wild girl chat.

"Let's go, sister in-law."

Ingrid had married Keith, Nick's brother who looked like all he did for a living was kill people. And no, no one attended their wedding expect themselves. Mosi couldn't even imagine Keith at the alter. Nick and him were not close but there was just that brotherly bond which came off natural though they chose to ignore it. The fact that Nick had once slept with Ingrid didn't bother Mosi, she chose not to because each day, he proved that he had slept with almost every girl in London. Just yesterday, the magazines had printed about a Kali, he said they used to fuck. He wasn't even ashamed.

She took a deep breath before walking out to where everyone was.

"It's a leap of faith. Just believe." Her mother had said a week ago when she arrived and now she understood.

It was a leap of faith.

Glancing at his watch, Nick sighed. She was only ten minutes late. He had to calm down but... what if she had changed her mind? He had proposed two months back. A well planned dinner in a yacht with hearts and flowers, Imani's idea. He had done it with Farrah and she hadn't said yes immediately. He had to convince her for at least ten minutes before she smiled and said yes.

Now here they were, about to get married in front of only friends and family and he was nervous. He looked around the botanical garden then back at their less than 50 crowd.

"She will be here." Sean whispered.

"I know."

Conrad laughed. "Is that why you are sweating?"

"Carole said she also wants to get married." Randy said fixing his bowtie. Nick still couldn't believe even after leaving the rehab center he still was seeing the therapist. Turned out Randy could actually have a relationship. A proper relationship. "Apparently I'm supposed to think like you since we are best friends." He chuckled shaking his head then fixed Nick's jacket. Thing is, Nick and Randy had met first. They were roommates first year at Harvard and they immediately clicked. Later on, they met Sean then Conrad.

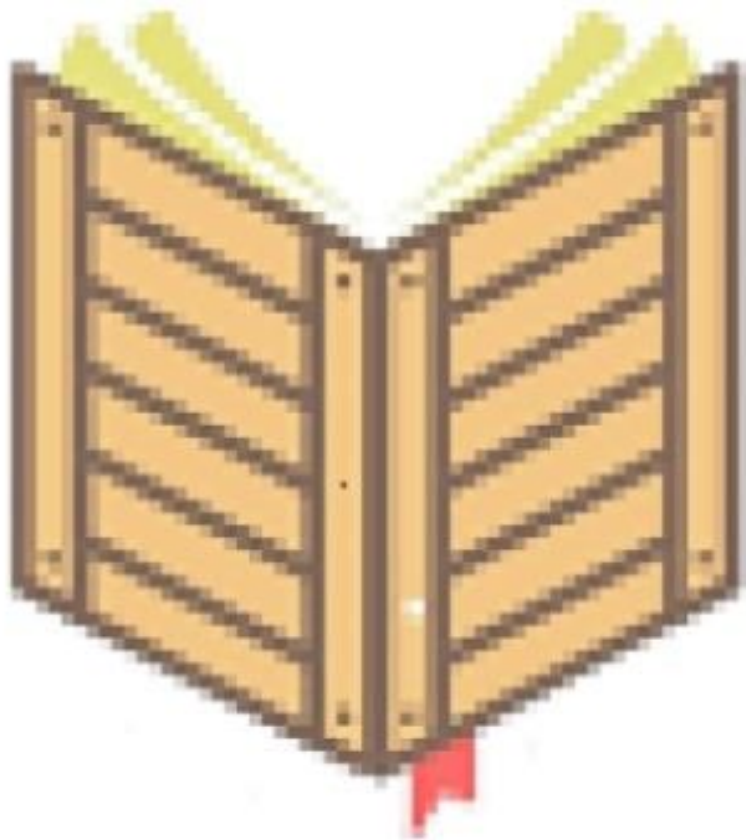
"The day you get married, it will rain bananas and cats." Conrad said laughing. "Where's Ariel?" Sean asked with a smirk.

"We broke up. She doesn't like my cat. I saw you with Mosi's friend. She seems feisty." Sean rolled his eyes.

"She just needs a good lay."

Just then, Nick saw Imani walk in. She gave him a slight smile before standing opposite him facing the direction she had came from. Ingrid and Adele walked in after her, both

wearing



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the same dress and smiling. It felt awkward having Ingrid as Mosi's bridesmaid and looking at Keith at the last roll. He looked bored and Nick was glad he didn't care.

"She's coming." Adele whispered with a smile then stood next to Imani after waving at her husband who was sited beside Robert holding their daughter. Looking at the crowd, Nick smiled with Miriam who was sited on the front roll with Robert beside her. She gave him a thumbs up.

He had introduced her to Mosi as soon as Santino was buried.

"She's lovely and firm. I love her." Miriam had said immediately. Nick loved her too. The song Mosi had chosen to walk down the aisle with started playing. A thousand years by Christina Perri. Farrah walked throwing rose petals on the ground till she reached him. He quickly picked her up.

"Heey!"

"Granny said me and mommy are getting married to you." Nick smiled.

"Yes. We are all getting married."

"Am I going to eat the cake?" "Lots of cakes! All yours."

She smiled. Nick could see Mosi in her eyes, just a younger version. "Are you going to be my dad?"

"Yes. Do you want me to be your dad?" She nodded.

"You will never leave right?"

He sighed emotionally. "Never. I will never leave." He put her down then let her walk to Imani.

"Wow! That... that was pretty emotional." Randy said with his hand on his chest. They all laughed.

"Grow up and you will experience the thrill of family."

"I'm going to tell Wendy." Sean joked. "I'm sure she will kill the entire nuthouse." "I still can't believe she's

crazy. You should have told her I like them crazy."

They all turned to look at Conrad. "No. She accused Mosi of trying to kill her after shooting herself. That's not your type of crazy." Sean said. "You can't want that kind of crazy."

Conrad rubbed his hands together smiling. "You will never know."

Nick turned and his eyes finally fell on her. Her mother was walking her down the aisle while her Uncle who was her father sat in the crowd. He fought the edge to walk towards her and pull her in his arms then kiss her.

"Wow! Dude, she's beautiful. More beautiful. She keeps getting beautiful." Randy whispered behind Nick.

"I know."

Her mother handed her over then went and sat beside her uncle while he took both her hands into his. The smile she gave him was worth living for. He looked into her shining bigeyes and knew this was it.

"You look beautiful." He whispered then leaned over and kissed her forehead. "As always. I love you."

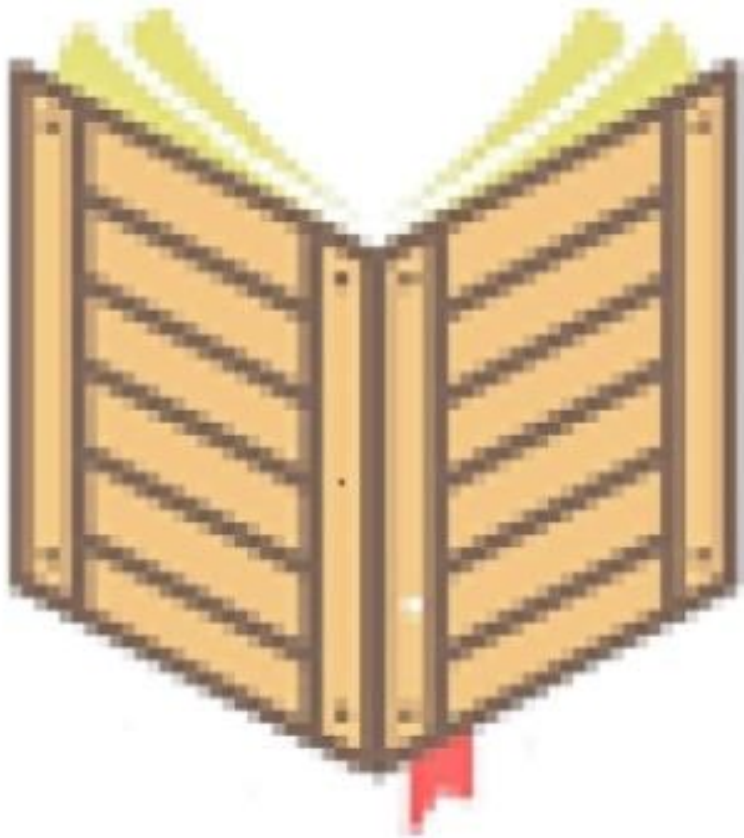
"I love you, too."

"I found you always and forever."

A tear fell from her eye while she chuckled. "You did?" "Yes. You are staring right at him."

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THE END



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