

## Episode 1

One thing I know is that when God created me it was never an accident. He carefully planned and looked forward to seeing my complete being. I can imagine the look of love and adoration at the sight of the work of His hands. David said it better in his psalm 139. All my days full of troubles and smiles ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. In light and in darkness alike I cannot hide from your spirit and to me that's enough to keep me afloat this life of mixed ingredients. You know what people assume about me is not what I am. They judge according to what they see but God who searches the hearts of men knows everything about me. What people talk about me is their business and am thankful to them for choosing me as their employer at a free cost. I don't live my life to please anyone because what's the use of pleasing others who have thick slices of their own sins? Christ paid a price too dear for me to worry about that.

oops forgive my lack of manners . my name is Wangu Banda am from chitheche Nkhatabay and I want to tell you how I became a single mother. To me its like I have always been a mum to my baby Amanda because I can't remember the last time I wasn't on her beck and call. I stopped living for myself time immemorial and am totally absorbed in my motherhood role. I became pregnant when I was 16. The funny thing is that my parents don't know of Amanda's existence and I don't intend to let them know anytime soon. If I take her home people will probably think I am doing my busy working neighbour a favour. my mum will even suggest to take her back to the owner on my provision of an address valid or invalid. That is the kind of trust my parents have for me because to them am their golden girl and I cant miss my step in this life.uhmm sad. Its a pity what people do to extreme heights in ignorance of their parents. I remember when I was nine years way back home. Our neighbor had a daughter Viyegzo who was the first girl to go to secondary school after a decade. The whole village was happy and they supported her in everything.

Before she wrote her JCE examinations she came back home and told her parents that they have closed the school due to water problems and will

be recalled in a date later to be communicated.

One day I was home alone when my mum and dad went to our maize field far away from home. I was in my room reading my books when I suddenly heard groans and moans followed by loud cries of a baby. I couldn't concentrate on who would leave the baby to cry like that. The cries grew louder as I stepped outside. I realised that they were coming from the grass thatched bathroom behind the house. As I was approaching I shouted if there was anyone inside but there was no reply. I opened the bathroom door and .....

Oh my God!!!!!!

## Episode 2

Sometimes what we do when we are alone is our most safeguarded secret we do not want others to find out. The big guy upstairs must be shocked times without number at what His creations in His image do in the sanctuaries of their secrets. Why we do not want anyone to see or know our hidden things is because at the core of our conscious we know that it is a sin yet we continue giving excuses for it. Some people think that if others are not seeing them then God is not seeing them too. uhhh typical of a human mind. I tell you there will be drama at the judgement day.

What my eyes saw, paralyzed my heart with fear and shock. I couldn't sponge the sight before me without feeling faint and a desire to throw up. Viyegzo was lying in the pool of her own blood while wrapping the baby in tattered cloths with all her remaining strength.

" i will kill you if you utter a word to anyone" i could barely hear her voice. My childish mind told me that something was amiss. i walked backwards and looked if i could find someone to help. It was all silent. I started running fast to find my mum. I run all the way as if the wind itself carried me. I found her and breathlessly narrated my ordeal. My mum was so shocked and pale. She shouted for Viyegzo's mum in the

neighboring field and together with other women we started off. Her mum continue wailing all the way as if there was a funeral. sometimes i don't understand why women wail like that. Whether in earnest or in pretense you can never notice the difference or else go ask Nigerian actors they know best.

We were finally home. The women went to the bathroom as i had said but Viyegzo was not there and it was spotless. Naah if you could see how these women insulted my mum for raising a liar and spoilt kid like me , you would think they got paid for it. How could i have spoken things that were not worthy of me at my age? Viyegzo's mum said her dear daughter had left for her friend's place at the neighboring village earlier that morning and she had actually seen her off. She shouted at my mum that we were on a mission to destroy her family's reputation because we were jealous of her daughter's success hence i would never see the corridors of a secondary school. That broke my mum.

What happened to Viyegzo is another story for another day.

Since that day, it was like i had initiated myself in trouble. We carried on very well. I could beat and bully my classmates at school and defied my teachers to the extent of banning me to attend most of their lessons eventually i failed examinations and repeated three times in Standard 5. When we went to the lake swimming and washing with my friends, i could hide their clothes until dark. They would be going back home naked and crying. It used to give me amusement and satisfaction to see them suffer. The beating i would get from my dad later on sometimes made me think he was not my real father.

My mum was outside peeling cassava to make Kondowole flour for our nsima while my dad was at the lake mending fishing nets with his friends and i knew they would not be back anytime soon. I saw that opportunity as perfect to go in their room and find what i could steal. I went through my mum's purses and handbags but i did not find anything i liked. A hymn book and a new testament bible were not my 'thing'. I searched my dad's pockets but found his tobacco and medicine for his cough. I never

understood what pleasure he found in that smelly stuff. The tobacco was draining him sip by sip but he was too stubborn to see it. I looked in their traveling bag. excitement coursed in my blood as i touched something papery at the bottom and knew instantly what it was. Money and a lot of it. These people were cruel. The previous day my dad had refused to pay money for the book i had torn to tatters when my classmate refused to borrow it to me. Now what was this? I decided to tech him a lesson by taking all the money and spend it on those sweet candies i loved the following day at the market. I stuffed all the notes in my panties and smothered the bulge which was showing. I smiled to myself. I turned to go.

"Wangu uchitanji munu?" (What are you doing here Wangu?)

It was my father.....

### episode 3

when you are caught right in the act, it feels like a cat has imprisoned your tongue making you speechless. it feels wow to lie but the guilt and remorse that kicks in afterwards can kill you. if you will have a chance to meet the super Biblical disciple Peter he will tell you what he felt when he denied knowing Christ thrice. maybe he thought they would crucify him along. shame .

the beating I got on that day made me doubt if that man was indeed my father. did I come from his loins? no way.

remember I am still telling you how I became a single mum. after I caused so much strain between my parents I was sent to Lilongwe to a distant uncle to my Mum. i was very excited to go to the city yet I was nervous to start staying with people I never heard of my whole life. I felt like a slave who will never return. the moment I arrived I sensed that the madam of

the house was not into the idea of my stay too bad her husband had a final say. this woman was dark skinned and fat no wonder people say our ancestors were apes if you don't believe watch the dawn of the planet of the apes.nxaah no wonder she was stone hearted.

it wasn't an easy stay because the only thing I was happy about was going to school without first going to the fields.

this woman I called Aunt grace wasn't about to treat me like royalty .they could have renamed her Aunt Hitler sure.

I turned to be her maid 24/7 who took care of her three squirrels she called kids.

"wangu wash the dishes" wangu take the kids to school before you start washing and make sure dinner is ready when I am back from Ma chifundo's house"

most times the husband would shout to leave poor me alone. but she would pinch my ear and say "your witch mother sent you to snatch my husband but I will show you that they don't call me die hard for nothing." I would cry for days.

men one day sneak to the kitchen when your wives are alone with maids or your younger relatives, you will see the chuck Norris sides of your dear wives.

the results of puberty were catching up fast with me but it wasn't my fault. I knew that the man was the devil himself when he became apparent of my blooming body.the suggestive looks he fired me with made me realise how some of these men are not loyal.

One day madam hitler went to a funeral at night.surely I am against some of our African culture are long overdue.you give the devil a chance of a life time when the women attend funerals at night in the name of consolation.should we say we are the most compassionate than our English counterparts? kaya but ku maliro komweko ena amapitira tea, kuliza nkonono and kutamba kkkkk talk of multi tasking yoooh.

he came to my room and started touching me in a way I didn't like.

"Shh just be quite .I will buy you sweets and nice dresses. "don't you like ribbons? " his big belly was bare and that frightened me. my pleas to leave

me landed on deaf ears as he locked the door and advanced to the corner I was shielding myself. he grabbed my arm and threw me on the bed as he opened the zip of his trousers. all I could do was cry and

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#### Episode 4

The pain razoring my body was threatening to send me into unconsciousness. I could feel myself drifting between two worlds . fear & shock paralyzed me. This man robbed me of my innocence and he was calming and threatening me as if it was going to change anything. I cried loudly and angrily packed my few belongings ready to go. where? I didn't even care anymore because it was useless but my guts stood up and told me that this house was no longer a safe haven and it hadn't been for a long time. even if I had to wait for the madam to come back and narrate my predicament, she would have probably said I shamelessly seduced her husband.

Dawn was approaching fast and that was the beginning of a new chapter of my forsaken life. I loathed this man with an intensity of the depth of hell and that broke the dyke of respect I had for the strong sex. I was Fourteen and knew nobody who could help.

I walked for a long distance and found myself in town from Area 24. those who know the place can agree with me that its a long distance from the dusty Ngwenya. I sat down in Lilongwe bus deposit and cried. there were few buses around . If I could ,I would have flown over to my home in Nkhatabay right into my mother's arms and unleash gallons of tears habouring my eyes. I missed her so much and whoever said mother's are the best knew exactly what they meant. I felt betrayed by my parents for selling me out to that devil of a man like a cheap slave.

"hey what are you doing here all alone?" a strange voice brought me to the real world. I looked at her, she was so old and frail. if I was in the village my reaction would have been so dramatic. shame how old people are

accused of witchcraft.maybe people don't want to see the grey haired?  
why not when God Himself the giver of life has blessed them with many  
years on this earth.

I wiped my tears with the back of my hands, nobody wants to be caught  
unawares crying.

"you are so young yet you look as if you have the troubles of the world on  
your small shoulders. what is wrong? " I didn't want her into my business  
but there was something trusting about her,almost comforting.

"I am so hurt right now and so cold. I don't have anywhere else to go and  
no money for my transport home." fresh tears started. I felt her arm  
patting my back.

" why don't I take you to my place then you can tell me everything and  
how I can help you? " she helped me pick my bag and we set off. we  
passed by Nantipwili filling station and the mosque.then we walked our  
way up until we were at the bus depot opposite Lilongwe Church of  
Central African Presybetarian. it was so quite but soon a minbus going to  
Area 23 via Kawale came. the conductor shouted as if the place was filled  
with people wanting to board the bus. I thought so hard,whoever said  
angels do not exist on earth should have seen this woman. who was she  
and what use was I to her? I have heard of people who use others' private  
parts. I didn't want to be a willing donor to their trade.

we travelled for an hour before she told the conductor that we were  
dropping off at chiwoko school. we walked at a path around the school  
and found her one bedroomed house .she lived with her granddaughter  
who used to be home twice a week. what she did, she had no idea but it  
was enough to bring food on the table. how long I was staying,I didn't  
know. \*sigh \* as I drifted into a deep slumber

I had a rude awakening by deafening noises before I even had a chance to have a recollection of my physical geography.

crying make people have fatigue I guess its hard work for the body no wonder people get sick after the loss of a loved one.

I went outside to see what the commotion was all about. many people were watching and some felt sorry while others laughed their lungs out. for sure these rains have brought mixed fortunes. for once we rejoiced that water problems have been sorted out, no more force hopes from water board's scarce running gold because now God has taken care of everything. The rains have left so much to be desired after reducing houses, toilets and bathrooms in rumbles. There stood a man in all his glory with soap in his head and face after the makeshift building saving as a bathroom succumbed to gravity. he was groping for his clothes and groaning from the pain of soap in his eyes. Sure black people have so much time to waste. instead of helping him, they were making a reality show of him and someone was taking pictures. people who were on their way to work, had to stand there for almost half an hour just to gaze at a naked man seriously? time is money to a white person.

"oh there you are my dear" she found me on the door way. I didn't yet know what to call her but gogo sounded best because its so rude in my tonga culture when you address the elderly by first names. she prepared me delicious soya porridge which I devoured within a few minutes .I later explained to her what had happened to me. it felt like I had relieved myself of the burden weighing my heart down. she decided to talk to her granddaughter on the phone and asked her to come home. I felt hopeful and closer to home because she sounded like all her monetary issues came to a halt in her hands.

at mid afternoon she finally came. her appearance shocked me. she was so dark save for her bleached face. talk of a body dyeing gone bad. she had gold braids which further made her look like a drama queen.

"gran who is this? " I sensed her instant dislike of me.

"chifundo can't you sit down first. I can't explain anything while you look as if you are on your way out already "

"how many times should I told you not to ever call me using that name? " the exchange wasn't like I had expected. the imaginary picture of her in



my head had betrayed me.

"sorry madam Cindy " gogo apologized. I kept quite as I waited for fate to settle it's score with me in her hands as she explained everything.

"don't be deceived .can't you see she is one of these masikini (street kids) who want to milk people dry with all sorts of stories? haven't you heard of people who stand by the road side everyday to beg for transport to wherever hole they crept from? some even beg for transport to go to mental hospital.I won't be surprised one of these days if someone beg for transport to go to hell " it was in black and white that she didn't have any kind words for me.

"I am not a thief "I defended myself bt it was useless.

"you better prove it before I throw you out faster than you can breath because Ana inu mwanyanya kuba " I was terrified by her lack of compassion.it was impossible that this sweet old woman's blood run in her mean granddaughter. it couldn't be.

"chifundo makanjira-nkhoma I won't watch you insult this poor child. can't you have a heart? I blame your mother for giving you this name,it's unbecoming.she could have named you the devil himself " that sent Cindy ballistic,she contorted her face in dislike and disgust .with the speed of a lightning she stood up and slapped me hard on the face.

"that is for coming here and turn my old woman against me" she stormed out of the house leaving me mouth agape ...  
I must confess I saw real stars for a second ..

## EPISODE 6

The pain that stinged my face was nothing compared to the rejection I was suffering. I felt so worthless and so down. Gogo put her arms around me in comfort and that dammed my eyes with fresh tears. I was so touched and amazed how God created everybody in His own unique image yet as different as the word itself. you can turn the whole world upside down yet you can't find another version of yourself or if you can go to extreme heights and dig every possible grave way back to creation you will still

find no duplicate not even if you are identical twins.

She was the only person who believed my story so far and I didn't know what posed before me when I would approach others for help. I didn't want to embarrass myself any further.

"don't worry I will see how I can go about it. am sure I will find some money then you will be home before you know it " I didn't want to further burden the poor woman let alone finish her food.

Days turned into weeks and later into months but there was no money for my transportation. Cindy visited but so rare and in those occasions she didn't speak to me. I ended up avoiding her and I did all I could not to cross her path. I didn't go to school because I thought what if I did only to go back to the village in a matter of time .

I talked to her if she knew someone who could help and employ me as a maid because I couldn't continue leaving off her. she introduced me to a certain woman I only knew as Aunt Ivy. the nature of my job was to be an assistant to her house maid in Area 36. that meant I had to leave gogo and start leaving with strangers again ...life couldn't be any worse because the old woman was my family for six months and it was no picnic parting ways yet still life had to go on.

true to her words I was an assistant maid but later turned to her shop keeper at her vegetable stall.

I worked for a year before I found myself a job at a Chinese shop. I was moving ahead and forgot all else about going to Nkhatabay. I was getting 10,000 kwacha a month and able to pay for rent and food at a bedsitter in Phwetekere. by then I was 17 but knew a lot more about men than most of my peers. I dated my work mate who I began to like more after he made a career out of complimenting on how good I looked every single day. I started dressing for him only. sure a way to a woman's heart is through sweet words to her ears. I was swept on the wings of puppy love and unbeknownst to me disaster awaited me next door ..

why I had fallen for Ben I didn't know. I guess it was one of those awkward moments out of fear of loneliness. he was ten years my senior and always talked about the future with me inclusive. he made me imagine a big house with kids running all over. my best friends Norah and Emma called me a hopeless dreamer but isn't that what each one of us live for. dreams make us cling to the future with hopes and expectations of a better tomorrow ? I wanted a life without drama and complications. he was a graduate but due to the skyrocketing levels of unemployment he resorted to the low paying job. he always said if he lands himself a better job,he will send me to school so that I became a university graduate like him. I had always dreamed of becoming a journalist particularly a radio presenter.

there was something captivating about this job that always intrigued me.you could be alone in the studio, talking to yourself like a mad person but the mass you kept gluing their ears to listen to you was just amazing. I still clung to that dream no matter how impossible it sounded but I was ready to climb those heights.

Ben was a nice man and after dating for a year he thought it was time to make us go further. I knew what he meant but I wasn't ready for it. every time he touched me I would freeze in fear. I never told him the rape incident and I guess I was still lurking behind its shadow.never a day passed by without me showering in those sad memories. sometimes I would wake up in the middle of the night sweating from the nightmare as if I was just being raped.

Ben couldn't have understood all this but he couldn't get it why I became withdrawn every time he brought the subject up. was I a virgin and afraid of first times? why couldnt he have me? wasn't he man enough. I always drew a line at my door step and never invited him inside. he was intrigued. did I have another man? if yes why didn't I just tell him so? on that particular day, I found him on my door step on my way from church.

"wangu if you can't have sex with me. we are done. if you make up your mind fast you know where to find me" as outright as that he left.

that was so brutal, having to cut me up with a blunt knife. it hurt and made me feel like that was what he ever wanted from me.

I locked the house quickly and went to see Norah and Emma. they knew how much Ben had turned out to mean to me. I was close to tears and locked on the horns of dilemma. I didn't want to lose him yet I didn't want to have sex before I was ready, when my body was still screaming in protest and still bruised from the rape five years ago.

I found them together at Emma's place. we didn't waste time but had an emergency meeting in her room.

"you look like someone died.

..wait wait wait did you fight with Ben?" I nodded. Norah the loudest of us all could be a pain.

I narrated everything to them and awaited their counsel. sometimes it felt like I mostly didn't have a mind of my own.

"leave the guy he will cause you trouble " Norah chipped in. I was shocked.

"just give the poor man. after all it won't be your first time " Emma urged.

"yeah maybe don't leave him, we all know you need him better than he does. come on you won't survive a day without him" Norah hit home. after so much arguments I knew what to do and we left for my place with the scale of uncertainties unbalanced.

Ben came a week later to apologize.

"am sorry love my behavior that day was uncalled for "

I gave him my best smile and we made up.

we made love but I felt nothing apart from the pain. he wasn't none too gentle but its like my body blackened out. I had to do it to keep him and to mask those sad memories.

he kept telling me that it would be okay. telepathically did he feel and sensed my pain and fear? I felt like telling him about the rape but advised myself against it. he was mad at finding out that I wasn't a virgin all along.

"why didn't you tell me that you already slept with someone else? was he better than I have been to you? you still love him I guess "

I was trapped ..

## Episode 8

my dam of defense came tumbling down from the flood of emotions that were running. I broke down and told Ben about the rape. he didn't say a word through out but listened. he didn't give away his emotions to show me what he thought. my heart was breaking at every word I was uttering. it was like venom was coming out of me sip by sip. I cried for my innocence. for a long time I had been blaming and hating myself for bringing the trouble on myself. maybe I had encouraged him to do that to me. if my body had not been so much revealing to him he couldn't have raped me.

"am sorry I didn't know you had passed through that.why didn't you to tell me all along? " he was pacing in the room, guilt written all over his face.

"I wasn't sure how you would take it" sometimes trust issues take a toll on you when you least expect. there is nothing that hurts when you are accused of something you haven't done. that is pure murder.

"I will stand by your side no matter what but please you have to trust me with your issues. if you and me are to spend our lives together and make this work there is supposed to be no secrets between us ". wow that completely took me off guard, I wasn't prepared for such sweetness. he took me in his arms and I cried my heart out. basking in the warmth of his love and care. I couldn't ask for another man. if I had any doubts and reservations about his love for me,it vanished in the thin air and in its place came the need to show this man my adoration by being loyal and dedicated to this relationship.

\* \* \*

my plans to the village sprang back to life. I took a holiday from work and had to convince a reluctant Ben that I would be back in three weeks time. I had to sort myself out. I don't know if my parents still thought of me

alive or they mourned my death and buried an empty grave.

when I left, I didn't know when I would be back because I only had a yearning to see my mum again. am sure she would never let me out of her sight ever again but I was a big girl and capable of making my own decisions even in a matter of life and death kkkkk.it felt like I had gone to hell and back, even the devil himself ceased to frighten me.

I arrived in the afternoon. my parents had all gone to church and I only found my young sister Mary who had grown up tremendously. how time flies! she cried when she saw me and we embraced for a long time. she filled me with all the village gossip. my childhood best friend eloped with her cousin who lived in south Africa .I learnt with sadness that my paternal grandmother died after a long illness am sure it was old age but Mary said there had been wrangles over farm land with her neighbor and the following day its when she had died. in anger my father had gone to the neighbor and beat him together with his wife and demolished their mud house. he had spent two months in a police cell.I always knew that his temper would land him in trouble. he never kept it in check and many a times he fought with his friends uhm at his age ?shame.

later my parents came and we had a sweet reunion. they thought I had got lost in the glitters of the city and just prayed for God to keep me in one piece.yeah I was grateful for being alive, well and kicking when death had triumphed over most of my peers. some in early child birth others who never learnt to close their legs,succumbed to sexually transmitted diseases .it was so sad I thought because some girls are innocent like me but get raped and infected becoming victims of circumstances. sometimes I think God has created a special horrible hell pit for rapists. I don't have a kind word for them when they go around exploiting innocent kids and women yet some go Scotfree while others receive penalties unbefitting them. we need to stand up and put this to a stop once and for all. absence of a wife shouldnt turn you into a sexual prey.  
ever heard of self control???

## Episode 9

i felt so bad leaving the village amidst my father's protests. My mum feared that i had fallen into wayward ways judging by all the stories she heard about city girls. i told her about Ben and she said he should come to the village and pay my lobola. am sure my uncles will succeed in scaring off his family with the huge and ridiculous amount that they were going to put on my head when that time arrive.i felt that my life was back there with Ben and even if i had returned to the village, what more was left for me? I knew with Ben we had dreams and promises that were yet to reach maturity. i prayed for his success in life everyday because i knew i was included in his life #sharedblessings. whoever said behind a successful man, there is a woman sure knew how to choose sweet and befitting words. i always thought men are the heads sure and true enough but women are the necks that drive the heads :) .

i wasn't able o communicate with Ben for the whole time i was in the village because of network problems. come on, in this time and age should we still break our heads for such things? i returned home and found a message on my phone saying he had gone to Blantyre for a job interview. i prayed to God to look upon him with His eyes of favor. the world is becoming a fast competition ground and you need to have God beside you no matter what but not as a spare wheel only in needy when you only have a flat tire.

I went to see my besties and catch up for the lost time. we planned several outings to dance our sorrows away. Norah had a stable boyfriend of three years while Emmah was always on and off with her boyfriend who i heard so much of yet never got to meet for all the time i had known her. if you ask me, i would say they were friends with benefits.

Ben came back and i was so happy to see him. there was a remarkable change about the way he looked. he told me that he had been offered a job as a site engineer and will be working in Lilongwe. wow i was weak at my

knees, not believing what God had finally made for us because after so many years he was finally going to walk in the line of his career. i couldn't point out how this divine grace had befallen us because i couldn't say we had righteous and perfect lives.

Just as he promised me, after receiving his first salary, he gave me money to pay for my school fees at a local secondary school to attend weekend classes. i was over the moon. i started form 1 and my results were extraordinary i guess it was because i had it in me to get educated. Weekend classes meant our couple-time was limited but any spare time that Ben could find, he dedicated it to me. some times he spent nights at my house and when it was time to go in the morning, its when i realized how much more i wanted him in my life.

I passed my Form two Junior Certificate of Examination with flying colours and was determined to pass my Form Four with good results as well so that i could go to the University and study Journalism. i didn't get discouraged by endless stories of low paid reporters but i got fascinated by stories how criminals and citizens who don't abide by the law get exposed.

i had just wrote my form four examinations and was waiting for results with a baited breath. i knew my university dream was just few weeks away and i couldn't wait. i wrote to my mum constantly keeping her afloat what was happening in my life and she couldn't hide her admiration for me because she had been married off to my father at the age of Fifteen because her parents couldn't afford to feed both her and her eight siblings. i don't understand how people keep bringing many children in this world when they cannot afford to take very good care of them. her dreams of becoming a nurse died a painful and instant death.

One day after work i received an SMS from Ben...

'we need to talk' it was as simple as that. normally he didn't like sending me messages unless it was something he found it hard to tell me in person.

My heart raced...



## Episode 10

I hardly slept that night. i kept tossing until the following morning. something was nagging me at the back of my mind and i knew it wasn't good news. but what could have been so bad that Ben couldn't tell me in person and instead had to send that message with no any trace of emotions in it? i was yet to find out. sometimes i hated surprises especially when they heralded bad news. i was terrified of being hurt. i had so far built a wall of defense around my heart and my whole being by treading carefully on the path of life, not to hurt others and in the process not to be hurt in return.

i left for his house, it wasn't far because we lived in the same neighborhood. i found his brother Lloyd and his ever loud girlfriend who couldn't keep her hands off him the moment i stepped inside. i don't know why but women have some defense mechanism that only a fellow woman can detect. the 'keep-away-from-my-man-cant-you-see-how-much-in-love-we-are' attitude. she relaxed a bit when Lloyd introduced me as his brother's girlfriend.

i went straight to Ben's bedroom and found him still in bed watching a movie.

"hie" he mumbled lazily without looking at me. i answered back and joined him on the bed leaning my head on his chest. the silence was tormenting and we sat like that for almost an hour watching a movie i couldn't understand before he said "can you please move a bit,you are hurting me". i quickly moved out and headed for the kitchen before i lost my mind because i could no longer bear the strain between us.

he joined me a few minutes later and stood on the door,watching me cook. i could feel his eyes penetrating to the core of my very soul. was it judgement? self accusation? as if he was not sure if he could trust himself with what he was about to tell me. i couldn't fathom the cause of his nervousness and i felt tears misting my eyes.

"wangu how best can you take bad news?" like seriously? my heart was in my throat and he was here further delaying it. i wished he could have just nailed it and got it over with.

"just say it am sure i will be able to take it" my firm posture betrayed the shock i was feeling inside, i could feel my knees buckling against each other. the waiting seemed like eternity.

"you see, you are the best thing that has ever..." he got interrupted by Lloyd who called him. at that time my heart was hammering inside me, threatening to burst. he told me to go along with him.

i put on a smile before the two stooges who were starting to drown themselves in alcohol. seriously i never got along with his brother who kept on changing girls like underwear. i felt he was a bad influence on my man

"i need some wine, can you please go and buy it for me in town? i hope you don't mind me and my girl getting wasted today. isn't it babe?" she purred like an overfed cat in return. Ben suggested i escort him to town, he drove his brother's car and we stop at an ATM and i watched him taking money close to twenty thousand kwacha. we walked the rest of the way to the liquor shop and bought two Overmeer wine caskets and a set of wine glasses all along he kept stealing glances at me and saying my name over and over and that was worsening things inside me. he paid for the things and we went to the car.

"wangu am really sorry" he started. a million questions raced through my mind.

"for what?" i asked unsure if i really wanted an answer to that.

"i have gotten back with my ex-girlfriend" he finally dropped the bombshell. i felt so numb from head to toe. it couldn't be, not my Ben.

"so you still love her?" i think it was dumb of me but i didn't know what else to say.

"yes. we were together at school and met here again recently" to someone who could have seen us, the conversation looked normal and innocent enough because i wasn't throwing any tantrums, not yet.

he started the car but he remembered that he forgot to buy a wrist watch in one of the shops so he had to get back. he insisted that we go together, i walked slowly behind him feeling the pain of my high heels and feeling

chilly even though it was burning.

we went inside the shop. he bought watch and saw a nice red and white floral dress that was just my size.

'would you like the dress?' he asked me, i looked dazed and blank that he thought i wasn't listening until he repeated. i declined this ridiculous offer, i didn't want any skeletons that could lurk and haunt me each time i looked at that cursed dress.

we headed back to the house, it was evident these people were in a mood of partying. i went straight to the bedroom and sat in silence. my mind stopped working and i didn't know why i still wasn't feeling anything. a driver came to pick Ben and he left for work without saying any word to me, i was grateful in another way because i didn't think i could have stomached any more word exchange between us. i wanted to watch a movie and went through his DVD collection, i saw an XXX rated movie and felt disgusted. i resorted to watch cartoons but i couldn't concentrate so i decided to leave.

" Ben said he should find you here when he gets back". Lloyd told me and that meant he didn't yet get news of our 'break up' or rather of 'my being dumped'. that at least saved the embarrassment until later.

" if he wants me, he knows exactly where to find me" i left avoiding to be interrogated any further.

i went home and locked myself. i took four painkillers and straight away i fall into a dreamless sleep until the following morning.

i took my phone and called him.

" we need to meet and talk. whatever it is that i have wronged you am sure can be forgiven. i think you owe me an explanation, you cant leave my life just like that" i applauded myself for being firm and strong without breaking up before him, i had a pride and reputation to protect.

" okay come to my place at lunch hour by then i will be back from work". after some awkward seconds of silence i hanged up.

i went to my room and took out my dirty clothes to wash. for some reasons i felt relieved from the tension i had suffered the previous day. i was hanging on to the last shreds of the strings of hope. my phone beeped signaling that i had received a new message. i checked.

" i am sorry for all this. i have already started introducing her to people, i don't think i have anything else to discuss with you again. all the best. sorry"

Reality sunk in....

## Episode 11

The sobs that threatened to wreck my heart into a million pieces like a broken mirror resorted into streams of rivulets and beads of sorrow that silently made their way down my cheeks. Memories were breaking me, refusing to patch broken dreams and hopes but mostly I felt betrayed by fate for weaving me a different path from which I had always anticipated; thus a life with Ben beside me. As painful as the lane of memories seemed so hard to revisit, that past is what made me feel so remorseful to revisit the palm of time. If only I had the audacity to erase that moment from existence, I could do so without hesitation and doubt. A single act in life, coated with glittery goodies landed me on the bottom ladder. All these years, I lived in the shadows of my past, frightened and haunted by loneliness, rejection and a-not-so-understanding society that raised eyebrows at my staying alone. They were the same unseen forces that pushed me into the shackles of his arms. Why had i trusted my fellow human being with my heart?

I didn't want him in my life but love paid me a surprise visit and i wallowed in it head, now it was drowning me. a sharp sword of betrayal and rejection, managed to pierce my heart and came out on the other side oozing blood. one feels empty and useless when he is told 'its over' because you know that you contributed to the survival of the relationship as much as the other person did yet those two bitter words make you feel like you did nothing to show and appreciate the love. a total failure.

i cried loudly as if i had been bereaved, attracting the unwanted attention of my next door landlady and her husband. my kingdom had fallen and there was nothing that could be done to bring it back. my hands were behind my head, wailing my heart out those who are fans of Nigerian movies will have a clear picture of what am talking about. she asked me what the matter was, i handed her my phone and she read the message that has brought doom to my existence and robbed it of its unique meaning. Ben was my everything, i have never loved my fellow human being the way i had. it wasn't about the money or the looks but he had filled my heart to the brim with so much love it blinded me such that i didnt see the realities of life on the ground.

" keep calm, there is more to life than getting ditched" the husband hitched in. i was sure he had been drinking that sacheted liquor which make people deliberately attract the disease of madness evidently from his slurred voice and sleepy red eyes. really he had a nerve! how does one talk like that when someone is mourning? somethings are better left unsaid but these people didn't know that i had just lost the reason for my existence. sometimes life is not fair, why was i always attracting the unpredictable circumstances to my life? how does one restart life after that shattering like of an earthquake or tsunami? i wished for death to claim me..ooh that sweet, pain free and comforting oblivion.

i had seen it coming but had ignored all the premonitions. why hadn't i said something when the other day he had been instructing his driver on the phone to pick someone up and he had mentioned the name, it was a she but i had been too much of a lady to ask. it just never crossed my mind why of late during his off days twice a week he never bothered to come to my place all call me over to spend the time together as he used to? ladies we all see it coming bit by bit but the thought of knowing and realizing the truth sooner or later send us on the verge of collapse. sometimes its good to be inquisitive its not like you are snooping on your man but taking time to analyze your relationship status could prevent an incoming heart break. imagine how knowing about a girl your man has got himself seriously flirting with could give you a chance to stop it before they become serious and replace you in a brink of an eye? always take your

guard.

\* \* \* \* \*

A week had gone and one morning i had to force myself out of bed after a sleepless night full of contradicting dreams, at one time i was shouting for Ben not to leave me by myself, holding his hand until he slipped away and disappeared into thin air. another one i was with him, laughing and chasing each other playing like we used to and i woke up with a smile on my face. will he come back or he is gone for good? some dreams though uhmm. i didn't know. i had to attend final rehearsals for a biblical play for my former school drama club which was to be staged on that day's night. the Director had to shout at me several times when i kept on forgetting my lines, it was a nightmare when everyone was looking at me whenever my turn came. i had to force myself to concentrate until we finished rehearsing. i went outside to freshen up and one of the boys who i had befriended rushed after me. he was a nice person almost my age and was as close to me as Emma and Norah were.

" what is wrong with you hard-head" he asked me because i had been avoiding his gaze through the whole session.

" naah am okay just tired i guess" i replied forcing a smile.

" you can not lie to me, you have been quite and distant what is wrong with you. do i have to force you to say it maybe with a whip but am not your father thank you very much. i don't know how i can put up with that sulking" I laughed at that. he always wanted to play big brother to me but i wasn't ready to tell him about the problem besides not even Emma and Norah knew anything. i had built my own cocoon and wasn't ready to shed it off.

He left to buy us cold drinks and i was grateful for it was a contrast to the heat i was feeling and these days my heart seemed to have tken an extra pace of its own.

we talked about the play and listened as he lamented about his girlfriend who he always complained that she was childish and inconsiderate to keep on demanding money from him as if he was working. my mind was drifting on and off until he couldn't take it anymore. he begged me to tell him what was wrong and if there was something he could do about it.

"Ben left me" i blurted it out and sobs accompanied it. i felt so embarrassed to have chased away such a fine man.he was mouth agape, for to him we were the perfect example of a happy couple and break up was the least he expected to happen to us. he always said we would get married fill our house with a thousand kids and grow old together in a cottage built along the lake shore back in my village. but fate had its own way of handling issues especially when it came to matters of the heart. he offered me tissue and out of courtesy he said i will be okay without him. but how?

when the play started, i couldn't stop gazing at the incoming crowd,to see if i could spot Ben's face. i had bought him a ticket and he promised to come but of course it was before the break. i carried on an excellent performance to the surprise of the team and it was a happy moment when after the performance we had a loud applause from the audience. tears trickled down my cheeks,i was the only one feeling so sad. they dropped each one of us at our homes for it was close to Midnight. i felt so lonely because i was used to receive his calls and talk for hours almost every day. the urge to pick my phone and call him was too much but i had to save myself from the embarrassment of his scorns.

when i was laying on my bed gazing at the roof, with tears rolling down my cheeks even absent mindedly and seeing his face, its when it dawned on me that my menstruating days were long gone without me noticing or was it because i had so much engrossed myself in grief and sadness that i had forgotten my own body? things couldnt get any worse .....

## Episode 12

if you want to know more about suffering read the whole book of Job and only then you shall understand how it was raining elephants and lions of problems for him. only that after he lost everything, The Lord restored

him a hundred fold. mine seemed to unfold without end and I didn't know when the expiry date to my problems was going to come and so far I wasn't even half way through Job's calamities.

the following morning I went to see Norah and it was the same time that somebody brought me a letter notifying me that I had been selected to study journalism at Malawi institute of Journalism. tears of joy trekked down my cheeks and I jumped up so high I thought I touched the moon. I was getting there slowly but surely. I didn't know how to thank God. Norah was ecstatic as I was but I could sense an underlying current of jealousy written on her face. you see she was a standard six drop out because she had to repeat the same class for six times until she decided that she was too old for that class. unlike me she wasn't a fighter and brains wasn't part of her gift so she quitted. the good thing was she taught me to plait and braid hair like I went to school for it and that's how she supported herself.

I told her my pregnancy fears, she was worried about how I would cope up with school in that condition. my heart broke. I didn't even know where to get ninety thousand kwacha tuition fee because not even my employer could give me a loan of that amount,he wasn't sure if his business could survive the next five years.it all depended on the direction of the wind of political affairs.

"go and have a pregnancy test that way you will know the truth" that sent me into a fit of panic. I wanted to know yet I was afraid of the raw truth. how will I ever forgive myself if am indeed pregnant?

I gathered enough courage and went to the nearest private hospital .my hands shook when I was given a container for my urine. I prayed for forgiveness and a second chance from God. if I will be spared of this pregnancy maze,I would never allow any man between my legs again until I walk down the aisle. later on my fears were confirmed by the pleasant young Doctor who congratulated me with a twinkle in his eye. I wasn't too happy but I felt a stirring and tightening in my tummy. I hoped it was a girl. I already imagined ribbons in her hair.

"you don't look happy about this. do you want an abortion? " what? his job was to help people make their lives better not the other way round.



"no no no am fine but its just that I have alot on my mind" I answered and took my leave. that shocking revelation made me to be more alert to my body. no wonder I had been eating like a pig recently not to mention the need to frequently pee and sleep like a log.

I called Norah and told her the news.

"Congrats girlfriend I can't wait to be an aunt to this sweet tomato. hope it will be a boy " this girl will never cease to amaze me.

"have you already told Ben?" I remembered that she still didn't know about the ditch.

" Norah we broke up" I started feeling tears in my eyes like I did everytime I said it until I narrated everything.

"what??? why didn't you tell me? I will murder that son of..."

"forget about me let's just concentrate on the baby"

"that is your problem, you always defend him even when he hurt you.forget about him because there will be no baby" I could actually hear her hard breath of anger.

"what do you mean? " I was confused.

"tomorrow we will go for abortion " she was never short of surprises.

"no way am I having blood of an innocent baby on my head" I didn't want to deliberately provoke the wrath of God.

"listen and listen good. this guy will take you to hell for this. you will be struggling with the kid while he is enjoying life with his strings of girlfriends. we don't bear kids with an ex that's a mistake of the highest order"

"you can't tell me what to do with my baby" I said with finality and hanged up on her. what sort of a friend was she to drag me to destruction? what if I died or never be able to have anymore kids ?it wasn't as if I didnt know what I was doing that I would be suprised where this pregnancy came from.I needed to be strong for my baby if I was to survive all these temptations. my phone rung, it was Ben.he was the worst of my fears. I fought with myself whether to answer it all not.I wasnt ready to expose myself to more harm even though I didn't know what he wanted to say. I needed to compose myself . I pressed the reject button

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## Episode 13

What i feared and dreaded most had befallen me. i needed to sit down and think about the way forward. Having a baby planned or unplanned isn't a picnic. you will be surprised to love and appreciate your parents more when you realize that you are bringing a human being into this world. i missed my mum, i wished i had listened to her but i thought i was big enough to handle anything and i wished i could talk to her but my village could have been entirely another planet because of its exclusion from development especially when it came to technology issues. come on who still write letters just to talk about family issues in this time and era of what-sapping and face-booking? imagine writing to tell her about my pregnancy and accidentally falling into the hands of my father, there could be blue murder. Here in Lilongwe i have seen so many gogos with phones proudly having poaches with threads around their necks just because they don't want to be left behind.

Straight from the hospital i decided to go home. i was feeling so tired especially from the burden i was carrying in my heart. its either i had to sleep which was impossible at that point in time or i had to cry my heart out which would make me feel better but take me nowhere. i found Ben sitting on the verandah of my house tapping his feet without a care in the world as if he was on a social call. my heart made a somersault, its a miracle i didn't topple over and land on my bottom in shock. my face was deathly pale as if i had seen the ghost of my ancestors. he was the last person i had expected to see. didn't he get it? not picking up his call meant i neither wasn't ready to talk to him nor see his face which i felt only made matters worse. the fact that i was still hopelessly in love with him and couldn't be able to hide it was sore to my heart while he seemed to have moved on. his presence made me ruffle my unmade hair and i looked at myself to realize that i had put on that piece of wrapper for quite some days and the thickest sweater even though it was blazing. yooh i didn't like being caught in that state and everyone else doesn't. you need to send

a message to your ex that you are doing great without them by the way you look.

" since you couldn't pick my call i thought of stopping over to see how you are doing" he looked as good as i could remember and i seemed to sink in his brooding brown eyes.

" as if you care" that came out so blunt i realized we still had unfinished business because i still wanted to know my crime at being ditched. everything ought to have a reason.

" just look at the state of you. what happened to water?" i know i still looked and felt like i had just woken up but he needed not to have stuck it to my face.

" if you came to mock me you might as well take your leave and come again when you have better things to say". I didn't have time for haters.he laughed like i had cracked the worst of jokes that need reaction force even though the joke isn't funny.

" i came to congratulate you for being selected to study your dream course.it doesn't happen everyday you should consider yourself lucky" thanks to his snooping friends parading themselves as teachers who always seemed to give him first hand information.

"thanks. it might be good also to know that i went to the hospital for a pregnancy test and it came out positive" did i just see his lips twitching in a knowing smile?

" well i knew it and i remember the night it clearly happened, should i remind you?" he was grinning mischievously.

"no thank you that's enough". how could i forget that passion filled night whose memories were imprinted on the walls of my heart and still made my toes curl and tingle, screaming for that lost time. now this pregnancy saved as a placard of the results of that night and i had to be the only one to show for the hidden act.

" i will support you emotionally, physically,financially you name it to make sure the baby will have everything."

"except mom and dad together every morning when she wake up" tears were already welling up in my eyes. never in my life did i ever dream of becoming a single parent as early as this. maybe through death of a husband but that's entirely a different case.

"lets not talk about that now,"he said while looking away. i could see guilt written all over his face.

" why not now? i cannot bear to have questions every single day as to why we are not together by an innocent kid. if you knew you were going to leave,i can as well go for an abortion to end it all. that way you and me will have no any single string attached. you go your way and i go mine as free as a bird." i wasn't ready to drop that subject because who knew when i was going to have another chance to speak again.

" i will always be there for my kid.as for abortion, whatever will happen to you i wash my hands off it because i didn't deny my responsibility" that sounded ironic,but i got it. he didn't want to have anything to do with me but he wanted to have everything to do with the baby. i felt so rejected i wished the ground could open and swallow me. his phone rung and he answered it with a Colgate poster sort of smile on his face.

"hello babe" my heart sunk and drowned, this guy sure had a nerve.

" where are you going? with who?.... ine nsanje (am jealous ). it was evident he was in his own world as if i wasn't standing there at all. he continued murmuring some more sweet nothings.

"okay hun i am waiting for my surprise when we meet. me? yeah well am at a colleague's friend you know wrapping up office left over work.okay.take care.love you more" urrgh he made those irritating kissing sounds. i was trembling inside out. did he just travel to romance land and drag me along to painfully watch the show? how could he be so cold hearted like a crocodile which drag its helpless victims in water with its firm grip knowing that he he is the king of the water? but this was my place and he was supposed to show some respect, some dignity. i felt hopeless and i couldn't do anything about it, it was his heart and he had the right to choose who to love and who to dump.i sucked it up.

"err sorry about that. yeah well where were we? ohh we were talking about junior and..."

"it will be a girl" i chipped in.there is no way i was bearing another Ben so that he should drive another poor heart crazy again.

" how do you know?" i rolled my eyes in boredom. i was the mother and therefore knew best. i didn't know why but ever since the doctor's confirmation,i thought of nothing but a cute little princess and i had

already started picturing her having my complexion.i didn't care if he had his looks but not his complexion because he was as dark as three nights combined.

" i must be on my way. here is twenty thousand kwacha. go and pay the first installment of your tuition fee" this couldn't be happening.

" i don't need your money,i will manage on my own". i still had my pride to rescue.

" stop being a drama queen and take the money,we both know you need it and please do something about your looks"...and it was true,my mind had already exhausted all the possible ways from where my fees would come from. i was genuinely grateful.i took it and watched him go in dispair and with a heavy heart.

that night i dreamt a person i had never seen before in my entire life telling me that if i ever would be dull and stupid enough as to attempt aborting, i would die. because i had thought of using the money Ben gave me to go with Norah to the doctor she told me about because i realized single handedly i couldn't raise the baby. all that talk of support and always being there,i convinced myself that it was just cheap talk. after waking up i was afraid of the unknown and battled myself out of that evil thought. dreams have a significant meaning to our African lives.

i went to do registration for my course from there i went to see Emmah who told me that she saw Ben in his car with a girl with a dramatic complexion and hair do. that reminded me of someone yet i didn't think it was who i thought it was ...

## EPISODE 14

If the cup of suffering had passed me by, i would have never known the real and actual meaning of pain. Many times we tend to lighten the troubles that others face only when we test our own share of calamities, do we actually understand their situations. An old saying "chili kwa nzako

usamangoti tachigwire nyanga" I don't know an English proverb equivalent to that but the thing is we tend to tell others what they could have done in a difficult situation yet we miserably fail to do better when it finally happens to us. Talk is cheap but action is like moving mountains.

When Emmah told me that she saw Ben with another girl, I had to go through the painful wheel of explanation again. She was so mad that she said if she had known earlier, she could have stopped the car and dragged the man-snatcher out by her Dracula hair. I told her that I would know what to do when I finally met them. Seriously I just said that to shut her up because even if I would have met them, my hands were tied. The fact that I was carrying his baby didn't mean he married me. It was my entire fault to give him the benefits of a wife before not even paying my bride price then why would he have bothered to marry me? We often swallow without properly savoring the act of chewing.

Going to school pregnant wasn't a picnic or a thing I would want to be doing every day. My body was undergoing some remarkable changes which I didn't understand until I chose to accept them. I had underrated my body but then I came to realize how strong I was. The first trimester was the worst, sometimes when morning sickness hit hard, I had to miss classes. Sometimes I would fall asleep during lectures. I was forced to stop working because weekend classes had not been introduced yet. I didn't know where I got the guts to make such a bold and daring step. I used the money I got for my service to start a business of selling zitumbuwa (banana fritters) it wasn't much but it was able to put food on my table. Ben was nowhere to be found. When I called him that I needed some money to start attending antenatal classes, he said it wasn't his fault that I was not working and I should stop bothering him about money. Eventually he came and threw Two thousand five hundred kwacha to my face. I cried to this monster change of a man. Eh things that men do when love has been thrown out of the window are unspeakable. I thought he wasn't the same man I used to know whose kindness used to melt my heart.

I learnt the whole semester but didn't write examinations because of

the balance I still owed the school. Despite my countless reminders to Ben to pay the fees, he never budged. All Ben's two phone numbers were not available. I went to his place which was the last thing I wanted to do and was told by his friend who shared the house with him that he had gone to Chitipa close to the border with Tanzania and had no idea when he would be back. Was he running away or what? Why was he doing this to me when I didn't beg him to pay my fees in the first place? I guess my dream to be a journalist died before it even hatched out of the egg. As if that wasn't enough, I was three months overdue with my house rentals. I sold most of my possessions but the money was just a drop in the ocean. I tried to talk to my land lady woman to woman but she couldn't hear any of it.

Next time you will know when to close your legs to save yourself from that excuse of a man or better still join a convent I picked my bag with only my clothes in it and left. I headed for Emmah's place for her to talk to her parents to accommodate me until I got back on my feet because I couldn't have gone to Norah's since their two bed roomed house accommodated her parents and six siblings. In my condition, I needed some privacy.

When I arrived at Emmah's house, there was a crowd gathered outside cheering and jeering as if watching a football match. I made my way through the crowd and was bewildered at the sight before me.

Emmah's father was showering a young man with blows, anger written all over his face, deaf to the young man's pleas of mercy. Emmah and her mother were trying to get him off the unfortunate young man but he was too powerful for them. People were doing nothing about it as if this was business as usual. They were busy taking pictures and videos. This world is turning into something else, am sure if that man had died, all those people would have feigned ignorance of the whole issue. I asked a certain woman what was happening; she was standing next to me enjoying the spectacle before her. She said the young man impregnated the girl. When they had managed to locate his place, it turned out that he was married with four children. In frustration the father took back his daughter home but swore to teach him a lesson to take to his grave. True

to his words, one day the young man came and stood at a few houses way. He sent a kid to go and call the girl. Luck wasn't on his side, the message landed in the wrong hands of the girl's father who went and confronted him but they never agreed on a thing he ended up beating him to pulp. So finally this was the goon who had been driving my best friend crazy as if she was a headless chicken. A pity she was blinded with love like the rest of us. It saved him right I almost forgot my own problems when with a smile on my face, I imagined my dad battering Ben blue and black. It could have been a sight I would have savored for the rest of my life. As it was this family already had enough problems on their plate and didn't need my baggage added to it. I left.

I remembered the angelic Gogo who took care of me after I was raped. I felt bad to be remembering her when I was in trouble. The last time I went there, I heard that she was quite sick and her relatives from her village in Mangochi came to pick her up so that they nurse her properly since Cindy was always on the road. I hoped she was alive, well and kicking. I had to walk from Area 36 to Chilinde and it was fast getting dark. I was so tired I could feel the strain in my swollen feet and groin. When I arrived at Gogo's, I found two children playing on the verandah and when I talked to them they seem to look at me as if they never understood any word from my mouth. A woman who I later learnt was their mother overheard me from inside the house and she told me to get inside. The house did not bear anything that resembled the presence of my mother figure. I introduced myself and when I asked about her, she went unusually quiet before telling me that they received a message two months ago that she had passed away. My heart sunk and I cried in earnest. Heaven had gained an angel for sure but I had lost one of the few people who loved me wholeheartedly with nothing to gain nor hold back. I used to visit her after I went to work at Aunt Ivy's place but I dreaded going there often especially when Cindy was around. She would bid her goodbye the moment I arrived. The message that she didn't like me couldn't have surpassed that. I felt the cold pangs of loneliness. I was in the middle of nowhere with no place to sleep. I was back to stage one. The only option was to go back to Area 36 to Norah's place. I didn't



have a cent on me and couldn't bear to walk that yawning distance again. The woman said she didn't have any money to give me. I took my leave. I started walking along the main road hoping for a miracle. I was hungry and thirsty. I sat down under a tree and broke down into a prayer.

“God I know many times I have failed you with my countless sins. Thank you because you are a merciful and forgiving God and you will bring me back to your embrace for you remember that I am but dust and like a cool breeze my life will one day pass away. Help me to accept the things I can't do anything about and to always trust you with my problems but mostly to give thanks to you in whatever situation I am passing through. If you will not be my anchor, I will head for destruction. Please Lord show your power to me and I promise I will be good from now onwards. In Jesus Christ's name Amen.” I sobbed my heart out and started walking again. It sounded like a deal with God but I was ready to change for good. When I reached Masintha ground corner road, a car stopped for me as if in answer to my prayers.

“Yes mai mwaswera bwanji (how are you madam?)” he greeted me. I answered while wiping away tears with the corner of my wrapper. He was listening to Don Moen's Healing rain and I kept quite letting all my pain be washed away. He asked me where I was heading to at that time and I told him I was going to a friend's place. He was a middle aged man with a long beard that covered part of his mouth and it made him look so serious. I felt uncomfortable and rushed to put my hand on my belly and said a silent prayer of protection. We passed Kawale and Biwi then took a turn a left turn at Summit Club. When we reached Falls Baptist Church, he said I should pay for the journey. I was surprised because I thought this was an act of generosity. He said he doesn't give people free rides. He stopped the car and said if I didn't have the money then I should bail myself out by sleeping with him right there in the car. He started caressing my thigh. Oh the other side of me rose up in defense; I shoved his hand away and gave him a hot slap across his face. It took him by surprise and he shouted in pain. Lucky enough the door wasn't locked so I opened it and run for my dear life into the haunting darkness as fast as my legs could carry me.

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## EPISODE 15

I was walking through the valley of the shadow of death and frightened all the way. Who wouldn't be when someone was ruthless enough to want to harm my unborn baby? I stopped running when I felt that I was far away from the car and watched him speeding off. I thought that maybe he was one of those people who slept with women for rituals.

My hand clutched my tummy in agony. The baby was kicking furiously. "It's okay princess mummy just run a bit too hard you will be okay my love". Sometimes when I talked to my baby it was like I was looking into her smiling face. The love I had for her already was overwhelming and I was determined to take care of her in my capacity and be strong for her sake. Mothers bond with their babies even before they see the face of the world and the process further continues when breastfeeding. You should see the glow on both the baby and the mother's face that moment they look eye to eye and she put her breast into the tiny mouth. In my fear when running behind the wall of Falls Baptist Church, I forgot that there was a cemetery. My body froze in fear as I walked back to the main road. It was horrifyingly quiet with only the hooting of the owls being heard. I took out my phone and beeped Norah, after a few minutes she called back and tearfully I narrated my story. She told me that I should find somewhere to sit down probably at the verandah of a shop and wait for her to make a few phone calls. I shouldn't move or talk to anyone until I heard from her again. I was not in the mood to trust any man with my life. This area was common with car garages. I could see watchmen lighting fire to keep warm for the night but I sat at a distance lost in my own world. After what felt like eternity, Norah called again and I gave her direction to where I was sitting. In twenty minutes I saw a car coming at a distance to where I was and she came out and hugged me. I

cried in her arms and she comforted me. I didn't know how I would have done without her. I was in an emotional mess. I knew the man she was with; it was her neighbor who had the hots for her. I greeted him and she handed me a take away box. I couldn't have been more grateful because I was starving. I ate in silence as I watched them chitchatting over nothing in particular until we reached home. When we arrived in area 36, I went to have a cold bath and straight away went to bed leaving the family chatting until midnight. Norah told her parents of my predicament and they were so sympathetic. Her father said I could stay there as long as I liked.

The following months I was busy helping Norah at her salon. Every head I plaited she would let me keep the money then every Sunday after church she would escort me to the market to buy kaunjika (second hand clothes) for the baby. I was nearing my end and I could say I had finished buying almost all the baby preparation materials. It wasn't easy to stand on my feet for too long or sit down but I learnt to bear it and would talk to my baby not to misbehave. Ben was still missing in action. Sometimes when I missed him too much I would send him messages just to say hie and after some time I would receive a delivery failure report. It was crucifying to think that he stopped bothering about me. Did I ever cross his mind? Did he miss me like I did? Did he still feel love for me? For all that he did to me and never bothered to do for me, my heart was still deeply and madly in love with him. Even if he came and asked me back, he needed not to have begged and I would take him back forgetting all that happened in a blink of an eye. My love for him was deeper than the depth below and higher than all the heights I had known above. Call me stupid but that man had put a deep cut in my heart that sprang with love even when it still hurts. Matters of the heart are something else.

Norah would scold me to forget about the moron and live my own life but it wasn't easy and I wasn't ready to raise this baby alone. He needed to be there for that first magical kick, for that first cry, for that first word and for that first step. Every day I prayed to God to bring me back my man so that we would be a complete family. One day when I was

at the salon, I received a call from Norah's mother to go home because there were visitors looking for me. When I asked who came she said she couldn't say but I had to go and see for myself. I told Norah and we went together. My heart was torn between two guesses. I thought it was Ben or maybe my father but there was no way my father could have located me without communicating first. That left Ben as my biggest surprise. When we arrived, I saw Ben's car parked outside. My heart rushed and I almost felt faint. I couldn't believe he was here at last. I had mixed reactions, was I to hug him or just a simple handshake would do? I stood at the door to catch my breath; the excitement was just too much. Norah squeezed my hand in assurance she knew I needed it. I went inside and my eyes fall on Ben's brother Lloyd. I failed to hide my disappointment. Of all people, what did he have to do with me? I greeted him and we excused ourselves and went outside because what was about to be said was for our ears only. Lloyd and I never got along. Mostly he said Ben was pampering and giving me too much attention more than I deserved while I never approved of his changing girls like nappies and his arrogance. Now see what costed me, am sure it was under his brother's influence that he dumped me perhaps he was the one who found him the girl. There was an awkward silence between us.

“I came to see you. Am sorry about you guys but Ben was never done with Cindy as far as I was concerned” I didn't think I heard well what he just said. But how many Cindys did I know in this world? It was only one and we never got along.

“Which Cindy is this?” I couldn't hide my anticipation to know more.

“Kkkk do you know her? The same girl who once you meet gets to your core like cancer and it's up to you to be annoyed or tolerate her, I never liked her from the start. She wasn't my type that's why she cornered my brother when we were in secondary school after seeing that I didn't give her the attention she clamored” my worst fears were tilted in the right direction and it wasn't a laughing matter. Of all people, why did he choose to end up with her? If it was somebody descent

it could have been better but Cindy, no way.

“I know her” I was on the verge of tears; my man could have replaced me with someone better. I didn’t know much about Cindy but her character was one she failed to hide like pregnancy. Good character is like perfume that spread to everyone you pass by. If it is bad perfume people, will look at you as if you are an alien but if it’s good everybody will ask what it is so that they buy their own. If it was beauty he had fallen for, I don’t know if over makeup is in the category maybe because I am a bit primitive, I prefer being natural. I knew I had a plain face and never a fashion follower but what I put on was simple but suited me better. Nevertheless it was none of my business.

I explained to Lloyd about Ben’s disappearance and lack of sympathy to help me. He said he changed his phone number and was kind enough to give me the new one. He gave me some money and promised to talk to Ben to be man enough and take care of the mess he caused in my life. For once we were on the same page. I was so angry and bitter with Ben for his lack of compassion. I went to buy airtime and called him immediately. It rung for a couple of times and I thought of stopping the whole thing when he finally picked up. All the fury I had bottled inside me and about to erupt like a volcano vanished the moment I heard his voice. This guy still made me feel butterflies do a flutter dance in my tummy. I almost told him how much I missed him and how I was miserable without him instead he was angry upon realizing that it was me and cursed whoever gave me his new number. I choose to be calm and polite. I asked what he thought of baby preparation things because this was the last month. That sent electricity blaze flying all over and he said why I was being rude by reminding him what he already knew. I stood there in silence, hearing him shouting at me for being stupid and primitive, a village champion who would drag him back to Stone Age so that he should have a dull future and probably I would send my village parents to bewitch him. All this was uncalled for but he kept on ranting about how his parents suffered to send him to school and get a degree, all that wasn’t for me to feast, enjoy and milk him dry but for him to bask in the glory of his

hard work and his parents to enjoy their sweat. I run out of airtime and the line went deadâ€¦!

## EPISODE 16

Patience is a virtue, a precious gem. Those who wait upon The Lord shall renew their strength like the eagles. They shall run but never get weary for The Lord will carry them on His wings.

I didnâ€™t know why Ben couldnâ€™t afford to be nice to me or pretend to. It couldnâ€™t have costed him anything at all. Was this the emotional support he talked about or it was nerve wreckage? If there was a time I needed a shoulder to lean on and a hand to hold me through the storm was this pregnancy trying time. Pregnancy is a matter of life and death and need to be treated with uttermost caution. You can never predict what will happen after those nine excruciating months but you keep hoping and trusting God to give you the privilege of holding your bundle of joy when all is said and done. The mistake I was making and most girls still make was to cling to the tattered threads of hope that the baby daddy will come back. We wait and wait and when we realize that it wonâ€™t happen, itâ€™s already too late the world has gone by without us.

The day before I went into labor Ben called me. After the last incident he threw vulgar into my face, I stayed clear of his way. It was bad for my blood pressure and I didnâ€™t want to put my life and that of my baby in dangers of complications. That day my blood pressure shot to the roof and had to be rushed to the hospital. I could take so much but I am human and bound to break. He asked how I was doing and I replied that I was so tired and felt like I was carrying a 50kg bag of maize in my tummy. He said â€œumayesa mimba ndi masewera etiâ€ (you thought pregnancy is an easy thing). Seriously I donâ€™t know if he meant that as a joke but it shot spikes in my heart. Was he happy that I had a problem? Every day I

thanked God that I carried my pregnancy with no complications. There was no single day that I had to say I was seriously sick apart from the high blood pressure which he was the cause. I hung up on him. Its either he learnt to talk to me in a sweet way or quit calling me. That night I didn't sleep well. I kept tossing from side to side, the discomfort was taking a toll on me and I knew it was just a matter of time before something happened.

When morning came, I had an exceptional strength which saw me washing all my dirty clothes and beddings. I didn't want to bring my baby into a dirty world. I didn't go to the salon, I went to the market and prepared lunch for the whole family and proceeded to clean the rest of the house until Norah's mum told me to take it easy. The discomfort heightened by the hour and no pain yet just some minimal contractions. When evening came, I couldn't take it anymore I was scared that things might worsen in the middle of the night and there might be no car to take me to the hospital. I told Norah's mum that I wasn't feeling well and she panicked and fussed over me. I was so calm maybe because I didn't know what to expect but knew that the proverbial pain was likely to kick in any time soon and didn't know how long it was going to last.

I had the longest night of my life. The pain peaked at every passing hour yet I didn't shed a single tear. I couldn't sit or sleep so I resorted to walk around the hospital with random breaks where I went to the doctor's office to see how I was coping. It was a public hospital and so overcrowded that the waiting room had no beds, women slept on the floor and only the entrance had space. Ben had all the money and he could have afforded to pay the bills at a proper maternity hospital but he just couldn't. At 5cm dawn had cracked and I couldn't walk properly, I had to drag myself to the labor ward. I felt so hungry and guzzled down 2 cups of porridge in a few gulps. I prayed throughout and asked God to forgive me for committing adultery and maybe that was the reason I was being punished with the unimaginable pain, the pain of a lifetime. I felt like it was going to last for eternity but at 8:00 am on that rainy morning, I gave birth to a beautiful baby girl and the pain went away as relief

washed over me like the rain on a sunny and scorching day. If you give birth, itâ€™s when you realize what your mother passed through to have you and start loving and appreciating her more. I donâ€™t know how those brave women did it back in the days and encountered the labour pain a dozen times unlike now when we think twice before giving birth to more than two kids. I salute you mothers sure. I have never felt such love like I did for this little cute thing. It was a mystery I would never solve; she was my flesh and had nestled inside my womb until she was a complete human. I couldnâ€™t believe that she was mine to love and adore, she was too perfect a gift to grace my miserable life. I felt the zeal to live life to the fullest, filling up my bosom and all the feeling of meaninglessness vanished into thin air. She gave out a loud cry and I patted her back lovingly as the nurse cut the umbilical cord. It was so magical that I kept on shouting my praises to God who had seen me through.

I could see a remarkable remembrance of Ben in her. Her face outline and features like the nose and eyes but it was evident that she had my complexion thank God. As I put her on my breast to suckle, I felt a tinge of pain and a funny tickle all the same on my nipples but was told it will get better with time. As I watched her peacefully asleep in my arms she was the most beautiful tiny thing I had ever come across in my whole life. Oh boy! Was I ready to be a mum? I wondered now that she was finally here. I was so tired and hungry and felt like I had a gully down there. So I ate food for two and fall into a deep slumber like that of the dead and woke up eight hours later. Ben called and congratulated me; he had been calling continuously while I was in labour writhing with pain. I couldnâ€™t depict if he was happy or sad because the way he talked, it was like he was talking about somebody elseâ€™s baby not his own. Maybe I wasnâ€™t the only one still in denial.

The following days were followed by visitors flooding the house with numerous gifts, I felt like I was part of the family and completely at home. My parents didnâ€™t know that they were grandparents but I would cross that bridge when I reach it. After two weeks without a name, Ben called and named her Amanda Chikondi Mbewe. To me it didnâ€™t make sense. I felt the middle name Chikondi which meant love was misplaced. Love



really? When he had dragged me to hell and back, what was loving about the way he had treated me? Still more he didn't come but called at least once every week until three solid months after he convinced himself that he was finally a father, he made an unannounced visit.

It felt so awkward as he picked Amanda up and looked at her like a mirror. He turned her head to see her ears, eyes and nose and the little miss didn't like it, she gave out a loud howl that made my heart jump and I thought he had pinched her. He handed her to me and immediately she kept quite. There was a lot that needed money but Ben could hear not of it. If I asked for ten thousand he gave me half the amount. Am sure he thought I was lying and I resorted to write a list of the things I needed and told him to buy and bring them to avoid any foul play. He seemed to be communicating with somebody and gave that person the exact geographical location to the house. He excused himself to go outside to meet that person, I followed him.

My eyes couldn't believe who I was seeing, i panicked!

## EPISODE 17

The bravest thing that one can do is to face your fears. If you come face to face with what make your spine chill, it's when you analyze yourself if you are a coward or not. I was standing right in front of the storm that had capsized my love canoe and I thought my eyes were playing dirty tricks with me. Standing in front of me was Cindy in all her glory, as proud as a peacock. I watched while they were exchanging kisses a thing which made me clench my jaws so hard it hurt. There was no way in reality that I was bearing witness to this. We looked at each other and I could see a glint of recognition turning into hatred.

“Who is this babe?” aah the cheek of her as if she has never seen me

before.

“That’s the girl who is giving me hell that she has my baby. Really? I watched the circus of lies circulating. I was sure Cindy was thinking that I was too plain to share a man with her, but I couldn’t play second fiddle because I had this man’s first born child and in my Tonga culture it counted even when the child was a girl.

“Are you sure the baby is yours? Because this girl has a record of blackmailing people” she said while pointing me with her long fingers. I didn’t know why she still didn’t believe me that I needed help from her grandmother (God bless her soul).

“I don’t know if the baby is mine because she used to have strings of boyfriends but you know me I am merciful” that couldn’t have set me ablaze for nothing. These people were playing with me a game right in my backyard and I didn’t want to show them that I was a fool like them. Who say such useless lies anymore? They are outdated. Gone are the days that people used to raise kids who are not their own, today they go for DNA test.

“Don’t test my patience, if you are not sure that this kid is his then go drown yourself in the lake because he knows perfectly that this baby is his flesh and blood” I was ready to take her head on because I couldn’t watch her insulting me.

“You have his kid but I have him every inch of the way and there is nothing you can do about it” her blood shot eyes were meant to send me away with my tail tucked between my legs but I didn’t flinch.

“See if you won’t join the rest of his exes” at hearing that, she gave out a loud chuckle as if what I was saying was out of this moon. All along Ben watched with a wide grin on his face. Am sure he was feeling proud to be fought over like a gold medal but I wasn’t ready to give him that satisfaction.

“Leave me alone and my precious baby, I wonder if at all you shall see yours” I fought back.

“You mean that monkey?” this time I didn’t need to answer back instead it was Ben who gave her the slap from the back of his hand with the speed of lightning. She gave out a loud shriek.

“Don’t dare call my baby that again or else you shall be sorry” he

said that, went to his car and drove off, leaving her holding her cheek with her mouth wide, open rooted to the ground. If she had not closed her mouth soon enough, a fly could have visited it. The sight was priceless if only I could have captured it on camera. I gave out a loud laugh and I went back inside the house. That saved her right. What made her think she was much better than me? My baby was beautiful and I knew it.

Two days later Ben came back. Amanda was now in a stage of playing and she loved laughing so much. I watched father and daughter laughing their lungs out. He was talking to her as if she was grown up already and it brought a lump to my throat. If we were still together we could have been doing that in our house, everyday. Sometimes I cried for what we could have been. The what ifs were driving me crazy. He told me to finish washing quickly so that he takes us to town for shopping. I couldn't believe this. What had suddenly come over him? I went to have a quick bath, looked at myself a thousand times on the mirror and came out putting on what I considered my best dress. Ben was horrified; his eyes seemed to ask if people still dressed like that.

“Can you find something better to put on?” the rest of my dresses were either maternity wear or not suitable for this occasion. I went back and put on one of Norah's skirt and blouse and came out. I had a thumb up from Ben and we were ready to go. It was like I was in a dream and enjoyed every moment of it. We started with Pep stores and bought so many pretty dresses for Amanda I thought Ben wouldn't be able to pay for it. We also went to some China shops and the shopping spree continued. He bought a plum, a walker and a bicycle as well. It was too much. He bought me some nice dresses and shoes and I loved the look on his face each time I came out from the changing room. He sure was on a mission to spoil me rotten. When it was noon, we went to have lunch at Steers and we talked and joked endlessly like old times. It was nice seeing him laughing again and often he could tap me on the shoulder to emphasize a point or to attract my attention!

How I wanted this moment to last forever. After eating we were on our way back, he asked me if I wanted to go to his place and I happily agreed. I

was so excited and had to tell myself to take it one step at a time to avoid further pain. The house was in a mess and I got down to cleaning from top to bottom like a dutiful wife as he watched cartoons with Amanda. I enjoyed every bit of it. His brother was at work and that left the two of us oops I forgot the three of us. When I was done cleaning I found them asleep. My heart melted at such a loving sight. I wiped tears from my eyes. I was grateful to God for giving me this baby. I realized that God was using her for us to bond again but I felt sad because I knew he would be going back any time and I intended to enjoy every bit of the moment at his side as best as I could. He had taken pictures of Amanda and framed them. This was to cherish for a life time. Thoughts of Cindy threatened to crowd and darken my mind but I quickly cast them away. Amanda woke up and started crying. She was hungry. I breastfed her then changed her nappy. Ben stood behind me and hugged me. He told me how much he missed me. Now this was going too fast. Where was he driving to? I wasn't sure if this was for real or he wanted to take me for a ride, again. I closed my eyes and let my mind absorb the words like a wet sponge but still more couldn't fathom it.

"I know I might have messed up big time but you are one girl I will never forget in my life" my eyes were fixed on Amanda and I was playing with her tiny fingers pretending not to be hearing him.

"Please Wangu say something. I am dying inside can't you see. I don't know what came over me that I had to hurt you the precious mother of my baby." I wasn't prepared for this. Nobody told me the complicated dictionary of love but now things were getting twisted and I felt trapped. Tears welled up in my eyes and run down my cheeks. The memories came hurricaning back. The pain, the fear, the betrayal and the blunt rejection. This was the man I fall in love with. Who was so kind it hurt, who promised me the moon and could have bought me the whole world if he could. Who had proved against the odds that he was ready to marry me even when it felt like I was a nobody. My Ben who made me smile and told me it was going to be alright when the sun set and darkness came tumbling in. who loved me beyond the limitations of words. He took Amanda from my arms, laid her on the sofa and gathered me in his big and comforting arms. What had gone wrong and what did I do to offend

him so much that he had to evict me from his heart without a second thought? He wiped my tears and gave me a long lingering kiss. I had almost forgotten how nice and sweet it felt but here I was reviving those precious memories. He looked in my eyes as if asking for my permission to go ahead but I quickly buried my face in the crook of his arms, breathing in his familiar scent.

“I want you back sweetheart” that sent me toppling over on the surf board of emotions!

## EPIOSODE 18

Love is supposed to be an eye opener. If you run blindly into it, you end up hitting blank walls because you can't see or understand a thing until you learn to open your eyes, trace your way back to the door and get out as fast as you can. You may have scars yes but they are there to show the battles that God has fought and won for you. If for once you can have your spiritual eyes opened, you will know and understand the depth of God's love on His children.

I had so many questions doing a complicated dance in my mind. Was this for real? If yes, what had made him realize his mistakes as suddenly as this? The Ben I knew now was different from the one I used to know. Now he was unpredictable, most of the times I didn't know what he had hidden up his sleeves. Wanted me back? On what grounds? Did it mean he was done with Cindy or I was to play the side chick? I didn't have the guts to spit it out because I knew his foul moods more than anyone else and I didn't want to spoil this magical moment. I wanted to get him off my back with no offense. I had not yet forgiven myself for getting involved with him in the first place. If at all we were to get back together, I wanted to trust myself before plunging in this deep love ocean again.  
Mphechepeche mwa njobvu sapitamo kawiri (once beaten twice shy).

I looked in his eyes to see any trace of lies in them. Eyes are the doors to the soul and men are not good at lying if you look at them deep in the eyes. When they stammer and look away quickly, that's a lie for you to catch. He wanted to look composed but I knew he wasn't comfortable. Men hate to be caught off guard or look less in control.

"No I will not take you back" I had to stand my ground if I was to win this battle of the mind.

"You can't shut me out, I'm back now and I'm here to stay in your heart. Please My Own." When he called me that I knew he meant serious business. My name Wangu is a Tonga language which means "mine". I knew he was lying even though he wanted to promise me heaven.

"Please Ben I don't trust you anymore. Give me some time so that I most of all learn to trust myself. I know I should do this at my own risk to avoid the blame game. Who knows what you will do again."

"I won't do anything to hurt you again, just give me a second chance." I looked at him and seemed to drown in the endless pool of his eyes. I felt weak at my knees and my heart somersaulted as if some strings were being pulled. He took me back in his hands and held me so tightly. I didn't know what I had got myself into but it was fine if it felt so good. I was tired of the heartaches, the harsh words and all the pains for once I wanted a peace of mind. He took a bundle of some neatly stacked notes of money and gave it to me.

"Take this money, find a nice house and move out. I don't want to be coming home and find my two beautiful women suffocating in the hands of strangers." This was just too good to be true. I was afraid to take the money; I thought he was testing me. He said when Amanda is older it's when he will take us to Karonga to see where he lived. If this was a dream, I wished to forever be a dreamer because it was better than the harsh tags of reality. I needed a break.

Right there and then I gave myself to him. I was so tensed up and didn't know if he would still find me attractive, but he seemed not to mind. He made me calm and at ease, making me feel like I was the only woman in the whole world.

He drove me back home; once or twice I caught myself drifting into a fantasy world. It was night and Amanda was asleep. The moment I arrived, Norah came to help me offload the things from the car and we bid Ben goodbye. We entered our bedroom and she cornered me for details. "What is this look you have painted on your face like you have just taken a walk among the heavenly stars?" my face was beaming with joy and disbelief. This Cinderella fairytale sort of thing was too much for me to handle. I explained everything to her and she told me to open my eyes and see that I had walked in a trap that Ben had in a sinister way set up for me to fall inside. I had acted like I was his puppet and gave him an exceptional show. I showed her the money and told her to help me look for a nice house.

"Don't say I didn't warn you. This guy is fake and you are helping him prove it." I took it that she was now jealousy of my luck now that he was back in my life. Did it please her to see me being worried every sun rise and set? I told her to stop talking about my man in such a way after all wasn't she the one who wanted me to abort? Am sure that could have made her happier. I had already made up my mind about giving him another big chance, I only told her so that as a friend she should just know and not poke her nose where I didn't need it.

"You will cry Wangu and it will be very soon. I will be there to see whether you will think the sun still rise out of his miserable behind." She stormed out of the room and for days she couldn't talk to me, there was a cliff between us. She still adored and played with Amanda while ignoring me. Few days later, I told Norah's mum of my plans to move out and she was against the idea from the word go. She didn't want to hear that I was back with Ben the same monster who had made me cry not long ago. She said if he was serious with me this time, he should take his people and pay my bride price because the way I was skyrocketing things, she was seeing me bearing him another baby. Honestly I didn't like it, out of respect I told her that I would talk to him about the bride price. It was all lies, I didn't even know the future of this relationship yet I chose to walk blindly back into it. Unbeknownst to me, I was in for a major disaster like the sinking of the titanic. She was like a mother to me and meant well, I didn't know how I was ever going to repay her for

her kindness. She was family but this was my life and I led it the way I wanted.

Two months later, I found a nice house two bed roomed. There was another house attached to it and my neighbor was a bubbly woman with four kids, we clicked immediately. The house was in Area 22 and it wasn't far from Area 36. Sometimes I would walk to Norah's salon with Amanda strapped on my back, singing all the way. Motherhood suited me best and I was determined to take care of my baby and gave her all the time in the world. Ben would come every weekend and to be on the safe side I went for an injection (depo) as a way of avoiding birth control, I didn't want any unwanted baby this time. From the start it made me sick, I started being nauseous and dizzy. For the next three months I menstruated for a week, twice in every month. It was horrible and I decided not to go for it again. The name of Cindy was a taboo amidst us, if at all I wanted to ask about her, he could give me an intimidating look that made me shut my mouth. When I told him the issue of the bride price he shouted at me as if I told him to murder his mother.

“The problem with you is that you let yourself go too much. I want to take things step by step and by now you should know that I hate to be pushed.” He said that flatly. I quickly apologized. Amanda turned a year and we organized a birthday party. She was a clever and active kid who liked playing with her toys. Already she was talking and calling me by my first name. No mama for her! I was now looking better because I lost so much weight during my pregnancy. People struggle to shed off post pregnancy weight but I longed to gain so much. Ben suggested that Amanda start going to baby care so that I should go back to school. I didn't know if this time he would honor his promise but I was ready to dive for it. He said I shouldn't do journalism again but rather change to studying marketing. To those of you who had started marketing with board is Chartered Institute of Marketing, you will agree with me that it's not a course for the faint hearted. It needs hard work and commitment. I was determined to prove to myself that I still had the mark of excellence.



It wasn't easy to balance between work and taking care of a year old baby. I had to wake up at the crack of dawn, wash nappies, breakfast and lunch and get ourselves ready for school. I would first leave her at 8:00am and proceed to school then take her back at 5:00pm. Sometimes I would walk when I didn't have money for transport because Ben said he would only give me school fees and I had to provide my own transport. When back I would wash the nappies again and prepare supper then retire for bed.

I was one of the best students in my class and mostly came out first at end of semester examinations. Six months later I had to write board examinations. I was so busy during that time I had to ask Norah to come and stay with me so that she should help me with Amanda.

One thing I noted was I started having different and strange sleeping pattern three weeks before my examinations. I would go to sleep at 6:00 pm in the evening and never stir until the following morning at 7:00 am where I would feel sleepy as if I stayed up the whole night. Setting an alarm never worked because I couldn't wake up. It was so difficult and I was running out of time to finish my assessing the Marketing Environment project. I didn't eat any food except have plain tea and toasted bread. At the sight of any food, my stomach would act up and I would go to throw up. I had a serious attack of malaria and recovered a week before my examinations. I was so lazy and too tired to hold a book, my eyes would be painful and I would fall asleep while studying. I didn't know how to control my own body and do what I wanted. The examinations were like a Greek puzzle to me. It felt like the syllabus had been invented from another planet. I felt helpless and only prayed for a miracle if I was to pass them. What I know is that the Holy Spirit reminds us of what we studied not just mere guess work.

That month my period never came. I felt trapped and was afraid if it was the effects of the depo injection I had five months ago or if I was carrying Ben's baby, again?????

## EPISODE 19

Sometimes we act as if we are used to have pain. Love is a good thing and moves mountains but if we keep making excuses for these men even if they hurt us, uhhm then we will never know the good side of it. That's why we endlessly chant the love is blind song. Experience should be there to shape up for the better. No way can a clay pot keep coming out the same way even after you destroyed it to re-mould. The bottom line is, one should know when to let go.

Perhaps if I had accepted my fate humbly and let Ben go, then I wouldn't have been carrying hot bricks on my back. I believe in love and so does every woman out there but it shouldn't be a factor for us to fall victims now and then. The river of love is never smooth, there are rocks, bends, waterfalls and even diversions but the beauty and freedom comes along with it. My heart was burning and I was sick. I was so pale and frail and always in bed. Thanks to Norah for always sticking around when she had her business to attend to. I went to the hospital and my horror story was confirmed, I was pregnant. Norah gave me that "I told you so" look and at that moment I envied the biblical Korah, Dathan and Abilam who got swallowed by the ground with all their belongings.

I couldn't afford another baby when my relationship with the father left a lot to be desired. I didn't tell him until he came to see me. He was shocked by my appearance and because I was slim, the pregnancy bulge had already started showing when I put on a tight fitting blouse. When he touched me, he sensed it.

"Are you pregnant?" I just nodded, waiting for the outburst that was likely to follow. I couldn't say a word because I didn't know what else to do. Amanda was a year and six months old and quite healthy, didn't see any problem with keeping the second one but at nineteen? "You can't keep the baby, Amanda is still young" no way was I going to go through the process of fighting people off with negative

thoughts to harm the baby growing inside me. He accepted Amanda and didn't want any harm to come to her why couldn't he accept this baby too????

my heart was in tremor and I could read between the line that he didn't want anything to do with this pregnancy. I was torn between fearing God so that one day I should be rewarded of my righteousness and pleasing a fellow man so that I should rot and burn in hell. he had already left before and it couldn't have been new to leave now. I could survive like before. I had bruises and scratches but with the passage of time I would learn live with them.

" I am not getting rid of this baby" I spoke holding my belly protectively. I put my foot down and it was written all over his face that it made him scared. he was a sort of man who didn't take no for an answer.

" I make decisions in this relationship you should always remember that in your thick head " he was shouting and my neighbor was overhearing us taking from the way it suddenly went quite from her ever noisy kids.

"you can start by strangling Amanda with your bare hands since this baby to me is the same way like her " I had been stupid and foolish but these contraceptive methods were complicated to me,I thought another method could further give me troubles. as for condoms uhm Ben refused to use them because he said they irritated him. most of the times I got worried that if he slept with girls like Cindy how safe was I ? I didn't know how many partners these two had.I was caught in a cobweb of risky sexual infections. I never had enough guts to confront him.

he cleared his throat. "its clear that you already made up your mind and I can't force you to do what you don't want." he was fuming with anger but I wasn't waved.

"you can't trap me by breeding babies with me. I wash my hands off this .go to the hospital when you are sane" he threw money on the table and started walking out. I run right behind him

" take your cursed money and burn in hell" I had equal anger in me and no longer afraid of him. he drove off,leaving dust flying all over.

I went to my bedroom locked myself up,cried my heart out. this time I knew he had gone for good.

the first few months I had trouble with Amanda. she used to cry saying she wants her dad even in the middle of the night. my pride was too much for me to sink low and call him again. it was time to part ways once and for all. I would tell her that her dad would come the following day.

one day I received a friend request from a strange man. I went through his profile and found out that he was from Mzimba Malawi but resided in Cape town South Africa . I added him as a friend. immediately he sent me a message but I never replied. Everyday he would send messages three times as if it was a dosage of medicine. I never replied. one day he sent me a message at midnight just to say hie. I was so irritated I told him to leave me alone. you will agree with me that sometimes those simple 'hies' flooding your inboxes become irritating. you wonder if the senders have better things to do or they spend their time always on FB. the following weeks we started chatting and I found out that he knew me through Emmah. he was nice and pleasant, his name was Edward. I could see the way his conversation flowed that it was just a matter of time before he prophesied his love to me and he did kkkkkkkk I told him that I wasn't ready for love. its a well known trick on social media. if a stranger is after you, just know love is on the way. I had a peace of mind and didn't want any man spoiling it.

Norah told me that I needed spiritual healing. she said she would take me to her prophet. I don't know why people want to always inquire from prophets when things go wrong. you just know that before they knew God they were frequent visitors of witchdoctors' shrines. people run around looking for miracles when if they had choosen to seek the face of God and His kingdom first, all those miracles will follow them.

we went there and the place was flooded with many women than men. sometimes I wonder if women have more problems than men.

the praise team led us into worship songs. if there is a time I enjoy most it's this time when I have to tell God who He is. uprifi Him and give Him the honor and glory that He deserves. each one of us has a reason to be thankful to God no matter the load on our shoulders.

it was time for the prophet to come to the pulpit and prophesy. the moment he appeared my heart skipped a bit. I saw the beard, that long and mouth covering beard. there was no way in this world that I would have ever missed that face which sometimes haunted me in my sleep and I woke up wondering what would have happened if he had succeeded....

## EPISODE 20

The type of games some people try to play with God will surely earn them a special VIP hot spot in hell. If you lie to your fellow man, you might say itâ€™s alright and I will try to explain it but itâ€™s a grave mistake to lie to God, He will expose you because there is nothing hidden from his sight. A lie is like bush fire, it spread up so fast you never know what has hit you until you will need another fib to cover the last one but you will always be on the safe side if you tell the truth. The circle continues.

This man had wanted me to pay with sex when he had offered me a lift. Here he was parading like the anointed one of God. Heavens know what else he used to do behind the peopleâ€™s backs. I am sure pretty sure women fall prey to his tricks and antics. This other time I watched a video clip circulating on the social media. A pastor was praying for a barren woman for God to open her womb. He took anointing water and started touching her in places that left you wondering if he was indeed under the influence of the Holy Ghost. Eti mpaka kumupisa mu blouse (to the extent of dipping his hands inside her blouse). Wonders shall never cease.

I got hold of Amandaâ€™s hand and whispered to Norah that I was out of there and stormed my way out. She followed me, obviously puzzled at my sudden change of mind. Outside I explained to her about the Prophet being the man who wanted to force his way into my pants that night she came to pick me with her neighbor. She said she didnâ€™t see a reason why we were still standing at this church. We left and she vowed to never

set her feet there again. I received a call from Edward. He used to call me but it was rare, mostly we chatted on face book. He sounded urgent. "Wangu please can you do me a favor?" I told him that I first needed to know what sort of favor before jumping into agreement. He said his Aunt who was in Mchinji, needed money to travel to Kamuzu Central Hospital in Lilongwe to undergo a surgery. He needed Five Thousand Kwacha. I told him that I didn't have that much money. He was on the verge of tears because I was his only hope. It could have taken a long time to send it from there. I didn't know the type of job he worked in South Africa and I didn't know him long enough to take that risk. What if he just wanted to con me? I didn't own a loan shark and I wasn't a shylock. I felt sympathetic and told him that I could borrow him three thousand kwacha, he promised to pay it back in two weeks time. He messaged me his Aunt's address so that I sent it through the post office since it was in the rural areas. I sent the money the following day.

I was undergoing the 3rd month of my pregnancy. Amanda seemed to sense stiff competition with her unborn sibling. It was like I had stopped giving her the attention she craved. I was too tired to play with her and seemed to sleep most of the times and sometimes I didn't tuck her in bed or read her a bed time story like I used to because I would retire to bed early. Emma had given birth to a baby boy. She got engaged to a man fit to be her grandfather and started living with him. Aahh she just wanted to get out of her parents' house because the gossip and humiliation was just too much. The man, who had impregnated her and got beaten by her father, was rescued by the police and rushed to the hospital. He never showed up again. Some lessons in life are learnt the hard way.

I went to do some grocery shopping at U-Save in town. I left Amanda at home with Norah. It was hard to continue carrying her on my back with another load on my tummy. I bought laundry soap and packets of sugar. I paid and went out. Somebody called me from inside beckoned me to stop and I did. It was Peter my childhood friend from my village. I was happy and surprised to see him. You know during those childhood games where we played house. Peter and I always played mum and dad and others

would divide themselves who to play the children, the thief, the hyena or the dog \*chuckles\* mostly the one who played dog or hyena was the kid who had mucus drilling from his nose and never seemed to blow it enough. Nobody wanted him close, in case he wiped it on your hand or cloth. He was looking GOOD and his perfume told me a lot about him, not the cheap ones that break you sinuses. A guy's perfumes always say volumes about him. Ladies take note. We don't want men who smell like they have just escaped from a goat kraal. He offered to take me to grab something to eat and we went to Gazebo at Bwalo La njobvu right there in town. I ordered chips and chicken my favorite and he had a beef burger with a cold drink. We talked about the village and some of our peers who had split between Tanzania and South Africa to seek greener pastures. The villages being along the lake, made people prefer fishing to going to school earning fast money. When he asked me if I was married pointing at my bulge. I told him to tell me about himself first because mine was a story long enough to write a novel. Falling pregnant twice for a man who seemed more or less like a distant memory, wasn't a bragging matter. I was the only left to clean the mess after he had done it and went away scot free. It's not easy to walk with a visible sign that you had sex, even your parents know what you have been doing lol. Don't start thinking that I told him that.

He said after he had finished his secondary school, he was selected to University of Malawi, The Chancellor College and studied Bachelors of Arts majoring in Literature. I couldn't hide my envy because that had been my option B if I failed to make it in Mass Communication. He was now working with one of the prominent NGOs. I broke down and told him about most part of my life omitting the sad ones. I convinced him that the father of my children was a nice man, responsible and all. You never know what will happen if you tell every Jim and Jack all your troubles and drama, you might scoop an Oscar in the latest village gossip. I didn't want that unnecessary limelight. We exchanged numbers and he said he might visit during one of his free weekends.

Later that night he called to find out if I arrived home safely. There goes a gentleman. He ended the conversation with "good night gorgeous."

And hung up. That completely took me unawares. Immediately I sat upright, looked at the phone as if it might give me further answers. I didn't want men on my tail as if I was a dog with rabies. I had to take it easy and roll the ball in my court at a comfortable pace nevertheless I went to sleep with a glow on my face. Two weeks elapsed; Edward didn't say a word about my money even though we continued talking every day. When I asked him, he said he didn't have it presently but will give it to me when he came back to Malawi. That wasn't the agreement. Was he trying to play smart with me? If he was used to steal from people in that manner then he was in for the biggest shock of his life. It wasn't much but my money is my money and needed to be paid back at all cost. I didn't own a charity organization. Besides I never liked him, he kind of forced himself on me. He had a wife and two children waiting for him at his home village in Mzimba but here he was trying to score one with me. He even talked about having a kid with me and name him Ulunji. Did I look like a baby making machine? I don't know what this tendency with men is. When they see you having a kid, they think you can also have their kids. Seriously????

Yeah! I missed Ben so much and still looked forward to that day he might pop back from wherever he had disappeared to but I didn't want to bruise my self esteem by getting tempted to call him. That was a no go zone. The man could talk as if he had vulgar language dictionary tucked under his tongue. I had been his constant victim and didn't want to fall on that unfortunate path again. As promised, Peter honored his words by coming to visit. He bought Amanda puffs. That put him in the good books of the little lady. I thought she missed her dad so much; she had to find a replacement until he came back. It was evident on her bubbly face. We laughed so much; this guy could make a good comedian. When it was time to leave, Amanda cried so much I felt embarrassed. When I came back from escorting him, Norah did not waste time to attack me. No wonder she had been drooling over his every word and stared at him as if she was a bear hungering over a honey pot. "Wow what a fine man. Give me his number; we can make a nice pair. Why didn't you bring him all along?"



“Forget it hun that man deserves to be in a stable relationship with a sane girl. Sometimes you can be a real animal and I fear for him.” I answered her while disappearing into my room. There was no way I would let Peter fall under Norah’s spell. Not when I was alive. Yes she was my friend but sometimes she had a lousy way of handling men. She always wanted a man to do as she saw fit but how could a man be himself if he was under petticoat government yet he had not even put a ring on her finger. Men run for their dear lives because she was a control freak. While I was confined in the comfort of my bed, my phone rang. Caller ID: Ben!!!!

With trembling hands I pressed the ok button.

“How are you doing?” he asked in that familiar deep voice that had made me fall for him with his sweet nothings. My lips curled into a smile. “I am great and you?” I answered back dying to detect any straying and about to fly emotions. There was none.

“Well I just called to know how you are doing. It seems you are remarkably well. Say hie to Amanda. Bye.” Just like that he was gone. This man was full of surprises. Sometimes I was forced to think that he suffered some kind of mental diseases, if not then he was prone to suffer it at some stage of his life. What kind of person does that? He was so casual about it as if I was a distant aunt he had long forgotten and it had just skipped his mind to call her, out of respect for fear of what she would say at the next family gathering.

It was a Saturday, Peter called to say he was coming over, he had missed Amanda. You are to be alert. Some men aren’t loyal, they will know your kid loves them and will use that to get deep into you. Every time he came around and asked about Ben, I always told him that he had gone to such such a meeting outside town. He always bought it. He even asked about his photo to get a glimpse of how he looked. I was so shocked to realize that I didn’t have a single photo of him. I had burnt them all in my fit of anger. I went to make popcorn. I didn’t know why I got nervous every time he said he was coming. I wanted to put everything in

order. I scolded myself for acting like a teenager on a first date. He knocked on the door and I ushered him inside. He always had a ready smile plastered on his face, it made me warm inside. It was just the two of us. Norah had taken Amanda to see her mum and were staying for the weekend. He walked straight to where I sat and I told him to take the other seat. He refused saying he wanted to seat close to me. I took my pillow and slept down on the mat, he followed me. It turned into a sweet game where he imitated me. We engaged into a cushion fight, we were laughing so hard like a bunch of kids. When I was exhausted, we sat down on the mat and had some tea while watching a movie. He took the pillow, put it on his lap and told me to sleep on it. He continued cracking my ribs with his endless jokes. His hands were now smothering the straying strands of hair from my face. It felt so nice.

Suddenly with a single knock, before i even had the time to answer it the door opened "I had the shock of my life"

## Episode 21

you will never be brave if you don't get hurt, you will never learn if you don't make mistakes, you will never be successful if you don't encounter failure.

who it was, if not the mighty and high Ben himself. nxaa I didn't know what sort of explanation I had to give him to convince him that it wasn't what he thought it was. but did I owe him that much considering the fact that I was just a passing breeze in his life and he never cared.

"is this what you do in my absence?" it hit me hard that he had to find us in that awkward yet innocent position. I didn't do anything with Peter not even kissing him yet here he was acting as if we have been caught pants down. I just stared at him, praying that his demons wouldn't get the better of him.

"it's not what you think. Peter here was just trying to be..."

" shut up you cheap wh\*\*\*" as far as I was concerned, I didn't deserve the leash of his tongue. he was acting as if he was holy yet his heart was burdened with too many unruly actions. I don't understand why men expect us to bury the hatchet and put not a memorial tombstone on it yet if its the other way round, you are assured of an unpleasant show of their beastly side. I owed him nothing so he had to stop acting like he owned my head.

" I must apologize sir for the act you just saw. me and your wife are just friends " poor Peter. he was unsuccessfully trying to stir himself out of this mess.

" she is not my wife and will never be. yes am sure you are just friends sharing a bed " that was a blow to my face. I know I had lied to Peter but I intended to tell him the whole truth in my own good time. Ben had just ruined it and blew off my cover. whatever will Peter think of me from now onwards was equal to a series of wrong turn movie.

"don't think if I hopped in bed with you,I can do it with every Jim and Jack. besides can I ask what happened between you and Cindy your obvious bed mate?" I regretted it the moment it came out of my mouth. it earned me a slap. it was the first time he had laid his hand on me and I didn't wish a repeat of that performance. Peter stood up and walked over to him. I know he wasn't much of a fighter and this came as a surprise.

" you can beat your fellow men to pulp I don't give a damn but you only expose your cowardice if you lay a hand on a woman particularly this woman. I don't care who you think you are but if you repeat this at any time of my breath, I will make sure I have you locked up and throw the keys at the bottom of the sea" you can imagine the pride that swelled inside my chest. Ben needed someone who could stand up to him. my Knight in shining armour yooh :) .before Ben had time to recover from the shock and shame, Peter went out with his message successfully delivered and gave me the 'you-owe-me-an-explanation' look . I knew now I had been left to fight the rest of this battle and in the history of it,I never won. I sat down and listened to him lashing out how he struggled to put food on my table and a roof over my head yet I was still an ungrateful illiterate pig. he said this time he was going for good because he was tired of my

promiscuity. koma how many times had he seen me in the company of men? he said he had heard enough of my town mongering with men and parading Amanda along. he said if I wanted that life I had to go alone and not sleep with men in the presence of his daughter, he didn't care if I slept with the whole town. where was his jealousy driving to? I would swear this man could follow me right to my grave if I wasn't careful I don't that way I would rest in perfect peace. it was like he had a chain around my neck and drag me like his prisoner. you can let someone throw many stones at you before you start picking them all up and use them to build a wall to keep that person out of your life. how I wish I had the audacity to keep him at bay once and for all. I didn't have words for this educated savage who claimed to be full of knowledge and wisdom yet he was acting like a fool. you can take James from the village but you can't take the village out of James. a fool is a fool whether literate or illiterate. but what good is education if you can't apply it to your everyday life?

all I was left with was to forgive myself for allowing him to hurt me.

" I came to give you your examination results. " that brought me back to reality. I took the sealed envelope from him.I was grateful he didn't open it beforehand. I tore the envelope with shaking hands and my eyes landed on the familiar stamp of The Chartered Institute of Marketing.

"read it loud, I want to hear it too." And I began.

"Dear Miss Wangu Banda. This is to inform you that..."

ohhh Nooo!!

I felt like a hammer had hit my heart, making it heavy and weary I couldn't breathe. My life had become a series of failures; it was like nothing couldn't work. I was in a relationship with a man who thought little of me. The best word could be that he was using me and loving every minute of it. I had just failed my exams, the only ticket to flee from his slavery. I knew why I failed. The time exams were approaching I was so sick I failed to do last minute touches. The time I was writing them, I wasn't any better. I failed all the subjects and that was unlike me. I was a straight A student yet I had goofed in the last minute. Don't judge me, people have failed exams before and will continue failing but what becomes worse is when you fail and you refuse to stand up and fight

again with another attempt. I was heartbroken and felt numb all over. I stood up and went to lock myself in my room leaving him as dejected as I was. I had failed myself. I cried until I fall asleep. A tap on the door woke me. I quickly looked at the clock, it was 2: AM.

“What do you want?” locking myself meant I didn’t want to talk to him. I didn’t want to go through the torture of facing him let alone be in the same room with him. He didn’t say anything since the previous evening. I didn’t want another disgracing lecture. I refused to open the door. When I woke up around 9, I found him watching a movie and he had made breakfast. Ohm that was a changed new version of him. I almost reminded him that he had forgotten to throw tantrums. I had fatigue from lack of enough sleep and I didn’t feel like eating so I made myself a cup of tea and went back to bed, leaving the door open. Around midday, he came and shook me awake. I looked at him quizzically. What now?

“Have this money. I am going back to Karonga. I will be back to see Amanda.” Then he left. A sea of guilt washed over me so suddenly I started crying again. I had thrown his kindness into his face and wasted his money by failure. I wish I had been strong enough to cope with the pressures and strains pregnancy in the first trimester but my body couldn’t hold things together. If I could I would have gone back to that time and reverse my ill timed pregnancy. I really needed some comfort

A week later Peter called. I thought that was the last I had heard from him bearing in mind that we didn’t have a pleasant parting. He said he had missed me so much and had been so busy with work that he didn’t even have time for himself. I had a lump in my throat. He promised to make it up to me by coming that evening. He said this time he was coming heavily loaded with ammunition for the get-rid-of-Ben-campaign. It felt like ages since I last had a rid cracking laugh. Amanda knew that it was Peter and she insisted to talking to him. I gave her the phone and she told him to buy chocolate for her because I refused giving her excuses about her teeth becoming bad. I heaved a sigh of relief when he hanged up without bringing that previous issue but when he came that evening, he

asked me for the whole truth behind that horrifying tale of my life with a man whose middle name was the devil himself. This time, I held nothing back. If we were to remain friends, I intended to restart on a fresh slate. I told him how cruel Ben had been to me and of course the good things he had done as well. Nothing could have healed that pain except the passage of time. He put his arms around me in comfort. A part of me wished I had known him earlier than Ben, who knows maybe the kids could have been his. After I had quieted, he said

“Can you please forget about him? Like completely cut ties with him. I know it’s too early to say this but I have always loved you from way back when we were kids. It doesn’t matter what you have passed through but I am here to love you with all your imperfections. It’s good now that I have known who you have turned out to be over the years we were apart, but I also have my own baggage and trust me I am not as perfect as I seem to look.” I looked in his eyes. I wasn’t ready to love and trust again, it was too fast too soon. I didn’t want another whirlwind to come into my life, giving me false hopes and promises of a lasting love, only to disappear the same way it came. My heart had walls now, built so high and daring no heart break could penetrate through.

“I am sorry, but I am not ready for any of this. Give me time to think about it.” I didn’t trust my heart with a fellow human being no matter how nice he seemed. You don’t become a dare devil in matters of the heart when you had gone to hell and back. You start looking for an Eden so that your heart should have a taste of how a portion of paradise feels like.

“I am giving you all the time in the world princess as long as you give me a chance to show you how much I love you. Please forget about Ben. That man can dig you a grave and bury you while you are still alive. I don’t want to lose you.” I mumbled a prayer for God to lead me in this valley of indecisiveness because this time I didn’t want to walk down in it alone. I slept in his arms that night and my baby kicked furiously. I am sure it was in excitement at the new found happiness. No more stress and depression. That night I had a dream that made me be assured that Peter was the one. I fall into an empty well and nobody could

hear me calling out for help. I stayed there for what seemed like eternity, crying, hopeless and helpless until I heard Peter calling me. I continued shouting his name on top of my voice until he looked down and saw me. I don't know how, but he had a rope which he lowered it and told me to hold on with all my remaining strength. With a few stumbles and enough bruises, he managed to pull me out. I woke up with a smile on my face and when I opened my eyes, he was there staring back at me.

“Good morning gorgeous.” He kissed my forehead. I was so overwhelmed with emotions. I had always wanted a friend in the man I would fall in love with. It hadn't been the case with Ben but I knew I had one in Peter. He was already a friend and made me feel at ease. I had told him everything about my life but he didn't for a single moment try to judge me. Don't be quick in judging others, you never know the type of battles they had fought and overcame in their lives.

On that day I gave him my heart to him and he promised to be a perfect gentlemen. It was nice just lying there in his arms and let time pass by. Amanda woke up from her room and joined us. He was happy to be in bed with his two beautiful girls. It was a sight worthy to be treasured for a life time. I have never known such profound joy and fulfillment and I owed it all to God for being there to mend my heart after it was torn into shreds.

Most of the times, he used to come to sleep over and he brought most of his things. The further Ben stayed from us, the better it was for us to have a good time together. I never had anything to worry with this guy; he was as transparent as a glass. I would go through his phone and never found anything amiss. I had his face book account password and his ATM card PIN. We went shopping for the baby together but I refused to go for scanning to see its sex. By and By the memory of her dad was being erased from her memory and she knew only Peter as her dad and I was shocked when she started calling her that. Some kids aah they have minds of their own. Children are the most inquisitive of creatures, they ask questions of what is never there and will ensure the answer you give them now will be the one you will always give them. He introduced me to his elder brother and we clicked immediately. His wife Jennifer was such a gem. I was

immediately accepted into the family and it always felt like I had always known these people. They had four kids. Three boys and a very cute girl who was of Amanda's age. The pieces of the puzzle of my heart were slowly falling into place.

Laurent Mphatso (which meant gift) came into this world on a June afternoon. What an appearance he decided to make on such a cold day. This little guy was a mirror version of me and I was so happy. He was going to break many hearts ;)

My heart was torn between whether or not to call Ben and tell him about his son, I knew his number by heart. You will be surprised how many numbers girls memorize in their lives. If I told him, it meant I was going to make my baby part of his miserable and troublesome life again. If I didn't, it meant he was to have Peter's surname and have a father in every sense of the word. But a part of me longed for my baby to have a chance to know his biological father no matter how much of a jerk he was. When I was still in the hospital, Emmah came to see me. She brought a wedding invitation card of Ben and Cindy. I didn't even bulge with emotions. If at all my heart was burning, I didn't twitch. This girl was cruel, she chose an awkward time to send my emotions flying and I wasn't ready to give her the satisfaction. I was happy with Peter and nothing was going to ruin it. Norah knew how I was on the verge of anger and she tried to laugh it off as a very bad joke. She said maybe they deserved each other with the sort of madness that each of them had equally stored up their sleeves. She wondered what sort of marriage it was going to be. I didn't care if they strangled each other.

When I was discharged from the hospital, Peter had packed all our belongings and we were relocating to Area 25. That dusty place. If it was meant to be a surprise, sure I wasn't too happy about it. He could have asked for my advice first before he bundled us up to an unfamiliar place. To say the truth I never liked the area but I was too tired to argue. He had already hired some people to help and they had already moved most of the things. He hired a taxi to take us to our new house. Wow I was over the moon at the sight of it. Amidst the dusty area, lay a fenced three bed



roomed and self contained house. It was dreams come true. I loved this surprise. He had already prepared the bedroom for my arrival and there was the baby's sleeping cot. Amanda exclaimed in delight and he took her hand for a tour around the house. Sometimes our light goes out, but is blown again into instant flame by an encounter with another human being.

I retired to bed with one thing in mind, Ben wouldn't be able to locate us and I would make sure I swore both Norah and Emma to secrecy!

## EPISODE 22

In this life there are two things involved. Its either you make a good decision or a bad decision but be assured that in every one of your actions, there are aftermath. You cannot burn out a candle and never expect the remains of wax. You cannot be for God and devil at the same time. There is nothing like neutral. Lukewarm Christians are the ones who bring destruction and confusion among other people who are not saved yet because they fail to bring out the true reflection of Christ.

My life was now on a perfect highway. For now I could relax and praise God for His abundant blessings. It's not like I didn't have problems, but they were not something I couldn't fix. I was a stay home mum not out of choice but because Peter had insisted on it. He said I should have enough time to take care of the children. He didn't want a stranger doing that, I guess the issue of the Ugandan maid made him not to want any maid close to the children. I would sit home all day and pamper my pumpkins. Laurent was such an adorable baby. Amanda would cry and refuse to go to school without him. I would drop her at school with a promise that when she comes back she will have him to herself. I had just put him to bed and I was watching TV while waiting for time to go pick Amanda from school. My phone rung, it was Norah.

“Hey girlfriend”

“Hie babes”

“Where are you?”

“I am home where else would I be you fool?”

“Yeah luv, we are now living posh and like royalty”

“God knows I deserve it.” I replied with a smile on my face.

“I am right at the gate; I have a big surprise for you.” She knew I hated surprises, they gave me the creeps.

“I hope I won’t kill you afterwards. Come inside the door is open.”

A few minutes later, Norah came in with a strange man. I hugged her and offered them to sit down. I looked at him and felt like I had seen him somewhere before. Maybe he is one of her ex boyfriends. I thought.

“This is my best friend, sweet pie Wangu you have heard so much about.” I smiled shyly because the stranger couldn’t take his eyes off me. I felt uneasy.

“Wangu this is Edward.” I couldn’t believe she could bring him to my house. I didn’t want any contradictions. If Peter could walk in that very minute, he couldn’t take lightly to the presence of a man. Experience had taught me that much. This guy was trouble with a capital T. I stood up.

“Why did you bring him here?” I asked seething with anger. They were surprised with the overreaction. What a nerve he had. It was clear; he never got the message that I didn’t want anything to do with him. The problem with some men is that if you tolerate their advances, they mistake it for an encouragement to go further.

“Give me back my money and get out of my house.” I didn’t want to take any silly chances. I didn’t care what sort of friendship Norah had with him; it was out of bounds to get him here.

“What’s the rush? I told you that I want to marry you, is that the way to treat your future husband?” if someone could say he was on drugs, I couldn’t agree less. If he was expecting me to jump up and touch the moon at the marriage proposal given to me on a silver platter, I was sorry to disappoint him. I had a man who I was happy with and I

wasn't a desperado. This guy had drama written on his forehead. Be careful people face book has deceived and driven many to destruction. The way his photos looked, wasn't the same way he looked in person. Thank God I didn't fall for him. Whatever favor I had done him, was merely out of goodwill, no strings attached. Did he think I had packed my heart and put it in his boots to toss?

It was evident he was a chain smoker, coupled with cheap liquor sachets; one could smell it right to the depths of the ocean. I don't know when was the last time water had the honor of visiting his body. Don't be mean to the poor guy Wangu. He needs your assistance. He wants money to go back to Mzimba, he was deported from South Africa. I didn't believe these people thought I owned a charity organization. He had not yet paid the previous amount he borrowed, now he wanted some more. I wasn't interested in making a further victim of these useless games. He would not get any penny from me. If she was truly his friend, let her help him, it wasn't as if she couldn't afford it. They left. He grumpy and shoulders weighed down by his backpack, her seething with anger for my lack of sympathy. I didn't care.

Later that evening when Peter came home. He had about him an air of weariness. I could see that something was weighing his heart down. I run him a hot bath and we had supper. Amanda's endless questions were met with a mere yes or no or a nod. I had to tell her to eat her food in silence because dad wasn't feeling well. It was unusual. I asked him to tell me what was wrong when I joined him in bed. He woke up and got some papers from his briefcase. I read it in shock. It was his transfer letter to Nkhotakota in Six months time. 129 kilometers away from Lilongwe. I was short of words, he was supposed to go and sort out accommodation issues before he could take us along and I had no idea how long it would take. I was so in love with the house we were currently moving, the idea of moving any time soon didn't go well with me. I tried to ask him if he could refuse, he said transfer came along with a change in package and it was for our own good. Sleep wasn't easy to come by; I took myself a pen and paper to write to my parents. Hearing Peter talk more about his

relatives, roused nostalgia in me. I told my mum how much I missed her and longed to see the whole family again. I was seriously thinking about visiting home.

A week later I got a reply from my mum. She told me that my father was suffering from stroke for quite some time now. I could imagine that my family was now struck by acute poverty with nobody to fend for them. I felt so guilty of not being there for my mum when she needed me most. If I go, how would I explain the existence of the children they had never known? I know my mother would understand at last but won't I send my father to the grave? I knew our relationship wasn't one I would boast of but he was still my father when all is said and done. I had to be there maybe they were his last days. I told Peter of my plans and he said when am ready to go I should let him know. I was ready to go in two weeks time. I suffered a long lecture from Peter to take good care of the children, he didn't want stories. He said I had to refrain from giving them to suspicious looking people who would bewitch them. I told him that he had survived from that very same village and why the children would not survived it too.

“I was so bony as a kid the witches probably thought my meat wouldn't be tasty.” I laughed so hard at his reply.

It's better to travel to Nkhatabay these days because you can board a bus straight without going to sleep at Dwambazi and board another bus the following morning. These days modes of transportation are plenty. I set off at six o'clock in the morning and when the time was striking past four, I arrived at Sanga Stage and hired two bicycles popularly known as sacramenta to take me to the village. One to carry me and my babies, the other to carry my bags. It wasn't an easy ride especially for the circlers who found it difficult to wade through the sea of lake shore sand. They left us a few houses away from my place and we walked the rest of the way with Laurent strapped on my back, bags on my head and held Amanda's hand. When I was approaching I couldn't miss the sound of voices wailing, then I saw people gathered on the verandah and some men sat under a mango tree wearing somber faces, I didn't recognize

anyone. My heart skipped a bit because all the signs befitting a funeral gathering were evident.

It left me with one question, was it my father? If yes then I was too late  
â€¦

## EPISODE 23

The illusions of death are too complex and confusing. The thought of someone stopping to breath and succumbing to oblivion is unnerving. Lots of questions without answers cloud the mind. What does being dead feels like? Does the dead person feel lonely or sad, does he hear the cries of his beloved ones yet he can do nothing about it? We all want to go to heaven but doing it through dying is spine chilling, most of us would prefer doing it the Elijah way, being carried to heaven on chariots of fire. After a person has suffered a long time from a disease that seem to chow at the body, leaving it weak to fight, we often say eeh akapume (he should go and rest). How do we know that where he is going he will rest if his name isnâ€™t written in the book of life? Come what may, we need to prepare ourselves so that when death comes knocking on our souls be it through sickness or sudden death, we should welcome it with a smile on our face. To some death is an escape from lifeâ€™s suffering and pain, a simple step to the next eternal life, to others itâ€™s a sentence to eternal torment and burning.

I know I had not been so close to my family especially my father. He was a difficult man to please and mostly it was like I used to enjoy causing him heartaches so that I knew how he would react. You may call it a temperamental test. What moved our relationship for the worse was his sending me away from home to live with strangers where I ended up getting raped. When that man tore at my inner fresh forcibly, I hated my father with intensity and thought he had been paid for it because one way

or the other he contributed to it. It was hard to believe that I had sprung from his loins. Seeing him lying peacefully in the coffin, made me think that if I could whisper his name once more, he could open his eyes yet it was never to be. He was gone for good. If I had come earlier, I could have seen him again for just one more time. It broke my heart to think that there would be no apologizing moments or never to hear his loud voice scolding me not to mention of not seeing him going to the lake carrying his fishing gear. I didn't have a remarkable and memorable childhood because I was busy bringing him mischief and he was trying to bring sense into my upbringing. Unlike my mum who most of the times let me have my way, my father was a disciple of the devil himself. To him every mistake called for a beating to cast out demons of stubbornness as he used to put it.

My mum cried loudly when she saw me. In my culture we cry in tales. Mostly we cry as if we are talking to the deceased or we say the last act we last did together. Among the Tonga crying is closely associated with singing but the tone is what brings out the sorrow. I was lost of words to walk on his funeral as if I was a stranger. I saw both my father and mother's relatives and they all looked surprised to see me at last and the children I came with. My mum lamented how in the time of his illness, he had longed to see me again and apologies for not loving me enough like he did with his other children but I was not there to hear his last words. Amanda clutched at my wrapper fiercely at such a commotion while Laurent started crying at the noise and discomfort. He loved serenity and this was a disruption on his personality. Later when things had quieted down a bit, my mum asked to see me in the other room. She picked up Amanda who started crying in protest. The room was the one I used to share with my sister when I was a kid.

“Wangu don't tell me these kids are yours”

“Sure Ma they are mine” I replied looking down.

“How come you didn't tell me anything? Oh child you can kill a person. You went through all this without breathing a word to your mama?” tears started welling in my eyes, the guilt was too much. I told

her about Ben causing me hell and promised to tell her later about Peter. "Am sorry Ma everything happened too fast and I suffered so much; I didn't know what to do. I didn't want burdening you with the consequences of my sins." She looked up at me with her trusting eyes which I had all along refused to be a part of.

"You could have come home to me dear. You know I could have got your back"

"I thought of coming home but there was Dad to deal with. I was terrified he could disown me for bringing him shame. I was buying time to prepare myself to face him, but I didn't know I would find him gone." My father couldn't take lightly to some things even when it wasn't complicated. He treated everything with utmost seriousness.

"What will I ever do without him Wangu. God knows this man was the centerfold of my life. I am lost; so lost I wish I can die as well. He suffered so much, I could see him slipping away every single day it's only that I failed to convince myself that he was going." Knowing my mother, he had been the reason he had held on for so long.

"Don't worry, God will see you through. I am sorry for not being there for you, for him and for everyone else" We hugged each other and let the tears flow freely.

The following day we buried my father at the family grave yard. Seeing him buried six feet underground made me realize how short life is. If you have close and beloved people in your life, it's never too late to show them how much they mean to you and tell them so. It hurts that in some of our African culture it's almost a taboo to tell your father that you love him. Don't you see and envy how people of other cultures through to each other the three lettered word? If you have issues with your family resolve those now before you will never be able to do it again. Saying sorry when someone is gone, will never change anything rather it will leave you guilt filled and burdened. I prayed for the peaceful resting of his soul, I hoped he had made peace with God before his final departure. He was gone but the message preached at the funeral was a foot print on my soul. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to The Father except through Him (John 14:6).

The following morning, the whole place was buzzing with activities. Endless family meetings and so many dishes to wash. My young sister Beatrice escorted me to the lake to wash nappies and clothes. It was good to see the glistening lake again. No wonder it's called the lake of stars. I could see the rays of the sun glistening upon the lake in breath taking shimmers. I breathed in the fresh air, marveled at the random and peaceful manner in which the waves hit the shore. The sun was rising and the orange big ball seemed not to be in a hurry to heat up the shore. The look on my children's faces confirmed that they loved it as I did. I looked at a group of naked children running and playing and made me remember my childhood. This place was my safe haven where I would run free and be myself without a care in the world, that's the beauty of being a child.

I realized that along the lake, the network would pick up. I called Peter and he was so happy to hear from me and so devastated about my father's death. I was at war with Amanda to give her the phone but I told her later because we had pressing issues to discuss. He couldn't wait to have us back; home wasn't the same without us. It made me wish I could fly and be in his arms that very moment; I missed my man so much it hurt. Before hanging up he reminded me not to forget the letter to his mother, which I was reluctant to deliver and wished I could give someone to deliver. It was in Laurent's nappy bag so after washing, I asked my sister to escort me to Peter's place to see his mum.

“Sis are you sure you are ready for this?” Beatrice asked.

“What do you mean? It's just a letter and I don't know what is inside that can make me fear her like boko Haram.” She laughed. I could remember so little about the voluptuous woman so I didn't know what my sister meant. We went there in silence. I had to know what she thought of me because it was just a matter of time before I would become her daughter in-law.

The house was big and looked modern unlike most of the other houses. We found Peter's sister Lusungu on the verandah chatting with her



two friends, am sure it was about boys taking from the way they got startled upon our intrusion. She went inside and came out with a mat which she put under a tree for us to sit down. Later her mother came. She really looked surprised to see me and remarked how I had grown and she further wondered when Beatrice told her that the children were mine as well.

I gave her the letter and died a thousand deaths at the countless times her face contorted. After reading she tore the letter in pieces to my horror while she was shouting "this cannot happen as long as I am alive. I would rather die than live to see that disgraceful thing taking place." She looked like a dragon about to spit fire. I was worried and afraid to think that I had been the angel of doom, to bring her the news that pushed her at the end of her tethers.

"I want you to stay away from my son once and for all." I don't know where that was coming from but at least it could have been best if Peter had told me in advance.

"Have I done something wrong Mama?" I had the right to know. It wasn't like I was the only one sticking to him like a leech.

"You cannot expect my boy to feed your army which you bled with God-knows-who. Let him find a girl, a virgin to spend his life with not a lagging and wasted woman like you. What do you two know about love so that it should make him so blind and stupid?" I was lost of words, my heart started a race. Beatrice kept nudging me at the elbow, it was time to go but I couldn't go without a fight.

"I will not tell my people to meet yours as he has requested to discuss lobola. I can't watch his money going down the drain. Where were you when your fellow girls were saving their dignity?"

This was getting heated up and I couldn't further stay there. "thank you very much Ama, your message is loud and clear but don't you think Peter is man enough to know what he wants before you getting on his way? Good day" I didn't want to hear her insults, I could have said things I could regret. I left.

"My son will never marry you. Besides I have already eyed a potential

girl to suit his caliber. I don't want to be a grandma to some shenanigans. That hurt but I clenched my jaws and went back home. We got behind the house and started putting the clothes on drying lines. Beatrice gave me a look that said she had so much to talk about but I made myself look like I didn't want to hear whatever she wanted to say. It wasn't good adding salt to a wound that had healed, only to scathe it again and ooze fresh blood. We didn't grow up together so she didn't know me and I didn't know her as much. We were strangers bound by same blood. A girl few years older than Amanda came to tell me that my mother was calling me inside the house. I told Beatrice to finish putting the clothes on the drying line and watch Amanda while I went there. As I was approaching, I could hear raised voices.

“She can't disgrace my brother like that!” that must have been my father's younger brother.

“She is my child I will decide what to do!” it was my mum. My heart was beating so fast and my stomach knotted.

“Am sure you sent her to sleep with every Jim and Jack.” That was my usual loud mouthed aunt, my father's elder sister.

The arguments kept on and I was debating on whether to go inside or not. If yes, it would be like walking on a land mine. Didn't I have enough shouting for a single day? \*sigh\*

## Episode 24

every sacrifice has a price tag attached to it. there's no sacrifice that doesn't come with pain. I was yet to find out how far my mother was prepared to do for my sake. I stood there frozen to the ground, remorse washed over me. I had disgraced my family and now my mother was being insulted for my sins. I didn't have enough reasons to justify myself. I made a mistake in the past but I was ready to change for the better .

I walked inside to find my Aunt Nyabanda poking my mother.

"here comes mother of mothers ." I pretended to have not heard her for I knew trouble was brewing.

"sit down my child." my uncle spoke with a straight face totally ignoring her. I joined my mum and aunt on the mat.

"we called you today because you owe us an explanation.we want to know where you got these kids."

aunt Nyabanda interrupted saying "we want you to tel us the father of your bastards ."

there was no way I was washing my dirty linen in public,my aunt was nicknamed ZBS after zodiac broadcasting station for her ability to.spread news fast. my uncle told her to shut up. emotions were rumbling inside me but I kept a passive face.

"we want you to bring the man responsible here so that he pay damages." some cultures are just out of this world. while I had struggled to shed Ben off my back, these people were trying to put that iron back around my neck. he further said the children need to have a sense of belonging and the family didn't have room for more humiliation. my mum was quick to answer that they should leave me to decide what I wanted to do. Aunt nyabanda had a permanent scowl on her face, I knew it wasn't hiting home.

"she has had her way too long, now it's time to tell her what to George." my uncle was determined to give me hell.

"uncle with due respect I understand your good intentions but there's no way I am getting involved with Ben again. he is the one who left me in this situation and I will never have anything to do with him again." I made myself clear.

"you are my responsibility and I have to make things straight once and for all, for the good memory of my brother." he was talking as if he will make my father rise again to reward him . my mum was firing shots for me,she said she won't allow them to push me around. my uncle said he didn't ask for her opinion anyway and didn't expect her words to change anything. I declined to get in touch with Ben,memories of his torture were still fresh and I wasn't ready to sacrifice my happiness for the sake of their money thirst. they were being greedy by wanting to feast on my misfortune yet

getting damages wouldn't even make a difference in their poverty levels. if they were so desperate, they had to sell their own daughters. we went on arguing for hours until a boy came to tell my uncle that his presence was urgently required. he went. he was a lazy village bones who was too smart to do any farm work yet he needed to eat every single day. he was more or less like the chief's representative. while others were busy tilling the earth to feed their families. it was his two wives and six children who bore the burden of farming.

Aunt Nyabanda left with the excuse that she was going to prepare food for her husband. rumor had it that she snatched the man from another woman using muthi. the man had married six wives and divorced them all then married my aunt and had since lived with her for over twenty years. what did she have that the other women didn't? I never knew.

later that night my mum gave me the letter my father left for me. I flipped it open.

"my dear child Wangu

time and distance had the best of us by giving us a hard time. if I could I would have reversed the wheel of time and be hundred times over the father that I longed to be. I am sorry for not being there when the storm of life hit. I wasn't there to protect and initiate you into the life and future ahead. you became grown up too soon and it was too late for me to do anything about it. I could have done better by agreeing to take a right hand in your upbringing yet it turned out that I pushed my responsibility to somebody else.

I am sorry for everything. take care of yourself and always be there for your mother.

I love you my baby even though I had a lousy way of showing it.

Love- Dad "

I felt like I had opened a flood gate of tears. reality finally sunk in, my

father was gone forever and all along we had lived like strangers. I cried because he never lived to see his grandchildren. I looked at my mother and wished I had the capability enough to buy the world for her to wipe the tears and sadness from her face. to live to never know the prick of loss again. we hugged each other and cried until there were no more tears left.

my phone beeped. an sms came through.

"live my man alone you b\*\*\*\*\*"

what the hell??????

when emotions make the heart weary ,the soul weakens as well. that SMS made my emotions into a messy crumble.there was no way Cindy could have sent me that since we no longer had scores to settle.she won,she had Ben. I didn't have trust issues with Peter because he didn't have any girl besides me and I wasn't competing with anybody since he gave me no reasons to distrust him.

I tried calling the number but it went unanswered. I was sure whoever had sent that was sending it to a wrong number. I wasn't involved with any one's man,my conscious was as clean as a nun's knickers.

my mum asked if everything was okay and I assured her that nothing was amiss yet my face betrayed my emotions.

I went outside and retried calling ,it was unavailable. I was about to get inside when my phone rung.my lips curved into an infectious smile, it was Peter. the frown on my face completely disappeared.

"hey love"

"hey dear. did you go somewhere yesterday? " he sounded as if he had heard something about me but I hadn't told him of that day's incident with his mother.

"I was home the whole day.why do you ask hun?" hide and seek emotional games weren't my slice.

"are you sure about that?" I was taken about to the previous day yet I still more saw myself that i was saying the truth.

" if you are not sure you can ask Amanda, koma why are you asking? ." it was a completely new feeling not to be trusted.

"am asking Wangu because am at my wits end.I have had a very disturbing day.I received a call from a private number. a woman who introduced herself as Tamara.does this name ring a bell?"

I didn't know anybody by that name and why did she call on a private number?

"I don't know her" I answered in anticipation for more.

"she says she has enough proof to prove that you and Ben are still going out. she is or was the girlfriend until he confronted her about text messages he was communicating with you. " that accusation was hot and quick and if handled with baby hands could put me at risk of losing Peter. "babe you know perfectly well what I think of Ben now. heavens can bear me witness that I am done with him,I don't communicate with him and its true ." I don't know who the hell was trying to upset my apple cart. my hands were shaking in terror and rage at the intensity some people can go to damage others.

" the worse thing is that Ben has :followed you and you have been seen in eachothers company all over the village.he is there to pay your bride price.is it true that you are second timing me? " wooh that was a lie straight from the pits of hell.how do people stop minding their own businesses I will never understand. yet it was ironic how i had been told to do exactly that .somebody was taking his news broadcasting seriously.he.further said that she had lost her marriage because of Ben,her husband left her when he found out she was cheating and now that Ben didn't want to do anything with her any more,she wanted to ruin my relationship too since all Ben could talk about was his baby,to her it was enough reasons to conclude that we were still together. I was shocked to the core.

" babe please you know me better than everyone else. I was going to tell you about your mother and the meeting with my relatives." this call had just come too soon before I had a chance to tell him. I narrated the events of that day and when I told him about his mother, he roared like an angry lion.

"my mother cannot dictate my life for me.I am old enough to know what I

want. "I told him that I will never go there again until he sort it out. he didn't want to further put a strain on our relationship, he told me to go back the following morning, no excuses. he wanted me back home .I felt like he wanted me to run away from these issues and shut ourselves in our own world. my life was now full of the fear of Ben ruining my life at every opportunity he found. how can his girlfriend know so much about me without him telling her? some side chicks are really ambitious. did she thought he would promote her to a main when he ruined and messed her marriage? to him it was a game and he had played her so well she had lost miserably. how long did she think she was going to get the best of both worlds?that's dreaming colourlessly.if it was all about money, Eeeh she had sold her soul to the devil called Ben.if she was somebody else,she could have sought for my advice first because I knew both sides of Ben's coin. there were some home truths I wanted to tell Ben.

I went inside the house and informed my mum of Peter's decision for me to go back.she didn't take it lightly.

"your father hasn't even rotted in his grave and you are already abandoning me? " issues were weighing me down and my relationship was at steak. as much as I wanted to stay, my heart was throbbing for my man.

I packed all my things and was awake most of the night,watching out for the first streaks of dawn and woke up early enough to prepare a packed meal for amanda and we got on the first bus.when mum was escorting me she was quite all the way.I left my phone with her with a new simcard. I needed to be in touch always.

it was the longest drive ever.I was so excited because every passing minute brought me closer to my man. after 9 hours of traveling, we finally arrived in Lilongwe the dusty city. Peter waited for us at the bus depot and it was Amanda who first saw him.my heart melted with love when he embraced me so tightly I thought he would crush my bones.its true distance makes the heart grow fonder.

we went home and it felt heavenly to be back. even Laurent looked so happy to be back. we went for a bath, prepared supper and went to bed. I was so exhausted and too tired to talk about the pending issues ,i fed the

baby and fall asleep the moment my head hit the pillow. Peter was on night duty changing nappies and bottle feeding.

morning came,I woke up feeling so refreshed.I prepared breakfast and my man left for work.the moment he left, I called Ben on a landline. when he heard my voice, he knew it was me.I asked him if he knew Tamara and he said yes.I didn't waste time to tell him to tell her to leave me and mine alone. I didn't want him ruining my life and if he had issues, he had to sort them out without dragging me in it. he didn't know that I had a man and told me to apologize on his behalf. kkkkkkk talking about him learning to say the five lettered magic words. he started to ask about Amanda when Laurent picked up a perfect time to cry.

"what baby do you have?" he asked. I didn't think it was necessary yet I still told him.

"what???? you have a baby boy and yet you didn't tell me?" did this man think my medulla oburangata was defunct? he said he didn't want this baby yet here he was blowing trumpets.

"forget it man. this baby is no longer yours.he ceased to be that time you gave me money for abortion ." I said that then hunged up .certain paths were never designed to be passed twice. Ben-phobia was completely gone. I didn't tell Peter about that call for fear of further bruising his emotions.

a week later we were at home on a Sunday. I was cooking while Peter was helping Amanda learn to count numbers. we had returned from church few hours ago and lunch was almost ready. I was setting the table at the dining room when there was a knock on the door.

"can you see who is at the door sweetheart "Peter called for me.I put Laurent amidst the books,to the surprise of the two people who were totally engrossed in learning on my way to the door.

I flung it open and there stood the worst of my nightmares. my blood went cold...



## Episode 25

there was a storm raging inside my heart. I felt a numbness that paralyzed my senses causing a deficiency that filled me with dilemma. there was no way in my weirdest dream this was happening.

Peter's mum and his brother's wife, Joy were standing at the door with another strange woman . my heart beat a thousand times in those few minutes and my mouth wanted to spit out the words to wave them away and make them disappear yet I couldn't move.

"babe who is at the door? " I could hear Peter's voice at a distance because I was lost in a maze of thoughts.

"wangu?" Joy's voice brought me back to reality.

I plastered a fake smile on my face as I ushered them inside. my hands were shaking as if of their own accord and I knew I needed to be strong for myself if not for the survival of my love for Peter. this was the biggest test to prove how strong our love was for each other. this was a furnace of temptations and tribulations so that at the end it might be purified as gold. we greeted the visitors and Peter's mother was looking like a tired and puffing toad. her eyes were shooting daggers in my direction. I sat as close to Peter as I could, as if shielding myself from the incoming battle. Joy was trying hard not to be nervous. poor thing she loved me and didn't want me hurt.

Peter was surprised to see his mother because she didn't say anything about her visit but one thing I was sure of was that she didn't travel all the way from Nkhatabay for nothing.

she cleared her throat and started talking, " I didn't come here to waste your Precious time and mine but I came to bail my son out from Egypt because he has been blinded by unseen forces." her voice was so defined as in a practical speech. all along Peter looked unfazed yet my stomach felt like someone was tying knots.

" Wangu you are a disgrace to womanhood. a deadly snare to kill my only son but I will not sit down and see you doing that " she was seething with anger. please tell me people when did falling in love while you already have children turned out to be a crime? who said a man who don't have

kids shouldn't marry a woman who already has kids? I have seen many women getting married to men who have children the size of a football team yet nobody raises a finger in complaint yet you are assured of world war when its the other way round.

"mum you can't come to my house and insult my wife "

"she is not your wife! " she protested.

"in every word she is to me and I intend to make it official soon so you have to respect that" he had in him a twin tower to her anger too.

"I will not live to see that day" she stomped her foot.

"then so be it mum."

" My son I brought you a befitting bride here Masozi"

no way it can't reach this extent.I thought as I rose to leave the room.

Peter held my hand and told me not to go anywhere.

"make me happy this once. this girl is a virgin and will fill this house with as many children as you want." this woman didn't have conscious. tears started welling in my eyes but i blinked them back.

"that will not happen, its Wangu I love. if you want marry Masozi yourself if you so much wish her to be a part of your life, " I could see things slipping out of the way bit by bit.

" if I am the one who brought you into this world, you will do as I say. am leaving Masozi here and I want this thing here..."she paused and pointed at me "... out of this house soon before I go back ." she provoked the lion in him. he stood up with clenched fist. am sure if it was one of his friends, blood could have been flowing by then.

"if you were not my mother, I swear i could have thrown you out of my house." he looked like a bruised bull but provoked enough to kill.

"my dear let's go"she motioned to Joy and to Masozi she said"remember to do as I told you, I don't want any useless stories.give me results worthy of the lobola we paid your family ." with that she left leaving her behind. I could see that she was under her controlling thumb and paying lobola in our African context is marriage enough. I felt like I was watching one of the episodes in a Nigerian movie.

Peter put his head between his legs probably wondering how he hadnt known his mother's craziness until then. my head was swirling, I stood up to go and have a glass of water. the blurring was intense,I felt like I had

been drinking alcohol for days.the heavy head and the heavy heart which was too small to take sure breaking news. the next thing I remembered was Peter shouting my name and rushing to hold me when everything else seemed to crumble on my sight.

I woke up with the worst migraine I had never known while I tried to open my eyes. the strong and terrible smell of medicine made me realize that I was in the hospital.I looked at my side and gazed into the most beautiful brown eyes ever. they looked tired and sleepy but still made my heart sink. Peter was holding my hand.

"hey beautiful.am glad you are finally awoke.you gave me the fright of my life." I was happy because my man was with me throughout the way.I didn't deserve such a beautiful soul. the tears started,they run down my cheeks and he wiped them away.

"I am sorry love it had to be like this but trust this heart to lead and help us keep our promises.I love you with all that I am and I wont allow anything to come between us.just trust me like you always do." still holding my hand, he put it on his chest where his heart beat wildily .i know I wanted to trust him but I was scared of leaving my kids if something happened to me.the battle had just started and here I was already emotionally defeated.

"who is taking care of the children?" I asked.

" I called Joy to look after them when I was bringing you here after you fainted.Amanda was crying asking for you but later when I last talked to Joy she said she had fallen asleep."

thoughts of Masozi in my house made me uncomfortable, I didn't know what instructions she had under the monster in law. I was proud of my man for taking the bullets for me and holding things together but for how long. time became a luxury for me,the sooner I got to the bottom of this the better.

the doctor came and Peter went outside. the upper left side of my lip and the area around my eyebrows were swollen. the doctor said I had High blood pressure and if I was to frequently have them, I was at a high risk of having stroke. it freaked me out.

after two days when my condition stabilized, I was discharged. I didn't ask Peter about Masozi because she was the very monster eating my mind. how would we sleep under one roof and continue living our lives as if nothing was amiss? I had to start watching over my children like a hawk in case she would think of doing something evil. the sooner she had to be sent back home, the better for all of us.

when I arrived home, I was happy to be home and see my babies again. Laurent had started bottle feeding and was now used to it.

it felt strange to be in my own house and I didn't hide my distaste. the furniture had been rearranged in such a way that I felt like I had walked on a place that had just been raided. I asked Peter if he did it, to my horror he said it was Masozi .the moment we arrived she brought food on the table for me to eat and told Peter that she had run him a bath.I realised that this girl meant business and she would take over my ship while I was still alive. she told Amanda to go take her plate of food so that she help her to make sure she ate it all "you are not my mum, "Amanda replied.

"stay away from my kids you adversary of the devil and stop acting as if you own this place "I shouted at her.seriously I didn't expect things to be accelerating this far. she had outwitted my expectations. she didn't say anything but she had a strange smirk on her face.

"stop being dramatic honey she is just trying to help. " I thought my ears were playing hide and seek with me. this wasn't good.

did Peter just defend her? I knew deep down in my heart that she was trying to win him over. how far would she go? I was yet to find out...

## Episode 26

I was so angry i could feel the hair on my head standing on its end. I stood up and went to our bedroom banging the door so hard it shook. I sat on the bed thinking of what to do next. if I would keep quite and watch the whole thing pass as if I didn't give a care in the world, I would wake up to

find my man gone snatched right in front of my nose.the tears came violently. I was standing between the devil and the blue sea. you will agree with me that few people make the sacrifice of disobeying their parents for the sake of love. Abraham was ready to sacrifice his only son who came in his old age when all hope was lost.it was for the love of God.if it was nowadays some of us would have failed that test.

Peter came and sat beside me.I was avoiding his eye,but he managed to cap my face in his hands and wiped my tears with his fingers .

"sweetheart please let her go.am so afraid " I spoke after I calmed down.

"if I do that my mum will be very angry ,remember she said they paid her bride price ." I got to believe that I hooked myself mama's boy.

"let them keep the money but I don't want her anywhere near me.did u hear yourself defending her?"

"am sorry my love. I wasn't supposed to do that. I want to go and talk to mum about this issue so that she can take her back to the village. "

"no way.I want her to go tomorrow. I can't stand the sight of her "

"let's take this one step at a time to see what really went wrong "

"what went wrong? well your mother just purchased a bride for you. my God I just can't believe it" I was now pacing to and fro.

"can you please let me handle this? " I wasn't satisfied with his answer.

"while you are waiting. warn her to keep away from my kids or else I will show her the other side of me you have never seen." this girl had to go at all cost yet he was treating her like Santa. I left him there and went to the kitchen to prepare food. there was no way I could have put my life on the chopping board. Amanda followed me to the kitchen.

"mummy when is she going back? I hate her " I was saddened by her ability to detect trouble from afar. it didn't go well with her that she was brought there by the woman who shouted on top of her voice for all to hear. that day Amanda had clung to Peter in fright.

"she will go baby tomorrow. did she beat you? " I asked her picking her in my arms.

"no but she just shout at me especially yesterday when you and daddy were not around "

"where was Aunt Joy? "

"she was in your room putting Laurent to sleep. "

"don't worry sweetie Mum will make her go tomorrow "

"you promise for real?" I nodded and was determined to keep my promise otherwise I had to watch Masozi make a crumble of my world.

I finished cooking, we ate and went to bed. Peter refused to eat either of our food. that night we slept looking opposite sides. I stayed wide awake thinking long and hard about my plan and I worked it to perfection. I finally slept with a smile on my face alert to any sound of movement in case I was played a mouse and cat game.

early the next morning, I woke up to run Peter a bath and prepared him breakfast. by the time Masozi was waking up, he was on the table eating. I smiled having had beaten her to it. she looked disappointed and probably blamed herself for oversleeping. he finally left and I escorted him to the bus depot to catch a bus.

I returned and straight away went to the room where Masozi slept, took hold of her bags and threw them outside.

"you are leaving this house today " I shouted while dragging her outside.

"you can't chase me outside. this is not your house you fool "this girl sure had a nerve but she didn't know who she was dealing with.

"well then I will show you who the owner is" I was fuming.

"he didn't marry you. why are you sticking to him you leech. "

"he is mine and I won't share him with you " I managed to drag her outside and further took her out of the compound and locked the gate. I didn't want to wallow in misery. there was no way I was losing my man to her. if it was Peter's mum who gave her courage then she will face me. I didn't care anymore what she would do at that point. I carried my day like any normal day until evening. there was a loud banging on the gate. I thought it was Masozi but when I peeped it was Peter. I opened. he walked past me holding a distraught Masozi by the hand.

"I didn't know you were this heartless Wangu " why would he scorn me in her presence? there was dust in her hair, scratches on her face and part of her skirt was torn revealing her flesh. I didn't do all that to her I just pushed her outside. I thought she had clawed back to wherever hole she came from. she must have sat by the gate all day. I didn't answer Peter but

went ahead to the bedroom as he continued shouting at me for being unreasonable and inconsiderate. she was a good actress and would have scooped an Oscar.

I took out my travelling bag and started packing to his dismay.

"what do you think you are doing?" he asked me.

"I don't have the strength to compete with either you or her.its either she go or I go.make up your mind quickly " there was a weight in my words which over emphasized my seriousness. "no no no you are not going anywhere " he tried to take the bag from me but he was unsuccessful. he took out his phone and called his brother.

"please bro come to my place we need to talk " his brother answered him that he was out of town in Dowa and won't be back until the following day. I didn't care, this was his battle and he had to fight it.

my phone rung.it was my mother.

she was crying on the other end.

"Wangu the house has burnt down..." the rest of her words drowned down in sobs.

\*sigh\* I had to go back home no matter what ...

## Episode 27

my heart was bleeding for my mother. the pain of watching all your life possessions burn to ashes is not easy. in that house she had shared her whole life with a man who was now six feet under ground and everything that reminded her of their lives together was gone.

I finished packing while Peter watched me. there was nothing he could do except pray that his brother Mike should come in the morning and resolve the issue. he had the nerve to go against her unlike Peter who trembled at her sight. I always believe that if one is old enough to make his own decisions,nobody can rule his mind for him.a man should be man

enough to stand up for what his heart believes because if not handled carefully, it can be the end of him. I went to sleep earlier because I had a long journey to make. if Amanda was older I would have left her with Joy until I came back but the thought of Peter's mother near my angel was disheartening. I heard that she hadn't yet gone back to the village. its not easy traveling such a long distance with small children.

The following morning when it was 5:00 AM I was ready to hit the road and was waiting for Mike to come and take Masozi who was like a dark cloud hanging over our heads. all this time I kept quite and didn't speak a single word to Peter unless spoken to. I was so angry with him for failing to take care of his own mess. why didn't he just throw her out? some how I thought he was beginning to develop feelings for him.

8:00 Am Mike was nowhere to be seen. if I would be late to catch a bus that time, it meant I would be in Nkhatabay at midnight and that didn't go well with me. I called Peter to the bedroom.

"I have to go, time is running out" I told him.

"please babe just wait a little longer. am sure he is on his way." his nervousness was evident. I felt sorry for him.

"I can't wait longer than this, you are old enough to take care of yourself. please do me this favour of sending her away. I don't want to lose you. " I was trembling and on the verge of tears. this man loved me along with my imperfections and I wasn't ready to let him go. he was the reason I believed in love again. he proved to me that all men are not the same. now our love was undergoing the test of time and distance. I trusted him to come out clean without a dent.

he took me in his arms and kissed my lips so softly it felt like a breeze had passed.

my heart let out all the fears it had of losing him. he assured me that by the end of the very same day, Masozi would be gone at any cost.

I told him to keep in touch because I didn't want to die of long distance fever.

We left the house . when the time was 9:00 AM the bus started off and Peter waved until the bus was out of sight. goodbyes make me cry especially this time was the hardest when so much was happening. I



called my mum and told her that I was on my way so that she and others would wait for me at the bus stage. it wasn't safe travelling alone at night.

it was an unusually long journey.the children were asleep. I had taken a packed meal because it wasn't safe buying food along the way. my mother,my uncle and my favourite cousin Tony who was a son to Aunt Nyabanda,were waiting for me.Laurent strapped on my back,Amanda in my arms,the bus conductor helped taking out my bags. we left for home. my mother was putting up at my uncle's place until the house was rebuilt. he had been staying with his wife for more than twenty years. they didn't have a child together but he had four children born to different women. I didn't know how the poor woman managed to stick along that far. it was courage,if it was love then it had reached its expired date long ago.

I asked my mum about Beatrice, she said she had sustained injuries in the fire. I was horrified to learn that she had not been taken to the hospital. we arrived home. my uncle's wife NyaMwenda was a pleasant woman and so loving with children, too bad she didn't have any of her own.

when I saw Beatrice,there was a chill that run all over my body at the sight of her wound.her left arm had blisters the size of a foot ball.she was groaning in pain.I shouted at my uncle for not taking her to the hospital. he said he didn't have money to take her to Nkhatabay district hospital. the worse thing was the black stuff smeared on the wound. if the wounds would open, she was prone to having an infection. i doubted if he could watch his kid and fold his hands in that condition.I took one of the painkillers I normally kept. whoever had a hand in the fire, would have hell to pay.there was foul play because In the middle of the night the door had been broken and a paraffin Jerry can had been thrown inside. the grass thatched house had instantly caught fire .its a wonder my mum escaped the fire unharmed. Beatrice had been a heroine by rescuing my youngest brother who slept alone in his room.

I slept with a heavy heart.Peter had given me enough money to build her a new house.the following morning I gave my uncle money to take Beatrice to the hospital while i went with my mother to see the builder. I had to take care of my mum just like my late father asked me to.

my mum was undergoing trauma.she would breakdown and cry. I was glad I was there to pat her back and tell her that it was going to be okay. we came back with the builder so that he see the sight and start his work.

two policemen walked towards us accompanied by my young brother. "good day madam.am Constable Chipiri and this is my colleague Constable Yosefe".I offered them a seat under a mango tree.

" i am Wangu and this is my mother Mrs Mbewe.how may I help you officers" my patience was running out in anticipation.

" Mrs Mbewe you reported the issue of your house catching fire? " my mother simply nodded.

"we have arrested one of the boys and he revealed who sent him.we would like you to come with us to the station so that we tell you more information. "

what absolute luck. my heart was hammering in excitement...

## Episode 28

the law of nature is unique and sometimes complicated. if you plant a single seed, once it germinates,it can't live to bear a single fruit. there will be multiple of them.likewise when you do a single wrongful act,you will leap a hundred fold.

the boy in question was sixteen years old, a son to our neighbours.that was what hurt most. remember Viyegzo? it was her brother Jacob. I have known these people since I was young and my father used to be drinking partners with their father. its true, the people closer to us are the ones likely to betray us,they know our every step and every move.

when he saw us, he cast his face down in shame. I wanted to slap the hell out of him but my mother told me to be a good Christian and forgive. it wasn't easy. we found out that a baby to Jacob's sister about 6 years old while playing with his friends had told them how his Uncle and his friends

had torched down our house. he said it saved my mother right for refusing to give his grand Ma the salt she begged from her. an old man sitting close to them had overheard the conversation and had called the boy inside his house where he explained everything. he even said his Uncle kept a photo of me and my mother. the old man told him to go and take it and he did. the issue was instantly reported to the chief who wasted no time but reported it to Police with some members of community policing.

it was then that the Police came in the wee hours of dawn to nab Jacob. afraid of a prison sentence whilst young, he confessed that it was Peter's Mum who had sent him and two of his friends. they had been paid in advance Mk3,000 each through Peter's sister. was that how much my family was worth?

Jacob's mother was outside crying and begging my mother to drop the charges. he had dropped out of school in form one and had been loaming around the village God knows doing what. an idle mind is a devil's workshop for real.

my mind was running inside a whirlpool of questions. this woman hated me so much she wanted to kill my family and stage it as an accident. it struck my mind that she wanted me out of the picture to pave way for Masozi while I was busy sorting out the damage the fire had caused. I was right where she wanted me and I didn't know what was happening back at my house in Lilongwe. what if she had been the one deliberately delaying Mike from coming to sort the Masozi mess? did he really come to take her back? my mind couldn't get hold of everything. even if I ended up getting married to her son, there was no way we could click. not in this life maybe in the next. I wanted to call Peter but my mind run against it because the Police had already called the Police in Area 25 where I resided and gave them Mike's phone number to get handle the issue. if I had called Peter am sure he could have instantly shipped her to the moon. the way he worshipped the ground she walked on was a wonder. I don't think in his mind there was anything wrong she could do. it had always been my mother this my mother that as if I didn't have my own. there was no way I could have let her go Scott free. she had to pay for each one of her sins. the

hand of justice had to catch up with her. this was deeper than I thought. Peter was standing between locked horns of dilemma. if his Mother was caught, charged with arson and sentenced to prison there was no way he could stomach it that I could have done something to help her. if I could drop the charges against her, there was no way my family could have forgiven me for choosing a stranger over them.

I didn't know what to do ...

Life is like a mirror, it always reflects what harbors your mind through your actions. You may pretend for a while but not too long, eventually you get caught up in revealing your true colors.

Have you ever heard of conflict of interest? Right now I was wobbling in one and doing a lousy job of fighting it. We went home. Back at the police station I had let my mother do it in her own way. Besides I couldn't make a decision for her since she was the one who had lost everything. For once I saw her angry. Angry at a fellow ruthless woman who hated her daughter so much she wanted her family dead to hit her where it hurts. She told the Police Officers to do their job and not in any way be lenient in handling Peter's Mother. She said she was a woman who was a disgrace to womanhood and didn't have mercy for her fellow woman. When we were leaving, one officer called me aside and asked for 'ya fanta' (that's the term they use to ask for a bribe). I gave him MK1000 as for my phone number I told him there was no way he was going to get it. He looked at the green note you would swear it was his first time touching it in months.

We arrived home, Laurent was crying from the heat which was getting worse by the day and Amanda was complaining of hunger. I prepared food in no time and after she ate, she went to sleep immediately. My mother called me for a serious talk. She needed some explanation. I told her everything of what was happening especially the reason I thought why Peter's Mother was being that wicked. She said if at all I needed

strength, it was now to deal with the prospective Monster in Law without affecting my love with her son. The problem was that this was Africa where you don't get married only to the man but to the whole family. The way I have observed Peter's family, she is the final decision maker and her word calls for immediate action. It frightened me that she could be able to set all the other family members against me, dooming my future of being Peter's better half. This was what my mother told me, "this is a test that will determine how much Peter loves you. When he knows the extremes his mother has gone to destroy your relationship, she will put a strain on their bond and he won't look her in the same eyes he used to. He will back track and get out of her grip to make a decision as a man." I loved how this was turning out. I had reservations of calling Peter, but he will hate it to hear from someone else if the Police managed to arrest her. Immediately I beeped his number and he called back.

"Hey sweetheart" it was nice to hear his voice again, I needed him after all that happened.

"Hey love"

"Have you already started preparations for building the house?" I told him about the progress of the project and he was so sympathetic and sent his apologies to my mum for the belongings she lost in the fire. He said after the house was complete, he would buy furniture and other stuff.

"I wanted to tell you a very sensitive issue but promise me that you won't act out of emotions but before I say anything I want to know if Masozi is gone." I could take it from his silence that she was still there. This man was testing my patience.

"Peter I don't have the whole time in the world, answer my question!" I was now raising my voice and trying so hard to be calm.

"I am sorry babe" |i.. I interrupted him before he could finish.  
"You know that's not what we agreed. You spent the night with

her? Just the two of you in the house? Who do you take me for? A fool perhaps. Let me tell you something, if I ever get to know that you two did something stupid God help me because I will send you on the available bus to hell.â€

â€œDonâ€™t overreact my love; I will sort this out soon.â€ I was touched by the calmness in his voice but that didnâ€™t guarantee that he couldnâ€™t cheat on me.

â€œThat song has long outgrown my ears. I need action you understand. Meaningless tales have never been my favorite so spare me the crap. You people want to drive me crazy. Your mother is always ruining my happiness. Do you realize that she is the one who sent people to burn down my motherâ€™s house?â€ I was now losing it. That wasnâ€™t the way I had thought of going about the whole thing but the Masozi issue had somehow ticked my temper bomb off.

â€œWhat?â€ his voice could way be heard to the moon. I narrated the whole issue to him and believe me when I said he point blankly told me that there was no way his mother could do that. Not the woman who brought her into this world and single handedly raised her when his father had disappeared to God knows where, leaving six children behind and a crazy and angry controlling woman. Sometimes I understood her over protectiveness but it was high time she let the now grown up children breath.

When I told him that it was just a matter of time before the Police arrested her and brought her back to the village. He said there was no way he could allow that to happen.

â€œCriminals deserve to be in jail and thatâ€™s where she belongs.â€ I answered. I regretted saying it the very moment it came out of my life. The way he way defending her was irritating. I hated to think that if her plan had succeeded, I could have been crying for my mother now. I had just lost my father and in no time, my mother could have been gone too. No way.

“Oh you shouldn’t have said that. Unali ndani iwe (who were you) if not for me? That good for nothing man of yours could have sent you to an early grave but I rescued your sorry a\*\* and is this how you repay me?” my grandmother used to say an angry time is the moment of truth. You know what people think of you when you make them angry. I was shaking in anger and to avoid saying any more words that I would regret, I hung up the call. He tried calling again but I didn’t reply. A message came through.

“You are so ungrateful and inconsiderate. I know you hate my mother but don’t try to create such stories that if not handled carefully will be the end of us.” I didn’t like where that was going but you know what, the moment I looked at Amanda and Laurent oh how my heart ripped in a joyous jump, I told myself that I had so many reasons to be happy despite the storm happening in my life. joy is a net of love by which you can catch souls. A joyful heart is the inevitable result of a heart burning with love.

As if in herald of bad news, a week later Peter’s mother was arrested in Lilongwe and transferred to Nkhatabay Police Station. Peter trailed the Police Van all the way. I went there with my mum and all hell broke loose. I came face to face with Peter but it was evident he had made an enemy of me. Fine I wasn’t the one who bore him but if he truly loved me he had to weigh the story carefully and see that she had not been fair to my mother. He shouted at me for being the cause of everything. If I had listened to him and trusted him enough to handle the Masozi saga, things couldn’t have gone that far. His mother had been selfish and treated him like a baby. For crying out loud he was old enough to differentiate right from wrong. I was so disappointed in him when we had to create a verbal war outside the Police station until my mother held my hand and got me out of there. I didn’t care what would happen to us because I couldn’t take it to have a man who disrespected me in front of people, if he had wanted to vent out his anger I could have appreciated it the most if it was done in closed doors, away from prying eyes.

When we arrived home my mum understood that my relationship was going through a major crisis. I didn't know if it was because of the money to build her a house that would stop if I broke up with Peter or because she knew that I was happy with him. She told me to go to him and talk about our differences, she even said we could forgive and forget about what his mother did and moved ahead. Drop the charges and let her go as free as a bird. Would I be able to live with her again as if nothing happened? If yes then it would be dangerous living since I would keep on looking over my shoulder to see what next she would do. There was no way I was going to him first, I had my pride. If he still wanted me he would come for me. In those two weeks he stayed in the village, he never bothered to come and see me yet he knew where I was. When we had gone to the Police station to drop the charges, the Police said they couldn't leave such a cruel and dangerous woman off the leash because we were not the ones who had ordered and initiated for her arrest. The Police had an obligation to protect citizens of the country regardless of the relationship between them. They would not leave her until she stood trial and be proven guilty or innocent. We talked that she should get out on bail but they said such an action would interfere in gathering evidence. At last after a month they got her out on bail on condition that she had to report to Police every day until her case was taken to court and she wasn't allowed to get out of Nkhatabay without permission from the Police. What happened to keeping people in custody for more than forty eight hours without trial being considered to be against the law?

The house was almost completed with the window frames fitted and the grass roof thatched. What remained were glasses and the floor. I didn't want it to have a clay floor like most houses. Peter came at last. The way Amanda run to him was a wonder, even Laurent sensed his presence and appreciated it by giggling. I thought I was dreaming but it was true. After the greetings, my mother excused us and told me that she was going to the kitchen to prepare food for the visitor. After five minutes of awkward silence, he asked how the kids were doing and how much he missed us.



Did it have to take him that long to realize it? I looked at him and all the love I had for him came rushing out as the anger melted but I wasn't going to make it easy for him so I looked away as he continued plucking out words from the love dictionary of his heart. Was he so strong or it was the weakness in me? I wanted to laugh at how much he was trying to make me understand how sorry he was. It takes a strong man to apologize but an even stronger one to forgive. One forgives to the degree one loves. Yes I loved this man to the degree he could never know more than the depth below and more than the depth above. I apologized as well for all the words I said to him in anger when we could have settled our differences like civilized people.

My mother prepared lunch and we ate while laughing and joking like old times. He said we had to prepare getting back home in three days time since the house was almost in completion, I couldn't have been any happier. I was glad our period of misunderstanding was over. Just as thoughts of the plague Masozi started gnawing at the back of my mind, before I could ask what happened to her, there was a message on Peter's phone that made his face so pale after reading it one could swear he had seen a ghost.

"Can I read the message dear? Who is it? You seem to be pretty shaken?" I asked while getting closer. He was a bit hesitant but I was sure he quickly thought that if he refused, it could make me suspicious so he handed me the phone.

"I want to tell you that I have missed my period and don't try to deny it because you are the only man I have known. It was once but that's all that it takes"

Ohh noo!!!!

Episode 29

Have you ever wondered what would have happened if Adam had called out to God after sinning in the garden of Eden? He waited until God sought him to realize that he had sinned. Am sure God would have forgiven him if he had taken responsibility over his sin. I feel that somehow he was blaming God for giving him Eve who later gave him the forbidden fruit. The power to rebuke sin was right in his hands yet he chose to do otherwise. Nxaa always shifting blame to others.

I looked at Peter in the eye and realised that I felt pity and sorrow for him. man's fall is his own doing.

"please babe let me explain" what sort of explanation would have justified such action? I left him for such a short time, a month and some few weeks yet he had already gotten inside her skirts and worse made her pregnant . his faithfulness was questionable. I didn't have time to listen to his unreasonable reasons. I didn't feel pain, not yet. I walked away to my room and left him with his head between his arms.

I knelt down in a prayer.

"oh God I know I am not worthy to stand before your presence because of my inequities. if it pleased you for me to have no man who will stick with me till the end, so be it. help me to have the strength to pass through these trying moments. please keep me safe for the sake of my dearest kids who are the best gift that you gave me. I will always be thankful to you. In the name of Jesus Christ The Son of The Most High God I pray. "

I got out to face him again. there was no way I could have given the devil the satisfaction of seeing my pain.

"you know what. get out of my house and never ever come back for me again. go ahead and marry Masozi am sure your mother will be happy. "

"don't talk like that my love. you know its you I want. what happened was a mistake I never intended. please I beg you forgive me" he was down on his knees. how I wish he was doing that but with a different purpose in proposal not forgiveness. tears were streaming down my eyes. I had given up, I didn't have any strength to fight for love anymore. he lamented about how after the night we argued about his mother he had lost his mind and complete sense of reason. Masozi came to our bedroom after

hearing him shouting. she comforted him and one thing lead to another. he had wanted a way to release and spend his frustrations so he claimed . "am sorry Peter but I am not travelling that path again " I showed him the door and he walked to it defeated, dejected and lost. it wasn't my intention to let him go but sometimes the best thing in this life is to learn when to let go of somethings. for once I patted myself of the back for making a decision for the love of myself. I didn't want to be caught in the cobweb of STIs. her being a virgin wasn't a guarantee that he should sleep with her without protection. what a virgin without dignity who wouldn't wait till the wedding night to offer herself to her husband. oh I closed my eyes in pain watching all the dreams we had, the joy, the high expectations and the future down the drain. Amanda came and hugged me. still little but she understood the pain Mum was going through.

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a week later Peter went back to Lilongwe. the news of Masozi's pregnancy spread across the village like a bolt of lightning. one could hear the high ulutations and songs of Peter's mother to the depth of the ocean . it was rumoured that she had already named the baby after her father if he would be a boy and her own name if it would be a girl.poor baby to be named after the monster. I hoped she wouldn't live to inherit her madness as well. she boasted about the success of her mission to get me out of the way.you can imagine the type of shame that I had to pass through. when I walked I could feel people's penetrating stares mocking me.whenever people laughed I automatically thought they were laughing at me.I became socially isolated and withdrawn. God bless my mother for being such a comfort. the reason I still stayed in the village was because I needed to think what I had to do with my life.this man dependency syndrome was running out of luck.I needed to stand on my two feet and take responsibility. I started helping my mother at the field. being closer to my mum made me realise how much I had wasted by being away. one day I received a call from Norah. She asked if I had forever disappeared because she missed me big time. I told her that I would be there in just a matter of time. it was a lie but knowing Norah she could be a pain.

"girl you have to come,am getting married in four months time " to say I was shocked is an understatement but I was taken overboard. she was the last person to think of settling down unless there was a catch to it.

"who is the lucky guy or should u say the unlucky guy?" i was intrigued.

"don't worry it's not one of your cousins. the guy is a Mocambican who works for Mota Engil. you know they are constructing roads in the country. if I say he is loaded I mean I am swimming in money ". you see that was Norah for you in black and white. something pricked my mind.

"did you tell him about your HIV status?" she went quite for a while in deep thoughts. am sorry I didn't tell you. Norah contracted the virus from her neighbours husband. remember that man who came with Norah to pick me up the time the fake Pastor wanted to rape me? he used to give her so much money she opened a Salon. some people can kill,neighbors are supposed to be one's source of comfort not sorrow and grief . since then,she had been out for vengeance. it was evident this guy was new in town and didn't know anything.

"well I don't think that is necessary, who knows if he is the same" you could swear her heart was at ease.I never gave up in lecturing her about living positively. she was young and had her whole life before her there was no need to ruin it.I was the only one who knew and she kept the secret even from her mother as sweet as she was. I was the only one who panicked at any slight sign of sickness...

True to my words, I went to Lilongwe three weeks before Norah's wedding. She was my best friend and I had to be there for her. She had been by my side through thick and thin and there was no way I couldn't have done the same for her, with her share of madness I still loved her. I left Amanda in the care of my mum and promised to be back right after the wedding. Amanda cried so much it broke my heart, she said she wanted to go and see her dad, in this case Peter. I hoped with time or perhaps with age she was going to realize that we were no longer together.

Norah's mum was so happy to see me but she couldn't stop

pointing out to my evident second mistake, Laurent. She said she had known that Ben would just pretend to be there for me then after getting me pregnant again, dump me. I didn't want this cruel reminder of my past. It was over and I had healed, there was no way I could allow the scars to be scathed in such a heartless manner. She didn't have to lecture me about morals. The reason that Norah was getting married still without a child didn't mean that she didn't have skeletons in the closet. She once confided in me that she had aborted the pregnancy of her neighbor's husband. Having two children to show for my wayward ways didn't mean that I was the mother of sinners. For the rest of my stay I avoided a one on one conversation with her.

The wedding was a marvel. I was so happy for her. The groom's family members were not present save for a few friends and colleagues, I doubted if they even knew of his union in a foreign land. After a long time, it was nice seeing Emmah again. I was terrified how much she had grown in such a short time. I started to believe that if you get to a partner way too old for you, your young blood mix with his and you end up looking as aged as him lol. Her daughter was grown and she was expecting a second child. She had a new resentment towards me which I failed to register the source. Some people tend to push their bitterness towards others, was it my fault that she ended up with the Mbuya? For all my problems, I never tried to put the blame on others even when those so called best friends of mine, somehow pushed me into sleeping with Ben in the first place. If they had left me to do it my own way maybe none of all the problems in my life could have happened.

I couldn't say I wasn't tempted to go and see Peter, but I schooled my heart to save its last dignity. Seeing him again may raise some sleeping pain. I might even be tempted into taking him back but to think of all the baggage was impossible. I decided to call Joy so that we meet in town. I didn't want to go to her house to cause unnecessary tongue wagging. It hurt to think that we could have been sisters in marriage but it was never to be. I wanted to feed my curiosity with the latest gossip in Peter's life. We met over a snack opposite crossroads at Café Delight next to Seven

Eleven Supermarket. We ordered our food and started talking. I was horrified to learn that since Peter came back from Nkhatabay he had drowned into some sort of depression. He had been aggressive and kept to himself. Masozi was indeed pregnant but the few months she had lived in Lilongwe proved to be some sort of a character exposure to her true self. They always fought because she was always in the company of township women gabbling his money and property away. Just the previous week, Peter had paid off a debt amounting to MK100,000 when the debtors threatened to take the refrigerator away. She was never home to clean up and mostly when Peter came back from work he didn't find her. When his mother was told of this, she said he was only trying to find an excuse to get rid of her and there was no way she could allow that with her grandchild on the way. Nxaa that left him with no choice but to dine and wine with the devil himself. I thought Masozi was doing that deliberately because she knew she had the monster's backup. Women never ever try to put your sons into such compromising situation you might end up losing them. His transfer was just two months away. The following month he was supposed to go to Nkhotakota and arrange prior accommodation. Masozi had said there was no way she was leaving his sight; she would follow him to the ends of the world. Recently Peter had started going to church, which was the happiest news I had heard in a long time. I knew it was only in the presence of God where he could find the comfort he clamored when no man could afford it. A simple mistake had robbed us of our future together. If only I could reverse the hand of time to that day I had left him alone with Masozi am sure she had looked at him like a cat before a bowl of milk. Joy told me that if at all there was something that I could do to help him that was the moment. She said the way she knew us our love had survived a lot and would I give up then? I told her that my hands were tied; I couldn't do anything about it unless he had to help himself. My past was dark enough to further darken it.

We finished eating, just as we were about to leave, I heard a voice behind me "you look more beautiful than I can remember." I turned around and oh my goodness; there stood Peter with his brother Mike. My heart hammered inside my chest threatening to explode, not trusting myself to

speak, I clenched my jaw and looked at Joy for an explanation. The look on her face gave her away that she had been the master minder of the whole thing.

“Honey why don’t we excuse these two so that they can talk?” Mike said to Joy.

“Sure love” they held hands, Mike gave Peter a reassuring pat and they left. Nothing could have prepared me for this, I was cornered and all my worst fears of knowing if I still felt anything for him were exposed, I was in love as ever as I had been. It was a battle I tell you, my mind telling my heart to stand up and go while my heart was telling me to hear the poor guy out for old time’s sake. My mind won.

“I don’t have anything to discuss with you” I spoke while standing up to go. He didn’t believe I just did that. I avoided looking in his eyes, afraid I would fall in them all over again.

“Wangu you can run but I know you still love me. I miss us babe,” I stopped frozen in my tracks as he continued, “I miss waking up to your beautiful face every morning. I miss seeing you smile and knowing am the reason behind it. I miss the kids oh God, I miss your silly jokes and I miss holding and dancing with you every Saturday evening when the kids are tucked in bed, just the two of us in the garden under the stars and the moon sometimes rain would trek down our smiling faces. I don’t mind doing that again with you.” That did it, I stormed out as fast as I could and went to board the first minibus I found at the bus stage. I was trembling inside and tears were coming fast and furiously, I didn’t mind wiping them away in full view of everyone. I had to let them out; the emotions had been bottled down for some time. Peter should have changed his name to Romeo.

I arrived at Norah’s mothers place, I tried calling Norah but the number couldn’t get through so I sent a text telling her that I would be leaving the following morning. She was still at honeymoon; I didn’t want to give her wrong reasons to feel like something had happened but

knowing her, she could smell it a thousand miles away. I sometimes came to think that there was a telepath between us, those who have "besties" would agree with me. I told Norah's mum of my instant departure she whined saying why was I leaving too soon, wasn't I enjoying it there? I told her that I needed to get back to my mother and kid. I told her that I would come again some time soon.

I left the following morning and it was terribly hot in the city bus. One thing I hated about travelling by public transport to Nkhatabay was the continuous chatter and noise of the Tongas. I am one myself but these people can make others feel like they are in the bus by accident or worse still in a foreign land. I have never seen people as proud of their language as the northerners (both Tumbuka and Tonga). Even among other tribes you can be assured of them to talk right there what others don't understand. I noted that Laurent's body temperature was rising; I thought that maybe it was the excessive heat but it wasn't the case, he started crying and refused to breastfeed. I removed his shirt and changed his nappy but he couldn't calm down. People were starting to mumble and asking if I was truly the mother for failing to make him stop crying. I stood up from my seat and strapped him on my back. The passage way was full of standing passengers and I found it difficult to walk to and fro rocking him in an effort to make him sleep. After a hectic time, he fell asleep only to wake up again when we were close to home. This time his body was burning and I knew my baby was getting sick. I called my mother and told her about it. I arrived home and she prepared water for his bath. Amanda couldn't stop fussing over her little brother who was in no state to play and giggle as always.

I remember that night as being the longest of my life. I gave him pain killers but the moment it lost its effect, he would start crying again. I was so exhausted for being up all night, no matter how much my mum told me to go and lie down; I couldn't do it while hearing his loud cries in pain. The hospital was far away and it was not a journey to embark at night. At day break, we took him to the hospital with my mother. On the way he started violent convulsions. I was trembling in fear I thought he was going



to die. We sat under a Mango tree until they subsided. She carried him as we almost run to the hospital. I was praying all the way asking God to send His words of healing to his soul and speak of good health again.

He was diagnosed with cerebral malaria and the doctor said if he had stayed any time longer without medical treatment, we could have lost him. The thought of losing one of my kids was unbearable. I couldn't think of living Amanda or Laurent. If I was alive, they were the centre of my world and they kept me going in this life of uncertainties. I was sure of their love for me and knew that be it in life or in death they would love me still unconditionally.

Maybe it was my fault for taking him on such a long journey and if anything had happened to him, I knew I couldn't have forgiven myself.

## Episode 30

God promised to heal all diseases, He didn't put restrictions. He is not called Jehovah Rapha (The Healer) for nothing. sometimes we tend to undermine the power and glory of God. we should understand that doctors only treat but God heals. have you ever wondered why some people get sick from a certain illness and get well at prescribed medicine while some people die from the same illnesses and the medicine fail to make them better?

for a whole week I was with Laurent at the hospital I realized how short life is. more young lives succumbed to death and I was so grateful to God for healing my baby. finally he got discharged and we went home. in moments like those I got so angry with Ben. he was out there enjoying life to the fullest while I shouldered the responsibility. God forbid if at all he had to come one day and take them away from me. Single mothers I salute

you, its not easy to raise a child with one hand, its a life rendering sacrifice.

Laurent was his usual self playing and giggling. this kid was happy naturally,I watched with a sigh of relief as he lifted his arms to Amanda to carry him.

my mother's phone kept ringing and each time she dissapeared to her room to answer it. I was so puzzled by her behavior but I didn't ask who it was.

later that night after eating supper, I went to prepare the kids ready for bed. we had two beds in the room. one was a double bed which I shared with Laurent and Amanda while Beatrice slept on the other single bed next to us. my sister had a sense of humor and we chatted like old friends. I couldn't deny the fact that she was growing fast . at sixteen she looked bigger than her age. I knew boys were beginning to eye her but I encouraged her to save herself for a better man. the world will never run out of men,she didn't have to be in a hurry in giving herself up.I promised her that if we managed to sell well in that year's farm produce she could enrol at a teacher's college. she couldn't hide her happiness. I didn't want her to end up like me with two children and without a man to show for it.she understood what I was passing through but it irritated me so much because she always said I would get back with Peter.

we talked in whispers when the kids were asleep until we called it a night and drifted off to sleep. it felt good to be back to the comfort of my place. hospitals were never my favorite place in the world. I slept on the floor while Laurent shared a baby cot with two more babies. my mother was sleeping on the floor at a make shift guardian's shelter. it was an open space with concrete slabs to sit on.during the day it saved as a waiting room. I felt sorry for a certain woman who lost her baby in the middle of the night,she had to endure the pain of watching her baby drift into oblivion while her mother was at the guardian's shelter. third world countries are at a pain to improve public services.

in the middle of the night I heard the door opening. I was startled because I thought it was a thief. i heard whispering voice.I woke up,tip toed my way to the door and opened a crack. I saw two figures, my mother and a

Man they disappeared to her room. I didn't recognize the man since I only saw his back. some courage though. I respected my mother and expected better from her. barely six months had elapsed since my father's demise yet she was already having another man in his bed. the poor man must have been turning in his grave. it was disrespect of the highest order and there was no way I was watching that happening without a fight. I went to her bedroom door and knocked furiously. I was sure no action had started yet. there was a few seconds of silence before my mother came out with only a wrapper around her armpits. she gave me the what -the-hell-is-wrong look.

"I want to see the man in your room." I spoke while looking directly in her eyes. it twisted her nerves.

"don't be dramatic. am sure one of the kids is in need of you "

"mama am not playing games here. bring him out, you can't lie because I have seen him. "I was getting impatient.

"please my dear I will explain in the morning for now go back to bed".it was evident she didn't want to sort it out my way. I was adamant to end this once and for all. she had to understand that I was no longer a baby.

"no way .am not going anywhere." the man heard us and came out to see what was happening. he was Mr kamanga my dad's best friend since I was a kid.

he was shocked to see me as I was equally shocked to see him.

"go back inside and put on your shirt , leave before I go and call your wife."

"I...I am sorry. "he stammered. I wasn't in the mood for apologies. my mum clapped her hands twice in disbelief. Mr Kamanga hurried back in the bedroom and came out still in the process of getting dressed. I stifled back a laugh. my mother held his hand stopping him from going.

"don't even think about it" I warned her.

he left and I locked the door, took the keys with me back to my room,leaving my mother mouth agape and filled with shame...

Bad things need to be nipped at the beginning to avoid a harvest of evil. If you delay in taking prompt action, you will have the trouble of

straightening things later in future.

I knew my mother was still grieving inside but replacing my father so soon was an insult. She needed to give us time to get used to the idea of not seeing our father again. Most of you will agree with me, those who had good fathers feel that nobody will ever take their places again. The following morning my mother woke up with an attitude, I deserved it for spoiling her night. I wasn't about to tolerate cat and mouse games under my watch. If she wanted games, she had to wait until we the children got out of the house. Now I got to believe Beatrice when she said at some point during my father's sickness, my mother used to disappear hours without end and come back late at night. It was so heart clenching. Was it because she knew that he didn't have any more strength to deal with her or maybe she just got tired of taking care of him? It's true the people closest are the ones likely to betray. They know your weakest spot and use it to their advantage for your down fall. I didn't mind her because she would suck it up by herself again. I sat outside peeling cassava for breakfast, I saw Mrs Kamanga coming. My heart thumped so hard it hurt. I thought, now she knows. I looked at my mother sitting on the veranda so far away from me to avoid talking to me. When she looked up, their gazes met, I saw the look of defeat in her eyes. I stood up quickly thinking I was about to witness history in the making. She walked past me as if I never existed, she was a woman on a mission but this time I would be there and if need be fight her to death to protect my mother.

“Ma Wangu you should come with me now.” She was panting like a mouse running from bush fire. My mother was more puzzled. I watched her closely.

“What has happened Ma Wezi?” my mother asked almost in a whisper, keeping her distance.

“Today I will kill somebody sure,” she started shouting and cursing saying a certain woman known as Anya Jere had run away with money from the village's women group banki mmudzi (village bank). She used to be the treasurer and she was trusted because of her long years

working in Tanzania. Women would contribute money on daily basis then give each other turns to take loans to boost their businesses and pay back with a small interest. It was Mrs Kamanga's turn and now for three days Anya Jere was missing without a forwarding address or any trace of money amounting to Five Hundred Thousand Kwacha. Rumor had it that she was hiding at her cousin's place in the neighboring village and she wanted my mother to escort her and beat her blue black. I could see relief washing over my mother's face. I wanted to laugh. My mother was never a fighter unlike Mrs Kamanga who had a fighting record like that of Jackie Chan. She even used to beat her husband that was why he left without protesting the previous night when I told him that I would tell his wife. I didn't know why my mother was provoking her wrath by rattling her nest. It was insanity. My mother refused to take a no from me; I guess she didn't want to disappoint her friend. I called Beatrice to go with them just in case things turned really bad.

Later in the afternoon I received a call from Norah. She was back from honeymoon and she said her husband wanted them to start trying for a baby as soon as possible. I gasped that it was too soon. She had not yet told him of her status, she said her happiness was too bliss to end with such disturbing news. Really? I was worried about her. This whole thing was too good to be true, the worst thing were the lies. If she had started her relationship on a "no secrets" note it could have been the best thing to do.

"Please my dear tell your husband the truth before your relationship is ruined. You are risking so much including your life. How long are you going to take your medicine in hiding? He will find out one way or the other but he will hate it if it's not from your own mouth," I told her but it all fall on deaf ears.

"I have to go girlfriend, my man is waiting. Don't worry I will think about it." She hung up on me. I sighed almost in tears. The whole thing just made me miss my man terribly. I toyed with my phone, yet again fighting off the desire to call him. I didn't have to be love sick when he was just a phone call away and loved every bit of me. What hurt most was

the thought of him sleeping with another woman. When we started dating, I became blind to every sight of any man. My heart had chosen him among many and I trusted him with my whole life, in every way he was the father of my children.

“Babe you broke the promise,” I soliloquized while wiping away the tears misting my eyes.

In the late afternoon I was taking a walk around the village with my kids. Staying at one place was stressing especially with no any entertainment in the house. People went to watch movies at the village square hall. It was so noisy and crowded one would swear everyone was a movie commentator. When we turned into a path that led to the lake, a certain man caught up with us. He looked to be in his sixties. It was summer when the mangoes were in broom. There were so many falling on the ground under the trees, ignored and rotten. Couldn't the fruits be put to a more usefulness? No wonder we were wallowing in poverty yet the resources were there. We exchanged greetings.

“Are you the daughter of the late Banda?” he asked me. I nodded. “You are quite a beauty if you don't mind me saying. Guess you took after your mother.” I was fluttered, it wasn't everyday that compliments flew my way especially now when my self confidence was crushed. I mumbled my thanks as we went our separate ways. Watching the lake had a calming effect on me. It made me think and reflect properly. It gave me hope that beyond the stretching waters life went ahead with or without my being happy. It's hard to understand but nature has the ability to heal broken souls. If you want to cry, shout or laugh, it will always be there to witness every moment and offer the much needed comfort.

The sun was setting and we headed back home. My mother and sister were not yet back; I went to the kitchen and started preparing supper. We already had fresh fish for relish. It's taken plain without any added spices yet its aroma and taste, beat that of expensive restaurants. Among the Tongas, every meal is associated with sea food, it's a tradition.

I was lost in my thoughts when I heard a knock. It couldn't have been my mother because she couldn't have bothered to knock. I went to open the door, to my amazement it was the man I had met earlier on my way to the lake. He stood there, gave me a smile. By the look on his face, he thought it was his best. His front teeth were missing. I got back inside and took out a wooden stool for him to sit on. I greeted him and waited for him to say why he was there. It could have sounded rude if I had asked. He looked to be uneasy.

' er I want to talk to you seriously. Who is home with you?' I replied that it was just me and my kids. I didn't know what sort of news he sought me for that called for him to talk to me alone. 'A group of men I joined later at the lake saw me talking to you earlier. They seem to know a lot about you, one of them is a friend to your uncle.' I wanted to scream 'so what!' but my curiosity to know more shut me up, there was no need to frighten him off but he had to be quick I had food to prepare. I was so mad at my uncle for washing my dirty linen in public. I didn't know men were good gossipers too, thought it was a feminine task. I urged him to continue.

'I am sorry for what happened to you. These young men are cruel.' Since I didn't know which part he was exactly talking about, I still kept quite. Was it the Ben or the Peter story?

'I know how it feels like to love and be abandoned later. I lost my wife a year ago and trust me it hasn't been easy.' He wiped his bald head with the back of his hand. We had two different kinds of losses. Did being dumped and dying sound the same to him?

'It happens; don't worry about me I am fine I moved on. I am sorry about your wife though.' I was getting impatient; it was unnerving for a stranger to know my private life. I had no idea how much he knew.

'The thing is, I was wondering', he paused and looked me

straight in the eyes before continuing, "I mean I came here to ask for your hand in marriage."

My jaw dropped!

## Episode 31

darkness cannot drive out darkness only light can do that, hate cannot drive out hate only love can do that- Dr Martin Luther King Jr

I looked at the old man in pity and felt myself biting back the urge to scream. I felt sorry for myself, had I reached that stage whereby old men looked at me as a suitable bride for themselves instead of their sons?

"Baba I think you should be going its getting dark," I spoke with the mastery of my remaining patience.

"don't think for a moment that am joking. please give me a chance. if you ever change your mind, call me," he paused to give me a piece of paper with his number written on it but I refused. my biological clock was ticking yes but his had long ceased functioning. it was better to spend my days as a single mum forever than signing my womanhood days off to this old cargo. maybe if I was old and widowed, I could have revisited his proposal.

I walked back into the house and strapped Laurent on my back, locking the house and took Amanda with me. I started off to my uncle's house leaving the old man standing outside. I had one or two words to give my uncle, he knew too much about me because we were related but that didn't give him a licence to broadcast my private life with every available ear. some men were loose mouthed, after having one too many of liquor with friends they tend to completely lose themselves. it was getting dark, my uncle's place wasn't far from our house. anger was boiling inside me and I prayed that I would find him home before he left to spend the night at one of his mistress' houses. he sure had some growing up to do.



I found his wife in the kitchen and she said he was inside the house. she could see that it wasn't a social call. I found him sitting on his wooden chair bare chested and dozing. I made some noise signalling my presence. after an exchange of greetings, I didn't waste time but to ask him if he knew an old man who had lost his wife a year ago.in the thick of things I had forgotten to ask him his name or perhaps he had said it and I wasn't listening.

he didn't seem to remember until I told him about his friend at the lake. he immediately knew him because everybody knew Kondowe who almost spent all his days at the lake,his wife sometimes brought him food there. I gave the description of Kondowe's old friend without front teeth and he recognized him.

"woow that's Mr Chirwa, he owns part of the rubber plantation. he is a good friend of Kondowe." well finally we were going to be on the same page.I thought.

"so you thought it wise to tell Kondowe so much about my love life?" he seemed quizzed by my question .

"it was nothing serious,he knows because he is my friend. " I couldn't believe it.

"its because of your useless story telling that am getting marriage proposal from an old man."

" wooh...wait ...wait. Mr Chirwa wants to marry you?" I nodded. "then I have just hit a jackpot because that man's purse has a gold lining." before I had a chance to answer him my aunt interrupted me "consider yourself lucky my dear, that man is an answer to every woman's dream. " these people got to be kidding me.marrying that man would be my worst nightmare.

"uncle you can't say that. this man would never be my husband. money is not everything,"I was defending my heart.

"you didn't seem to dislike it when I was giving some to your mother,now I understand Mr Chirwa's motive towards helping your mother ." so even my mother was part of selling me off to slavery? this man had acted as if he had just got to know me that afternoon.

"pass the message that I dont want him." before I rose to go, my cousin Melina entered holding the back of her head with her hand crying.

"oh not again," I heard my Aunt murmur beneath her breath. she was the youngest of his children.

"what is it again? can't you shut up? you are making noise " my uncle didn't take lightly to such an interruption.

"Jacob has hit me again Papa" Melina said.

"that man will kill you one of these days,"aunt said walking back to the kitchen.

"who asked for your opinion witch." I was beginning to forget my own issues.

"stop calling my wife that and go back to your mother. it's true if you are not careful that good for nothing husband of yours will kill you."

"What now Papa? I don't know why you still cling to that barren thing,"the sarcasm for her step mother was evident.

"that's why I didn't promote your mother to my second wife, she has a lousy mouth and you are becoming more like her everyday no wonder you are a punching bag to your husband. go away before I do more damage to you." I wanted to laugh,Melina went back without a word. I decided to leave too because my uncle was in no state to continue talking.

back home I found my mother and sister back. they had a fruitless journey because Anya Jere was not there. I didn't mind about how tired she was and went ahead to ask her about Mr Chirwa.you can't believe her answer. she said,"am happy for you my dear, you have just won a ticket to steer us away from poverty." I was so disappointed in her,was that what she thought of everything? some people would sell their souls to the devil for the love of money. as for me I didn't want to end my youthful days abruptly to such mockery of a marriage. we needed money yes but I didn't want to be the sacrificial lamb of the family altar.

my phone rung,it was Peter. I let it ring for sometime before pressing the reject button ...

the human mind is an absolute wonder and very unpredictable. how do one control thoughts from popping in unannounced and sometimes uninvited. I get perplexed by the female mind. my granny once told me

that it works twice than the male mind that's why when some of these male start lying tales, we catch them midway through before they finish.

I was to make my folks see sense in what I was saying but it wasn't hitting home. my mother was adamant to wave me off into the waiting arms of Mr Chirwa, surely I would die first before I found myself in them. couldn't Peter have picked a perfect time of calling? my mind presently was an emotional wreck and i didn't want to strain if further. our last parting wasn't to die for. I was running away from him, from myself. I was afraid my heart would betray me because the last time I checked, I was still hopelessly in love. I needed time to heal, to trust myself with him again yet the dyke called Masozi stood imposingly between us. I had learnt so much from what Ben did to me. I didn't want to play second fiddle or plan B ever to any man. I had enough lessons about men to last me a life time. I also had kids yes but I had them before meeting Peter. knowing fully well that your partner was cheating and had a baby when he was still with you was not easy to live with. the village was becoming a dangerous place to live, if I wasn't careful I would end up in the wrong hands. I am a hopeless romantic by nature who believes in settling for nothing but true love. if money is involved then it should be a bonus not a ruling factor.

I went to bed that day so furious I wasn't talking to my mother. Beatrice tried to tell me the full details of finding Anya Jere saga but I dismissed her saying I was tired. the only way out of this mess was to go back to Lilongwe yet money seemed a bit of a problem. starting all over sacred me. I needed to start looking for a job.

the following morning I told Beatrice to give the kids porridge who were still sleeping. I was going to my aunt's (a sister to my mother) place. she and her husband were some of those sweet people who seem to be extinct from the face of the earth nowadays. I knew we had not been close but we used to be when i was little. they were not rich or poor but lead a life of content with what they had. I always say the highway to happiness is being content with what you have and always thank God for it, in His time and reward for your doings He shall bless you according to His riches and glory. they had four beautiful kids who had all managed to go further with

their education. I didn't blame them since both their parents went to school while mine uhmm couldn't wait to start bringing us into this world.

I left. I wanted to bare my heart to somebody who would understand. she had an aura of authority about her that made my mother listen to whatever she said. I passed through a deserted path that lead to a church. there was a river along and the bridge that used to interconnect it to another area had been washed away.the river held some childhood memories. when I was a kid I came with my friends for a swim. the river wasn't safe since people used it as a refuse dumping site. I was busy showcasing my swimming skills to my friends when somebody announced that my aunt was coming. she told me to get out of the water but I told her that she wasn't my mother to order me about. the nerve of me.she practically dragged me out and beat the devil out of me.as far as rivers were concerned, that was the first and last time I got in one. I was walking,admiring the breathtaking view when I heard somebody walk behind me. I looked back and saw a young man behind me. I could feel his eyes penetrating right through my back. I walked swiftly but eventually he caught up with me. I wasn't in the mood for small talks yet it was written all over his face that he wanted to talk.

" hello. you are quite in a hurry."he began. I answered in such a low turn off voice I thought he wouldn't continue.

" sure I have things to do"

" are you going to work because you are so early? I could now see the road leading to my Aunt 's place.

"am not going to work but am going to see my aunt"

" do you stay around here?"

" no I live in Lilongwe." I was beginning to get irritated.

" am Remo I just came for holidays at my uncle's.am studying at Mzuzu university. " as if I cared. I eyed him,he looked to be young and we were almost of the same height.

"am Wangu nice meeting you. well that's my destination,nice talking to you Remo," I spoke while entering a bamboo made gate.

"what's your surname?"

"Banda,"I replied almost dashed inside, there was no way my Aunt would

see me with him,there would be blue murder. I think I saw a look of triumph on his face as if he had won the national lottery. honestly I didn't care.

I found her home and wasted no time in narrating the reason for my visit. when I finished she said, " sometimes your mother give me doubt if she is okay upstairs. she can't force you to marry somebody that old. I will come there tomorrow and sort it out once and for all.dear stop worrying yourself to death.

"thank you very much Auntie ". I took my leave. there was so much weight that had been taken off my heart, atleast somebody was on my side.

when I arrived home I was in better spirits. I trusted my Aunt to give my mother a piece of her mind.

I entered the house and my heart froze. sitting on the chair with one leg crossed on the other was Peter grinning from side to side ...

## Episode 32

a journey through time make you weak or strong. if you choose to cruise too fast, you end up being tired and give up along the way,that's why others resort to suicide . if you take one step at a time, you focus and get determined to pick yourself up when you trip. life ain't an easy thing to live,you need to take it seriously from day one and live your everyday like it's your last.

"what are you doing here? " I asked him evidently furious.

"Wangu my dear that's not the way to talk now," my mother jumped in. you would think she wasn't the same person who was shoving me into the arms of the old cargo just the previous day.

"stay out of this mum it doesn't concern you," I waved her off.

"fine I will leave you two to sort out your issues." when she had gone

banging the door after her I said, " I asked you something."

"please my love forgive me.oh God knows I have passed through hell when you left me.I can't continue living without you." oh my heart bled at that but too much water was still passing under the bridge and I couldn't have a smooth crossing. I had run away in hope of healing myself yet here he was reminding me again of every sore and ache.

"you can't have two women under the same roof that's unheard of," I couldn't bring myself to have him back into my life.

"I will send Masozi back to the village after she delivers." God forbid me to be the reason to sink an innocent child into the sea of poverty when both parents were alive. I know how my kids felt the pinch of absence of their father in their lives.

"no way.be man enough to bear the consequences of your actions. give your baby a chance to know his father mine didn't have that privilege." I said meeting his gaze. his bloodshot eyes exposed the pain buried way deep in his soul.

" oh my God I don't know what I have done to myself," he said more to himself than to me.

" do yourself a favour and go back to Masozi to save us both from headaches.you are better off because its your first time but I cannot risk myself from pain for the second time." his head was between his legs.

"I came all the way here to take you home, there's no way am going back without you," he spoke in finality. going back with Peter could have been better than staying back to face Mr Chirwa's ridiculous marriage proposal. the devil you know is better than the angel you don't know. I knew Peter's baggage but I didn't know the load Mr Chirwa possessed and that was scaring ...

Later that day I convinced Peter to go to his mother and wait until I thought about the whole issue. reluctantly he went,deep down inside me I knew that I wasn't taking him back no matter what.

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the following morning I woke up to the loud voices of my Aunt outside. my mother didn't know of my journey to report her to aunt.

"I don't know what sort of a mother are you or if I should even call you one. why are you forcing your daughter into that forsaken marriage? I thought you will love these children but no you want to kill her before her time. do you have an idea what killed his wife?" I could hear my aunt roaring.

" do I come to your house and tell you how to raise your children? " knowing my mother I knew fully well that she couldn't have gave in. "you call that raising? huh your husband must be ashamed of you in his grave. you disgrace me.." the exchange was more serious than I had thought. I hated to be the reason for their truce. I got out of my room to go and atleast cool things down before they got worse. i was sure the neighbours were now watching a free show.

" don't drive my husband into this. I will do what I want with my children and there's nothing you can do about it." it was a dare,my mother's stubbornness sometimes amazed me.

"it's your love of money that will kill you," my aunt was just hilarious.

"you don't know anything about poverty. thank that husband of yours for marrying a fool like you..."

"mum please stop shouting," I interrupted the commotion.

"I should shut up you say. mxii you have the nerve to talk to me after you have caused all this?" I stepped back a few steps because I knew a slap was on the way.

she went back inside and started throwing my bags outside.

"i hate nonsense.i feed you and your cats while their father is enjoying his life to the fullest.i have had enough," she was shouting.Amanda started crying in panic.I handed Laurent to Aunt and picked Amanda up rocking her back and forth.tears started flowing down my cheeks.

I never intended for things to turn this way...

My mother was a good person i know but maybe i had just pushed her to the edge. imagine waking up one day to the realization that you are a grandmother whose existence you never new until now. staying far away from her created a huge gap between us, we didn't bond like we were supposed to. i had overloaded her life with my own baggage so i

understood that she needed a breather. she could have just said so and i could have given her the space and freedom. wait a minute,,, did in anyway had to do with Mr Kamanga? i didn't know.

My aunt helped correct my things and i left for her house. after she threw my things out to the dismay of her sister, she went to lock herself in her room. i swear my aunt had enough anger to break the door down but i stopped her in time. this whole thing was comedy to Beatrice, i didn't see the funny side of it especially when my tears were involved. we left but i promised myself to be back since there was no way i wanted my mother to be mad with me forever.

My eldest cousin Janet who lived in Mzuzu was there for the holidays with her three girls. after a few days my aunt asked me if i wanted to go with Janet so that i stand doing business and support myself. oh God bless her soul i was over the moon. she gave me money to start buying wrappers and clothes which came from Tanzania so that i either open a shop in Mzuzu or in Nkhatabay. i needed to get away for sometime to give myself time to think properly. i had two kids who needed feeding and clothes, i had to stand on my two feet and earn a living. i realized that folding my hands was never going to be a solution to my problems. as far as i was concerned men would always be there, i was still young to be caught in the cobweb of emotions. Peter had to accept the fact that Masozi was the one carrying his baby and for now he was stuck with her. to be abandoned while pregnant is risky to both the mother and child, few people make it with scars. ladies lets love each other in the name of sisterhood, whatever the reasons don't be a thorn that pierce your sister's heart. the same man you blag about today after he leaves his wife for you, will leave you for somebody else. what makes you think you are so special and can take somebody else's husband? find your own single man the world hasn't run out of them yet.

when we arrived in Mzuzu the weather was so horrible, i didn't know if it was still part of Malawi. i was used to the hot temperatures of Lilongwe and Nkhatabay. Janet had a big house and i had never met her husband



until then. he was a pleasant and warm person who liked joking a lot. when he shook my hand in welcome i mumbled a prayer to God to help me live with them in harmony, i had a feeling that this was going to be my second home. if you surround yourself with productive people, you become productive yourself. these people had gone to school and they were working. there was a high possibility of me doing something about a job.

Later that evening when i had retired for bed, i watched my children sleep peacefully, sometimes i thought i didnt do them justice by dragging them along with me when i seemed to be forever moving. they deserved a stable place, a place to call home definitely. i vowed myself to provide that for them, from my own sweat not a man's because i was now convinced that i never got any luck with men. i tried calling my mum but her number was busy i gave up after what seemed like a tenth attempt instead i logged in to Facebook and read people's crazy statuses. some people have drama and others bare all their lives on the social media just humiliating themselves. i had two friend requests from people i didn't know and a message in my inbox which read." are you Wangu Banda who i met in Nkhatabay?" It was Remo Da... what what. i recognized him as the man i met on my way to my Aunt's place few days ago. it was out of this world, i thought other people were fully employed by Facebook and used it to their extreme potential. one friend request was from him, i went through his profile before i accepted him. he was online and immediately he sent me a message. asking what i did for a living and what i was doing in Nkhatabay when i had said i l lived in Lilongwe, he even asked if i was married or not and he requested for my phone number. immediately i logged out, i didn't have time for stalkers. i slept like a log and Laurent didn't stir at night, guess he was tired from the long journey. i had been a bit reluctant to travel because the last time i was returning from Lilongwe, he got seriously sick.

The following morning after having breakfast we went to town in Janet's car to start immediately identifying things that i wanted to sell. we left Amanda and the other children in the care of a maid. for the first time in years i felt relaxed and sure of what i wanted to do. i choose to buy

wrappers and slippers which would fetch me money in the village. Janet advised me to first look for things to sell right there in Mzuzu then later on when the business gets a grip, i should go to Nkhatabay. i couldn't have done on my own. i didn't know where these people were in the first place when my parents shipped me off to Lilongwe for that crazy man to rape me. i was sure if i had been left with my aunt, my life could have been different by now.

we finished by looking for a shop to rent and we were lucky to find one at Ten Thousand Kwacha. Janet told me that she will pay rentals for the first three months because business might be slow for a start. i couldn't thank her enough for everything, she was a God sent angel.

We went back to the car. i was overwhelmed with happiness. i was going to do my own thing with to strings attached. God had been so faithful to me i didn't know where to begin to thank him because of His love for me, i had a testimony...

### Episode 33

As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.- John F. Kennedy.

My business was growing beyond my weirdest expectations. God was connecting me with the right people. I had no idea on how to run a business but Janet helped me until I learnt the necessary tricks. A certain man from Blantyre became my regular customer. He used to come and buy wrappers from me until my stock almost run out. Later in the following months, he would deposit money into my account and after I confirmed receiving, I would send the goods through Axa Courier Services and give him a waybill number for the parcel. The transaction was purely based on trust and understanding. Every month I knew I already had a done deal. I could now manage to send Amanda to a local

school.

We got on well with Janet and the family. The only problem I found was one with her elder daughter Emerald who was Ten Years. I noted that she didn't like my kids, she would shout at Amanda for no apparent reason and she would stop her from playing with their toys. I started buying my kids their own toys and told Amanda that after school, she should ask the maid to switch on our bedroom Television set and stay there to watch cartoons. All this was to get out of Emerald's way. To the outside world these guys played the perfect couple but I could hear them shouting at each other at night when the household was quite. Most times Janet would wake up moody with puffy eyes. I didn't want to look like I was snopy but since we had now grown closer, one day I asked her after noticing that she had a black eye.

"Are you okay sis?" I asked her over breakfast. Her husband had already left for work earlier than usual.

"you won't understand dear but things haven't been easy with Francis." I know I didn't know anything about marriage but the little time I stayed with Peter made me realize that it ain't a bed of roses. To me a black eye didn't call for any understanding it was pure violence which called for instant action.

"talk to me,pouring your heart out could help." I was truly touched seeing her heart saddened me. She told me how they had been fighting for sometime. They had three girls and the husband wanted a boy. She had delivered them through Caesar and her last operation had almost been fatal. He seemed to hear none of it now that she couldn't get pregnant any more. Her gynecologist had told her that she shouldn't bear any more children yet he insisted. God was merciful to her and closed her womb but now he was accusing her of using contraceptives behind his back. I was shocked and didn't expect a person like him to be so unreasonable. It was clear he didn't give a care about her life. She was way older than me but I told her that she should actually go for the pill or injection because the moment she fall pregnant, she would sign her own death sentence. In that case a black eye was better than pregnancy because if she could get tired of the black eye,she could get out of the marriage. Some men nxaa and their obsession with baby boys.

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I left to go and open my shop. Janet's issue crowded my mind, I felt that I wouldn't rest until I was sure that she had started using contraceptives, that way I would know that she was safe. I was so engrossed in my own thoughts I didn't see the man standing beside the shop opposite to mine. I felt his stare which made me uncomfortable. I pretended to rearrange some things for sometime but when I looked again he was still staring, so impolite. I became uneasy as I thought he was a thief. There was no customer in my shop, I couldn't quite think of what he wanted. I locked the drawer where I put money and went to the guy next door. He used to sell DVDs and electrical appliances and we became good friends. I told him about the stranger and pointed him out. Immediately he went to confront him.

"Madala what are you doing here?" I could overhear him interrogating the man. I know he didn't do anything wrong but looking at me like that gave me the creeps and made me suspicious.

"it's a free world I can look at whoever I like besides am looking at that beautiful lady not you." I was shocked by such an answer. Some people have all the time in the world, imagine spending an idle hour just doing nothing but looking at a fellow human being as if at the end you would be paid. I watched him move away but I had a feeling that whatever his mission was, it wasn't yet completed. I had to be more careful.

Before I knew it time was gone, I had to close the shop at 17:00. I had been on my feet most of the day being at customer's beck and call, plus cater for Laurent's needs. If things continued that way I would find an assistant. When I boarded a minibus going home, I received a call from Beatrice saying Mrs Kamanga was about to beat Mum to pulp. Earlier that morning people had seen Mr Kamanga leaving our house and the news had gone viral. Now that I was no longer there the two fools had overplayed their games and thrown caution out of the window. Knowing the female Jackie Chan am sure she would leave her face with little for any man to desire her again. To say the truth I didn't feel sorry for her, she deserved everything that came her way because I had done all I could to warn her

out of that but it seemed I was too young to give her an advice.

Thirty something days are for the thief to do as he pleases but the fortieth is for the owner to deal with the plunderer...

## Episode 34

Be a rainbow in someone else's cloud - Maya Angelou.

Life is not always fun. If you trust God to be with you in every step you take, some mistakes, tears and sadness become a stepping stone to your success. I salute all those people who make God an anchor of their souls and seek for refuge and comfort in His words. His words is alive, every breath of it and it shall never return to Him without accomplishing the purpose He spoke it for. Those people who make suicide as a means to an end I think lack the determination to find out the essence of God's purpose for their creation. Soldier on, as long as there is life there is hope. As long as God is on the throne, things will get better. I never knew why people tend to ignore good advice when given to them for free. I am forced to think they already make up their minds even when they come to ask for a piece of your mind. I knew munthu sazatheka ( you will never get to understand a human being) when few months later I received a call from Norah. I know I have never been a good person but what I told her before was one of the best advices I have told to people. She refused to tell her husband the truth about her status and waited for 'the right time' despite my pleas. To me that was sitting on a ticking bomb waiting for it to explode then run when it would already be too late. Her sobs didn't make things better and I had to go to the bathroom to avoid waking up the kids. She was pregnant and went to start antenatal classes and these days expectant couples go for compasery HIV testing. She went with her husband Frank. He tested negative and she was positive. The problem was in all the anger and confusion, she admitted to the counsellor that she

had been like that for some time. Frank remained quite as if he wasn't even there. It scared her so much. At least a twitch of emotions gives you clues on what to do next but in this case, it was difficult to know. He went back to work and came home around 9 pm, drunk on alcohol which was unlike him. She was home all along, sleepless and on the edge of emotions. He went straight to their bedroom, locked himself and started crying so loudly it nearly drove her mad. Then he started breaking things. Her mother stayed far and when she called her, she said she would come in the morning because she didn't have a car. Norah couldn't drive in that state, I told her to go to one of her neighbours but she said she didn't want to drag herself in the neighborhood gossip. Frank had stormed out and she didn't know where he was. I wish I was there for her. I didn't care if I would do nothing to help or change her situation but giving her a shoulder to lean on could be best. I comforted her with words I knew would soothe her soul. I gave her a couple of verses from my favourite book of Isaiah and told her to take some pain killers for her throbbing headache.

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I tried to convince myself that the man who stood staring at me that day at my shop was just one of these people who have nothing better to do until I noted that I was meeting him everyday morning and evening few months later. It was clear he was stalking me and that scared me. He had some sort of an evil smirk on his face which made him look like he was doing a mental calculation of something. Call me paranoid but if you have been raped before you will know how every man looks suspicious at every action that makes you uncomfortable. One day after I had gotten off the minibus, he ran beside me and started introducing himself. I wasn't interested so I looked away. If he had wanted me to know him he could have it in a good way without looking as if he was spying on me. I never caught his name but he said something as being a cook at one of the district hospitals which was located close to town. He had grey hair but said he wasn't married and had a four year old son. At one point I told him to leave me alone and go his own way but he didn't hear any of it. He said his girlfriend left him after he managed to send her to college but ditched

him after she had her degree in hotel management. If that had been said to earn my sympathy, I was sorry it didn't hit home. He turned back when I didn't answer him still after he asked for my name and number . If he was as wise as his grey hair showed,then he would get it that I didn't have time for him.

We became close friends with Remo but when he started making advances towards me I told him that I didn't want to be in a relationship with any man. You should have seen the sweet names he was calling me but nxaa it didn't wave me. No man didn't have any place in my heart my kids did. The bottom line was that I was done with the dating issue and I wanted to work towards the future of raising my children. Remo was single and two years younger than me. I thought he was immature and was just looking for a fling. I told him to date girls of his age and didn't want to be dubbed as his sugar mummy lol.

I don't know why he claimed to love me at first sight, to me that only existed in Mills and Boon novels. Girl meets boy,they like each other boom they get married and lived happily ever after.

I told him that if he ever mentions any love word to me again, I would broke him once and for all. Kkkkk he never stopped calling me my love, bae or whatever sweet nothing he could think of but I overlooked it,my heart never melted.

That day after meeting the old man can you believe that he was after me again. kkkkk this time with college of agriculture registration forms. You might think its too good to be true but this actually happened. An opportunity was dangled in front of me. Why do men want to catch me in their nets with a hook full of academic snares? if the tale of his ex girlfriend was true, it meant he was a fool who never learnt a thing or two about life. Ofcourse this chance was given on condition that I agree to get engaged to him and he pay my bride price. At the end of that year he would marry me then we would relocate to Mocambique where a new job as a Hotel Manager awaited him and I would be a teacher because in Mocambique teachers are most wanted. Dreamer. I told him that I wasn't interested,that was the dumbest thing I heard that day. As I bordered a

bus back home I left him there standing with a permanent scowl on his face, disappointed and angry. I didn't care that wasn't my business.

Later that evening when I was helping the maid prepare supper, Beatrice called me. She had turned out to be my village news caster, everytime she called I was assured of the latest scandal. I picked up the call.

"hello"

"Wangu Mum is missing," She immediately started. I didn't get it.

"what do you mean? she ain't three years old..."

"I know but she went to town three days ago and she hasn't returned ever since."

I was confused, should I be worried or suspicious?...

## Episode 35

Sometimes the desires of our hearts land us into trouble often times. We tend to go against the morality of nature in pursuit of fulfillment.

The news of my mother's missing unnerved me. How did she get missing or was it a deliberate move? My questions were answered when I called my Aunt and told her of the news. She laughing her lungs out and called me stupid for believing such hearsay. She said Mr Kamanga was missing too and that day his wife had gone to aunt's place and told her the issue which meant they had calculated each one of their moves. I was so mad at my mother I clenched my fist. If she was near me I could have slapped the living daylights out of her. So it didn't sink in her to leave him alone, am sure the beating she received just scratched her skin because if it pierced her heart she couldn't have done such a thing. Aunt told me not to worry myself to death, she was capable of taking care of herself wherever she was. I was sorry to say she acted like a bitch in heat. Talk of throwing her modest out of the window. Weren't there men who were single and could



have loved her the more? I was too old to see her do such a disgraceful thing. I didn't know what my uncle would do upon hearing it. I called her number and it rung a couple of times without answering. Had she answered I could have given her piece of my mind. I was ashamed to tell such a story to Janet.

I went to bed feeling sorry for my mother. If my father was dealing with such behavior before he died well it must have been the worst way to send a man to his death. That must have sent the poor man to his grave quicker than the stroke.

The following morning I went to open my shop as usual minding my own business. I started saving my money to finish my course in Mass Communication. I still had that passion enclosed in my heart. I knew I had to do that for myself no matter what if I wanted a good future for me and my own. Every month end when I stood on the altar giving my tithe, I always reminded God to do what He said in Malachi 3:10-12. It's a matter of giving back to God what is already His.

I don't know why but that day I was feeling so sleepy and had a terrible headache I could hardly keep my eyes open. I just wanted to close my eyes and drift off. I decided to close at mid day and go home. I needed some rest. I found Janet at home which was unusual and she was taking a bath while the maid was cooking. I asked the maid if she knew why her Madam was home she said she came home in quite a rush and she heard her talking on the phone about going to Nkhatabay. I wasn't sure either why she was going. I waited at the sitting room until she was done.

"Sis why are you home this time? " she asked me just as I was about to ask her the same question.

"I ain't feeling well so I came home. Why are you going to Nkhatabay anything wrong?" I didn't think Aunt mentioned of this visit the previous day.

"well dear I wanted to call you as soon as I finished taking a bath." My heart somersaulted. Her face was suddenly clouded with sadness.

"what is Sis?" I moved to the edge of the chair.

" It's your mother..."

I wanted to scream and cry my heart out but the tears didn't come , my mouth went numb. I didn't believe my ears to have heard her perfectly. My mum was involved in an accident with Mr Kamanga and he died on the spot. She was in a critical condition and wavering between life and death. I knew we were not on speaking terms but the few months I had been away from her deepened the love inside me. She was a difficult woman to please but she was still my mother and I loved her to the moon and back. I realised that I was shaking all over. Janet came where I sat, took Laurent from my arms and placed him on the floor. She hugged me and told me that my mother was a fighter and she would pull through. " We need to get her transferred from Nkhatabay District hospital to Mzuzu Central hospital. when they went to collect the body of Mr Kamanga from the mortuary his lunatic widow went to your mother's room and attacked her." I put my hand to my mouth in paralyzed shock. "Well she met her match because my mother beat the demons out of her and she wailed like there's no tomorrow." I imagined the scene and couldn't help smiling. Poor woman to have lost her husband in such a hurtful way.

"Pack a few things we need to be on our way mum has already done the transferring process she is waiting for us."

I knew and understood the power of relations. If my mother was half the person her sister was am sure we could have moved mountains. It brought tears to my eyes to think that these people were so caring yet she didn't care about them. I packed a few things for Laurent and hurried back. I fed him and changed his diaper. In a few minutes we were ready. We boarded a minibus to town to go to Janet's husband's work place. He was waiting for us in his car outside the office premises. We didn't waste time but started on our way. We drove in silence. I was lost in my own thoughts reflecting on my life. It had not been easy but here I was in one piece. If God had not been my anchor and strength I could have been dead by now. My Mum needed a steel hand and my Aunt was the right person to do it. I only prayed that she would pull through and live to learn from her past failures. Before I knew it we were in Nkhatabay. Janet called aunt and she told her where they were. I hurriedly walked behind her my heart

threatening to burst in my chest.

We walked in the narrow corridor until we arrived at a door marked Intensive Care Unit. Janet told me to go inside because they couldn't allow both of us at the same time. I felt my legs turn to jelly. I heaved a deep sigh before I let myself in. The sound of machine was the only thing that was heard. A nurse was arranging tubes and wires in preparation of the move. I looked at my Aunt sitting on a chair beside the bed. She had aged overnight. Her eyes blood shot from lack of sleep and too much crying. She crushed me to her and sobbed so hard I thought my mum was no more.

" Be strong baby the devil is trying us." I went to stand beside the bed and looked at my mother, she had an oxygen mask on her face. My heart tightened with love and heart break. This woman had carried and nursed me with so much love, I vowed to move the world and nurse her back to health. She had been unconscious since she was brought here. One minute her condition would stabilize the next she would be at the end of her living thread. The nurse announced that we were ready to move. We moved her bed out of the room so carefully not to hit anything. Janet was also alarmed at the sight. Nobody had thought it was this serious. The ambulance was parked right outside the hospital door. We moved her inside and made her comfortable as much as we thought best. The nurse would accompany us to monitor her. My Aunt stayed with the nurse in the ambulance and we started our journey back.

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A week had now passed with my mother still in coma. The doctor said her condition was still not changing. She had sustained internal injuries with some broken limbs. She was swollen from head to toe. We talked to her everyday but there was no response. We prayed everyday for God to intervene. I fasted Esther ( 3 days dry fasting) but nothing happened. We didn't lose hope but banged our trust in The Lord. Those few weeks my life revolved around the hospital and my shop. The dark circles around my eyes showed the stress plaguing me. During weekends I would leave Laurent with the maid and spend the day with her while Aunt went home to rest. I would read her the bible and watch her for any twitch of

emotions. Day by day the human in me started drifting off in despair. I was losing hope if she would ever regain consciousness. It felt like we were waiting for something to happen whether good or bad. I had to be strong if not for myself but for Beatrice and my brother. Whatever the will of God was to seal the fate of my mum we were ready to face it. My aunt was the one who kept me going. When I cried she was there to take me in her arms and let me cry.  
"it's okay to cry love, the pain needs to get out," she would say.

That weekend I was sitting beside my mum and just watched her. It brought back childhood memories when I would pull her eyelids when she was sleeping. It was to tell her that I was hungry. She would wake up and tickle me I would laugh so hard it brought tears to my eyes. My phone vibrated, it was a private number. My thoughts quickly raced to my customer from Blantyre until I went outside to pick the call.  
"hello," I muttered in the mouth piece.  
" hey love..."

oh goodness that unmistakable voice I knew too well and fought so hard to forget ...

## Episode 36

Forgive when it's still hurting, when the wound is fresh and oozing with blood. Do not wait for the passage of time, rest you be tricked into forgetting when actually its forgiving you ought to do first. Love is giving people the freedom to be the way they are, not trying to make them the way you want and one forgives to the degree one loves.

The voice on the other end paralyzed my senses. I failed to get in control of myself and I hated that. I knew Peter would never leave me alone but couldn't he had picked a better time than that? I was going through an

emotional crisis and that wasn't a conducive environment for love to trespass.

"what can I do for you?" I said keeping my emotions at bay and in check as best as I could.

"Can't you please have a heart to forgive? oh Wangu I know I hurt you so much and I deserve all this. Did all that we had mean nothing to you to give up just like that?" That put me right on the corner.

"You have no right to talk to me like that? did it ever occur to you to consider what we had when you were sleeping with Masozi?" I was just trying to justify myself that he deserved the punishment I was unleashing on him.

"how many times did you forgive that psycho Ben? you couldn't even see that he was never for real yet you kept him on board. Don't I deserve another chance? tell me if you no longer love me then I will never bother you again." I gave out a huge sigh. Saying I didn't love him could have been a blue lie but admitting to love him could have been self betrayal of the highest order.

"can we talk about this later because now am not in the best frame of mind." Atleast i was being honest with him.

"I will leave you to think and call me back whenever you want I will wait because I don't want to force you in something you don't want." I could feel the anguish in his voice. I loved him so much it hurt. When he hanged up I realised that the key to my own happiness laid in my hands by letting go of all the hate and hurt harbouring my heart. Forgiveness is the fragrance the flower leaves on the heels of the one who crushed it and in silence alone does a man's truth bind itself together and strike root. I was determined to take that step to healing and it had to start right there inside me.

I wiped away the tears I didn't realize were making their way down my cheeks and wetting my blouse. I went back to my mother's room. Apart from my children she was all that I called my own. Come rain come sunshine nothing about us would never change unless she chose to drain her DNA from me.

I held her hands which were warm,another comforting sign that she was still alive.

"oh mummy you could have told me what to do. Please come back I miss you. Do you think going back to Peter is the best thing? I can't do this alone I need you ..." I broke down and cried so hard. Letting out all the pain bottled inside me. There and then I heard her cough then when I looked at her she was trying to open her eyes and getting them accustomed to light. It felt like I had witnessed the birth of a new born. "Mum..." I called her thinking that it was all a dream and afraid to wake up to the cruel realization of the truth when she would suddenly vanish. I went to call the nurse who first looked at me as if I was crazy before I snapped at her and had her on her heels. We rushed to the room together and she looked at her in amazement.

"it's a miracle,I didn't think she would pull through," she mouthed. It was an emotional moment, I was kneeling down and praising God like I have never done before. Psalms 103 was all over my lips. I was blessing The Lord who forgives all our inequities and heals all our diseases. The nurse told me to go outside because she needed to do some examinations before the doctor arrived. I went home to tell Aunt and Janet the good news,such news was profound to be told on the phone. I was grinning all the way :) and obviously Peter forgotten at that moment.

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Life couldn't have been more rosy. We were home celebrating my mother's homecoming. Janet's husband went to Nkhatabay to fetch Beatrice and my brother Yamie. They were dying to see Mum as well and we couldn't deny them the pleasure. She wasn't going back anytime soon. For all we knew, Mrs Kamanga wasn't to be further frustrated. My mother's presence would trigger new hard feelings. I couldn't imagine the scandal circulating among the villagers. Beatrice told me that Uncle had gone to the elder's council and put a case against her for dragging the family name in the mud and for having an affair before her husband's family set her free. I didn't care whatever they could do next as long as my mother was fine,tomorrow would take care of itself. i knew she was in pain everytime the accident crossed her mind but I didn't want to bring her pain all over by mentioning Mr Kamanga. The day she was discharged from the hospital she asked me if Mr Kamanga was fine, I told her that he

died and I didn't want her to talk about that until she was ready. At least she had to deal with the news of his demise sooner than later.

"you won't understand,nobody would but he was my first love." I read her pained expression in shock but didn't want to probe her.

I had so much things which I didn't know until I went to find my Aunt in her room to get to the bottom of this.

" Aunt much says Mr Kamanga was the love of her life, how is that possible when she was happily married to dad?" I was no longer a kid so some things couldn't be shocking to hear.

"You won't understand dear." she said but I knew all I had to do was ask her long enough.

"I will try to understand. Come on now I need to hear something that will finally bring this madness to an end."

She patted on the bed beside her and beckoned me to sit closer.

"What you are about to hear is not meant for your childish ears. It will be best if you keep your mouth shut, I don't think your mother would like the whole world to get hold of it."

I became excited. Skeletons in the closet are almost sacred.

She begun telling me how mum and Mr Kamanga were childhood sweethearts. She got pregnant and they got married. Unfortunately she miscarried in the fourth month. Mr Kamanga left her with his grandmother while he went to Zimbabwe in search of greener pastures with promises of a good life when he would return. After a year,her family went to take her back assuming that he won't ever come back for his bride. My father who was the best friend quickly went to pay her bride price and her family married her off without her consent. Trouble came to a peak when I was born and Mr Kamanga came to reclaim his bride....

In those shocking minutes I got the most terrifying revelation. I didn't think this was what I thought it was.

"Does that mean Mr Kamanga was my father?" I wasn't sure if that is what I wanted to know even when I went through the trouble of asking.

"No sweetheart. Remember it was a year later after Mr Kamanga was gone that you were born." The relief I felt was beyond words. I couldn't imagine

that I came from the loins of such a shameless man. It was quite a love story but these two had over done it. One must always know when to let go. We win some and lose some. One can never have the best of both worlds. I felt sorry for my mother for having had to endure a loveless marriage for such a long time. I now understood the underlying animosity between my parents which seemed to accompany them everyday. My father was a bitter man who thought he had beaten his best friend once and for all yet they were in love more than they had ever been and that had made him a ruthless man. Later I think he must have realised that if you can't beat them, join them. He had to endure such a mockery of a union to his last breath.

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Now that my mother was feeling better again, I felt that it was time I reconstructed my life. I had neglected myself for some time and in the process denied myself the peace of mind. It was high time I got off my high horse and made peace with Peter. The fact that I still loved him and had not been successful to put him at the back of my mind was driving me crazy. How does one person get stuck in somebody else's mind for so long? I took my phone to call him and he picked it up at first ring.

"hello"

"hie how are you?"

"good and you?"

"great too."

"well I ..." Seriously he wasn't making it easy for me.

"yes am listening " then silence.

"I just wanted to tell you that can we forget the past and look into the future? " That was rather said abruptly. He heaved out a sigh one would think he had been holding it for a life time.



" Thank you very much princess you have just made me the happiest man in the world."

Butterflies fluttered in my tummy as I held back a dam of tears that threatened to flood my eyes.

"Well what will happen to Masozi and the baby?" That had always stood between us and even if I had tried to ignore it, it stood imposingly. after all it was the reason for everything.

"You won't believe me but I am one lucky man." He said yet I had no clue where this was driving to.

"what happened?" Seriously I started feeling like a stranger for not knowing his life's latest development. He started telling me how one day after work he came home and found a letter on the dining table addressed to him. It was written by

Masozi. She said she has had

enough of the marriage in which a husband had nothing to do with her.

kkkkk that was if marriage is one sided. The only time she got

pregnant was the only time he had touched her. I admired her courage to know when things wouldn't work. She had left heavily

pregnant and had taken everything that belonged to her. He had being frightened to think that nobody would believe him and the first thing he did was go to the police station and say it all. One policeman had asked for Masozi's

number and called it. She said there was no way she would get back to Peter even if he was the last man on earth. She got it that he didn't love

her and respected that fact. She told the policeman not to hold him responsible for anything that would happen to her because she had

chosen her path. She said she was in Mwanza staying

with her boyfriend, a Mocambican truck driver.Peter had been shocked by such an honest revelation but it was a blessing in

disguise.

I felt like punching the air in

victory. Such a mountain having had to disappear after all the havoc we passed through. After all the

pain,the shame,the rejection and the tears. Well that was done but now I

didn't know how to handle Peter's mum. wasn't she going to say I gave her son muthi? The Lord who saw it fit to cast out the Peninah out of my life, knew that my hands were clean.

" That's some good news but please make sure you keep in touch for news of the baby when it arrives," I said bearing in mind that he shouldn't neglect his child as well.

"There's no way I will have anything to do with her again. That woman brought me nothing but bad luck," he fumed.

"The baby is your blood and innocent in every way."

"Wangu please don't make me do what I don't want." I knew better when not to argue with him.

"I want to come and see you in a week's time," his words were music to my ears and I was so excited. The thought of seeing him again made me realise how much I missed him and guilt washed over me for the calls I rejected and the ones I hunged up on him.

"can't wait to see you again." I giggled almost pinching myself for such a show.

"I miss you my love,I wish I had the ability to fast forward time."

That night I went to bed with a glow on my face. Remo kept sending me messages which I didn't reply,I didn't have the time to entertain that. The king of the castle was back to claim his queen.

I didn't want to end up like my mother nursing a love wound for the rest of my life.

For the life of me,I hoped I had made a good decision ...

I was waiting for Peter with abetted breath. I didn't think what he would think of me after getting a glimpse. For what seemed an uptenth time I straightened my dress. Well I had picked a bit of weight over the months and I didn't know if he would like this new me. I had been standing at the bus depot for the past one hour. Waiting had never been one of my best virtues. Knowing these local buses I was sure another breakdown has amassed leaving the passengers with no choice but wait till it was fixed. Peter's phone was off so that left me with no choice than wait longer and have a stretch over my nerves. I took out a pocket mirror and combed my hair again until I told myself to stop acting like a teenager on a first date. Unknowingly I was tapping my feet until a man sitting next to me almost shouted that I was driving him on the edge. I didn't blame him my high heels were making a deafening noise. I was glad i left the kids at home because it could have driven them nuts. At last after what seemed like ages, a bus came in and I watched the passengers disembarking one by one until I saw him. My Peter as handsome as I could ever remember. As if on cue, we looked into each others' eyes and I felt his smile melting my heart. I run into his arms and for a moment thought it was just the two of us in the whole world. There was no need for words, the closeness was just enough. I felt tears misting my eyes, it wasn't for sadness but an overwhelming joy that tied my heart in knots. I almost regretted for shunning him all this time, didn't it ever cross my mind how much I was missing him? He looked into my face and oh boy I swear I could drown into his eyes. That was when we noticed the people around us. Display of public affection was considered as embarrassing but at this moment it was the last thing on my mind. Why does love become embarrassing yet people fought openly in public places and everybody would see nothing amiss?

We went to the hotel he was booked for the night. It was getting dark so I just helped him settle down before he reluctantly agreed to let me go home. I had a permanent glow on my face and my eyes shone like those of the cat who just got a bowl full of milk. I felt so young and bouyant I could feel a light to my step.

However when I got home the mood was different, almost sombre and when I walked in to find Aunt and Janet, they went silent as if a bomb had

been dropped and waited for explosion.

"I hope I didn't interrupt something important," I said apologetically.

Trying to lighten the mood my aunt said, " No love. You can sit down and hear all about it after all it concerns you too."

" No mummy please don't, I will tell her myself after I have sorted it all out." Oh poor Janet always trying so hard to protect me from hurting but did she know how much pain I had taken aboard my life or she all thought it was a joke like everyone else did?

" I can't think of a better time than now," aunt said and my mind started to wonder hoping it wasn't my mum.

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The following morning I went to see Peter. I didn't want to have him worried but now I had a problem bigger than death itself at my hand. I replayed Janet's words in my mind and for once envied those people who smoke just to get the stress out of their system. I could do anything to get this out of my mind. Janet's husband had said he has had enough of feeding what looked like his wife's whole clan. He had said he won't release any upkeep money until we got out of his house. Janet had protested at the cruelty and inconsideration of it all but he had threatened to leave without a second thought. I laughed though realising the selfish side of it all. It wasn't like we were staying forever. A visitor is like dew, comes in the morning and goes before you know it. Where was the African in him? in Africa if you marry somebody, you marry the whole family. It gives one a complete sense of belonging.

I found Peter having a late breakfast and he was quick to pick on my black mood. I told him everything and he went quite as if in deep thoughts.

" Come with me," he said finally but i looked at him blankly in disbelief. My worry was my business. I already had existing customers in an already existing target market. The thought of starting all over wasn't so appealing to me.

I started telling him about my business and how this place seemed to be full of opportunities. He still insisted that he wanted me with him on the first bus to Lilongwe the following morning. I told him that I needed time

to take my mother back to Nkhatabay until she fully picked up the pieces of her life. It would mean I would be out of business for a while but it was worthy it. So I thought.

" Don't make me wait for a life time because I also have a life to run," he said. It was unexpected and I couldnt hide my dissapointment.

" You know what I have to do this whether you will wait or not." With that I stormed out. The selfishness of some men too nxaa. One minute they will be caring, the next they will be driving you crazy with their constant demands for you to do as they please. Well he was in for a shock ,unlike the last time I now had a strong grip on myself.

Back home I just wanted to take a long bath and go to bed. Amanda and Laurent were a gem as always. They detected my black mood and made me smile. Laurent was making funny faces at me while Amanda was tickling me. I had no choice but to join in the fun. Seriously at times I felt like a kid again around these two.

When we were exhausted, we went to have supper then watched Television until it was bedtime for the kids. I tucked them in then took a novel Two women by Martina Cole. She would always be my favourite writer as far as books are concerned. She tells it all like it really is. After reading for almost an hour I decided to log in to facebook. I had one message in my inbox and thought if it was another useless 'hie' from a man I would scream my head off. I remembered another hie from a hie fanatic. When I asked him what was up with the 'hies' he said, "am not on whatsapp." Dumb bugger I blocked him instantly.

I opened the message. "I want my kids back you fool" It was Ben.  
oh God not again ...

## Episode 38

I realised that my hands were trembling but not in fear but in anger at

what I would have done to Ben if he was standing before me and uttering that nonsense. I could feel the hatred I had for him rising the bile inside me. Who did he think he was just to waltz back in my life and expect to be treated like loyalty. Well he was in for a big shock because I would fight him to my last breath before I let him near my kids again even then my ghost would come back and haunt him for days without end. Before I blocked him I thought of going through his timeline to check what had rattled his nest. If you want to know people take a journey through their facebook timelines and you will see it all bared up. Few people I know have the decency of keeping their real life out of the fantasy of the social network. There was not much just some statuses hinting that these days he was always frustrated by some people. I laughed. It saved him right and atleast it made me strangely happy to realise that he didn't live a peaceful life like he wanted me to believe. Remember the ex's favourite quotes "hie am glad I left you. You never made me happy. " kkkkkk. I decided to go further by going to Cathy's account through Ben's relationship status; married to Cindy Mbewe. It was all there. God I thank you because you will make the Hannah out of me by giving me Samuel and putting all the Peninahs to shame. another one read God you are never too late nor too early but just on time and I know in your time you will bless me. I laughed this time unable to stop myself. We were turning religious over night? It now made sense. Ben wanted to use my kids like pawns to take off the shame of so many years without children. These people who made fun of me without a second thought and laughed their ribs off at my distress. The bad news was they had opened my eyes and I was many things but not stupid. Immediately I blocked them both spoiling their chances of finding me unless they thought of using another account. By then I would be ready to take them head on. I was just buying time for them to knock themselves out with worry but one thing I knew they burnt the bridges long time ago for them to get back into my life.

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The following morning I started making preparations to send the remaining stock of wrappers to my customer in Blantyre. I already explained my situation to him and he hoped I would be back to business

before he runs out of stock. I didn't order any because I knew that I would be moving soon. I locked the shop and asked some boys to help me carry the bag. I went to Axa to send it then went to my landlady to hand back the shop keys. When I was done the sun was already up in the sky and burning really hot. I went home to start packing. I wanted to get done with my mum's stuff first before doing mine, it was nice because Beatrice was helping me. I didn't even have time to say goodbye to Peter. Part of me was sad but another was happy because goodbyes made me too emotional for my own liking.

One look at my mother made me realise all I wanted to know. She didn't want to go. I understood because Mrs Kamanga wouldn't take her return too nicely. She would give her hell and I could see through her eyes that she was terrified. I already discussed it with my Aunt, it was a silent joke we knew too well between us. She was to stay with my aunt until the coast was clear because that woman was determined to murder her in cold blood with her bare hands. That way I wasn't going to spend my whole life mooving over her because she would be in the safe and capable hands of my favourite Aunt. Blood is thicker than water because if it wasn't we would have left mum to mop her own mess.

I planned to stay for three weeks before going to Lilongwe to join Peter. I was excited because I would be close to Norah again. The last time I talked to her she had her baby boy named after the father Frank, such a cute baby from the pictures she had sent me. I was glad they were back together and he had accepted her the way she was. That at least had taken the worry off my mind but still she said she suspected he was having an affair. Didn't she worry enough about taking the baby for a test the following month without him being another thorn in the flesh? Poor girl I couldn't wait to see her again and hear it all.

I finished packing and waited for tomorrow so we had to start off. Later in the evening we had a meeting and I thanked Janet and her husband for accommodating us in their humble abode. I know it's not fun fair to take care of people. Only God could be able to repay them with more blessings for the time and money they had spent on us especially footing my mum's

hospital bills...

## Episode 39

we went back to Nkhatabay and I seriously wasn't looking forward to the gossip that awaited us their like a swarm of bees. Thanks to my mum for making us the centre of such unnecessary limelight. Am sure upon seeing my mum,they could wish to call Mrs Kamanga and watch the drama unfold. Ever heard of minding your own business? I don't think so. True to my thoughts, the moment we arrived at Aunt's place, wel my paternal Uncle Kondowe made an appearance to give my mother his piece of mind. It still echoes inside my head.

"You are a shameless b\*\*\*\* no wonder you killed my brother so that you should be left to sleep with the whole village, " he bellowed.

All the while I didn't want to get involved in this but the moment he dragged me into that conversation,well he set me off completely and made it my business.

"That's why Wangu can't even secure herself a man,like you she ain't done being the village bicycle. " His mistake. As if on auto pilot, I got up and stood in front of him, all the remaining respect I had for him vanished.

"who are you to judge? do you think you are better than all of us? who put you in charge of mankind or you are trying to play God? You pretend to be a happily married Christian yet you have infected half the girls in this village. You think the world is blind? sort out your own shit before you say somebody else's stinks." The way his mouth dropped in disbelief one could have thought he had run out of body fuel. I continued.

"Respect her for who she is and if you don't like that well am sorry but keep yourself inside your house until you learn to." All this time my mother kept a passive face while my Aunt was grinning with pride for putting this crazy man in his rightful place.

"Thank you for that but I tell you Wangu you will pay for this. Nobody talks to me like that and get away with it." I knew it was just the last few



kicks of a dying horse. The moment he walked out of the door mum and aunt burst out laughing.

"For once I thought I was seeing the younger version of you," my mum said to my aunt.

"Yeah I remember how I shouted at him when he came with his brother to pay your bride price. I wish we had a say in all those matters, all this couldn't have happened. Ofcourse Mr Kamanga could have still died but then you would have tested the best years with your true love." aunt replied.

"Enough of the past. I am going to prepare your room mum so I expect you to get out of that chair and take a bath."

"Can't I skip it today?" she asked with puppy eyes.

"I am not going to urgue with you, even Laurent knows better than trying that with me." I said jockingly and went out.

Aunt went to make tea. Tonga people love tea with a vengeance. They can take it any day and time even when the sun is scorchingly hot. I hummed to myself while changing the sheets on the bed. It felt good to be back even though I took pains at my uncle's words when he said am failing to secure my own man. Seriously I only have had two men in my life ;Ben and Peter and that wasn't so bad. Sod Ben off but Peter and I were now in good books and if things continued running smoothly I might agree when he pops the 'great question.'

Poor Wangu that man will never have enough courage to go against his mother as long as he continues behaving like a frightened school boy. I thought.

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The week dragged by so quickly because I didn't have much to do. Somehow I couldn't wait to go to Lilongwe. I missed hearing Jennifer's latest gossip news inside Peter's family. I dreaded bumping into Peter's mum, I wasn't prepared for that doomsday. I was sure she could blame me for ruining Peter's picture perfect marriage if at all there was any. After a week at Aunt's place, I set off with Beatrice and Yamie to go to our house, we couldn't stay too long and at some point we had to go back. We went to do a spie's

job to make sure the coast was clear. A part of me didn't want to go but another one wanted to. It was called confronting one's fears and coming face to face with the devil himself. The sooner I got it done with the better. I was scared because as it was, mum had some questions to answer to Mr Kamanga's family. This couldn't have gone unnoticed no matter what.

We arrived at the house and it felt strange being there. We were like under watch and every now and then I kept glancing over my shoulder in case danger lurked in the shadows and jumped on me. Beatrice and Yamie went to unpack in their rooms while I was dusting the furniture. I was absorbed in my own thoughts before I was brought back by some loud voices which I realised were getting louder as the person got closer to the house.

" Did you think you were going to hide forever?. " She shouted as she banged on the door as if trying to take it down. I went to the window and saw through the curtains.

Well i was convinced we had cctv cameras in this village in form of people. She was standing there with a 5Litre gallon and a box of matches which she was waving as if it was a medallion.

Never have I seen such an angry woman before who seemed to have completely lost it...

I felt my legs turn to jelly as my stomach churned and threatened to topple me over. Her eyes were a mask of daggers of fire and she looked crazy enough to commit murder. There was no way I could have watched her set the house on fire again. What is wrong with black people? why do we think we can sort everything with violence?

I opened the door and stepped outside. I could feel her malice and hate clawing right under my skin.

"Where is your mother? " she asked me. Unless I was her fellow lunatic there was no way I could have given an honest answer to that question.

" I don't know." I replied with a tremor in my voice. She narrowed her eyes and looked in my face then said,"look I ain't here for games. Just tell me where she is because if you are hiding her in this house I will burn her

to ashes in it without a second thought. "

" I don't know. I am not her bodyguard."

I could see that I was annoying her further but showing that I was frightened to the bone could have given her an added advantage.

"I am warning you child don't get involved in things that are not of your age. you see me and your sweet mother have scores to settle. I will not rest until I cause her the same pain she did to me and will enjoy every minute of it. I could have done that a long time ago but I now swear on my husband's grave that I will make her pay every inch of everything."

She was talking more to herself than to me.

"I told you already that I don't know where she is you can even go inside and look." I stepped aside to let her pass while Beatrice and Yamie sat on the verandah. The moment she stepped inside and started looking in the rooms, I took the keys from inside the door handle and locked it. She had the matches and the petrol but I knew she couldn't set the house on fire while inside unless she wanted to sign her own death warrant. I took out my phone and called one of the police officers who helped us when Peter's Mum sent people to set the house on fire. I explained to him hastily and told him that it was a matter of urgency because lives were at stake. He promised to be there in twenty minutes time. Excitement and fear coursed through my blood. I knew that I had just included myself in her black list and what she would do to me later would be best left to my imagination. She was inside banging the door as if to bring it down and shouting obscenities that made the devil look like a small baby.

The police came and took her. I hoped they locked her up and threw the keys in the ocean. People like her are a danger to society and they deserve to be kept away until they learnt their lessons.

When I told my Aunt what happened she said she wished she was there and teach the crazy woman a lesson she would take to her grave. I told her that she should do that if she wanted to join her in the police cell.

Days turned into weeks quickly than i had expected and I went to Lilongwe. This time I wanted to guard myself against any heartbreak even when men are said to be unpredictable. I wanted to go back to school and

finish my course while that chance was still there. He had his job and I didn't want to forever be on the receiving end. I had plans of opening a boutique and employ somebody to do the job while I went to school. I didn't know how Peter was doing in helping his baby with Masozi. It was time I stepped in because I had to put to an end to this syndrome of abandoning babies. I knew how much it hurt to take care of a baby alone, accident or planned. I had plans to go there and see him myself with or without Peter's approval. I didn't want to be punished by God for being 'the other hard woman'. She was married yes but it had to come from her own mouth if she didn't want anything from him but the baby would definitely want something from his father. Hard feelings aside, we were both women and know better the sorrows of a fellow sister. I couldn't imagine the tantrums Peter's mother had thrown upon hearing news of the perfect bride she had chosen for her son. I was yet to find out...

## Episode 40

Sometimes we get lost in the maze of the essence of life when we tend to live at pleasing others. Unless we realize the real meaning of our lives it's when we will learn to bring out the best in ourselves and the people around us will also learn to respect and accept who we are.

The pieces to my life's puzzle seemed to be falling perfectly in place yet in a strange way I was feeling a yawning abyss inside me. I felt that it was all wrong, we were living like husband and wife when we weren't married yet. I know I had not done the right thing with Ben but this time my soul yearned to do things in a different way. There was no ring to show for it not even a bride price on my head. You may say I was too ambitious but formality is very important to every woman. Who don't want to see that dream of being a smiling bride walking down the aisle to the dismay and envy of many come true? I didn't want to sound nagging but enduring the agony of waiting day in and day out when he would finally pop ' the

question ' was enough to drive me on the edge of my emotions. Peter didn't seem bothered by it, in fact he didn't think anything was amiss as long as we stayed together. It was the same terrible spirit of negligence that had landed him between the thighs of Masozi and who knows what other woman had shared his bed in my absence. I didn't blame him because he wasn't the problem. I was the problem since I was the one giving him all the privileges of a wife when he had not yet made me one. He was enjoying the fruits and I could imagine him boasting of it to his friends for not having to be tied down by a woman. I hope I didn't make myself sound emotional and desperate. If we wanted to make something out of this, we had to make it official this time or else all the efforts will be in vain. It had to be right before God as well as the law.

It was strange to settle down at first. Being a stranger in the house I had once familiarized myself with. He had a house boy who stared at me rudely on first meeting and I later told Peter that we won't be needing his services any more. It troubled my mind to let him be near my kids especially my Mandy. I have heard enough stories of house boys who raped children and I didn't want mine to walk that path as I had done thanks to that overzealous relative. The following day he received his money and marching orders. I insisted on moving to a new house because the house reeked of Masozi's presence and memories which pleased me not. I saw a house to let in the newspaper and contacted the owner who said it was in Area 18. This is one of those neighborhoods where your man is at risk of falling into another woman's lap. It's nice yes but one pays a price along with it. I cancelled it out immediately. I found another one in Area 10 and fall in love with it immediately. It was expensive 100,000 Kwacha a month but this serene and posh area was worthy every penny. I talked to Peter about it and we made arrangements with the landlord to see it the following day. I called Jennifer to accompany us. It was remarkable how close we had been to each other and talked almost about everything. From nappies to men. I came to realise that her marriage wasn't as rosey as I had perceived over the years. Mike couldn't satisfy her as much as she heard other women talk about. She had thought women exaggerated but later she found out that she had pretended all along and

made a good job of convincing him. Poor man.

I was bored of sitting idle. Both kids went to school and Peter had said I had to wait for his friend to return from China to give me few business tips. I already knew that I wanted to open a boutique but he said I had to get proper training and become a good beautician. I didn't want spending my days on women's hair and nails and listen to their gossip of men and the endless havoc they bring into our tranquil lives. I wanted to sell clothes, shoes, bags and cosmetics.

It was a good thing when Jennifer told me that there was a vacancy at one of her father's friend's company. He owned a chain of Supermarkets Saka's Cash and Carry. They were in need of an assistant cashier. Somebody to supervise till operators. I didn't know if he was indeed her father's friend or there was more than the ordinary eye could see. I didn't care and this job sounded so boring but I was tired of lazying around, I ended up taking it.

The house was so beautiful beyond my expectations I gasped seeing it. I fall in love with the well tended garden. My feet seemed to dissappear in the carpet on the green grass. I felt the desire to remove my shoes and run happily. I knew the kids would love it too. The house was big. Four bedroomed and ensuite. Walking around the house made me feel guilty to think at the acute poverty swallowing people at the village. My mother was way better than others. Atleast we never went to bed hungry for that I was grateful to God. By the look on Peter's face I could see he fall for it too. He got a well paying job and we could afford it :)

We left after signing a rental agreement. On the drive home I couldn't stop chattering about what flowers I would plant in the garden.

My first day at work came quicker than I had expected. I just took my Cv to that branch's manager and he took me to my supervisor before he showed me around. My supervisor was a scary woman who throughout the introduction had a permanent scowl on her face. Her name was Miss Kapenga. She was in her forties and unmarried. I quickly understood the source of her misery ; she didn't have a man to vent out her frustrations on.

She introduced me to some of the people. Four girls who were till operators and would later meet four others who were on off day. They worked in shifts and had twenty staff members. I was put on a certain girl's till to supervise. Her name was Marble. She had pimples of ten people on her small oval face but she had a nice smile and was friendly. In a few minutes we were chatting like old friends. She told me to look out for girls who gave out more change to people and later shared it. They were least bothered with stock taking because a few tears and allowing the boss inside their skirts kept them on the job. I laughed out on the absurdity of it all.

We were in the thick of things. The queue was long and i was helping Marble packing.I heard a familiar voice.

"Wangu..."

I looked up and couldn't believe who I was seeing ...

## Episode 41

I didn't know whether to scream my head off or not but I wasn't happy to see Cindy. Her face was over made up as usual and almost patched to hide the dark circles around her eyes. She had lost weight over the years and her clothes seemed to hang on her small frame.

I mumbled my greetings to her but she didn't seem to be in a hurry to go.

"I looked all over for you but heard that you were in the village." she started.

" You were well informed. I had things to sort out there." I replied hoping that she got my drift and leave.

"somebody said you got ditched again," she gave out one of her loud laughs like a hyena that had people look in our direction.

"If you don't mind I have work to do. " I was trying so hard not to lose it.

" Work? you call this work? hmm let me tell you something,I have waited to give you some home truths. Stay away from me and my man you witch.

I know what you did to me so that I shouldn't get pregnant. God will shame you till the day you die because He will give me a dozen." This drama queen though always trying to cause trouble.

"Which man are you talking about? don't tell me you are humming about my left over Ben?" If she wanted to play mean, I would give her the full dose.

It hit home,before I knew it she pushed me and I almost landed on my back making the contents of the customer's shopping bag that I was packing fly in all directions. I could hear ooh-aahs and a red switch inside my head turned on. I went full force on her and started beating the living day lights out of her. All the anger and frustrations I had harbored over the years came flooding back. This woman was the reason I had entangled myself in Ben problems. The vengeance spirit in me rose so high it felt like every blow,every slap gave me a breath of relief. In the background somebody called security and the next thing I realised was some big and powerful hands dragging me off her. I was panting like a bull dog while she was wailing like a well paid actress in a Nigerian movie. Her face was a river of blood, the nose and mouth being the source. Next time she would learn to keep her mouth shut. People were taking pictures, I was sure in no time they would flood the social media I prayed Peter wouldn't get hold of it yet. The security guard led us outside and I watched Cindy going into her Range Rover and drove off. It was a good thing she had a drive because in the state she was,she couldn't have been able to drive herself.

" Wangu Banda in my office now!" The manager bellowed behind me. I was so ashamed of myself for causing such a scene on my first day at work as I walked past people. Marble gave me a smile almost looking proud of me,she had heard every word and I could see that she couldn't wait to ask me for complete details.

Before I could even close the door of his office he started shouting.

" What you did is unreasonable and uncalled for. The media will be on our tails now thanks to you. Have you ever heard of self control? I don't think so ...You have just put me in an awkward situation with my boss for failing to control my overzealous junior who think is a wife to John Cena.

Customers will be afraid to come here in case somebody will jump on



them." He went on for the next twenty minutes. When he was done, he said " any questions?" as if he was doing an interview.

" I am sorry Sir." I managed to say.

" I won't tolerate such behavior. Consider yourself dismissed until further notice. " I felt so useless standing before him. I had failed myself by losing the job I wanted so bad. I went out of the office and disappeared into the staff room to take my bag and change my clothes. There were some blood splattered on my blouse. I went to clean my hands and splashed water on my face to calm myself down. I looked in the mirror and laughed. One day this could have happened because that girl was a fool to think she could talk to me anyhow. She didn't know I had grown wings over the years. I came out and went to Marble to say good bye. There were whispers behind me and I knew i was the hottest topic for the following weeks' gossip. We exchanged phone numbers with Marble and promised to call her for a chat at my house.

I stepped out of the Supermarket to catch a bus at the nearby bus terminal. As I walked past the car park I heard a voice.

" So you think you own the whole world and beat people as you please?"

I froze in my tracks and looked at him. He had an evil smirk on his face and his eyes were a true reflection of the blazing pits of hell...

## Episode 42

You can't afford the afflicted with afflicting the comfortable -Princess Diana Frances Spencer.

My hand was running as if it caught up with a rabbit. Somehow at the back of my mind, I knew Ben was likely to grace me with his presence at the expense of his Dolly wife. If it was somebody else am sure he could have brushed off but because it was me, he wanted to cause me so much

pain. He had his right hand behind his back and didn't know what he was hiding. I didn't answer his question but I stood there looking him in the eye, daring him. Sometimes I wished I could hear that he had dropped dead so that I would never set my eyes on him again. I know I forgave him for everything but why did he keep on crossing my path in this life? why couldn't he let sleeping dogs lie? I thought he was the one who didn't want anything to do with me again? Why would he and his wife think I was the source of their misery when they had brought calamities on their heads? To be accused of witchcraft is a serious offence in Africa and may lead to mob justice because the police don't want to get involved. It's either people will go to a Sing'anga to pay back to the one who had bewitched them or call for the exorcism of the accused. Talk of the stigma and discrimination that trailed. I once watched on Emmanuel TV when a family was divided because the mother was suspected of practising witchcraft. Out of her four children only one child believed that her dear mum was innocent. There were chaos I tell you in their house. Imagine a husband you vowed to spend the rest of your life with and the kids you carried and nursed with so much love and sacrifices turn against you out of the blues...

" Why did you beat my wife when all she did was come here for shopping? Should I hire body guards for fear of what crazy people like you will do to her?" I didn't answer him not that I was afraid but I was sorry for such a fool that he had become. If she had learnt to mind her own business, she couldn't have earned herself a beating.

"Today I will show you your place and how to stay there always" He said before he brought out his hand and produced a sjambok. I let out a shriek and jumped in time before it landed on my body. I started running for my dear life. I was in heels and surely looked like an ostrich on the run. I run my way out of the shopping centre premises into the nearby bus stage. People. were whistling in excitement at seeing such drama in broad daylight. I looked behind me and it was unbelievable seeing Ben with his big belly juggling in front of him. Lucky enough there was one minibus with no passengers inside except the driver and conductor. I quickly went inside and begged the driver to go. He drove the car leaving Ben behind shouting that he will find me soon. I laughed so hard for sometime before I realised that I forgot my purse that morning in a haste to go to work

when Peter had to drop me as well as the kids to school. I was likely to pay a hiring fee for all the seats and I did mental calculations. The minibus carried eleven passengers when they knew traffic officers were like rabid dogs on particular days but once they knew the road was clear they would pack us like sardines.

"How much are you charging me going to Area 10?" I asked the conductor.

"Just 5000 kwacha Mai" This was even worse than I had assumed.

"Listen to me. Don't act as if I am a foreigner thinking I don't know bus fares very well. For your trouble I will give you 3000 kwacha."

The driver jumped in, "You are jocking right. I think we should turn back and leave you where you we picked you. Am sure that man you robbed will pay us handsomely." These minibus drivers and their big mouths. No wonder they are always on the wrong side of the law.

"Shut up big head. Maybe if you kept your mouth shut and think before you talked God could have shrunk the size of your big head." I said and the conductor laughed so hard as if he was watching Anne Kansiime. The driver screeched the bus to a stop and said, "Get out all of you." we were at Area 18 bus stage. It's quite a distance to Area 10 bearing in mind that I also had to walk for a good thirty minutes before arriving home. When we weren't moving an inch he came around the passenger door and dragged us out. He had a big scar on the right side of his face which looked like he had been scathed with a pocket knife. To me scars meant; battles fought won or survived with signs to take up to the grave. I didn't protest. When he asked for me to pay for 3000 for the long way we had come I said, "I ...I don't have the...the money with me now. " A hot slap landed and stung my face. I felt so hot. If I was white, am sure I could have been as red as a beetroot.

"wrong answer. You think I enjoy leaving my warm bed and wife at 4:00am for people like you to mess up my business?" I could see that I had started a wrong person. The conductor was shivering like a dry leaf beside me; he knew what this guy was capable of doing.

"We ...we can go ...go to my house and I will pay you." Seriously I didn't know when the disease of stammering caught me.

"I don't have that time." he said then took off my shoes. I watched my beautiful and expensive peep toes going for good. They were a birthday

present from Peter and their absence would go unnoticed. We watched him driving off when my pleading to have my shoes back landed on deaf ears. I didn't know what to do and honestly Peter would go ballistic. It was better to have him chew my head off than to walk such a long distance back home. I took out my phone and dialled his number. He picked up at first ring.

"Babe where are you. Just dropped by your office, I wanted to see how you are doing at your new job only to be told that you have been fired. What happened?" I didn't feel like talking about it after all the roughness that seemed to take toll on my day. I told him that I would tell him when we reached home. I told him where I was and in twenty minutes he arrived. The way I clung to him was enough to let him think I had bruises all over my body. The side of my face was swollen. I was sure that ruthless man's mother was a man because if she was a woman, he could have seen part of her in me. I told him to give the conductor money for his transport home after all we were in that predicament together.

When we arrived home, Peter filled the bath tub with warm water and he carried me to the bathroom. He put in soothing soap and bathed every inch of me. I had not said anything about the whole incident but his gentleness made me cry. What would I have done without him? He was a complete different page from Ben and I realised how luck I was to have him. I clung to him as I cried on his chest. I soaked his shirt with my tears and water but he didn't mind. He had left his work and important meetings just to be with me at that particular time. He caressed my hair and planted a thousand kisses on my face while whispering in my ear that he was there and nobody could hurt me anymore. One thing I loved about this man was the closeness we shared. He didn't rush to have sex with me but loved to be there for me first.

I finished taking a bath, he helped me getting dressed and gave me pain killers for my throbbing headache.

I went to make a snack for us and we ate. I took out the meat from the fridge to defrost in readiness for that day's supper while we went to watch Television. He took me in his arms and I dozed off. He woke me up when it was 5:00 pm so that we should go and pick the kids from school. I went to

fix my face and hair then we were on our way. He made me smile again with his crazy and imaginary stories I had heard a thousand times they made me laugh nevertheless. It was almost 5:10 pm when we arrived at the school. We started at the kindergarten section to pick up Laurent because we knew in no time Amanda would join us soon. We stood by the car and watched kids pass by to their parent's cars. The car park was almost deserted when we realized that Amanda was nowhere to be seen. I handed Laurent to Peter so that I went to look for her at her class. The teacher was gathering her books, ready to go and two other kids were packing their bags too. Amanda was not there.

"Good day Madam can I please help you?" She asked me.

"I am looking for Amanda."

"You are Mrs...?"

"Forget the Mrs part but I am her mother."

"Oh I see. You said you are her mum and you are looking for her?" I was beginning to get irritated by her questions.

"That's exactly what I said." I answered impatiently.

"Well that's funny because a man who said is her Uncle, your brother came to pick her up saying there was an emmergency at home and you asked him to pick her up."...

I saw my whole world crumbling down...

## Episode 43

If you can see the positive sides of everything, you will be able to live a much richer life than others - Celestine Chua.

I couldn't believe the stupidity of these people. Somebody just came and picked my kid from school at the expense of mere words that I sent them. Where was the seriousness of the school rules? why didn't they call me to verify? If something happened to my daughter, I swore on my father's

grave that these people would pay dearly. I was standing there and she was looking at me as if I was crazy or something? let my daughter go missing for the rest of that day then they would know the crazy side of me. I didn't pass through those agonising nine months and an extra week for somebody to rip my baby off me. I started crying and telling her how irresponsible they were just to let people take kids just like that. I told her that I only had one brother and he was so far away he had never set his foot in Lilongwe. I went back to Peter and told him everything. We had to go to the headmaster's office but it was closed. We decided to go to the police station. All along tears were flowing down my cheeks and prayed for my baby's safety. She was my first born and the bond we shared was beyond imagination. She couldn't vanish just like that without somebody being behind it. A first thought came of Ben and in all the confusion of that day I realized that I didn't tell Peter what happened earlier that day. I decided to tell him starting from the incident with Cindy.

"You did what?" his voice vibrated in my ear almost making me jump.

"She started everything and I lost it before I knew it. Am really sorry love." I apologised.

"Now look what your foolishness has cost. You should really learn how to control your anger. How do you expect to find these guys. We don't know where to find them let alone their phone numbers." He was really mad at me and he kept banging on the dashboard with his left hand while driving. I remembered that I knew Ben's number by heart and could have said it in my sleep. But this wasn't a right to say that I might have fuelled his anger further. I took out my phone and dialled Ben's number but it was off. We drove to the police station and my eyes were puffy from so much crying.

We found a female officer on duty who kept on looking at Ben and flirting all the time I was giving out my statement. I could feel the urge to slap her hard. Couldn't she have some respect? I looked at Peter who seemed to enjoy the show then my voice dragged to let out a well timed and deliberate sob that saw Ben closer to me and gathered me in his arms. I saw the desperado rolling her eyes to the ceiling in irritation. I almost stifled a laugh. Well perhaps she could have my man one day but not in my presence. When she asked if I suspected any body to be behind it. I gave

out Ben and Cindy's Names but no address. We left on a note that they would be investigating and will let us know on any new developments. This woman just wanted an excuse to have my man's number am sure she crossed out mine the moment we walked out of the door. I have never felt so empty in my life. It was like Amanda's absence created a void in my hole that couldn't be refilled. Laurent was hungry and he started crying. We hurried back home and Peter went to make him his baby food while I went to the bedroom and stared at the ceiling blankly and let the tears flow. It wasn't fair. I was here in a warm house and comfortable while my baby was there cold, alone and frightened with strange people around her. I didn't think she would recognize Ben. All the memories she had of him had faded long time ago. He had barely been there and she had forgotten him.

Oh God I don't know what to do please help me. I can't do this alone. Please keep her safe because if anything happens to her I will never forgive myself. I prayed silently.

That night I didn't sleep until the following morning.

Peter called his boss and explained the situation. He gave him one leave week leave. We took a bath and set off to meet all the people we knew for help if not for any information that might lead to finding my daughter. I was walking like a wounded soldier, anytime I was likely to drop off. We went to see the town's worse thugs and Peter gave them money to tip us at any sight of Ben. By noon we were in the middle of town and exhausted with a baby who was crying restlessly. My mum called me and I wished I didn't speak to her. After all the pleasantries, she said, "Mrs Kamanga was taken to Zomba Central Hospital upon confirmation of a psychiatrist that she wasn't mentally stable." That was accompanied by a sarcastic laugh that irritated me so much I cut her call. When she called again I didn't pick up. I hate people who are happy at the misery of others. It's selfishness.

The second day my baby was nowhere to be found.

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## Episode 44

When you meet anyone, remember it's a holy encounter. As you see him, you will see yourself ...for in him you will find yourself or lose yourself - a course in miracles.

A horror in my heart kept widening at every ticking second. I was losing it. The pain razoring and jabbering me inside was swelling by the hour. I opened and let a dam of tears flood from my eyes yet the sense of loss couldn't go away. I had an uneasy feeling that something bad had happened to my daughter. Call it a mother's instinct. It hurt so bad to know that all I could do was pray and wait for a miracle from God. All the efforts of finding her were hitting blank walls and I wished I could wake up from this nightmare that was tormenting me. Nothing could have prepared me for anything like this in all my life. Days turned into a week and she was still missing. The police still had nothing. Posters of her missing were placed in most public places yet nothing came out of it. The going was getting tougher by the day. The effects of sleepless and restless days and nights were slowly catching up with me. I was so exhausted yet sleep failed me. I felt like if I closed my eyes for a moment, I would go to sleep forever and never be able to see my Mandy again. I looked like a zombie and Peter, God bless his soul was the one taking care of Laurent.

When he was making breakfast in the kitchen, I was crying my eyes out in the bedroom. I couldn't eat and always wanted to be alone. My eyes run out of tears but I was moaning and groaning in emotional torture. I was reminding God that He gave me that precious gift, legitimate or not, to the glory of His name and He would help me find her. I had heard countless stories of child trafficking and I had never for once imagined my daughter falling victim to those lunatics. Children are so Precious, innocent and deserve to be protected and cared for. Nobody in their right minds can think of hurting them but the thought of pedophiles walking Scott free out



there was enough to make my blood cold.

All I could see in my eyes was her smiling face, those priceless moments she had hugged me and said, "I love you mummy." in her childish voice. Those moments she had told me that I looked beautiful in a new dress. I could do anything to have them back.

Peter came and sat beside me. I didn't hear him enter until he spoke.

"You can't continue like this hun. Please come and eat something. You need the strength. "

"No I don't ...All my strength is gone, I don't want anything else. I just want my baby back, I want her here." I wrapped my arms across my chest and locked myself back and forth. My eyes hurt and I had a throbbing headache but no amount of painkillers could take away the pain enveloping my heart and soul. He took me in his arms and tried comforting me but it didn't work out. Fear was paralyzing me. I was afraid of losing, I was afraid of the unknown, I was afraid of living with that pain forever. How does one get used to such pain? How does one beat it and how does one continue hanging to the thread of life when all the right reasons you have to live for are gone? How do you live knowing that you completely failed your dear kid? I remembered that the morning of the day she went missing, she told me that she didn't want to go to school because she had a headache. I knew Amanda too well to say she didn't have a headache. She just wanted to stay home and watch the new Tinkabell cartoons DVD that Peter had bought her the previous day. Oh if only I had let her stay maybe something like this couldn't have happened. Thoughts like these broke me and fuelled the yawning abyss in my heart. I couldn't take it anymore. I became hysterical and started shaking so hard. Peter had to take me to a doctor. I remember that I was crying for Amanda on top of my voice before the medicine overpowered me and I drifted off into oblivion.

When I woke up I had a stale taste in my mouth and my nostrils were filled with the overpowering smell of medicine. My mind was blank, there was no pain until I remembered what was happening. I started crying again then a doctor and a nurse came. I refused to be medicated again. I

felt that it maybe could have been better if my baby got sick and died. Atleast I could have seen her corpse and see evidence that she was no more but vanishing in the thin air left me with so many questions. I quickly cast off those thoughts out of my mind.

This whole thing was putting my mind to a test of sanity and dared me on how much pain I was able to bear.

Later Peter came with a crying Laurent. He seemed to notice that something was amiss. Poor man all this must have been too hard on him. The doctor recommended that I see a therapist. I didn't want a psycho in my life to make me forget. I wanted to feel every pain and nightmare as long as she was out there.

I asked Peter if he had heard any news,he sadly shook his head. The doctor prescribed painkillers for my migraines as well as sleeping pills and lots of rest. He also said I had to avoid issues that further depressed me. The circle of my life was incomplete with the dot of absence of my sweet child. The sunshine that lit my grumpy days.

I remembered that the day I carried her in my arms and looked into her tiny beautiful pink face,all doubts I had about going on in life vanished, for that moment I completely forgot the pain,rejection and horror that became my companion when Ben left me. Now that joy had been completely pulled off unceremoniously ...

## Episode 45

There are few misfortunes in this world that you cannot turn into a personal triumph if you have the iron will and the necessary skill - Nelson Mandela.

I sat on the couch looking at the Television screen, watching the lips of the news anchor yet I was miles away,my ears couldn't grasp the meaning of

his words. I felt like I was nursing a wound in my hurt, the danger was that I couldn't rip it open and see the intensity and how much it was bleeding. I was feeling every pain with my every heartbeat. The pain of missing my baby.

I only came to know that the telephone was ringing when Peter came from the bedroom and picked it up. It was obvious I became deaf from my present environment. Laurent was taking his afternoon nap and that gave Peter time to do some of his paper work.

"what? " I heard him talking on the phone and I jumped to stand at his side as if I wanted to snatch the receiver from his ear.

" what is in Peter? " I asked him, my heart skyrocketing inside me.

"okay we will be there in fifteen minutes. Thank you very much." He said to

whoever he was talking to then put the phone down.

"Sweetheart grab your jacket. That was the police officer and they say they have some information about Amanda's missing. "

I nearly fainted.

"Is she okay? where is she?"

"I don't know love. we have to go there and find out. I need you to be strong." He was scaring me big time.

I didn't trust myself to go through all this. He went to the bedroom and got a sleeping Laurent. I was shaking so much even when we sat in the car and Peter drove us to the police station. I was afraid of raising my hopes so high. It was the longest Twenty minutes of my life and I was biting my nails off my fingers until they hurt. We were both quite and lost in our own thoughts. I could see that Peter was nervous as well taking from the way he kept rubbing his face.

We finally arrived and we had to wait for our turn because there was only one officer on duty. I kept pacing to and fro with Laurent on my back until Peter grabbed my arm and made me sit on a nearby wooden bench.

Our turn arrived and I painfully watched as Peter narrated our issue to the officer who didn't look up the whole time, as he wrote something in his note pad. He called another officer from the adjoining room.

" could you please take these people to the victim support unit. They are here for that issue of the missing girl." To which the other officer nodded

and led us through the door he had earlier come from. We walked through a narrow corridor and he ushered us into a room marked "abused victims"

The moment I stepped my feet inside, I stopped dead in my tracks. I felt Peter's hand squeezing my own in assurance...As if swept away in a sudden dream,the sight before me floated in my eyes. I could hear the voices at the back of my mind but only one stuck.

"mummy. " I have never heard such a sweet voice all my life.

I clutched her to me with all my strength. Afraid that if I let go for a moment, I would wake up from this sweet slumber and find her gone. Tears flowed down my cheeks and there was no need for words.

"mummy I told him that I wanted you but he couldn't take me home." I looked at my daughter and saw eyes filled with pain,anguish and terror. She didn't deserve all this. Ben was sitting beside the police officer engaging him in a conversation that seemed to distract him from hearing what Amanda was saying.

"As I was saying officer. This woman is careless and irresponsible. She left the kid alone and look what happened. " At that moment I wanted to grab his neck and squeeze the lie out of him.Peter read my mind and stepped in time enough to stop me before I did anything stupid.

"Calm down dear. This is not the time to do that." Peter said.

"You will regret ever knowing me just like I loathe the day I set my eyes on you. " I fumed.

"Well we will see about that when the social worker hears all about this."

My heart sunk ...

Am I not destroying my enemies when I make friends of Them? -Abraham Lincoln

There was a look of triumph in Ben's eyes as if he had hit a jackpot. Who marvels at the pain and tears of others? Had he not cast me and his children out of his life like left overs? Okay. He had left me for another woman,I accepted it and moved on but do you also leave your children for

new ones? I don't think so. If the incident with Cindy at the Supermarket was the one that had opened this can of worm, then Ben was a coward driven by the shadows of a woman. If they didn't have issues of not being able to have their own kids, it meant he wouldn't have any use for his kids.

"sweetheart take the kids to the car while I finish talking to this idiot. " I told Peter while unstrapping Laurent from my back. Upon seeing his sister he had yelped in delight.

"Not until the social worker is here. " Ben couldn't shut his trap.

"Sir can you let me do the talking. Leave your differences aside and let us talk," the officer said to Ben. Peter sat down again with the kids.

We all sat kept quite and let the officer talk. Ben was eyeing Peter from head to toe. This was the second time these two had been in one room. The hatred emanating from each of them filled the atmosphere.

"Mr Ben Mbewe here claims that he found this girl walking along the road all by herself ..."

"That is not true!" I shouted in interruption.

"You were not there when I found her so you know nothing. " Ben defended himself. Seriously this man was shameless.

"I know that the day she got missing, she was at school and somebody went to pick her up." I answered.

"That is not true. " Ben argued.

"Quite..." The officer said, then continued. " You seem to have unresolved issues between you. perhaps you should take this matter to court."

" Not until the social worker comes here. " Ben said again. I began to wonder why he was so interested in this particular social worker.

"I think we should hear from Amanda what really happened. She is seven years old ,she can be able to say the truth. " I suggested.

"Not yet. that's your problem you don't treat her like a baby that she is. I found her and let me do the talking." Ben jumped in. Seriously he was beginning to get on my nerves.

"Let her explain. " The officer said to a disgruntled Ben. Just as I took Amanda to step forward to tell us her story, a young lady in high heels despite her long height strolled in. She didn't seem bothered by it.

" Good day everybody. Sorry am late I had to take care of some unfinished

business." She spoke while sitting herself down. The look on Ben's face changed abruptly. He was smiling from ear to ear and couldn't wait to hear his saviour speak.

"Without wasting your time,I have a police order to restrain this woman here from getting near the girl basing on issues of parental negligence and psychological abuse" She spoke while handing some papers to the officer.

"Look here madam,you can't come here and produce these papers for all of us here to bown down to you." It was good for the officer to say that in time before ndinakaphula ngozi( I acted without thinking).

"Are you in anyway trying to interfere with my job officer? " She asked while pointing at him with a long red nail.

" Which police issued this?"

"It doesn't matter as long as it has a police stamp on it. This good father here is trying to take care of his daughter and you are trying to stop him." Now this was getting personal. I couldn't sit and continue watching.

"Which father? You mean this good for nothing man who knows nothing but planting a seed and disappearing for somebody to take care of his shit?" My question was directed to the lady. It was obvious she had been fed wrong information and her face was blank,she didn't know what to say anymore.

"Wangu I am warning you for the last time.I have as much right as you have into these children's lives..."

"Like hell you have! Do you think the world start moving at the snap of your fingers or what? " I was roaring like a wounded lioness that I actually was.

"This is not a fighting ground.Amanda tell us what happened." Peter who had been quite all along finally found his voice.

"Who is this thing here? You are talking on whose behalf you wretched thing? You think I am stupid because I let you take care of my children" I definitely thought this room had turned out into a battle dome to settle our personal scores.

I picked up Amanda and put her on my lap to tell her tale.

"Don't be afraid sweetheart. Mum is here and nobody will hurt you," I whispered in her ear assuringly.

"I...he.." she began. I saw Ben looking at her, passing a silent threat and

frightening the life out of her with his intimidating look ...

## Episode 46

My sixth sense told me that there was more on the ground than the eye could see. Amanda buried her face in my chest. I didn't want to further subject my baby to his torturing. It's only people who are sick upstairs like him who frighten kids for their own selfish reasons.

"Officer you should excuse this man. He should go in the other room while we hear Amanda out." I said which made Ben almost to leap out of his chair in protest.

"That won't happen. I am the one who should say something here since am the one who found her." Am sure that sounded absurd even to his own ears. From the way Amanda clutched me, I sensed that as long as Ben was present, she wasn't free to talk.

"I then suggest either he gets out of this room and get this whole thing done with or we meet again in court. I am sure everybody here would like to see the report I have from Amanda's teacher as well as the video footage of the School's cctv cameras." The officer said and I wish you could have seen the look of total puzzle on Ben's face. It was clear there were loopholes in his seemingly perfect plan.

My heart got excited, I couldn't wait to see him getting what he deserved.

"Mr Ben Mbewe what evidence do you have for us to believe that you found Amanda alone and stranded because the school confirmed that she was in there until three o'clock in the afternoon?"

"I ...er...er not now. but I will call someone who knows who was with me at that particular time. "

"We don't have all the time in the whole world. Can we see the video officer?"

"Sure enough." The officer said rising to take the video.

"Wait officer. Can we do this tomorrow. I am rushing to pick up my wife she just texted me that she is not feeling." He tried to run away.

"Mr Mbewe give me one reason why I shouldn't lock you up in jail? " The officer had a serious face on him.

"maybe we should just hear what Amanda will say." The social worker suggested.

We all sat down and listened as Amanda narrated how Ben came to school to pick her up. He told her that he was her dad's friend and came to pick her up because Mummy was in the car and not feeling well. I pictured Amanda getting worried and hurrying to the strange car to see a sick me. Then he had taken her to a strange house out of town and she met a woman who was not her mother. She had cried and begged to be taken home but they eventually made her sit in a room with lots of toys and food which she took days before touching. Ben had asked her if she remembered him as her dad but she had said she didn't to which he had threatened her that if she didn't remember then she won't ever see her mum again. The poor kid must have cried so hard at this. It hurts to remember all those days that I had felt so much pain thinking I would never see my baby again.

I comforted her and promised that she could take a few days off from school and would never go back to that school again.

"Mr Mbewe I will have to lock you up for being suspected of kidnapping your own daughter..You will be read your rights when your lawyer arrives"

"Officer wait ...." Ben pleaded but the officer didn't have any more time to waste. He handcuffed and led him away. Tears flowed down my cheeks. I was ashamed for letting myself in that wicked man's life enough to bore him two beautiful souls who meant the world to me. It was my daily prayer for God to make them have more of me inside them than that monster's part.

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Later that evening we invited Mike and Joy with their kids for a party to celebrate Amanda's homecoming. It felt good to hear the sound of my own laughter. It felt like a century had gone since the last time I had been happy. I couldn't let her out of my sight until she slept in my arms and I went to tuck her in bed. A lump in my throat reminded me the love I had



for my kids and later as I went to bed that night I thanked God for fighting my battles and scattering my enemy.

I had never had a more peaceful good night's sleep that day than I had ever have in my entire life. Motherhood had never felt any better :)

## EPISODE 47

The gold medals you see are not really made of gold, they are made of sweat, determination and precious alloys called guts.

My life revolved around taking very good care of my children. I didn't mind doing anything else than being involved in each and every one of their new activities. At their new school I made clear instructions not to allow anybody else apart from Peter and me to pick them up. They didn't have to go to a school where they would stay the whole day. Peter bought me a new car and all my transport issues were sorted out. I would pick them at 1:30 pm and we would spend the rest of the day playing and laughing. I wanted to shower them with the motherly love that I never enjoyed.

My heart was at ease with Ben on remand for the past month. He had been refused bail and I went to court to take a restraining order to stop him or his psycho wife from getting near me and the kids. The court hearing was set in the following month and my lawyers were updating me on the proceedings. I now slept better and had less nightmares. Who would have believed that I was now leading a peaceful and drama free life. Nothing could beat my new found happiness. The Manager at the Supermarket I was working before I was dismissed had called me to say they would have a disciplinary hearing and would require my presence. Whatever they would decide later wasn't of any interest to me. It wasn't like I was getting more money from it but I just wanted working experience.

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I had just finished cleaning the kids' room when the security guard knocked on the door to tell me that there was somebody at the gate looking for a job as a gardener. Since the last gardener we had, left for his home village, I told him to bring the man to the house. I went to check on the rice in the kitchen then came back to the lounge to see the visitor. Something struck my heart sharply at his presence. Even though he now kept a beard and his hair was grey, I still recognized him anyway. I stood looted on the spot, all those memories flooding back into my head. Memories I had tried unsuccessfully to lock up. I used to have nightmares of his dirty and filthy hands on me back in time. There was no way in a thousand years I could have forgotten him. Aunt Grace's husband. This man was the reason I hated men, he was the reason I almost gave up on dating and he was the reason I found myself in the unfortunate arms of Ben. He had taken away my innocence just because he felt he could do so. I couldn't defend myself against his wickedness and the beast in him led him into raping me.

"Get out of my house now I don't ever want to see you here again!" I shouted which sounded as if it could raise my father from the grave. He tried to apologize frantically for something he couldn't remember doing. It was a waste of time.

"Shut up and just go." I showed him the door. He almost knelt before me which disgusted me further.

"Did you help me when I cried that night you were raping me?" I asked him. There and then recognition of who I actually was dawned on him. "I am sorry Madam. Forgive me." I waved my hand at him to keep quiet but he didn't listen.

"Ever since I did that to you I have known no any peace. The guilt I have carried all along has made me lose everything I had in this life. It is like anything I touch is cursed. Everyday I see your crying face but I didn't know where to find you to apologize". The man was crying and sweating profusely but it did nothing to stop the pain buried deep inside me.

"I hope you die and rot in hell wicked man." I said mastering my last remaining patience not to slap his face. I called the security guard to lead

him out. The moment the door closed, I rushed into our bedroom and threw myself on the bed, cried so hard I thought my heart would break. I had to let go of the anger and pain that had tortured me all these years. Rape can leave people scarred and scorched for life.

Eventually I fall asleep and I woke up from a tap on my shoulder. It was Peter, he came home earlier than usual.

"What's the time sweet? " I asked while giving him a kiss.

"It's around 3pm. I know am early but I had to come home at all cost. " He said looking so downcast I felt for him, leaving aside my own worries.

"what's it hun?" I asked hugging him close.

" I don't know how to say this but I received a call from the Police in Mwanza. Masozi was found murdered at a resthouse and the police found her phone. The call log showed that I was the last person she talked to." My mind was moving like a whirlwind. If it was true why had he called her worse still without informing me. Not that he needed my permission to do that but not telling me meant something fishy which he didn't want me to know was happening.

Oh God not another police case on our hands ...

## EPISODE 48

Laughing at our mistakes can lengthen our own life. Laughing at someone else's can shorten it.

The following day we found ourselves driving from Lilongwe to Mwanza. I couldn't stop countless questions from clouding my mind. Yes Peter agreed having had talked to Masozi in the morning of the previous day regarding an issue of money that the baby Chris was sick and needed to be taken to the hospital then later mid way through the day its when he received a call from the police about Masozi's murder. I was so

unconvinced of this justification because I wasn't there to overhear their conversation. Trust is a serious issue in every relationship and need to be handled with kid gloves. You will agree with me how many sleepless nights have we spent worrying ourselves to death what that partner of ours is doing with an ex. They may discuss innocent issues but if an ex is involved, well it calls for proper scrutiny.

If things didn't go well, it meant that Peter had to be in a police cell to allow room for proper investigations.

We arrived around mid day and proceeded to the police station in question. After we were directed to the CID officer, we left with him to Mwanza hospital morgue to identify the body. I was a bit nervous because I had never seen a corpse before at close range let alone identify one. Peter however, kept a passive and only once or twice I caught him crenching his jaws. It was a good decision to leave the kids with Joy and Mike while we came here because I didn't want my kids in the thick of these things.

I made sure that I followed behind them when we were entering the morgue with another person who worked there. It had an overpowering stench of chemicals and the temperature changed the moment we stepped inside. Here in this place was the unfathomable mystery of death where people came to reality of the demise of their loved ones when they were prepared and put in a coffin in readiness of their final resting place for their bodies. Giving mother earth what belonged to her. Suddenly I was taken aback by memories of my own father's death. Tears misted my eyes. "Are you sure you want to see this?" The officer asked us to the surprise of me and Peter. He nodded and I did too. We proceeded until we came to a section which had a covered body on a big trolley. He stopped there and uncovered it. My heart jumped up to the roof, immediately I regretted seeing it. The body was badly butchered and the face was swollen almost beyond recognition. Some parts were bandaged to stop the blood from running everywhere.

"oh my God..." I said that over and over.

"It's Masozi." Peter finally spoke after what seemed like an eternity of silence. He turned to me and hugged me so tightly as he sobbed so hard.

"I wasn't nice to her Wangu yet she bore me a kid. My own son who I only

saw in pictures. " I let him talk for a few more minutes before he calmed down and we left.

The officer suggested we go back to the station and he update us on latest developments on the case which happened before we arrived.

All the way I held on to Peter's hand, afraid of us and afraid of the impending unknown.

The officer led us into his office and we sat down as we waited for him to take out the case file.

"Well after we managed to locate where the deceased used to live. We found out through one of the neighbours and a close friend that she had been fighting for sometime with her husband. From her statement, it must have been because of the numerous lovers she used to entertain when the husband who is a cross border truck driver is away. She left the baby with this neighbour and went to the resthouse with a man. The husband got wind of the news before he reached Mozambique and made a u-turn journey in haste. It was like he had put people to watch her every move. As expected he went to the resthouse and caught them red handed. A fight had erupted and the lover escaped leaving Masozi to face the wrath of her husband alone. She got more than her share of punishment from the deep knife wounds which had been found on her body. She was tied to the bed post and bled to death. The resthouse officials alerted the Police and she was already dead before the ambulance and the police arrived. Such a sick world we live in."

" Has the husband been found yet? " Peter asked.

"He is still at large because the company truck he drives was found parked along the road in the wee hours of this morning."

We still had a murderer roaming out there.

"Where is the baby now?" I asked.

"We are making processes of putting him in a Children's home but now he is still with the neighbour who is the only one putting up with his tantrums so far."

Peter went ahead to tell the officer that he was Chris' biological father and the circumstances that lead to their separate if not fortunate ways.

" Officer is it okay if we can take the baby with us?" Peter asked. Seriously

my mouth was agape and it rather came unexpectedly.

"We still need to investigate this case even though you don't have a case to answer. Under normal circumstances you will have to apply for adoption because you were not legally married with the deceased even though your mother paid for her bride price but you never consented to it. I will allow you to see the child for now and immediately start processing for adoption that is if her immediate family won't have any objections "

We left to see Chris and Peter was so excited about it as if it wasn't a few minutes ago when he was grumpy.

He was a bubbly kid but one could see that he lacked proper care and needed to be well fed to fill the sunken cheeks. Am happy to say he was a younger version of Peter,a chip from the block...

We waited while the neighbour bathed and dressed Chris. As she handed her to Peter,he let out a defeaning wail but still more we took him with us. The moment we stepped outside,a strange woman almost run into us.

Seriously I thought she was a random mad woman until she said,

"So you finally came you wicked man," to our bafflement.

"I don't think I know you." Peter said. The neighbour whispered to me that she was Masozi's mother. Never in my life did I dream of crossing her path.

" My child has died because of you.Your rejection and cruelty drove her straight into the arms of that beast. You should be ashamed of yourself because her blood is on your head. Oh Masozi if only you had come back home." She started crying and the neighbour led her inside the house. I felt sorry for her. Burying a child is considered abominable by nature and taking into the gruesome circumstances in which she died, was a bitter pill to swallow. Unlike me,Masozi had failed to accept that Peter didn't want her anymore. Walking away from him,she had wanted to prove him wrong by flinging herself at the next available Tom. Eventually she had looked for love in the wrong places with the wrong people in desperation to be loved and accepted.

We left for town and bought clothes,shoes as well as gloceries. Watching

father and son playing was priceless. I was happy that he had finally got his kid and were bonding just fine. Chris in all his innocence, didn't know that he will never grow up to see his real mother. Life had it's own particular ways of doing things.

We went to leave him when we were done shopping. Peter gave the woman money for upkeep and some to help for Masozi's funeral. It was the last honourable thing he could have done for the mother of his child. The excited look on the woman's face gave her away that she had every intention of using Chris as a pawn to milk money from us. I would be a step ahead of her. Before she knew it, we would complete the adoption process and have him home with us.

He told her that in case of emergency she shouldn't hesitate to alert us. I guess she saw that as her ticket to riches.

On our way back to Lilongwe, I heard Peter talk about nothing but his son. "Did you see how handsome my son is, he will break a few beautiful hearts when he is all grown up." I almost rolled my eyes in boredom. For once I felt jealous. I knew he was over excited and wanted to make up for the lost time as soon as possible but if not careful all his attention would divert to Chris alone forgetting that we all needed a portion of his attention. I hoped the coming of Chris won't destroy the beautiful family that we had and won't change the good man and father that he had always been. I wanted to raise this kid like my own but if he stepped in the picture and show favoritism then I won't fold my hands and watch.

We arrived in Lilongwe around midnight. I was beyond exhaustion and hungry. We decided to wait till morning to pick the kids up at Mike and Joy's place even though I missed my pumpkins so much.

I was not in the mood of cooking, so I went to the kitchen and start making noise with the pots busying myself as if I would cook. Peter called me to say I should go to bed and we will eat in the morning. Just what I wanted. We went to take a bath, after wards when I hit my head on the pillow I straight away drifted off to lala land.

I was awoken by the ringing of Peter's phone. He was not in bed. I called his name but he didn't respond. The phone continued ringing and it was

impossible to go back to sleep. I was so annoyed. Who could it be calling at 6:03am? I decided to answer it. It was an unregistered number.

"Can I talk to Peter?" The person said when she realised that I wasn't the person she wanted to talk to.

"May I please know who I am talking to?" I asked as politely as possible.

"Don't ask me many questions. Just do your job. Some maids have the guts sure,"with that she hung up leaving me looking at the phone as if it could provide answers. What a way to start my day. It was impossible to get back to my beautiful slumber. I got up and started making the bed. Peter had a case to answer if he didn't want his day ruined just like mine.

I went to brush my teeth and came back to get dressed. All along I was trembling with rage. Just when I took his phone to have him explain, a message came through.

" Morning dear.I am at the hospital with my nephew, I need some money."

It was the same unregistered number...

## EPISODE 49

sometimes giving someone a second chance is like giving them an extra bullet for the gun because they missed the first time. Never let go of hope for it is one of man's last possessions.

All the intentions I had of staying calm, flew out of the window.

"Peter! " I screamed my lungs out. He came running with a flying pan in his hands.

"What is wrong babe? The neighbours are still asleep."

" Wait until they hear all about this to make them awake for the rest of this day." I answered him while giving him his phone. He looked at it in shock and I could see that he was working on what to tell me.

"It's not what you think..." He stammered.

"Then what is it? for Christ's sake say something and stop acting like a



school boy."

"come sit down and I will tell you all about it."

" Just tell me.You know am not deaf I can hear you perfectly from here. Who is she?"

"okay. She is Liz my ex..."

" What business do you still have with her?" This question seemed too hard for him to answer.

"... nothing. "

"Nothing when she is comfortable enough to ask you for money? nothing when she has the guts to call me your maid? I don't think an ex calling you dear is nothing. " I roared.

"I am sorry. I didn't mean for things to be this way." He started apologizing which I immediately brushed him off.

" I don't want an apology.I want an explanation to prove that you no longer have anything to do with her again."

" I am not doing anything with her but she just sent me texts and call me."

" You mean you can't tell her off? By the way,how did she get your number because when I came here back from Nkhatabay you changed your sim card?"

I cornered him right away.

"Mike gave it to her but please don't ask him."

" You know what,sometimes I just can't believe am dumb enough to take you back in my life.Do you think if you were in my shoes you could have believed this clap?"

" Am sorry love." He said while getting closer.

" Don't even think about it. am out of here until you give me a proper explanation." Having said that I finished dressing, took my phone and car keys then headed out. Why do men lie? I now women lie too but ours are hard to disbelief lies which one can't phantom easily yet the loop holes in their fibs can be seen from afar. I felt it inside me that something fishy was going on and i better watch my back. Was I on the verge of making another milestone mistake? It hit me that I had been busy engrossed in my life problems while he was reconnecting with an ex girlfriend. Sometimes I think men cheat for their egos,they don't want to bruise it by looking too feminist and letting problems to centralize their minds, they want

something to distract them and make them seem so much in control of their lives which could be crumbling without them realising it.

I didn't know where to go as early as it was. I called Marble.

"Hey girlfriend."

" Hey friend. Are you home?" I asked her.

" Yes dear. it's my day off."

" Okay. am coming over just want to get away from home for a few hours."

" Okay sweetie. You will find me,see you."

" Alright bye." I hung up and drove to Area 14. I had to think of something to put a permanent stop to all this. I smelt trouble with a capital T.

In twenty minutes I drove from Area 10 to Area 14. I found her with her twin sister Marcy. Remarkable. She didn't tell me that she had an identical twin. They looked so alike for a moment it was difficult to differentiate one from the other. Sometimes they could finish each others' sentences. I laughed at their silly jokes and Marble didn't bother to ask me what was wrong.

We decided to go to town to do some shopping. I went to have a bath and changed into one of Marble's dresses. It was a Short purple dress that hugged my slim frame.

I felt good. It's true that the way you look can change the way you feel. We went shopping. I spoilt myself with a new pair of shoes and Martina Cole novels. Shoes and books will always be my addiction.

Marble bought clothes enough to fill a new wardrobe. Am not trying to be sarcastic but I didn't know Supermarkets paid much for such extravagance. Marcy bought swim wear in readiness for a weekend at the lake with her boyfriend.

We went back home and had lunch. I wasn't worried about my kids because they could be fine with Joy.

Marble brought out a bottle of Brandy. Naturally am not into alcohol I think it's because I haven't yet found a reason for myself to drink.

I declined a glass until Marcy told me that it won't kill me.

Curiosity was killing me until I took natural fruit juice and diluted it. It kinda of tasted sweet but not good enough to make it my favourite drink.

The girls laughed at me.

After the second glass,I went to turn up the volume for me music player and we started dancing. I was feeling euphoric.

Five missed calls from Peter didn't mean anything to me,I was having fun and unaware of the outside world. I kept drinking until I couldn't remember anything ...

## EPISODE 50

Dreams are...illustrations from the book your soul is writing about you-  
Marsha Norman.

I woke up with a headache that seemed to split my bed into two. I was in my bed but I had no idea how I got in it. I felt so sick and weak with a dry throat I was afraid it would crack any minute. The incident of the previous day came back to my mind. If I say I was embarrassed, its an understatement but I was mad at myself. Have I swooped so low to degrade myself at such level? I have never acted like a bad girl in my life and didn't know what sort of grey haired demon had possessed me. I knew Peter did wrong but getting drunk wasn't a perfect solution. I really felt awful.

I made an effort to get up but I ended up slumped back on the pillows. Peter came in carrying a tray with a cup of coffee and slices of bread. I couldn't look him in the eye. He smiled and I failed ashamed of myself. "Somebody is really sick." He said while smiling. Perhaps I imagined our previous morning's row. He came beside the bed and carried me to the bathroom. He took off my night dress and soaked me in the warm water in the filled tub. I just wanted the earth to open up and swallow me. "Babe am sorry. " It really took some effort for me to say those magic words. He just nodded and smiled at me. I had lots of questions as to how I came back home,I was in one piece and that meant the car was in perfect

condition but where was it?

"Where are the kids?" I asked.

"Mandy will be bringing Laurent any time soon so you better hurry and get dressed." He left me to finish bathing.

I didn't want to let my kids see me in any awkward situation. What if they saw me in a drunken state? seriously I will never forgive myself for such tomfoolery. What sort of a mother was I becoming into? what example was I setting to my children? I didn't deserve this man. After what I got myself into I didn't deserve his kindness.

I finished bathing and got dressed before the kids came. Wow they came rushing and threw themselves on the bed.

"Mummy, dad said we must not bother you because you are sick, is it true?" Amanda asked me. This question just further reminded me that she was growing up and I had to behave myself. I looked at Peter who winked at me.

"I want ice cream." Laurent said.

"You always want ice cream." Mandy said.

"Alright. let's have breakfast and this little man can have all the ice cream that he wants."

"Hun don't spoil him he will have all his teeth rotten."

"...But mummy I brush my teeth every day." Laurent defended himself.

"I know sweetheart but too much ice cream ain't good for your health." I told him while picking him in my arms.

"Eish does that mean I will die?" Laurent said to which we all burst out laughing.

We made our way to the kitchen. I was feeling much better and I took aspirin for my headache. I watched them having breakfast. My phone rung. It was the Manager at the Supermarket telling me that I had to report to work the following Monday. It was a Saturday and I only had Sunday to prepare myself. I was over the moon to get back to work but when I told Peter he flatly refused. . .

There was a moment of silence between us. I didn't know how best to answer Peter without sounding offensive. I didn't know what reasons he

had to stop me from working again. Was it the same issue that happened with Cindy on my first day at work? but it wasn't like I would be fighting her everyday.

"Why do you say that?" I asked him. He sensed a brewing storm so he said to Amanda, "Go and watch cartoons when you are done eating. Me and mum will be back shortly. " He said taking my arm. We made it clear that no fighting around kids no matter how quickly angry words could speed out of our mouths.

We left for the bedroom and sat on the bed.

" Listen to me carefully. it's not like I don't want you to work but find another job not at the supermarket again." He spoke with that sort of aura that said 'I am the head of this family don't dare disobey me' which I found quite offensive.

" Why? I only worked there for a day and didn't give you any reason to doubt me perhaps except that unfortunate incident with Cindy which wasn't my doing." I responded my voice raising by the minute. I don't know why but the moment am offended I don't talk quietly, I shout from the roof top and tremble from the anger. That ain't normal sure.

"I don't like the combination of you and Marble. It's either you look for another job or don't get back to the Supermarket. "

I chuckled at his words.

"You cannot dictate who I befriend. Do I choose your friends for you and you quite have annoying friends who I could happily choke but I let you hang with them" This man wasn't serious. How the hell could he even think of that.

" The state of you and your so-called friends yesterday left alot to be desired from such friendship. If you are wise you will never be near them again. What sort of friends encourage a married person to stay out as late as 01AM."

" I am not married." That came out so suddenly before I could stop it and I regretted instantly.

" I know I am not your ideal man." He said. This argument tilted in a totally different angle.

" You know what. I no longer want to prolonge this conversation but neither you nor anybody else will stop me from taking that job" I spoke

with finality.

" We shall see about that." He said then stormed out banging the door so hard it shook from its hinges.

I sat down and soothed my temples. This situation wasn't helping to ease the headache. I took out my phone and called Marble. She laughed so hard at hearing my voice.

" The state of you yesterday could make drunken master look like a walk in the grass. Girl you well crazy last night." She said and continued laughing.

" What did I do? I can't remember anything." I asked her.

" We went to a party last night in Area 47 near Chez Ntemba" She began and my hand ran to my mouth involuntarily. I didn't go to parties especially when alcohol is on the menu. She laughed again and continued, "You wanted to test every drink there and we stopped you before complete damage was done. You picked a row with another girl over a remark she made to you that you had to go to bed and leave people to drink in peace. You were about to start world war when we dragged you to the car and called Peter who came to pick you up. Am bringing your car in the afternoon. " I was short of words so I told her that we would talk when we meet later.

It was a moment of reflection, character stock taking. Maybe Peter was right these girls were bad company. Wasn't I big enough to take care of myself and avoid pressure?

No. I would go back to work and prove to myself that I could survive.

\*\*\*\*\*

Monday came so quickly. Peter gave me 'the eye' as he watched me getting ready. I had to find a maid or else enroll the kids for extra lessons so that they knocked off at 5pm, that would be sorted out when I knock off.

On this first day I received a heroine's welcome. Many people patted me on the back congratulating me for putting Cindy in her place. The place was buzzing with laughter and warmth. I learnt that the stern female supervisor left. In her place was a bubbly young woman who I heard turned a blind eye to some unruly behavior. Marble was so happy to see me. We chatted for a long time until I was called to the Manager's office, it

was unbelievable that we were together the previous day.

"Sit down Miss or Mrs?" Seriously this question irritated me beyond words.

"Just call me Wangu Banda after all that is what is on my CV" I said. He took out some documents for me to sign. It was a new contract form renewable annually and a letter of employment offer. I went through both documents carefully before signing. I was being offered net salary of Fourty Thousand Kwacha during the first three probatory months subject to change upon given confirmation letter. I was happy to earn my own money. Somebody could say it was peanuts but it was mine,my sweat and I earned every penny of it.

When we were done, I shook the manager's hand and turned to leave.

"Ain't I getting any appreciation from all this?" he asked. I stood rooted on the spot.

" ...but I have already thanked you. "

" Don't act like a child, make it exciting," He almost purred the last words. He got around his desk to where I stood,a little too closer for my comfort.

"I don't understand Sir." I said politely and stepped back.

"Come on now. let me show you some good time." He said as he put his hand around my waist. One look at the door made me duck towards it. It was locked. My heart thumped so hard in my chest I almost felt dizzy.

" Don't come near me or I will scream."

He gave out a sarcastic laugh that made me wish I could bash his head inside him.

" This room is sound proof,scream your lungs out and nobody will ever hear a whisper out there. "

I eyed him defiantly and knew that I would have to fight him to my last breath if I wanted to get out in one piece, even if he wasn't a match for my small flame.One thing I was determined of was that nobody would ever do anything to my body which was against me,my dignity, my womanhood. Once was enough and as long as I breathed nothing could prove me otherwise ...

## EPISODE 51

Nothing could beat the deafening beating of my heart which sounded like African drums. In a move so prompt and swift, I dug the heel of my shoe on his foot and pulled his neck tie so hard I almost choked him.

Immediately he let go of me and rushed his hands to the mercy of his neck. I pulled him closer to my face.

" Listen to me you fool, if you think you can play games with me I will show you that I ain't your mate. I don't owe you anything and get it in your thick head that I won't leave any stone unturned without putting you in your place. As long as I am here stay out of my way. Do you understand me?" To which he only nodded. The look of surprise on his face showed how he didn't expect this. He had underrated me, that was his number one mistake.

I told him to give me the keys, which he did without hesitation.

I took my leave while licking my lips like a mischievous cat.

Marble and I locked eyes, she punched in the air in triumph. I could feel that she knew I had put the bastard in his place because his promiscuity was legendary among the female staff. He liked taking advantage of girls especially new ones.

I carried my day with a ready smile on my face. I told my supervisor that I had to pick my kids from school which she consented. I left around 13 hrs and by 13:30 I had Amanda and Laurent in the car. While I was driving home, I missed a call from Beatrice and my mother. That made me conclude that these people had stepped on each other's feet and both wanted to get me on their sides. I knew them better than anybody else. They could be predicted.

I turned on the radio and Baby face's Nobody knows it but me was playing. Such an emotional song just what I needed and in silence I let my tears fall. It dawned on me that I had Peter but it was getting lonely by the day. He was near yet so distant. I was feeling the walls were getting pretty tight around me. This issue of Liz was chewing the back of my mind slowly and I came to realize that there were times when Peter was picking



his calls out of my sight and in hushed voices. Was I imagining things or something fishy was going on? I envied my men free days when I had no reason to worry, when my nights contained a good night's sleep. If on this day I won't get a proper explanation, there would be blue murder. I felt a small warm hand on my shoulder.

"Mum are you okay?" Amanda asked me.

"Am fine sweetheart Mum is just a little sad." I said while wiping the tears. The emotional strain was just too much. Peter was quick to judge my drinking with Marble yet he forgot what drove me nuts in the first place. What if Peter told me that it was over between us, what hold did I have on him less still what did I have to support myself and my kids? What if he died suddenly, what would I end up with when I knew nothing about his finances? As cruel as it sounded, I had absolutely nothing. What a sad situation. I wasn't getting younger and this dependency syndrome left a lot to be desired.

I drove to Joy's place to drop off the kids then drove back to work.

I had a fine working day and knocked off. Went to buy relish for supper and picked the kids from Joy's. While I was there my lawyer Mr Mlenda called me to say the date for a court hearing for Mandy's kidnapping case had been fixed, it was in a week's time on a Thursday. Presently Ben was out on bail but he surrendered all his travel documents to court. Mr Mlenda was going to talk to Amanda's previous teacher who was a key witness in this case. That meant I had to take two or three days off work. That wasn't good for a job that I just started. I thanked Joy for watching over my pumpkins. I told her to help me look for a maid who would come to work and go back home.

We went home. While the kids were getting ready for their evening bath, I called Beatrice. She told me that she had found a man to marry and mother was against it because he wasn't rich and she had to wait until I sent her money for college tuition. How hilarious!

"Beatrice why do you act as if a man is a means to your end of poverty? You think getting married will bring all your Christmases at once? If you get married count me out as your sister. I want you to have a life I never had, is that too hard for you to achieve?" I lectured her tearfully.

"Sister you told me to wait until you send money but am getting impatient. I love this man so much it's not like somebody is pushing me." She said what looked like sensible reasons to her. I pitied her. Did she think I had a garden of money where I grew it like vegetables?

"Are you pregnant perhaps?" I asked again. Maybe that could have been reason enough for her rushing.

"I am not. I am on contraceptives." Kids of nowadays are beyond this world.

"You fear Pregnancy not STIs? Oh Beatrice do you know what you are doing to yourself?" I lamented.

"I know what I am doing. Unlike you it's enough to save me from having two fatherless kids."

That was an insult and a half. What right did she have to talk to me like that when all I was trying to do was help?

"You know what, do whatever you like I don't care. Good luck. My regards to mum." With that I hanged up.

I sighed so heavily. I left my phone and went to bath Amanda and Laurent. Whatever calamity would befall Beatrice wasn't my doing. Gone were the days of our forefathers when life was so SIMPLE. Today it's more complicated and polluted one needs to take every step of the way with caution.

By seven O'clock I had dinner on the table. Peter walked in from work while on the phone, with a peck on my cheek he disappeared into the bedroom. I finished setting the table and saved Laurent his food. He needed coaxing to eat and afterwards he couldn't hold his eyes from sleep. When I was done and waiting to tuck Laurent in bed, I went to check on Peter. He was in the bathroom singing his heart out. I looked at his phone on the bedside drawer and my eyes darted back to the bathroom door.

"Honey" I called out. "Are you going to be long in there?" I heard the shower being turned off.

"I just started but will be out soon," he answered. Perfect. I quickly went to pick up his phone. I started by going through his call log. seriously I wasn't someone who went through his phone, but now I couldn't live with an intrigued mind forever.

He had just finished talking to Liz that fact I knew because I had memorized her number. I quickly went to his whatsapp and browsed through. He had three new message.Liz again and two other girls Mary and Stella. These conversations had too much of sweet nothings,'okay dear' the other 'okay thanks for the money love' I knew then that he had sent Liz the money.It seemed like previous conversations were deleted. I couldn't sit. I quickly took a pen and wrote down the numbers before Peter got out. Seriously I would deal with them in my own time. A battle line had been drawn. I lost before and wasn't too keen to lose again unless Peter said it in my face that he didn't want me. Fighting these girls, I knew could mean too things: driving him completely away or stopping him from these silly games. I was ready to risk it all if it had to determine our future together ...

## EPISODE 52

This was a moment of truth. I got punched again again on the face by life. As much as denial was a big chunk of all this, I had to face the brutal reality. This man would go even if I clung to him. I didn't have time to blame myself for what I didn't do for him to slip away.

I sat quietly on the bed thinking of what best to do. Tears were out of question,they brought nothing, they get one nowhere. I vowed to myself never ever to cry again because of a man. He wasn't worthy my single drop.

I didn't see him standing beside me,with his phone in his hands. He knew that I had gone through his phone and the expression on his face said it all that he had run out of excuses.

"I ...I ...." he stammered. It was so shameful a man as old as he was failing to explain himself. Whatever game he was playing or had played was up. " I don't know how to say all this" He began and cleared his throat to continue," It's not like what you think. These gals mean nothing to me. They are friends of my buddy Robert. " That was him alright and again

shifting the blame on somebody else. Who did he think I was? deaf and dumb perhaps?

" You know what? I don't have the energy to fight you or your army of girlfriends. I don't want to threaten leaving you whenever we fight so from now onwards you and me have never met before. You do your thing and I do mine. Even if it means sharing bills until I find a place for myself and the kids." I spoke with a mastery of calmness that I could afford. I could swear that I had beat his expectations. He had expected me to through tantrums and ransack the whole place down in anger.

" I am sorry luv,this won't happen again. I am sorry to say this but I got pretty lonely when you went to Nkhatabay in the first place." So the blame was being shoved into my face again. This man was just unbelievable.

" I could have chosen to date a thousand met in that period but I just couldn't bring myself to do that. I know that I must have been a fool to believe in us,in our love." I didn't know why I was telling him all this, he owed me nothing and he had just proved it. Thoughts of Remo crossed my mind. I had been too hard on the poor guy maybe it was high time I gave him a chance. A game of revenge couldn't do me any good, I had to show him that I was too smart for such degrading act and I could do better.

" Should I say you are having affairs with these girls?" I asked him.

"No! I swear that there's nothing between us."

" Why did you gave Liz money?"

" That is none of your business keep out of it," This present Peter was totally a stranger to me.

" Can you just tell me why am here and still in your life? I think to be tagged as your concubine could be more befitting." A chance for a civil conversation with him had been abused.

" Suit yourself pal." He said and went to get dressed then went out of the house.

I felt a sense of loss and fear. Fear of what he had suddenly become and loss for the loving and caring man he used to be. I let myself calm down before going back to the children. Laurent was fast asleep on the couch, I picked him up to tuck him in bed. Amanda

Amanda looked at me closely,I could feel that she sensed my distress. I

smiled at her. I picked Laurent to their bedroom and tucked him in. His face looked so tranquil and calm, I kissed his forehead and prayed that he would be a better man when he grew up. I closed the door quietly and went back to have supper with Amanda. After we were done, I let her watch cartoons until 8:30PM while I read Martina Cole's Maura's game. Reading made me forget my distress for a moment.

" Good night Mummy I love you. "

" Night too Princess Mummy loves you always. "

I knew that I will always have these too to love me unconditionally and that was the beauty of my life.

I read until 11:00PM when I decided to go to bed. There was no sign of Peter. I kept turning and tossing throughout the night alert to any sound of a car until the wee hours of the morning when I woke up to get ready for work and prepare the kids for school. My eyes felt like there was sand in it due to lack of sleep and I drunk one cup of coffee after the other to keep me from dozing off while on duty.

Peter came that night when I was preparing supper. He kept up the silent treatment and while it was difficult not to talk to me in the presence of the kids, he took his laptop to the guest room feigning that he had alot of work to do. We ate supper without him on the table. I didn't bother to ask him where he had been because to me he had already made his stand known, he didn't want anything to do with me. I was beyond exhaustion and retired to bed earlier. It wasn't easy to try to sleep on the big bed alone knowing that he was in the next room.

The next three days passed in the same manner. It hurt to think of him and see each other like total strangers. If I got my first pay I would move out. I needed peace of mind even if it meant staying in a house that didn't have electricity and running water. I had survived so much and could survive again without his help.

On the third day of our silence, I returned home to find Beatrice. I didn't know how she got there but she just said she thought I knew about Peter sending money for her transport to come to Lilongwe. She said when she arrived,he went to pick her up and dropped her home then returned to work. How was this kept under wraps I didn't understand. Apparently

Mother called Peter to tell him about Beatrice's situation. As if I had predicted trouble for her, the day after I talked to her, she had a rude awakening from her boyfriend's baby mama. He didn't tell Beatrice about his ex wife and three kids. She was insulted and threatened. She couldn't face him again nor the neighbours who heard her boasting of her man. I told her that she should consider herself blessed having had escaped such misfortune by a hair's length. Such men were a disaster waiting to happen.

Peter like always had come into the picture and saved the day. He told her that she should come and enroll at college. These people owed me an explanation yet they had kept me in the dark all this time. I quickly realised that Peter could have refused to help yet he did that deliberately to trap me, to have my family behind him. Were we all going to rely on him? Was I going to suffer at the hands of this man to save my sister?

## EPISODE 53

Often times we look back at the closed door forgetting that there's an open door ahead of us... Sometimes we try so hard saving the ship from sinking not realising how much time has been wasted, the time that we should have moved on and build a better future ... Our destiny is never tied to anybody... Our tears are not worthy for any man. - Juliet Mailole Luxylady.

No matter how much I tried to tell Beatrice that she came at her and Peter's own accord, she was still adamant that she will stay and let him pay her college tuition fee. I told her that my mind was made up and I was leaving this excuse of a man who had abused my kindness and made a mockery of my feelings. She literally begged me not to do that because she needed to study.

"You can stay if you like." I said finally and left. For the next two days, Peter was nowhere to be seen. I carried on my life and told myself that he was big enough to take care of himself.

I called my mother to tell her how disappointed I was. Why had she acted like a selfish young girl? Did I always have to be the family sacrificial Lamb? She said I should swallow my pride and forgive Peter because men make mistakes and I would never find an angel among them. She was just being unreasonable. I didn't argue with her because I knew that this was my life and all the decisions concerning it lay in my own hands.

I talked to Marble if she could be able to accommodate us until the end of the month when I had to find my own place. I knew that we didn't know each other that well but she actually agreed and told me that I should stop stressing myself over Peter.

On the third day he appeared with Chris in his arms. I didn't know what strings he was trying to pull but my bags were already packed and I was ready to move.

After Amanda and Laurent were done fussing over the additional member of the family, I called Peter for a serious conversation.

"I just want to thank you for everything you have always done for me and I pray that God should always bless and reward you. Since we can no longer be together, I want to tell you that I am moving out." I told him. These words that I had rehearsed over were finally out. It was end of the road.

"You are not going anywhere. What will I do with Chris alone?" It hurt that he wanted me to stay because he needed somebody to take care of his son.

"Employ a maid. He is old enough to cope."

"No. You won't desert me at a time like this. I have always been a father your kids never had and you will be here for me as well."

Okay, I was sorry things had never turned out the way we planned but never was I staying to be chained to his slavery. The next thing, he would be bringing more kids to me. Who knew what sort of shadows lurked in the dark out there? Just because he had found me at my weakest point in life, it didn't give him the freedom to throw my love into the gutter and bring me more girls drama.

Seriously I didn't need extra stress with the upcoming court session.

He had come to my rescue but I didn't date anybody else the moment I

started loving him.

The following morning, Beatrice and Peter realised the seriousness of the situation when I called a Taxi driver and started loading my bags inside. I was leaving behind the comfort of the house, nice food and a car but that wouldn't give me solace when my heart was breaking in trillion pieces. I needed peace of mind.

Nobody tried to stop me until I was done.

" Are you coming with me or not?" I asked Beatrice. She looked from me to Peter without saying anything. I thought that she hadn't yet decided. I told her that if she wanted me, she had my number and would call. Amanda constantly asked where we were going without her dear dad but I told her that I would explain later when we arrived. Is there a Seven year old without too many questions? They always want to know everything.

I took my kids and left, leaving a distraught Peter and Beatrice behind. For Peter had taken me for granted, for Beatrice had expected me to stay for her sake. Well I had disappointed them both.

For days that followed, I busied myself settling in. I enrolled Amanda at a nearby public school since I couldn't afford to send her to a private school. Laurent went to a Private Kindergarten whose conditions I could afford. Not the type of private schools that demand so much even after paying school fees. I tell you change is not easy especially to two small children and adapting is quite challenging. Marble was so nice to my kids and she could spoil them with treats. I can't deny that day in, day out I couldn't help it to wish for Peter's call or text which didn't come. I guess it's a girl thing.

I was home getting ready for the following day's court session by going through the statement which I had given to my lawyer containing all that had been happening between me and Ben. Beatrice called me. The moment I picked up the call, she said hysterically

" Oh Sis please come now I accidentally burnt Chris on the arm with hot water."

" What??? How bad is it?" I sat up on the bed.



" it's very bad"

" Take him to the hospital." I composed myself.

"You know I am new here and don't know any hospital."

" call Peter and tell him about it,he will come. "

"You know he will freak out if he finds him in this condition. Please come the arm is swelling pretty bad"

I was locked on the tight horns of dilemma ...

#### EPISODE 54

#Mbhele Pinky Yandiswa-

Hay Beatrice u left there on your own why call Wangu when you need her to sort your problems now don't go there otherwise Peter will blame you as he always shift the blame to people tell her you don't have car and you have two kids to take care of. remember that's not your place you can't just up and leave kids with your friend she is already helping you with a house to stay I

agree Peter was always there for you and kids but you owe him nothing let him take his son to

hospital not you.Well I have no word to add here I like the story just the way it is

Thank you.

#Batsiba Bee CoZa-

Some times you sitting back and watching is all the fighting that it's needed all will make sense one day.Let them deal with the burnt child,his dad didn't think about his son when he decided he'd Date the whole community now as for

Beatrice she should let you nurse your fatherless kids "her words not mine" said like a grown woman let her behave like one.

I didn't know what sort of games Peter and Beatrice were playing but it was likely to hit a blank wall. I was out of there and nothing was taking me within their screaming heights again. I sent a message to Peter telling him what had happened. Immediately he called.

"You have time to text me yet you don't have time to take Chris to the hospital." He ranted.

"I did that because Beatrice don't know Lilongwe that much." I said calmly.

"I am in Blantyre, 375 km away and you are there telling me that crap."

"Eeh please don't shout at me I was just trying to help. call Beatrice and sort it out" I hung up on him. What sort of madness was that? I swear next time I was going to zip my mouth forever.

I carried my day as any, ignoring both Peter and Beatrice's calls. I called the estate agent to ask if he had found a house for me to let yet but he said all the houses available were big, expensive and out of my requirement. But come next month, he would find it.

The following morning I got up early to get ready for a court hearing. I was so nervous because I had never been in court before and wasn't sure how Ben and Cindy would react to seeing me again with my two beautiful kids. The kids they wished were theirs but who God thought it fit to bless me. I smiled in the mirror at how Ben must have been feeling at that time. To be taken for prosecution for kidnapping one's own kid. Who in their mad minds would do that? I was convinced that children were a precious gift from above, no amount of money could buy it unless you only had to ask God for them and in His own time He blesses. I had the kids dressed in a way that would send a message to Ben that I was doing fine without his penny. I wished I had forgotten about this whole thing and took a restraining order for him getting near the kids forever. Knowing him, he was likely to get an injunction and fight it. I had to get this done with now than later because later would be more dangerous. I called Mr Mlenda and told him that we were ready, he sent the driver to come and pick us to Lilongwe Magistrate Court. His name was David, he gave me his number in

case of any delays. I called him and gave him directions to Marble's place. In thirty minutes he called that he was at the gate. I picked up my handbag and held the kids by the hands and set off.

I didn't imagine the court room to be packed like that. I saw strange faces, probably Ben and Cindy's friends. I seriously felt out of place and Mr Mlenda squeezed my hand in assurance. I was grateful to this guy. His company represented underprivileged people for free so that they find justice. The police officer who was handling Amanda's case had referred me to him. I would say I didn't regret knowing him and he was yet to prove himself likewise on that day in the court room. As we were waiting for Ben and his lawyer to come as well as the magistrate, I gazed at the wall clock. It was 8:45, fifteen minutes to go. I closed my eyes and prayed for God to be with me. To speak for me and let the holyspirit guide the proceedings.

8:55 Ben, Cindy and his lawyer made appearance. The sort of cheers that greeted them from the audience, could have mistaken this whole thing for a political gathering. I felt my heart somersaulting in my chest. As the magistrate was yet to make his way inside, my phone rung, it was a strange number. I ignored it. The caller rung four more times, and whoever it was didn't seem to be giving up any time soon, I had to excuse myself to answer it outside.

"Hello" I almost whispered in the mouth piece as soon as my feet stepped outside.

" My daughter ..." a quivering voice said.

"Mum?" I asked yet the voice wasn't my mother's.

"it's Peter's Mum, please come, Peter was involved in an accident last night, he is at Kamuzu Central Hospital, please..please co ..." the rest of her voice drowned in heart wrecking sobs...

## EPISODE 55

Sometimes love is not everything, sometimes love is not enough. People get

hurt because of it.

That exciting dance of courtship  
When two hearts engage each other  
In a date of feelings and emotions  
That make butterflies flutter in the tummy  
Making rhythmical cords and strings  
Into a beautiful well tuned song

Little does the heart know  
Partaking the fatal risk ahead  
That would either determine  
A heart break along the way  
Or a happily ever after  
That brings with it  
Sacrifices, will, determination  
of giving up or not  
Against all odds  
Until the heart decides  
To vow on the altar  
Until death does them apart

This journey of a lifetime  
Is not for the faint hearted  
Who wither and shiver  
At any slight sign of a storm  
or give up completely  
In the raging ocean of phony pain  
But to forge ahead unwavered  
And fulfill each other's life purposes  
And let to live  
With each other's imperfections.

Yet when things go sour  
... the aftermath

Is best left to the imagination.

Time seemed to come to a standstill in those few seconds when I was still clutching the phone to my ear as if trying to decipher answers from it. Why did everything seem to fall apart when all I was trying to do was live my life? Why did life throw misfortunes in my way when all I was trying to do was find my own comfort spot in this world of uncertainties?

There was no way I was going to walk away from the court just to be by Peter's side. He had his mother and relatives and they could take him to the best doctors even fly him to the famous Garden city hospital. It wasn't like my presence could make him live when God decided to take back his soul.

I sniffed and wiped the tears that I had not realised were streaking down my cheeks before going back to the court room. Just as I sat down, the messenger announced the presence of the magistrate and we stood up in acknowledgement. He was a tall man, as he began to speak, his voice was loud and deep, befitting his stature. He then read out a brief summary of the case.

"We will start by hearing from the defendant" he announced. Ben's lawyer stood up and bowed exaggeratingly and began to speak.

"Your honor, I want this court to realize that there is nothing wrong with a father, who had been denied his right of enjoying the joy of raising his own children, to yearn to take care of them..."

"Objection my Lord, the defendant looks to be giving judgment on my client." My lawyer protested.

"Objection overruled, the defendant may proceed." The magistrate said.

Ben's lawyer continued, "my client has been treated with contempt, derision and rejection when it comes to his children. He has been denied the right to bond with them and exercise his responsibilities where they are concerned. It is a shame that he is here now in this court answering charges of kidnapping when all he was trying to do was catch a glimpse into their lives and catch up where he has been missing out. Your honour, do you think the world will be a better place to live if more fathers are denied such a vital role? I want this court to about those

precious moments in their childhood and adulthood spent in the company of their fathers. I rest my case your honour."

The court was sent into a frenzy. I felt out of place, as accusatory stares were shot in my direction. I swallowed hard and put a protective arm around Amanda. If Ben think he will get his hands on my gems then he is out of his mind. I thought bitterly. My lawyer stepped forward and gave complete account of the circumstances that led us into this court room. Starting with how I met Ben and proceeded to how he dumped me for his ex when I was pregnant. Silence washed over the intrigued and perplexed audience as the truth of the matter started sinking in. I was wavering between fighting to concentrate on the case at hand and imagining how badly hurt Peter must have been. The case was adjourned till the afternoon of the following day as people contemplated on the outcome. I was set to win this based on the truth, no crookery or skull-duggery. I didn't know if we were fighting for the kid's custody or putting a kidnapper behind bars?

The moment I walked out of the court room, I was welcomed by overzealous reporters. I refused to tell them anything until my lawyer whisked us off in his car.

The following morning Marble brought me a Lighthouse newspaper. on the front page was the picture of me and the children." Woman denies father his children" was one of the stories making a headline. I laughed it off as one of those reporters who rush to report things they are not even sure of and don't have a slight idea how it feels like to be a single mother. To wake up one day when the child is sick and you almost worry yourself to death how you will manage to take him to a good private hospital because you don't have a single penny in your coffers. Do they know how it feels like to be condemned by the society as a black sheep as if it's always your fault baby daddy left? They simply have no idea and have never walked that path in their lives. They can go to hell for all I care.

During the afternoon court session, it was packed than the previous day, thanks to the media who had pushed the publicity button. I didn't call back Peter's mother to find out how he was doing, fear for the unknown

was plaguing me.it was better to stay in the dark for the mean time because if anything had happened to him during this trying moment, I didn't know how well I could have carried myself.

Ben's lawyer continued to torment me with his backing phrases. I saw the social worker who I met at the police station. Her face didn't give away any emotion but I was glad she was one of those few people who knew the whole truth. The case was adjourned again to three weeks later, so that witnesses should be paraded in court. The sleeplessness and the restlessness that was to follow made me wish I had let go of this whole thing and lead a normal life.

The following week,the estate agent finally found me a house. It was in Likuni close to Likuni parish. I moved in immediately even though Marble insisted that I wait until the case was over. It was a one bedroomed house and I settled just fine. I used some of the money I have saved from my business. The sad part only was that I had to move the kids yet to a new school. I was not doing them justice with all the moving until Amanda complained I told her that we would we won't be moving again for a long time.

Time was moving fast between waking up in the morning and prepare the kids for school then go to work till evening. The school was nearby so Amanda was able to take Laurent back home and I would find that she had given him something to eat. My angel was growing so fast into a young lady.

Two weeks later, I received a call from Joy. Ever since I moved out,I only told her that we would meet and chat but of late I didn't seem to have the time. It was nice to hear from her again.

"hey dear, long time"

"Hie love how are you?" She asked.

" I am great and you? "

"Am fine too. How are the kids? Give them my love and tell them I miss them so much.you should bring them one of these days"

" don't worry after the court case we will come to see you."

Listen atsikana,I know it's none of my business but I thought I should let you know. "

" shoot " I said anticipatingly.

"Well it's about Peter. He is in a pretty bad shape.the accident left his legs in danger of amputation if nothing will be done. As we are talking now, he is confined in a wheelchair but the trouble is that he is refusing to see an orthopedic doctor,so that he start therapy. Nothing is making him listen to a voice of reason." It seemed things were worse than I thought,atleast he was still alive and that was all that mattered.

"What doesn't he want to walk again?" I asked almost angry with him for being so hard on himself.

" oh Wangu he is a bitter man right now,I don't know how Beatrice is managing. From his spite to the constant demands of Peter's mom. She is now their official maid at their beck and call 24/7"

" that's the trouble she invited herself" I said calmly trying to hide the fierce wave building up inside me.

" please, after the case is over,can you come and help to convince him to get himself back in shape?"

Seriously I didn't have an answer to that.why was I expected to be there for him when nobody was there for me? Why was everyone thinking I was a super woman with super strength? ...

## EPISODE 56

I didn't know things were that bad for Peter. What sort of love was I harboring beneath my big heart if all this time I had not picked up my phone and ask how Chris and Peter were doing? perhaps I forgot that this was the very same man who had set aside his time and life for me and my kids. Why then was I treating him with so much contempt? If I was looking for a perfect man, I realised that I had to look among the angels because men have their own imperfections and once or twice are bound to fail in this life and I had been wayward in my ways too. I felt ashamed of myself. Ladies, I deeply thought that i would further be making a fool



of myself if everytime we had a taint in our relationship, I had to pack my bags and flee. Would I have done the same if we were married? Who was I kidding if not myself, it was either I completely erase Peter from my life or we talk things through. I couldn't go and help in nursing him back to health and say I no longer wanted him in my life that could have been ridiculous. What bothered me was Peter's Mum suddenly looking at me as the right girl for her son. Was she trying to trap me into her snare so that I help then be discarded later? All these thoughts were further confusing me. I slept with a heavy burden on my conscious, it felt like Joy had pricked it.

The next few days were spent in and out of the courtroom. There were times when I really thought I was going to lose my kids and badly needed someone to talk to. I called my mum but knowing her I didn't dare tell her all about it because she could have got on the first available bus and fuss about everything thereby depriving me of the peace of mind I so much clamoured at that moment. I resorted to talk to my church's pastor's wife who keenly listened to me baring my heart and offer the spiritual inspiration I needed. I prayed alot and told God all my fears because I knew that He alone above the magistrate and between our lawyers and ourselves was in the best position to sort out everything. He knew this moment would visit my life and He would be there to hold my hand through the thickest storm.

I kept my faith and crossed my fingers, hoping for the best.

When all the witnesses were presented in court, it was Amanda's own statement that sent the people into the excitement of wishing they could pass personal judgement on Ben for being such a big fool.

When the magistrate passed judgment, he said" it is very unfortunate that the society is still keeping these type of men who are selfish,arrogant,mean and have big egos to protect more than they could protect and care for their children. However,we thank God because there is still time for this man before these children are all grown up to make amendments. This should save as a lesson to mankind. " throughout his speech, I was sitting on the edge of the bench in anticipation,my heart thumping hard in my chest.

Ben was ordered to pay 1.5 million kwacha as compensation for the kid's maintenance and he had to pay to the court every month maintenance and all their extra expenses including school fees, food, clothing, shelter and I had to make complete details and count of how much they needed per month and submit it to court. What I didn't like was he was given visitation rights every one weekend every month and that meant i had to endure his presence. I was given full custody of the children.

It was a moment of sheer bliss as in excitement I hugged my lawyer tightly and I watched Cindy at the corner of my eye in a strange jubilation. Am sure one weekend every month to have the kids over was able to put such a smile on her face. The media were having the time of their lives too taking pictures and talking to people. Money wasn't an issue to Ben so he couldn't appeal to the hefty amount on compensation.

I called Joy and Marble to share the good news. on our way home, Peter called me to congratulate us for wining the case, he had heard it on the TV. He knew how much the children meant to me. You can imagine the confusion in my emotions to see his number on my phone screen. I had deleted it but still more knew it by heart. His voice was low as if it was an effort to utter the words.

When he said bye and hung up, my mind was reeling. All along he had been following it all up to the end when I thought nobody cared.

Suddenly I said to the driver, "can you turn around and drive to area 10, I need to see someone urgently."

I had to go back into the arms of my beloved, I prayed for strength and hoped I could be of much help.

## EPISODE 57

The heart and mind are always in conflict of each other, only in rare occassions do they come to a brief agreement which most of the times is in

favour of the heart.

The drive to Area 10 was the longest I had ever known, I couldn't stop thinking of the endless questions popping inside my head. What would I say when I finally see him? What if he didn't want to see me and I face his rejection?...ohh the pain of being turned down was unbearable. What if I failed to convince him to attend therapy? It would surely bruise my self esteem. The children fall asleep on the way,it was such a relief having not to answer their endless questions.

I gave the driver directions to Peter's residence. As we passed through the familiar neighborhood,I couldn't help to relish the sweet memories this place held for me. Who could have thought that I could be one of the occupants in this posh area,with well manicured lawns and gardens as well as well built brick fences. It had all seemed thus a distant and impossible dream until Peter had made it true.

When the car finally stopped at the gate I had pointed out to him, I felt hesitant if what I was doing was right for the right reasons too.

" I won't be long," I told the driver.

I opened the small gate and walked down the drive way to the front door. Surely this had once been my home and I didn't need to fidget from the bundle of nerves. I stood at the door for a few seconds and sighed deeply,composing myself before I tapped lightly on it before opening. I saw him. Sitting in the Wheel chair,his arm resting on the side arm support,holding his chin. He was looking outside the window to the garden I so much loved.He didnt hear me coming in,obviously absorbed in his own private thoughts and lost in daydream. The metal chip on my handbag which I eased on the nearby chair clicked. He looked in my direction,I stood there rooted to the ground as I read disbelief written all over his face. Our eyes locked for those brief magical seconds and my heart sunk to the the realization that I still loved this man with all the fibres of my being, from the tips of my toes to the ends of my hair. As if in well calculated moves, I strode to him, our gazes still holding and unable to break the spell bounding us. As I neared,he put out his arms and gratefully I kneeled in front of him and fall in them. Words were unnecessary and better unspoken as we both let out sobs unleashed from

the pain of separation, it seemed to give us some sort of comfort. He made me look at him and cupped my face in his hands, kissing my tears away. "I missed you sweetheart," he said. Not trusting myself to speak, I buried my face in his chest and cried even more.

When the tears were spent and we both calmed down, he told me to sit down on the nearby chair. All along we had not realised that his mum and Beatrice had come into the room and stood watching us in awe. I smiled at them and mumbled a greeting to Peter's Mum. She responded and started looking about as if she was searching for something.

"Where are the kids and your bags?" she asked me. Surely she didn't expect me to waltz in there bags and all just like that.

"The kids are in the car and I didn't bring any bags." I answered and saw a pained expression on Peter's face.

"Can I go and see them?" Beatrice asked excitedly.

"You can go but if they are still asleep please don't wake them they had a tiresome day." Beatrice was already at the door before I had finished.

"I hope you don't mind if I take him out to the garden." I said to Peter's mum. Sensing our need to be alone she agreed but on condition that I take food and make him eat because all he drunk lately was coffee and toast no wonder he looked thin. Peter looked down shyly. I went to the kitchen and looked over the pots. There was beef stew and nsima in a food warmer. I served two plates and went to set the table in the garden under a shed. I had insisted on putting a table and chairs because sometimes I loved sitting there reading my books and watching sunrise or we would sit there when the children had gone to bed and had our own special moments. I suddenly felt nostalgic as I wheeled him into the garden. It didn't need coaxing to make him eat. For that moment I avoided saying anything about the accident. As we ate, we joked and laughed about old times as if nothing had happened. We could also hear the children playing inside the house.

It was evening and I promised Peter to come again the following day to hear all about his visits to the doctor and plan where to start for his journey to recovery. He didn't say anything but I knew that the matter was delivered and would be thought over until the next day when I will be certain. He was rather sad to see us go and wished he didn't have to miss

us. Peter's mother was the most awkward suggesting that I leave the kids for now. I refused. Beatrice went to take her handbag and suggested that she was coming with me. I knew better than to say no to her because I realized that I would hear all the gossip from her. Chris threw his tantrums and clung to Beatrice. We decided to take him along...

## EPISODE 58

We went back home with the kids. I was delighted to watch them play and ran all over the place. All the noise was driving me out of my mind in the one bed roomed house but their laughter and screams were worthy of it. Chris was being treated as the baby and got away with so much. Laurent tolerated him like a young brother and let him have his favorite toys. Soon exhaustion kicked in after they had dinner, I tucked them in bed. I couldn't help smiling down at their little cute innocent faces, looking so serene. Love tightly gripped my heart and I envisioned Peter standing beside me as together we looked at these gems that completed the circles of our lives. I took out my pen and notepad. I had to start making plans about the One Million Five Hundred Kwacha that had come miraculously into our lives. I had always thought of buying a house for the children as a priority. One can go to bed on an empty stomach in the comfort and warmth of his blankets but even if somebody manages to scarp for food to eat, a blanket doesn't offer the much desired comfort when he is outside under a biting cold or drizzling sky. I made a note to talk to the estate agent the following day to help me find a house. In this area of Likuni a house at such a price was likely to be found.

Beatrice had told me so much and she said as far as she was concerned she was not going back to that house no matter what. This whole thing had turned into a blame game. With Peter's mum hating her for being in her son's house when I was the one supposed to be there at this hour of need. But then if only Peter hadn't gone out of town...if only Beatrice hadn't been crazy enough to scald Chris' arm with hot water...if only I had

not left,we couldn't haven't been here in the first place. She couldn't help telling me amidst sobs and laughter how unbelievably cruel Peter's Mum was.The feeling of cold water thrown into her face every morning to wake her up when she had not slept enough from tending to Peter's groans of pain and endless demands during the night. It seemed like he was driving towards killing himself by refusing anymore medical attention. The facade of her (Peter's mum) joy I realised was plastered to trap me into believing that she was a changed woman. It was just too good to be true.

The following morning I left the kids in Beatrice's care but I told her that she had to think of something to do because keeping an idle person was expensive unless she wanted to go back to the village. Laurent opted to stay ,as young as he was, I sensed that she didn't want to be anywhere near his grany because of the tantrums she never bothered to throw in his absence but showed it enough to scare the poor lad.As long as Beatrice was staying, he could stay too.

I arrived at the house when Peter's mum just finished helping him take a bath. The strain on her face was evident. She had just been left alone with him overnight and she was already tired, well it saved her right maybe she could start respecting other people's efforts. I went to make breakfast and we ate almost in silent. When we were done, she went about cleaning the house while I sat down and Peter called the Doctor to book an appointment. We were scheduled for physiotherapy at 10:00 that morning. It was around past eight so we still had enough time to chat.Peter's mum was sulking because I didn't raise a finger to help her when a load of laundry was waiting. That wasn't my job and she couldn't tell me what to do for fear of upsetting me. We started off at 9:45 and she helped me get Peter settled in the car and folded the wheelchair in the back seat. I was driving.

Peter looked good.Clean shaven, in a black Jean and a White stripped golf shirt. His body spray aroused in me memories of how I used to know that he was nearby when it wafted across my nose. peculiar? There is always something that reminds you of that special somebody. Be it a favorite food or drink that you feel is more in his life than you are,a song that make you think of him every time it's played, a movie that you have watched for a

thousand times alone or together yet it has never come near to boring. You become more alert to all these things when you two are together but it is even worse after a breakup.

We arrived at the hospital. The doctor was a pleasant young man who told us that Peter had to have his legs x-rayed again because we forgot to bring the previous copies. As we waited for the results he took us to attend a session, there were a few patients in attendance. He explained that the road to recovery laid within oneself. One has to be willing and determined. It was a force of strong faith and a belief in God and oneself. The x-ray showed that there was more damage in one leg than the other. The ankle was badly strained and had required an immediate POP had Peter

not refused any further medical attention right after the accident. He had discharged himself from the hospital.

Further examinations had to be done and he had to spend a few days at the hospital to which he refused. He agreed after a bit of cajoling from me. I had a job to attend the following day so I didn't have to be there. I called Peter's mum to get prepared because I was going to pick her up to be his guardian. When evening came, I left. She was ready and we set off immediately. Throughout the drive we settled in some sort of mutual silence that suited both of us just fine. I realised that she needed help and the least I could do was find them a maid but this time I would get a house boy, somebody who could stand up to her and maybe be a little afraid to bully.

The following morning I went back to work. Peter had let me have my car back so before going I had to go and see him. He was happy I had brought home made food, he didn't want to touch any from the hostel.

It was good to see Marble again. In my absence she befriended a girl from the restaurant next to our Supermarket. Her name was Rabecca but she preferred to be called Becky. We got on fine but she was just too loud for my liking. Surely this girl could win Olympics of talking, if at all there is such a thing, and win a gold medal. Half of the lunch hour was spent with us hearing her bragging about the expensive gifts her boyfriend made a job of showering her with. Poor thing, maybe he was cheating and wanted something to distract her attention from sniffing it soon. Marble's fiance

was abroad furthering his education and was due to be back in a year's time and plan for their wedding. I hope by then she won't be surprised that he had married somebody else and won't ever be back. Well when you hear too much of heartaches around you, you begin to realise that love problems are real and in due time things are likely to blow off, one just needs to be prepared.

The manager tried as much as he could to stay out of my way. It didn't come as a surprise when the Supervisor called me and Mable that we were being transferred to the head office at the same complex with City mall at Bwaila roundabout. It was a relief but the owner, an Indian Mr Ratiff was another hard nut to crack, his temper was legendary, it could go off anytime, anywhere. Well we would find out for ourselves when we got there. After all how did the rest of the workers manage?

Later, I called my mother. She was back to her old self. I hoped she wasn't planning another love escapade with somebody else's man. I told her that once I had things running smoothly again, I would arrange for her to visit us, meanwhile she needed some money which I promised to send soon. I went back to the hospital. When I walked in, Peter seemed to have been in a serious conversation with his mum. When I sat down, she went outside without even greeting me. I wondered what had rattled her nest this time, I ignored her. I hugged and kissed him then let him fill me with how he had fared at the physiotherapy session. His left leg was in a POP up to the knee and it didn't need to be moved in the next three to four days, any sudden movement could lead to a prolonged hospital stay. I brought him books and magazines and propped up his pillows so he could read.

Mike walked when we were laughing and teasing each other. He was with... Marble or Marcy? I didn't know who was who until I had to ask. But what were they doing together and where was Joy?



There was an awkward moment of silence as we all tried to make out what was happening.

"hello Wangu long time" Mike said to me trying to lighten the mood.

" hey Mike ...its good to see you again" I said and knew that I sounded awkward.

" baby meet my bro Peter and his woman,guys this is Marcy."

Mike made the introductions. 'baby'? so he was cheating on Joy? and how dare he introduce me as Peter's woman urgg he just made me look like i was his nanny. Maybe I was all along without even realising it. Marcy looked at me as if she had never seen me before.

" how can you bring her here when you knew mum is around?" Peter asked.It gave me the impression that he knew about his brother's side chick. These guys knew everything about each other and kept secrets. Remember how he said it was Mike who had gave Peter's number to Liz.

" Sorry bra I thought mother was home.We will be going soon,so where is she?"

"she just went out" I answered him.

He gave me the shopping bag they brought and I opened the bedside drawer and shoved them inside none too gently.

" Alright then we are off." he went over to Peter and hugged him then came to hug me too.He whispered in my ear.

" pretend you didn't see or hear all this." Then he smiled at me,took Marcy's hand and left. My eyes followed them out. I went to close the door behind them and sat on Peter's bedside.

" small world eeh?" I looked at Peter for an explanation.

" Don't accuse me of anything dear" he defended himself.

" How did they know each other?Peter come on you know that's not fair."

" That night you went to a party with the two rascals,Mike escorted me when I came to pick you up.They met but I didn't know he was serious about her. "

" It's not nice, Joy is a good person. I thought they loved each other." I said in disbelief.

" Honestly babes I didn't have an idea they were this hooked. Mum won't be happy to hear it so I suggest you keep your mouth shut and don't let it

out to Joy. I don't want to cause world war."

I didn't answer him, I was lost in my own imagination. It wasn't nice to keep Joy in the dark about all this, what if it was in my case, couldn't she tell me? She had always been a good friend and was I to betray such trust? okay if I told her, what would her reaction be? would she confront him and say she had heard it from me. Even if I told her not to say she heard it from me, they will know anyway because among them all, I only could be the one to spill the beans. I was so confused as I recalled Mike's warning before he had left. I promised myself to talk to Marble so that she tell her twin to stop messing with Joy's marriage. What if she knew already? Twins don't keep secrets from each other.

I left with a clouded mind.

The following morning at work. When I arrived, I didn't waste time but called Marble aside and asked her.

I explained what I saw the previous day and she gasped in shock. I don't know whether it was real or pretense.

"You know how good Joy has been to me and I don't want her to suffer at the expense of another woman."

Her voice in reply was full of genuine concern.

"I didn't know she could scoop so low and date a married man. But how come she didn't tell me?" I truly felt sorry for her, she must have felt betrayed and left out by her twin. She took out her phone and called her. She put the call on loud speaker.

"Twin wanga" (my twin) Marcy answered jovially.

"Marcy what are you doing with Mike?" There were some silent seconds before Marcy answered.

"So Wangu couldn't afford to keep her mouth shut? I can imagine now the madam knows about her husband's side chick hahaha seriously I can't wait to meet her." How dare she make a joke out of something so serious.

"Marcy am warning you to leave him. I will tell Kelvin and let's see if he won't dump you." I sadly listened to their exchange.

"You will do me a favour, I don't know how to get rid of such a leech and... Please tell Wangu to stay out of my business." she laughed sarcastically and the line went dead. Here lay a complicated case that required the wisdom like the one God gave to Solomon.

They were twins but so different like the two sides of a coin. One so promiscuous and hopping from man to man. the other, living the life of a nun while awaiting for her betrothed from abroad.

She was so disappointed I went and hugged her.

" how could she? she even seem so happy about it." She complained.

"Don't worry am sure we will come up with something to stop her. " I wasn't sure what.

During the Saturday of that weekend, Joy called me. She was coming to take the kids to the Play centre. I gave her direction to the house and she came. Looking at her made me feel so guilty. What sort of a friend was I when I couldn't gather enough courage and tell her? If she knows later that I knew all along and didn't tell her, won't that be the end of our friendship? she could never trust me again.

My guilt was so acute I could taste it in my mouth. Amidst our chats she realised that I wasn't half listening to her.

" Wangu are you okay?" She asked me. I was taken aback and just nodded in acknowledgement.

"tell me what is wrong? You know you can always talk to me." That further saddened me. I was close to tears and felt like I could choke on my own words.

"Am fine, maybe just tired." I answered smiling slightly.

"Take it easy on yourself, I know you are worried about Peter but just believe that he will be fine. The whole family is grateful for your help. Your coming again into the picture has put off the strain from all of us. we can now say we hope for the best and thanks to you sweetheart." She was just too sweet. Nobody had uttered a simple word of gratitude to me not even Peter himself.

It wasn't fair on her but I didn't want to spoil the day for the fun anticipating kids.

" Joy I want to tell you something..." I began.

## EPISODE 60

There is no price tag on friendship.

I looked at Joy and immediately felt so sorry for her. I wasn't sure if I should be the carrier to herald such doomed news. I felt an overwhelming urge to shield her ears and heart from ache at the same time I wanted her to know what her man was doing. Shamelessly flunking himself around town with an immature teenager who was out for nothing but fun and had little thought of the aftermath.

" Never mind dear maybe some other time. " I told her.

" ohh," she held her chest." for once I thought you were going to tell me some bad news, you should have seen your face. "

I smiled at her and squeezed her hand.

" Don't worry. I can't afford to be the one to wipe off that smile on your face without a second thought. it's nothing don't worry." My heart was racing at such a blue lie but hey I just couldn't bring myself to say it.

She dropped me at the hospital while they went to have fun.

Peter was in better shape now. I wheeled him outside where we sat under a tree and chatted restlessly. I laid a wrapper on the green carpeted grass and had our lunch. His mum had gone with Joy so that she could drop her at home to rest. I just couldn't make what I had done to her to give me an attitude, but whatever it was, it didn't have long to stay inside, sooner than later she was likely to burst it out. She was just bidding her time.

Peter told me that he wanted more than we were doing. He was near but feeling so far away because I was shutting him out, building borders that he couldn't reach out to my heart again.

"Babe I know I messed up but knowing that you are here until am well again make me wish I can stay ill forever"

"Peter please don't start. I'm not ready to go further that step. I once did and burnt my fingers, I don't want that again. Let time alone decide what will happen to us." I spoke with a sense of finality.

" Why are you afraid to continue talking about us? Are you afraid to admit that you still love me as much as I do? that's you all over, trying to keep everything under wraps. I'm tired of your pity, I want to know that you are not doing this for charity." I wasn't prepared for his outburst.

"Fine.I hear you but can we wait until later when we both feel like talking about it?" I didn't want to give him the satisfaction that he had cornered me.

" When will that be?" he asked, clenching his jaws.

" Let's concentrate on getting you better because for now that's what really matters."

"Oh boy it's going to be a long wait then." he said.

We finished with the fruit salad I brought then went back inside.

The silence between us was spine chilling. I didn't want to say something that could hurt him let alone give him false impression that I was being flirty. I could shower him with praises and adoration just to get him back on his feet but for him to feel that we were good again as in back like the good couple that we used to be.

Mike had scared me further. Cheating was in these two close brothers' blood and nothing could stop them. The thought of Liz always made my blood cold. But what is it with people and exs. Once an ex shows signs that you are still desired you can't wait to show off how you have improved in their absence. Sometimes I guess it's to settle an old score (get back to them for dumping you).Some people can even hop back in bed with an ex and later do the dumping again,only this time the one dumped in the first place,does the dumping. An itch for revenge does that.

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In the days that followed,Ben called to say he wanted the kids for a weekend. Give me a break! I wouldn't recommend for sleep overs at this stage because they were not yet used to have him as a father. I couldn't forget Cindy's uptight attitude towards me.What would prevent her from dishing it out to my children too? Wouldn't I wake up one day and find out I was childless,thanks to her? My fears for my children were strong yet I didn't have the power to stop it.

The day when Ben was coming to pick them up,I told Amanda to look out for herself and Laurent. If anything could happen, she should get out of the house and seek for help.Get somebody to call me.I let her memorise my phone number. That was the intensity of my fears. I know I sounded crazy but my baby understood.

He finally came and made a show of his Range Rover. He parked outside

and hooted so loudly that when I came out to see who was making such noise, I found all my neighbours standing outside in awe. It must have bemused him but it annoyed me big time.

When they were gone, I didn't know what to do with myself. Of course Chris was there but it did little to fill the void. I worried myself to death and knew that it was going to be the longest weekend of my life. Peter was back home but I knew the state I was, I couldn't have been good company, so I stayed at my house. Reading my favourite Martina Cole wasn't a help either, I just couldn't concentrate. The whole of Saturday I slept and fought off the insane need to take my phone and call Ben to know if my babies were okay. I just had a bad feeling that something had happened to them. I watched every ticking second of the clock until finally I received a call from an unknown number. With trembling hands I picked it up and answered.

"Mummy?" There was no way I could have mistaken that little voice.

"Sweetie are you okay?" I asked breathlessly as I prayed that they should be okay.

"Yeah Ma we are fine. I borrowed Aunt Cindy's phone to let you know because I knew that you will be so worried." I was so thankful to God for such a sensible soul. Thank God that they survived their first night just fine.

"When are you coming home, I miss you?"

"Uncle Ben I mean Dad said he will bring us tomorrow evening. You should see my new dress and shoes. Laurent has an aeroplane, he makes noise with it I don't know if any of us will be able to have peace." I chuckled at that.

"I can't wait to see all of that. Tell Laurent I love you both and take care hun."

"Love you too mumie, bye."

At least that put my mind at rest, I had to wait for their return. I laughed at myself for worrying over nothing. You can't blame me it's called 'motherly instinct'...

## EPISODE 61

An awakened imagination works with a purpose. It creates and conserves the desirable and transforms or destroys the undesirable -Neville Goddard.

Sunday evening,Ben brought the kids.I hugged them so hard as if I would never let go.

"Did you think I would kill them or what?" Ben asked me.

"Did I do something wrong?" I retaliated.

"The way you fuss over them its like you can't believe they came back."

"I don't think you can understand but being away from my kids is not something I do every day."

" 'our kids' I would appreciate it if you would get it through your thick head that I intend to be as much a big part of their lives as you are so get used to it."

His answer irritated me and I clenched my jaws,looked around to see if the kids were within ear shot before I answered. Their voices could be heard from inside the house.

"I don't care what you intend to do but I could appreciate it if no harm could befall them in your care,I haven't forgotten how wicked you can still be."

His face contorted.

"Ouch ...that hurt, anyway who is that little fellow who was here when I came to pick up the kids and he is here again today?have you adopted another mouth to feed?"

I swear Ben had a way of talking,every word he uttered had an insult hanging at the end.

"It's none of your business who I keep and who I don't.Thanks for bringing them back.Bye" I dismissed him but he didn't move an inch.

He called Laurent and Amanda who came rushing outside.

"I'm leaving. Hope you will show your mum everything that Aunt Cindy has bought for you."

What pride!

"Yes dad" Amanda answered.

"Who is your friend?" Ben asked Laurent pointing at Chris.

"His name is Chris" Laurent answered.

"He is uncle Peter's son. mum said that makes him our brother."

Goodness,some things are better left unsaid.I was so ashamed of myself for getting my kids right into the confusion of my love life.Today you tell them this is your uncle, tomorrow this is your dad.Next time you will introduce new men in their young lives and before they are fully grown they will get used to all the 'uncles' who come and go.You will be surprised to know that they were counting them all and finally they know what a love-sick jerk you have been.

" well...well...well that's quite huge.I'm touched. Peter is opening his closet now and I hope there ain't more skeletons in the closet. How are you coping with baby mama blues?" His voice was filled with the sarcasm that I had now got used to. I closed my eyes in distress and started counting before I lost my cool.

"Alright kids,say bye to your 'father' and lets go inside it's getting cold." My voice was stable and I was determined to show him that his words couldn't make me twitch. Thank God he didn't know the full details of the masozi saga otherwise he could have used it to torment me.I am sure the 'you are not any good' part could have come in.

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The following morning I called Mike and asked him to meet me if he had time. I wanted to clear my conscious and get rid of the sleepless nights of guilt which were making my life hell. I felt like every passing day I was anticipating for something bad to happen. I hoped that the news would delay reaching Joy before I had time to play my role and save the day. Who did I think I was? The heroine who saved a sinking ship and rescued people? What if it backfired to me and Mike defended himself and proved that he wasn't cheating?

I almost hung up before his voice was heard on the other end.

" hello"

"Yes Mike,this is Wangu"

"Yes?"

My heart started hammering. Why was I such a coward inside?

"I was wondering if you have time.can we meet and talk?"



" I don't have anything to talk to you unless it's concerning Peter.Besides stay away from my family,you are an intruder."

Then he hung up.

Maybe he was right,this whole thing wasn't my business. Joy has always been a friend when things were falling apart with Peter.I didn't know how best to handle this whole thing but I prayed that Joy couldn't come out hurt worse still our friendship couldn't be bruised.

I carried out my day as a normal one and continued the routine between work and visits to Peter's place. His condition was improving and he started using clutches.

Working at the headoffice was just fine. I made myself as scarce as possible by keeping out of the boss's way. We helped pack goods in shelves and we were on our feet most of the day. Marble was no longer a till operator and neither was I a data collector. Thanks to that ruthless Manager who was determined to get his revenge by getting us transferred. The only way out was to find another job because at the end of a working day we felt like we had swum across the ocean.

The supervisor was also giving us hell,he seemed like he was the very devil's incarnate. I wanted a job but this was turning into a nightmare. By and by I was dreading to face the day when morning came. I could see that Marble was at the end of her tethers too. A day filled with all sorts of degrading remarks as well as overworking wasn't something to be proud of. It was my sweat yes but it came the hard way. Finally we were reduced to mop the floor. People think mopping is so simple and can hardly be regarded as hard work.Wait until you mop and somebody step on it before the floor is dry. Imagine facing that irritation every day. It was driving me crazy.

Peter's mother was still avoiding me. The moment I entered the room,she would leave without greeting me.whatever demons were lurking in her mind needed exorcism. Why didn't she say it outright if I offended her? On this particular day I had a bad day and I just had to vent out my anger.When I arrived,I heard her laughing inside the house but the moment I entered she kept quite and stood up to leave.

"Where are you going?" I asked her.

"Excuse me.."

"You heard me.why don't you just say it out that I'm not welcome. I think we both realised it long time ago that we don't like each other. If you don't say it today I will never step inside this house again." I busted out. Not even Peter was prepared for that.

"Peter tell this thing to get out of my sight,I don't want her trouble." She said to Peter.

"please listen ...both of you." Peter was trying to play the peace advocate. " Don't get involved Peter. This is between your mother and I.it's time we set the records straight. she can go to hell for all I care."

"Don't talk to me as if I'm your mate.if you think coming back here and trying to stick to my son will make him marry you then you are a right candidate for the mental hospital."

I was stunned beyond words.who in their right minds would say that.

"Remember.weren't you the same person who begged me to come here? You should be ashamed of yourself."

"You act as a cheap wh\*\*\* who stays this long with a man who hasn't even paid a single penny of their bride price. Desperado!"

" You witch why don't you drop dead and do the world a favour"

"Enough!" Peter shouted. In all our argument we forgot his existence.We put him on a tight corner and left him with no option. To show sides could have been a disaster.

" you stand there and watch her insult me.me? The woman who gave birth to you.Peter you will never know a day's peace in your life!"

"Leave him alone.you are a shame to womanhood."

In the thick of our exchange,we heard a shout as if from strangulation. We both rushed to his sides as he struggled to breath and we watched in disbelief as he slipped out of consciousness, I was shouting for her to call an ambulance and she was shouting and insulting me for causing everything ....

## EPISODE 62

Choose your life's mate carefully.from this decision will come 90% of your

happiness or misery- Jackson Brown

To say I was trembling like a dry leaf is an understatement. Between us we managed to lay him down on the carpet and I applied the basic first aid I had seen people do on TV. I did a mouth to mouth to resuscitate him but nothing happened. I felt his neck pulse but there was nothing. I knew that panicking wouldn't solve the problem. I summed up enough courage, went to take the car keys and told Peter's mum to help me carry him to the car. All along I was praying to God not to let him die on me... His head was propped on pillows on his mother's lap to keep him stable while I drove like a lunatic. At that time traffic officers meant nothing. In no time we arrived and he was rushed into the emergency room. The most annoying thing was that his mother kept shouting, "if my son will die, his blood will be on your head"

I didn't know what issues this woman had with me but another word from her mouth, I could have knocked her teeth. She just had to learn to shut her trap.

If I stayed in one room with her, people would find her dead, so I went out of the waiting room and walked to and fro the corridor.

It was getting late and I was hungry, I wanted something to eat. I went at the reception and asked where I could find a cafeteria. She was a pleasant woman who looked at you with those pitiful eyes that seemed to tell you that she understood what you were going through. I didn't want to be pitied, I wanted to eat and hit my head on the pillow.

She gave me directions and I went there. I had a steaming cup of tea and a cup cake. I drank it slowly as I reflected the tangled path that I seemed to visit ever since I made myself into Peter's life. The heart pain I had known because of him impregnating Masozi, his mother who would always be a thorn in my flesh as long as me and her son were together and his ex girlfriends. There was only one way I seemed to dread thus; to walk out of that room and never look back. Who was I kidding if not myself. Nothing beats a heart that is in love, others call it being pathetic while some say its true love. I have never sat down and studied these two at close range.

What I know is about being pathetic is when he keep hurting you and you keep taking him back. Some of us women have a crazy tendency of loving bad boys. Being in love is when he is not giving you pathetic reasons to

threaten your heart with other women in his life.

How does one continue loving somebody and look ahead to a bright future together when his mother hates you with a vengeance? Imagine that sweet son of yours with a woman you don't ever want. You would do anything to show him and prove that she is not worthy his trouble. Why was I a threat to Peter's mum? Did she think his son loved me more than he loved her? Seriously for the sake of Peter I was ready to tolerate her but if she kept acting up towards me I wouldn't do otherwise but cut ties for good.

At that particular moment when I was thick in the forest of my thoughts my mother called me.

"Should I starve while you are alive?"

"Mum how are you?" I answered her.

"Am fine. you promised to send me money but I haven't seen a penny yet."

"You could have asked politely. You sound as if I owe you money."

Why does she always pick the most awkward times to call me?

"Are you sending the money or not?"

"I've kids too who need the money more than you do. I'll give you money if you learn the proper way of asking."

"Wangu don't start lecturing me."

I thought with age came maturity but this was something else. I had problems and she didn't have to add more. She was an elder and she was supposed to do things that had to make her earn and maintain the respect I had for her. I loved her still but I could draw a line and hold back.

I switched off my phone and continued sipping my tea. A distraught looking man invited himself to where I was sitting. I could see tears glistening from his eyes and veins sticking out on his forehead, now and then he had to take out his handkerchief and wipe them off. Seriously I felt ill at ease. It's not everyday you see a man so grief stricken and not ashamed of showing it. I didn't know what to do apart from watching him.

"Oh Rosemary why" he finally said. I guess he was soliloquizing and I didn't ask what happened to that Rosemary.

"My wife just died leaving me with a two year old girl. What do I do without her? We have been married for three years and ohh she was the most beautiful thing I had ever known." He started opening up. Grief is

scary especially if you don't know the person both bereaved and deceased. I don't know how to comfort a grown up man but suddenly words came into my mouth.

"It's only God who gives and takes what is His and it's not in us to question His will because Him alone knows why. The best we can do is pray for strength and courage to brace us up in these trying moments. Give thanks to God for the happy moments you shared with your wife and may God help you raise your kid."

He looked so blank I thought he wasn't listening.

"All my strength is gone and my heart is heavy. She was talking this morning that she is fine and ready to go home. She sent me to get her favourite food and when I returned she was gone."

I felt sorry for him and wished I could do something to make him feel better.

"I'm sorry for your loss." I told him and then he gave me his business card and took his leave. I was left gazing at it yet seeing nothing. I knew the pain of losing a beloved one. That moment when you wish you could hold them again or tell them you love them for a moment when memories seem not to be enough. The pain of losing them is unbearable and makes you wish time could stand still only at those moments when you were together for the last time.

I went back to the waiting room to find the doctor talking to Peter's mum. The expression on their faces didn't look good, I quickened my pace to hear for myself.

"...as I was saying madam, your son is out of danger now and has gained consciousness." The doctor said just as I arrived.

"Can I see him now?" I asked.

"Am afraid not. He has said he doesn't want to see anyone now."

"But am his mother.."

"I respect the rights of my patients. For now I would advise you to leave until tomorrow when he is in the mood to talk to you again"

I was dumbfounded and didn't want to say much. I started going out.

"I'm not going anywhere until I see my son." His mother was about to start acting up. I didn't want to be witness to all the drama because I had enough of it for a day.

I went to where I packed the car and waited for sometime to see if she would follow but she didn't.

My thoughts started drifting to that recent widower. I took out his card again and decided that I would call him the following day to ask how he was fairing. I learnt that his name was Isaac Matope, a senior procurement officer at N&T holdings. I saved his numbers in my phone in case I lost the card.

I decided to leave without Peter's Mum. I called Beatrice to ask if the kids had eaten. Laurent had refused to eat until I was home. I didn't know how he ate when he went to Ben's place. children are just peculiar creatures. I arrived home and fed Laurent before he slept. He was half dozing already. Later I put him to bed and went to have a bath before having my supper and hit my pillow.

The following day at lunch break I called Isaac. He said they were on his way to Zomba to his wife's village for burial. I told him words of comfort and promised to call him again later.

Marble asked who I had talked to with such a sorrowful expression on my face. I explained to her including the issue why I went to the hospital in the first place.

"Gal the way you are concerned is like you were his mother." She mocked me.

"I just feel sorry for the poor man"

"Okay if you say so but ask yourself why you haven't called Peter to ask how he is feeling."

I failed to answer that question.

After eating our lunch we went back to work and throughout the day I didn't bother checking on him until we knocked off. I went to the hospital called Peter's mum that she should come out of the hospital. When she did, I gave her car keys and simply walked out to go and board a minibus back home. I didn't look back. half of me expected her to throw the keys at me, the other half wanted her to tell me how Peter was doing but I was too proud to ask...

I just wanted to walk away from there and never hear anything again about these people ...

## EPISODE 63

Quit listening to accusing voices. if you don't like yourself,you will never become what you were created to be- Joel Osteen

It felt nice to walk away as if I didn't have a care in the world. Deep down I knew Peter would pull through,he was a fighter and survivor even when he didn't know it. He just needed a driving force to nurture him.

When I arrived home,I told Beatrice that she should pack Chris' clothes ready to take him back to his father and grand mother. I called her to ask when she would be back home,lucky enough she said the doctor would discharge Peter the following day in the afternoon. I informed her that Beatrice would be coming the following day with Chris and she agreed. Beatrice was against the idea of leaving Chris but as long as he was still with me,Peter would use him as a snare to lure me back to his net.

Sometimes I didn't know if I wasn't strong enough to resist him or if I was so weak to fight off temptations. For once I realized that all my problems derived from men. If I had been able to live my own life and not fall for Ben and his tricks to send me to school while he in exchange got sex,I could stil be standing on my two feet. Don't be deceived,some men will never be nice for nothing. They always want something in return.

Selfishness takes time to mature and it has different levels and sometimes we are foolish enough to excuse it as jelousy and misinterpret it for love. Just because he takes you out for lunch and drive you around town to fancy places and calls you around the clock while worshipping the ground you walk on,doesn't mean he doesn't have crooked thoughts,he is simply buying his time to take his dues. You will be suprised to learn of a side chick or less still a main chick you have never heard of or suspected him of having.

Anyway I made up my mind to wash my hands off these people who were eating at my life like a cancer.

The following day before leaving for work I gave a sulking Beatrice money for transportation to Peter's place. Seriously I never got why she still

wanted me to have Peter in my life. It wasn't like my life depended on him. People like Beatrice had a serious dependency syndrome. She was the same person complaining about being ill treated yet she didn't want to cut ties. Well I had my own share of grief and wanted a breather.

At work there was serious trouble. Thieves had broken through the roof and went away with goods worthy millions. The two night guards were nowhere to be seen and that left the police with no options but to hunt for them. We were left at the mercy of the boss' tongue who insulted us as if he went to school for it. If only he could use that mouth to recite bible verses. It was depressing to be on the receiving end when the culprits were at large. we were being questioned one after the other throughout the day. It didn't matter if you were already questioned but you just had to comply. Our histories were dug almost to the point of us to mention our forefathers. The day was one of the longest I had ever known.

We knocked off before our time and each one of us was glad to leave such misery behind.

Beatrice was home and in bed even if it was early evening. I woke her up. When she looked at me, I felt the depth of her accusation and could see that she had been crying. It seemed that letting Chris go had been the hardest task. It hadn't been easy to me as well. He was such a sweet child who never gave me too much trouble. I was fond of him and I could see that the children were also feeling his absence. This situation was just beyond me.

I made biscuits for the kids and tried to cheer them up.

I made a call to the estate agent who told me that he hasn't yet found the house for me to buy because one million five hundred thousand wasn't much considering how the currency was fluctuating.

I made a call to Norah who seemed both excited and mad to hear from Me. But then friendship is like a swing, you need to push for you to have the desired effect. We were in the same city yet both of us looked like we had forgotten about the other. I blamed it on my hectic job and she blamed me on the pressure surrounding her marriage. She said now her husband had found himself a mistress and she was having his baby. I was shocked to



this recent turn of events and in all this madness she had tempted several times to commit suicide. I don't know if it was a good idea but I told her that no man is worthy dying for and if she loved herself she had to get out of that marriage as fast as she could. She may not do it for herself but for the love of her baby she had to soldier on. She would never be the first woman to be a single mum nor the last one...

#### EPISODE 64

Have you ever felt so lonely it feels like the hollow inside you gets wider by the second? Well I did and its not something you can get used to nor claim to fight, the least one can do is learn to live with it until your heart is ready again for love and companionship. Sometimes one can be lonely even when a partner is there. When love seem to wear off by the day and when it looks like there is nothing left out of it except the two of you to agree and part ways without all the fuss that comes with breakups. It's really sad when you are in it and wish you could close your eyes and open them again to find that all of that is a past that is locked away at the far back of your mind.

I was sitting on my bed and wish there was someone I could open my heart to in a way beyond the closeness of friendship alone. How does one open up to a seven year old and expect her to offer the comfort you long for? When all that you long for is a shoulder to lean on and strong big hands to hold you while you unleash the tears and pain bottled inside. Even when you act as tough as you wish to be, there's is somebody you wish to comfort you too.

Willowing in my love misery was not an option so I went to see Norah and her husband. Between them there were all the signs of a love lost. The animosity and tension engulfing the atmosphere was enough to make me wish I wasn't there at all. Why these too were still holding on to the tatters of what used to be a happy marriage was beyond me. We all stay for different reasons. For society, for children, for our egos and pride...for

faith and hope for a miraculous turnover from above.

The strain could be heard in her trembling voice and frightened manner in which she carried herself. She was a bubbly person by nature but he had put the fear of the devil in her, blew out her shining candle and reduced it to melting wax. She looked so sick and thin, it showed that she had not been eating properly. Most of the times he was drunk and his actions were unpredictable. He had resorted to insulting her and calling her all sorts of names even around people. Gone was the loving and caring man I had once seen and it's a pity the picture of him on their wedding day was still vivid in my head but he had completely changed, transformed into a worse monster than characters in the wrong turn movies. I had one conclusion - all this was too much for him to handle, he had lost his mind or hidden behind the facade of alcoholism and womanising. He was sinking deeply and would die there if he didn't seek professional help. When she was escorting me, I told her that an abusive man will stop at nothing until he breaks you down and see to your ruin personally. Nothing pleases him than seeing you at your lowest ebb, desperate, hopeless and begging for his mercy. His presence alone was able to make her have nightmares when she could dream of him murdering her in her sleep.

I told her that if she was prepared to leave him, she would be welcome at my house. I couldn't forget the kindness and care she and her family had bestowed me when I was carrying Mandy. Surely a good turn deserves another.

I left with a heavy heart and afraid of what would happen next. I felt like I was watching a timing bomb that was about to explode.

I was ready to help only if she was able to help herself. To take that first step outside would determine an entirely different way of life. A new lease of life that she only dreamt of; a peace of mind.

I went home. The children were at school and Beatrice was in the kitchen preparing lunch. She looked startled because she wasn't expecting me to be home so soon but I could come in and go as I pleased, I didn't need a chaperon for that. She only had a wrapper tied around her armpits but didn't look like she was coming from the bathroom. She was in a good mood than I could remember. She pulled out a stool for me to sit on as she

told me about a new girl she had befriended recently. It wasn't my business but I listened anyway. There weren't many times we chatted like that and I wanted to make the best of it.

She took my handbag to the bedroom and told me to remove my Shoes and rest my feet. The kids were due to come home anytime and I couldn't wait to see them again. I stood up to go and change my clothes.

I went to the bedroom, removed my clothes and laid them on the bed. I looked at the room which had two beds. Amanda shared it with Beatrice while I did with Laurent. There was nothing else to be done since I couldn't yet afford a bigger house. But I knew deep down inside me that I could fight for it and give that to my kids before I breathed my last.

I opened the narrow wardrobe to look for a dress to wear. My eyes met with those of a half dressed man whose eyes instantly moved to my breasts below and instinctively I put my hands around them protectively from his intruding and prying eyes and screamed for help...

## EPISODE 65

I pulled a sheet from the nearest bed and covered myself as best as I could. Beatrice came rushing beside me and told me to stop shouting for fear of alerting the neighbours. I took out my phone to call the police.

"Please sis don't call the police." she begged me.

" so... you know this man?" I asked her but she didn't reply and I interrupted the silence as a yes.

" You may do all that you like out of this house and out of my eye shot I don't mind but don't bring your baggage inside my house.don't you have shame?"

The man had came out and was getting dressed. The need to slap his face was so great but I ended up clenching my fist and dropping it at my sides. He wasn't worthy an ounce of my anger even if I had all the right to unleash it.

"Out of my house both of you!" I shouted. If Beatrice had thought she could escape this so easily then she didn't know me well enough. Where was the

respect I deserved? If not for me as her elder sister but as the owner of the house.

"But sis..." she started protesting and I shot her a look that had her shut her mouth.

"Let's go Lumbani" she told the intruder. That was when I realised that he was the same fool who wanted to marry her back in the village but she realised soon enough that he was married and already had three children. She had escaped the polygamy unknowingly and if she was somebody else she could have been thanking God for that and keeping away from this man. Yet here she was with him in my house and allowing him to misuse the liberty of her body. I really felt so sorry for her. I mean what sort of disturbing love was that when one didn't learn any lesson from the first encounter? Did she thought she was strong enough or beautiful enough to lure him to her bossom

and make him forget about his family he had spent so many years to build? What I knew was that he wanted to use her as much as she could allow then go back to his wife. The wife probably thought him to be on one business trip or another when all he was doing was spending his days in the arms of another woman. Why do we women have to prove to each other that we are the best at destroying and disturbing fellow sisters' peace? Do you know what it took for that other woman to build the home and family she calls her own? The sweat, agony and endurance she tolerated for this man to still be with her and bore his kids? Love is hardwork yes and its a miracle to stay in love, to stand the test of time and overcome those mountains that seem impossible to move.

Maybe she could have said she didn't know that he was married that first time they met, when she knew she called it quits but now she was going back to him as if he was the only man on earth and didn't know when another one would come again...

After they went out, heaven knows to where, I called my mum.

"Hello"

"Mama you should tell Beatrice i don't want her in my house again. How could she bring a man in my house? "

"You mean she brought Lumbani?" she said then started laughing.

"How did you know?" I was bewildered. "Ofcourse he came to tell me. He

has already gone to your uncles and paid her bride price, she is going to be his third wife."

I couldn't believe any of this. Not even a second wife but A THIRD!

"Mum are you alright? is that what you want for your daughter?" I was on the verge of tears.

"If that's what she wants then so be it, she is not a kid anymore. Are you jealousy or what? At least she is getting married properly, where is your husband if you even have one?"

she cut right where it really hurt me.

"But mama..."

"Enough Wangu. Your sister is marrying into a royal family. Lumbani's uncle who died few months ago was a Chief and he will succeed him. why can't you be happy for her?" she said cheerfully.

"For you its always about status and money never integrity. You should try to preserve it one day and you won't regret."

"Make sure you treat her well. She is the one who will bore him a male child when those two miserable women of his have failed."

"You don't have shame and I feel so sorry for you. I only hope you won't live to regret this."

"At least am happy for her and it won't kill you to be too."

We had said enough and prolonging the subject would have only made us say things we could later regret. We said our goodbyes and hung up. This wasn't a scheme that had happened overnight, it had been happening for some time. I wondered why I was always the last one to know things in this family. Don't they think my views count too?

My phone beeped, it was a message from Isaac. Of late we spoke almost everyday as he told me how he was coping with his wife's demise. How his daughter was with his mother in another city until he sorted himself out. Such a sad love story. This guy had loved his wife so much I could see from the way he talked about her. All I did was give him an ear as he lamented and offer comforting words where necessary. But when he said he wanted to see me again I told him that for the moment I was so tied up but once I sorted some issues I would let him know. I didn't realise I was smiling to myself until I heard the kids' voices entering the house. I got dressed and went to them.

Two weeks later, Norah called me that she had finally gathered enough courage to walk away. It looked like a stroke of grace had touched her life as she had went to the police and reported all the abuses she had suffered at his hands. The bruises on her body from the battering. He had chosen to inflict them where people wouldn't be able to see. The husband and his mistress were nowhere to be seen. Since she couldn't afford to pay rent and other bills as well as take care of her baby, she could come to stay with me until she was back on her feet. Her father had told her to look for somewhere else to stay because her space at home was no longer available the moment she went to get married. His reaction he claimed was to save as a lesson to her siblings to be careful when choosing a partner to marry. Talk of that awkward moment when your family abandons you when you need them most. I still didn't understand why he took me in when he was now denying one of his own.

A car stopped outside our yard while I was washing the children's school uniforms. Joy came out of the car wearing sun glasses, I didn't know why she had not called to tell me that she was coming. I stopped washing to go and welcome her. We hugged but she didn't say any word even when I spoke to her. When she took off the sun glasses, she had a blood shot eye. I gasped in surprise.

"Atsikana what happened to you?"

"It's Mike..."

## EPISODE 66

You don't know how strong you are until being strong is the only option-  
Anjawo Nyirenda

Looking at Joy felt like a dam of defense had broken and the water was everywhere, wild and untamed. I took her hand and went inside the house.

Norah had taken the kids to the market so we had enough time to talk. My heart was hammering inside me and hoped that if she had got wind of her husband's cheating, she won't be mad at me further for not telling her. When I looked at her face again, tears were flowing down her cheeks. I squeezed her hand in comfort and she smiled at me faintly.

"Do you realize that you are my only friend who I can talk to without being judged?" Seriously this question took me unawares. We were friends yes but we hadn't reached that level when we could say we were best of friends. I was flattered to know that she regarded me as such.

"I don't know the type of battles everybody has fought out there, as such I don't take it upon myself to be judgemental. That's one lesson life has taught me." I told her. She looked like she just reflected on a past painful experience taking from the way her face contorted suddenly.

"I agree with you. but you have known pain in your young life. I am older than you but you won't realise how much I have learnt from you?"

"Me?" I wondered "what could I have possibly taught you?"

When she answered, her voice was calm.

"Wangu don't ever belittle yourself. You are strong."

"Anyway enough talk about me. Tell me what happened to you" I said changing the subject.

"I can't understand Mike anymore. It all started with late home comings. As if that wasn't enough he would go for business trips for a week or two. I thought it was normal because I trusted him so much but I don't think I still do."

The cat was out of the bag.

"That's too bad." I sympathized.

"He is having an affair. I couldn't believe it if somebody else had told me but I saw them together going into a shop hand in hand can you imagine when he had lied to me that he was out of town." She let out a heavy sigh then continued. "I followed them inside. I am not a violent person but I swear I wanted to murder the woman right there. Can you imagine when I asked Mike what he was doing there, the b\*\*\*\* had the nerve to ask who I was." At that moment I could play the picture in my head, one bit I didn't envy to be Marcy.

"Then what happened next?" I asked curiously.

"He said,"Marcy this is my wife." And the girl had the nerve to say "such a big pig?"

I could imagine the tempers that had flown everywhere. That was a big test for even a sworn priest to pass.

"Do you know the girl?" I asked her feigning ignorance.

"Yes i now do.You wouldn't think I could leave it like that? I have dug as much as I can and lucky enough I even know where she stays. She has an identical twin." I was shocked to hear such detailed information.

"Hey how did you know all this?"

"People don't think twice when selling out the devils.well wishers did."

"What will you do now?" I had to be careful in my questioning for fear of raising suspicion.

"I can't give up my man or my marriage.I worked too hard for this.I swear I will make both of them pay dearly and when am done they won't wish to cross me again."

I kept quite to allow her words sink inside me. How much damage was she prepared to do?

"When he came home and I asked him about this,he beat me up in front of the kids. What has this girl really done to him because Mike has never acted like a maniac before especially in front of the poor kids. They were so frightened."

"Don't blame yourself dear.his cheating is none of your doing."

"I will go there and sort her out.she can't come from the blues and upset my life. Mike hasn't been home since last night.I can't imagine that he went to her."

Suddenly she grabbed her car keys.

"Where are you going?" I asked her.

"Home ofcourse."

I sighed in relief.

"Okay dear.don't do anything stupid.go home and take care of your man and kids they need you."

She left. My mind was reeling. What was I to do? Call Marble and warn her of the impending ambush? Let matters be like they were? What if she went there and find Marble instead of Marcy? She would receive the punishment that wasn't meant for her and worst of all Joy would be



arrested for assault.

All in all I didn't want anybody to get hurt especially since I wasn't already in good terms with Peter's family. Mike would surely blame me for selling him out to Joy, to borrow Martina Cole's word 'glass'

I went to resume my washing and thought about Ben's request to take the kids to his home village during the school holidays. That was deep and I wanted to find a way for them not to go. I would go mad worrying about them so far away.

Thirty minutes after Joy had gone, she came back all flared up. I was alarmed.

"Come on gal you and me are going for a drive." She said to my surprise. She was breathing heavily and sweating hard.

"Are you okay Love?"

"Stop whining like an old woman, lock that house. Let's go!"

This was an order but I didn't want to go, something didn't sound well.

"I just can't leave..." I started protesting but it didn't change a thing. I locked the house and put the keys behind the door mat. I called Norah to tell her that I was going out and would explain everything when I returned.

We drove out, I was surprised that we were driving to Area 14 right into Marble's neighborhood. It's when I really started panicking. She looked like a maniac, as mad as a hatter. Every word I spoke was hit by a blank wall of silence. She was murmuring to herself under her breath and I couldn't pick out exactly what she was saying.

She brought the car to a sudden halt and got out. I followed behind, frightened of what I was about to witness.

She banged the gate none too gently and an alarmed gateman came to open. The moment the gate opened, she pushed the old gateman aside and made our way straight to the house. I saw the man dusting himself up and run after us. Joy opened the door to the house. Both Marble and Marcy were home, watching television and their chatter died instantly the moment we arrived unannouncedly.

"Which one of you is Marcy?" Joy bellowed like an angry lioness that she was. My eyes locked with Marble's and I gave an innocent shrug to signal her that it was none of my doing even when I knew it was useless. She

didn't look to believe me and at that moment I felt like a Judas for bringing the angel of death right at their door step.

" I am.." Marble said slowly and the moment those words were out, Joy pounced on her. I couldn't believe it, i knew who was who and couldn't understand why she chose to be a sacrificial lamb for her promiscuous twin. With Marcy we tried effortlessly to get Joy off Marble but she was too strong for us and mercilessly raining blows on her, ignorant of our pleas. Marcy was shouting that she should leave her sister and beat her instead but it was already too late. The security providers of that compound finally responded to the alarm that had been pressed by the gate man. Two guards finally managed to get Joy off Marble. Her face was battered and blood was coming out of her mouth and nose.

"Let me kill this b\*\*\*\* where is your loud mouth now, speak to me again like you did that day!" Joy was still shouting when they took her away to their car. Where was the sweet natured woman that I knew and who was this animal in her place? I couldn't look both the girls in the face. Marcy went to take towels to clean her twin's face while I looked On. She was murmuring apologies for her taking a bullet in her place. I could still hear Joy urging with the security guards outside.

" Are you happy now?" Marcy shouted at Me. I didn't know why she was blaming me for her own sins. I wasn't the one who had slept with somebody else's husband.

" What are you still doing here? Go away!" It was Marble talking through clenched teeth with so much difficult I could see that she was in excruciating pain.

There and then, I knew that I had lost a friend, a confidant and a colleague because things would never be the same again between us. To her, I had betrayed a profound friendship and failed to guard the code of sisterhood. I was at a loss as I slowly walked outside to see Joy. Another security guard called me aside.

" I am sorry madam but we have to take your friend to the police station."

"Please don't do that" I begged him.

"Did you see how that girl is damaged there? She won't have the confidence to look herself in the mirror again. Perhaps you prefer we call the police here? "

" No..no.."

" let's go then, your friend is quite a handful. She has a smell of alcohol on her.were you aware of that? I hope she won't live to regret today." I then knew that she had acted on the influence of alcohol. After today,I don't know if a bottle of liquor would visit her mouth ever again.

She handed me her car keys and we drove behind the security van.

It was like I wasn't there at all. She was talking to herself loudly ofcourse and I fought the desire to slap her hard on the face to shut her up. I was trying to think of how to get her out of this mess. After what seemed like eternity she eventually fall asleep ...

She looked so innocent I felt so guilty when I had to wake her up at the car park of the police station. It was time I called Mike, the son of the devil himself and I wasn't too happy to be the one doing it...

## EPISODE 67

Why was he cursing and insulting me as if I was the one who had sent him to cheat on his wife? He even got it all wrong when he accused me of wanting to destroy his 'happy' marriage. Did he even know the meaning when love and faithfulness was not included?

All I wanted was for him to come and sort all this out because I didn't have the money to waste on such a senseless matter. I didn't know what his next step would be but to me having a mistress, rude or not, wasn't my idea of an ideal life, it only leaves you and yours hurt while the home breaker picks up her own broken pieces, walk scott free and start afresh with somebody new.

I gently nudged Joy awake and went to her side to help her out of the car. We went inside the station where the two security guards were giving their statement. The way they were describing Marble's injuries was enough to make the police lock Joy up forever. Worse still they said we left Marble unconscious and didn't know if she was still alive.

I was so angry for their petty lies and was even angrier at Joy for dragging me into the middle of all this.

Isaac called me, I went outside to pick the call. I told him where I was and what was happening. He offered to come and see if he could be of any help. I told him not to bother since Mike now knew and could probably make an appearance too. He insisted to come.

He arrived when I had just finished giving my statement. To my surprise, he hugged me so tightly never minding the prying eyes. I was so embarrassed since I wasn't used to such public display of affection.

He called the office on duty aside and engaged him in a steamy conversation. I could see from the officers facial expression that those two security guards had done enough damage. Within minutes they went inside a room, when they came out, the police officer was grinning from side to side and came where Joy sat.

"madam be careful next time before you act like a mad woman." He told her. Joy was about to start giving him a word or two when Isaac quickly strode to her side and told her that we had to go.

It was obvious a bribe had been offered, we all know what police officers are like when it comes to corruption.

I drove Joy's car and Isaac drove behind us. When we arrived at Joy's place, Mike was not there. I helped her inside the house and her mother in law was there. I acted as if she was never there as I helped Joy to her bedroom. What was she doing there when she was supposed to be taking care of Peter? Whatever, I didn't mind.

I made a strong cup of coffee while Joy finished taking a bath.

I left when she was tucked in bed, awaiting her husband. I wished her all the best to that and told her that if she wanted anything she could always let me know but it didn't have to include dragging me to another beat-a-mistress mission.

I left with Isaac.

"Thanks for coming over." I told him.

"Anytime Sunshine." He smiled before proceeding "hope next time I won't have to come to your rescue when you will be the perpetrator" I laughed to that. Well I was a good girl so he had no reasons to worry. This was the only time we had been close since the last time we met at the hospital. I was afraid to ask about anything to do with his late wife in case I touched

a raw nerve. There was something about him that made me wish I could hug him close and tell him that things would be fine, an envelope of sadness. He probably would have thought me crazy or something. He suggested we go to Mc Daud's for a bite. Since I was hungry I didn't refuse but I was conscious of what I wore. It wasn't something to be seen in at such an extravagant place but again he insisted saying he didn't mind. What a man. We sat down and ordered Lunch. Unbeknownst to me perhaps to both of us, we didn't have a slight idea what fate held for us. This was a time that changed things between us even as I became more conscious when he started baring his heart to me. I wasn't sure if I wanted to take a step and see what was inside. To me it was a no go zone. He was still someone who needed emotional healing, he was living in the shadow of his late wife and whether I wanted it or not but her name would still be a major topic of conversation only God knew till when. I loved his sense of maturity and I didn't know if he was also a mama's boy in a man's skin like Peter. I know it sounded ridiculous to compare the two but I had to if I didn't want a repeat of mother in law blues.

Even though inside of me was screaming not to do this, I found myself agreeing to meet him again the following day at lunch. I felt like Peter would think that I had betrayed him, us but he was water under the bridge just like Ben was.

He went to drop me home. I learnt from Norah that Beatrice came and collected her things and left me a note.

"Sis, am sorry for everything but understand that I have followed my heart. My wedding date has been fixed. If you want to know more, call me. That way I will know that you have forgiven me. Love, Beatrice."

I read it for a thousand times as I fought myself from calling her.

Another time. I told myself, throwing the note on the fire.

For the days that followed, I was busy working. It was hard to walk beside someone who no longer had anything to do with me. It was so hard to believe that at one point Marble was my friend and we could laugh together. The days at this forsaken place were bearable because we had each other to turn to. She had started treating me with contempt that was hard to deal with. Even when I tried to talk to her on a simple issue, she could either ignore me or answer me rudely. I let her be.

In all these passing days, Mike didn't make an appearance at his home. Neither was he available on his mobile phone. Joy was panicking, really losing it. She couldn't stop thinking that he had left her for Marcy. There was no way I could help her find out the truth because we were no longer on speaking terms with Marble. The whole thing was proving to be difficult when Joy went to Mike's work place and they denied to tell her any information about his whereabouts. She stood waiting by the premises gate from morning to evening until they closed and watched everybody pass by with abeited breath but she didn't see him. She blamed herself for wanting to fight for her marriage yet she had ended up pushing her man into the waiting and eager arms of another woman. No matter how hard I tried to tell her otherwise, she couldn't hear any of it. Reporting him missing wasn't an option either because we both knew this was a deliberate move intended to prove whatever ego tucked up his sleeve or teach Joy a lesson never to interfere in his affairs. I didnt know what a grown up man with three kids and a wonderful wife would look for in a girl like Marcy. She led a reckless and carefree life, never minding whose foot she stepped on as long as she was buoyant, afloat the modern life.

Joy was slowly sinking in despair and helplessness for a man who had hurt her. She couldn't hide the fact of her regret for agreeing to stop working and be a full time house wife. I remembered how she had advised me not to give up when Peter had suggested the same for me. She had failed to stand her ground when it was her turn, defending herself that she was legally married and was as much entitled to what he had as he was. Now she couldn't have access to their joint account without his signature.

I was at work when Joy called me that she had received a call from a lawyer who claimed to represent Mike to go and see him. She wanted me to escort her. I told her that I couldn't make it since I was at work. She begged me and I had no choice but to tell The Human Resource Manager that Laurent was sick and I had to rush home to take him to the hospital. I felt guilty to say such a lie but I had to answer Joy's call for companionship. I hoped we couldn't end up at the police station again.

"I hope the lawyer has news of my husband" Joy told me the moment I stepped in the car when she came to pick me up.

I didn't want to say anything but my instinct heralded some bad news. I learnt that the hard way. To me anything associated with lawyers meant trouble.

We drove out of town to Six Miles along where his offices were situated. G&J associates was a firm I heard that handled difficult cases of divorce. I didn't tell her that for fear of being misinterpreted. Perhaps if I had told her in the first place about Mike and Marcy things could have turned otherwise.

The receptionist was a middle aged woman with a ready smile that made you wonder if she knew you from somewhere. We waited as she made a call before directing us to Mr Godsend's office.

He was a short man with a long beard and big eyes that made him distinguished.

As he firmly shook our hands respectively, I prayed that this meeting would end well because of late, Joy seemed to always be at the end of her wits.

"Welcome ladies please take a seat."

"Thank you" we said in unison.

"I'm Mike's wife Joy and this is my friend Wangu." She made the introductions.

"As you already know am Mr Godsend and my pleasure meeting beautiful ladies like you."

"Am rushing to another meeting, can we go straight to business." Joy said sounding serious while looking at her wrist watch.

"I am your husband's lawyer and he wants a divorce."

I could hear the sound of a cow mowing far away and a pin dropping somewhere. I couldn't look at Joy for fear of what she could look like. My heart was having a Marathon. Has it reached that giving up extent sure? I wondered.

"On what grounds am I being divorced?" At last I heard her speak but her voice had a pained expression attached to it. She couldn't believe it as much as I did.

"That will be said when you sign these papers."

"Tell Mike I want to see him now!" She started shouting on top of her voice. " I don't care how you will do it but bring him in this room. Why can't he be man enough to say it in my face?"

I wasn't the only one shocked by this angry woman. Mr Godsend had to push his chair back for fear of being poked in the face.

" I am sorry madam but your husband is out of the country now and will be back in two weeks time."

"Oh God I can't believe this! How could he neglect his kids and waltz out of the country without saying anything? What sort of a fool did I marry?" She continued.

"Madam please I would advise you to go home and wait until he returns.am sure you two will reach to a certain agreement." I thought lawyers were used to handle angry people but he was trembling like a dry leaf.

"What makes you think that he will let me know when he is back especially since he disappeared without a whisper.Tell me what do I tell my kids? "

"Joy ..." I began. She gave me a look that warned me not to get involved.

"He has frozen your joint accounts for the moment but if you need anything for the kids you should tell his mother she will know what to do." That she devil should have been hanged long time ago. I thought.

"I didn't marry his mother,I got married to him. That woman can go to hell she has meddled in my business too far."

"Those were his instructions am just passing the message" he defended himself.

Joy told me that we had to go. I followed her meekly like a puppy.

On the way back, I told her not to quarrel with her mother in law, fighting her was useless. She just had to wait until Mike came back. As far as Mike and Peter were concerned,they thought their mother an angel. There and then she broke down and started crying. To her being divorced meant he had realised his mistake and wanted to collect it by removing her out of the way of his life. She felt she hadn't tried good enough and hadn't been woman enough. I told her that it was his loss not hers because she was a remarkable woman and mother who had made a selfless sacrifice of her career, time and life to raise a family.



she couldn't hear any of it for she labelled herself a failure.

Reluctantly, she let me go home after I had let her take sleeping pills for her to sleep off the pain and rest even though it was early in the evening. I told the maid not to disturb her until she woke up herself.

Back home I took a bath and had supper content with my children around me. I chatted with Isaac while in bed until I fall asleep unknowingly only to be awoken by my phone ringing in the wee hours of the morning. It was Peter's Mum. For three times I watched the phone ring until I couldn't take it anymore. Why was she calling me at such an odd hour as if we were long time friends.

"What do you want?" I asked, obviously irritated. Her voice was a mixture of sobs and shock.

"Joy hanged herself"

...oh No...

## EPISODE 68

Rejection is like a disease that slowly eats at the core of one's soul.

I felt numb from head to the tips of my toes. It was just unbelievable, simply insane to think that just a few hours ago we were together but now she was gone, completely wiped off from the face of the earth, leaving behind a shameful legacy as a woman who died the death of the cursed. I was crying uncontrollably as reality sunk in. There was just one person I thought of turning to in those painful moments, Isaac. I dialled his number with trembling hands. The moment he picked up, I couldn't hold back the tears and I ended up telling him nothing he could phantom.

"hang on sweetheart I'll be right there."

The whole house was awake now and Norah tried to console me but I just couldn't stop the tears. Amanda and Laurent started crying too in all the confusion, they were scared for they have never seen me in such a state before.

The moment Isaac walked inside the house, I run to him and buried

myself in his chest. He was in his pyjama and slippers, obviously sleepy but he left the comfort of his bed to be by my side. He hugged me tightly. I told him everything and he was grief stricken too. I knew he understood the depth of loss, the sting of death he had known and came to live to live with.

I asked him to drive me to Joy's place, Norah wanted to come with us but I told her to watch over the kids.

He drove silently, deep in thought and I was equally in despair, crying all the way for an extraordinary woman who had given up on life too soon. If only I had stayed with her over the night maybe things could have been different. I couldn't help to ask myself 'why?' a thousand times because she wasn't someone I had known to give up easily just for a man who had brought her headache. She chose to depart and leave behind three beautiful innocent souls she had helped bringing into this world. Where had her faith gone? That endless pilgrimage of the heart. I was shaking uncontrollably as we drew nearer. Many a time, Isaac had to stop and gather me in his arms as I became hysterical. The pain inside me was enough to rip my heart open and tear it in shreds.

We arrived at the house just in time as her body was being carried from the house into the ambulance. I quickly got out of the car to see her corpse for myself but Isaac stopped me before I did. I wanted to wriggle free from his hold but one of police officers who was standing nearby said, "you don't want to see that madam, its not a pretty sight."

I stood there, crying my heart out as Isaac held me in his arms. It was better to keep the picture of the woman I used to know. Looking at Joy's children didn't help matters, I just didn't know what these poor kids were thinking. Lusungu the eldest was holding her two siblings who had no idea what was going on. A thousand thoughts were crossing my mind. Where was Mike? Who would take care of the burial? Who would inform Joy's family because I didn't have the strength. Peter's car drove in at that point and he stood dead in his tracks the moment his eyes set on mine, I looked away. He walked straight to where I stood.

" What sort of a crazy world do we live in? Is that what you used to discuss with your friend? Advising each other to commit suicide? " I didn't know why he chose that moment to fire me with so many questions.

"Excuse me Sir but this is not the right moment to talk like that." Isaac saved me.

" Where is my poor mother? She must be terrified." He spoke while stroding inside the house, only pausing to look at the kids before proceeding. Did he make me his mother's keeper or what? Where was the once compassionate man I had loved before? It was useless to talk about him when it didnt help in bringing Joy back to life.I was heart broken.

" Be strong now dear, you must realize that not everybody is as strong as we might wish them to be." His words only brought fresh tears to my eyes. Peter came out holding his mother as if she was the most delicate China. Her face was cast down as if genuinely grief stricken. I wished I could shake her shoulders until her teeth came out of her mouth. She was the worst pretender I had ever known and wished God could punish her there and then. She was alive to destroy the lives of these men she called her children yet they were too blinded by her influence to notice it.

I watched them pass us to Peter's car and we went to where the children were sitting. I wanted to usher them inside the house but a picture of Joy hanging from the roof made my blood coil, it felt like I was seeing her, swinging, painfully struggling for breath, fighting as death finally claimed her.

I called the maid to make tea for the children because they were obviously cold. After she was done serving them, Isaac called her to narrate how it had happened. She said she had found her hanging in her bedroom when she went to check on her if she was awake so that she should bring her something to eat. It must have been hard for her to see her employer who was more than a mother to her in such a state. Another thing, she had found a suicide note by the bed side...

## EPISODE 69

The mentioning of the suicide note had me jumping out of my skin. Part of me wanted to see what had really driven her to the edge. The way Mike was driving her crazy with his promiscuity, could have gladdened the

heart of every woman when he had bid her goodbye. There was no chance of seeing it now because it was in the hands of the police. Relationships end but as long as one is alive, there is hope that somebody out there will still have room in his heart for your love. You don't have to kill yourself and prove to the world that you couldn't afford to live without him.

Joy's relatives started flocking to the house. I didn't know who had pulled enough strength to undertake such a hard task of informing them. Never did I wish to be the one to deliver bad news because some people collapse upon hearing it and the thought of heart shattering cries, filling my ears wasn't something to look forward to. A group of women got out of the car. Two of them were holding a grief stricken woman between them who was having difficulty in walking. I guessed that she was Joy's mother. How was I going to answer these unbelieving people's questions when there was nobody from Mike's family? I thought against calling Peter. Telling these people the root cause of this catastrophe would open a can of worms that couldn't do justice to the memory of Joy's life. Not that there was anything more to hide because as it was, suicide couldn't be hidden.

Some people started moving furniture to other rooms to create space at the sitting room. We had to get things moving as to prepare for the next step when her body would be brought.

Isaac called me outside. He wanted to be on his way back and go to work. He gave me money to use in case I needed something. I wanted him to take the kids to my place until the funeral was over, I wanted to shield them from all the pain and bad memories that they would carry as they grew up. I felt that it wasn't possible to do that because there was nobody who could give me permission.

when he was leaving I told him how thankful I was for his help and support because not everybody else could have done that.

"call me if you need anything sweetheart" he said, touching my cheek before leaving. I felt like I was all alone without him but for the sake of the kids, I chose to stick around as long as it was required. I was already having a tough time at work for giving more excuses than any other employee. What would happen next didn't cross my mind because I was mourning and nothing else mattered.

The night of that day, the women's guild from Joy's church came to sing

funeral songs. Those songs that give hope to the remaining people that they will see the departed person again some day. They are songs whose meaning make you feel the unbeatable pain of loss and wonder how it would feel like when your turn comes.

I had my phone in my hands and was going through it when I noticed that I had an unread message. When I opened it I got the shock of my life when I read that it was from Joy. I closed my eyes and thought I was dreaming. The message had been sent at 01:45 am of that day.

"I couldn't bear to see him in the arms of another woman. The shame was just too much. My children would always see me as a failure for driving their father away. I'm sorry Wangu but I hope you will understand and help to take care of my babies."

My outburst was so sudden I couldn't control it. I felt like if only I had read that message the moment it came through, I could have done something about it.

Nobody could have understood but I did, Joy was afraid of losing, afraid of being alone, afraid of looking at life through a new window. A new window of life after divorce. Everything had stood still in her life upon hearing that simple seven lettered word.

I was taken outside as I had disturbed the singing. While they took me inside the tent that had been pitched outside, I saw Mike coming. He came now that Joy had breathed her last when he had not wanted to be near her when she needed and missed him most. This man who had the guts to walk here when nothing could be done anymore. If I had a gun, I could have shot him right there and then with a smile on my face...

## EPISODE 70

"Who do you turn to when disaster strike? whose name do you call upon when calamity hits your life so suddenly like a storm? The bible from Genesis to revelation does not talk about somebody who succeeded after he called upon the names of different gods. If you trust in The Most High God with your troubles, there will never be any point of enough is enough,

don't give God limitations, He is the one who created you and therefore, knows how to comfort you best. Even Job had enough troubles of a life time but never did he curse God for him to die even when he was hopeless. Naomi lost her husband and two sons but never did she for once think of taking her own life to forget everything. Eventually when we wait upon The Lord, He will always be faithful to restore all the years that the canker worms devoured." There could have never been a more befitting sermon delivered by The Pastor at Joy's funeral.

It was painful to see the premature death of a woman who, God willing could have lived long enough to see her children grow up. All through out the sermon, I felt like I was part of a nightmare that refused to end.

Looking into the faces of Joy's children made me cry the more as I wondered what would become of them. Mike was playing the bereaved husband, wearing a sombre face before the people who never knew what a real snake he was. Once or twice, our eyes locked but he ended up looking away guiltily. I saw his lawyer too perhaps coming to see the end of his unfinished business. He had been like an angel of doom, mercilessly bringing bad news from the deepest pits of hell. I saw him leaving the tent to answer his phone. I followed him.

I stood behind him while he finished talking then lightly tapped him on the shoulder. He turned around visibly alarmed at my sight.

" oh...its you" he said forcing an awkward smile on his face.

" why did you come here?"

" I'm sorry about your friend..." he began.

" cut the crap you don't know half of what am feeling."

" Trust me I didn't know something like this could happen. Its very unfortunate."

"You people have no shame, God will punish you a hundred fold. Why did you have to do all that? What did you achieve anyway? " I could feel my anger rising.

" you have no right to talk to me like that.I was only doing what my client told me to."

" will you sue me? You know what,I don't care anymore. Whatever you will do just go ahead and do it"

"I'm sorry.excuse me."

He left me standing there and I watched him going to join Mike on the next seat.

I saw him whisper something in his ears and he looked back to where I was standing and I felt fresh tears stinging my eyes. My friend killed herself for such a useless man who was afraid to admit his mistakes and sort out his problems. He had ran into the confusion of a young girl's life hoping for change from whatever problems he was facing in his marriage. Joy had never told me of the fights or arguments surrounding their marriage and I had all along believed them to be an ideal couple until the Marble saga. People out there suffer in silence, they keep problems under wraps until they are broken and wasted. I believed that divorce wasn't the main cause of her suicide, there was more than the eye could see and a part of me wanted to find out yet the other part was too afraid to stumble upon skeletons in the cupboard. But the easiest way to find out quickly was getting closer to Peter which was something I couldn't do even in the craziest state of mind.

The journey to the cemetery began. She was to be buried at St Peter's Cemetery in Area 3 amidst her relatives protests. They wanted her buried at her home village in Ntcheu but Mike said otherwise. I don't know if he wasn't so ashamed to act as if he was the caring husband before the elders. Joy's mother was not in a state to hear news that led to her daughter's death, I decided to keep my trap shut.

As the coffin was lowered down the grave, the sense of loss was acute. Life feels like we will live forever when we are breathing and moving about yet in a twinkle of an eye it all goes away and comes to an end. For the departed person her part is done and gone on this earth, it remains for us the living to mend our ways and our relationship with God so that when our turn comes to meet Him, we should be ready. It doesn't make sense to go to church for the sake of people to sing on your funeral yet you lived this life in vain. What will it benefit man to acquire wealth, respect and status on this earth yet end up in hell. For the love of God let's realise the reason He put us on earth and strive to live to His expectations. Should we say Christ paid that price on the cross for us to throw it to the wind and gutters? Absolutely not, His love was shown so we shouldnt perish but have an everlasting life, I thought as I moved away from the cemetery....

## EPISODE 71

Fear looks down, worries look around and love look ahead.

Three weeks after we buried Joy, I found myself in Nkhatabay attending Beatrice's wedding. In life there is a time for everything. One minute we are crying, the next we are smiling. All these two times help to bring out the best out of our lives.

I was only told of the wedding a week just before it happened and had to make haste arrangements for me to go. Seriously I felt so out of place, like an intruder. The wedding felt like that of a friend's friend. Everybody else looked to be in the best of moods and well dressed while I felt grumpy and at a wrong place. The activities seemed to go on without me. You know that feeling when everybody around you seem to know what is next to be done while you wait to be told what to do or wonder what somebody will do so you might follow suit.

what irked me most was seeing Beatrice visibly happy at the expense of another woman's misery. She was smiling at the world as if she was the only woman ever to get married.

Don't get me wrong but being another wife to his already existing wives, wasn't my idea of a happy marriage. No matter how much in control the man might seem to be, he still finds problems in one way or the other in running his house. The way I know a woman's heart, especially if that woman is me, the jealousy that could rise upon sharing my man it's something I can't contain. If a man takes another wife because there's a problem or weakness in you, it's no longer about you as a woman but it's about him to change and mend his ways by stopping to be greed and acting like he wants to own every woman on two legs. Stop blaming yourself and making lame excuses for him so that by the time he is lowered in the grave, he leaves behind a legacy of having many wives and children who he couldn't afford to educate, clothe and feed properly. Wives and Children who live their everyday lives competing and fighting for love and attention of one man who seem to only be selfish but want to



show the world that he can have many women at his disposal.

If he can't accept you with all your flaws, imperfections and weaknesses, what makes him think you can accept his weaknesses and mistakes without a fight?

On the eve of the wedding, I couldn't contain myself but went to Beatrice and gave her a piece of my mind. She knew that I didn't approve of all this but she simply didn't care what I thought. At that moment I could have happily exchanged her for another sister too bad we don't choose our relatives unless we drain all the blood and DNA.

It was already too late for her to adhere to my advice because she had already chosen her path. It was only my prayer that in her quest and thirst to get married, she wouldn't end up miserable. Chances of a happily-ever after were one to ten still more I didn't bargain for it.

I didn't tell her more words than to say I hoped she knew what she was doing. My mother got hold of this and I got insulted and misinterpreted as a jealous person who was frustrated because being the elder sister I should have been the one walking down the aisle. If walking down the aisle with all the gabbage, then thank you very much I didn't want a complicated life.

I just wanted to get back to my kids as soon as this mess was over because I couldn't take another minute of her insults.

Just as I got out from talking to my mother, I got out from my mother's room to go back to my own room when I bumped into somebody ...

"Wangu..."

## EPISODE 72

To be taken unawares at such an awkward moment when my emotions were flying in all directions wasn't something I was happy about.

"Wow Wangu long time."

"Long time indeed Mr Chirwa." Time had not done justice to his appearance. He looked so older than the last time we had met. It was hilarious to think that I could have been stuck with this old man who had

offered me a marriage proposal.

"What are you doing here?" I asked him.

"I'm the uncle to the groom."

This meant that I could have been married in the same family with Beatrice. If the groom's Casanova legacy was anything to go by, then thank God for rescuing me from this promiscuous family.

" oh... okay." I was short of words.

" forget my lack of manners. Let's go outside and I will get you thobwa (non-alcoholic traditional brew)

"Oh no..no I could have loved to but I have to go and see my cousin, she just came in."

" should I say you still don't like me?"

"Well I don't hate you but I hate myself for looking like your match. Enjoy yourself." With that I sprang off leaving him mouth agape.

There was no way I could have let those memories of that evening flood my mind. Did he just want to try his luck again?

I went outside to another hut where visitors who just came in were put before allocated to their rooms.

I saw Janet and I was happy we had met again. We oohed and aahed over each other and her kids. We bonded in the brief time I had stayed with them. Too bad I didn't bring Amanda and Laurent. She promised to visit us in Lilongwe. Chatting with her was the only time my spirit buoyed. I finally had a companion amidst all those strange people who treated me like I was leprous, with their sullen faces as if I was a distraction to their happiness. As much as I didn't like this place but I had one desire I wanted to fulfill before leaving, thus to see the other two wives. Seriously my heart went out to them.I imagined them somewhere within the compound in secluded rooms amidst all that noise, lips pouting with anger and frustration at an additional competitor. Each lost in her own thoughts on how to outwit the new bride, the moment the honeymoon phase was over. Probably they were leaving her to enjoy it while it lasts, then the curtains will be raised to signify the start of a real show.

It was too bad my Aunt didn't make it. She said she was having trouble with her legs but I knew there was more to it than met the eye.

The way I knew her, she didn't want to be part of something she never

approved. She knew this was Beatrice's important day of her life, whether for the best or for the worst. I knew her absence was felt with a sting because she was one family whose approval was much sought for in the family.

I took Janet to the room where I slept because it had few people. When I helped her prepare her sleeping place, we went to the kitchen to get hot water for the kids' bath. We chatted and laughed while scrubbing them and then we gave them food to eat. It was impossible to sleep with all the loud singing of chilimika and malipenga (traditional dances) so we had trouble putting them to sleep until after midnight when the commotion died down.

We had so much to talk about, the people I used to know in Mzuzu and how business was like presently. Somehow I regretted leaving Mzuzu because I had to go back to Nkhatabay to help my mum recover from the accident. Perhaps if I had looked for my own place and continue my business, I could have been singing a different tune. Away from Peter and his heartaches.

We finally slept and looked forward to the events of the following few hours, not enthusiastically but with relief that it should be over and we should be heading back.

By 5:00 AM the place was buzzing with activities and my eyes ache like I had sand in them because I slept for a few hours than usual.

We started getting ready for church. Janet was grateful for Extra hands with the kids and in no time we were done. I heard that some churches didn't agree to bless a marriage when a man was polygamous but I wondered with this one. I wasn't trying to judge but it simply doesn't make sense to involve God in issues that we already know He doesn't approve.

As Beatrice walked down the aisle to the altar, she looked so beautiful I guess every bride does. I saw my mum dab her eyes with a handkerchief and she looked at me questioningly as if to say, "when is yours?" She must have really been emotional. I knew that this was some of the reasons people get married for all the wrong reason of appeasing nagging mothers who are impatient to let time be the judge between you and your husband to be. If you ask me, I would say it was good to cry now than later when

problems began. I wasn't trying to be a horrible soothsayer but I felt a terrible feeling about everything hanging in the air. I won't lie, there was a moment I wondered if I would be able to walk down the aisle with a man of my dreams. That man who by looking at him reduces your legs to jelly and make your tummy an arena of butterflies games.

"Don't be stupid Wangu, God ain't asleep, in His own good time He shall give you your own Adam." I consoled myself.

When it was over, we went back home to change, eat and wait for the reception at the village square.

I called Norah to check on the kids. Laurent had a cough but it wasn't something for me to worry about. Ben came the previous day to take them to his place to spend the weekend. I was mad for not being asked about it let alone having my approval sought. As much as I was sure no harm would befall them but they had to ask for my permission first. Norah said she was scared to tell me because she didn't want to start something that wasn't there. When I was done talking to her, I called Ben but he didn't pick up my call. I was seething with anger and impatiently waited as the wedding reception proceeded slowly eventually I had to leave half way through. Whatever part was there to be played as a bride's sister was long forgotten as I boarded a bus back to Lilongwe without saying goodbye to my mum.

## EPISODE 73

My journey back to Lilongwe was not something I would wish to do anytime soon. The feeling of uneasiness that engulfed my heart made matters worse. What was wrong with me? I knew I had to trust Ben with the kids but a part of me screamed in protest. Not that he would hurt them but taking them far away from me was scary enough that I shivered even though sweat was trickling down my face.

Isaac kept texting me on whatsapp. The conversation diverted back to his love declarations. I simply didn't want him to be more than a friend. To me what he wanted was a replica of his late wife. I didn't want to be

chained down to excuses that would see my every action critically scrutinized on the magnifying glass to see if I performed the way she used to or could have. It could have made me mad being in such a relationship which couldn't have had any love in it but rather pity and mercy. Her pictures still hanging on the walls and everywhere around the house intrigued my mind. I probably would have felt like I was trampling on sacred ground, a temple that had inhabited two soul mates until death robbed them of their time together. I laughed to myself having had conclusions like those when I didn't even give him a chance to prove himself.

I had burnt my fingers enough to know if I would burn them again or not. The few months I had known him were not enough to convince myself that I had undying love for him.

I asked him for time, which he said he didn't have. Why was he in a hurry? I believed a little patience couldn't have hurt him nonetheless. My battery died when we were passing Salima, so I slept for the rest of the way.

We arrived in Lilongwe in the wee hours of the morning and waited until 5:00am to go home.

The moment I knocked on the door, it opened as if Norah had been expecting me the whole night. The atmosphere was tensed between us and she tried to explain why she didn't tell me when Ben came to take the kids. The court case can back to my mind and I shuddered in protest that I would never go through that agony again.

" Even if you had told me or tried to stop him from taking the kids, Ben couldn't have listened to you. He is stubborn." I told Norah.

" I was afraid of how you would react." She said with a smile on her face. The ice had melted. I wanted nothing but my bed because lying down in the bus had felt like bricks were beneath my back. I ached all over.

I went to sleep until 10:00 am and went to take a bath. The following day was a monday and I was worried to face my boss who calling him Hitler was an understatement. I was one of the staff who gave more excuses to tend to one problem or the other. This other time he even bellowed at me that his company wasn't a charitable organization that paid people who worked less.

Before leaving for Beatrice's wedding when a few days previously I was attending Joy's funeral, The Human Resources Manager had told me to go to the boss myself and tell him the excuse. I couldn't risk it, I made sure I kept out of the boss's way the whole day and almost sneaked out when it was time to knock off. I didn't know what calamity laid before me on the morrow. As a defense mechanism to maintain my sanity, I allowed 70% of his insults to penetrate and pass as undecoded from one ear out to the other.

I went to get dressed and later took out the kids' clothes to wash. Ben's phone was still unavailable but I knew that he had to bring them since they had to go to school the following day.

Norah was making lunch on the charcoal burner outside and we were chatting. She told me that her husband was back from Mocambique and he was requesting to see her and the baby. She asked me on whether she had to go or not. I answered.

" That's your decision to Make. You are the one who know the depth of your love for him because alot can happen. Whatever you do bear in mind that a hyena may only change the forest he is in to another but that won't him a giraffe."

She was left more puzzled than she had been before. I wasn't an excellent adviser on love matters, if I was perhaps my previous relationships couldn't have suffered catastrophe.

Later in the afternoon, I received a call from Marble. I was reluctant to pick it up for fear of reopening wounds.

" Hello"

"Wangu how are you?"

"Great and yourself?"

Then a moment of silence.

"Er...I just wanted to say hie since I haven't been seeing you at work recently."

She made it sound like I had been off work for like forever when it was only four days ago. Besides how would she act like all was well between after everything that happened.

"Have you been sick?"

" I went to Beatrice's wedding in Nkhatabay."

"Wow so she got married. All the best to her." I hated that feigned enthusiasm as if it was the reason for her calling.

I waited.

"I...I'm sorry about Joy." She stammered.

How will I ever get over the pain of losing Joy? Hearing her name mentioned was even more painful than just thinking about her. At least in thoughts I would try to summon only the best memories to my mind while hearing it from Marble made me realize how mad I still was at Marcy and Mike for driving Joy to suicide.

"Can we talk about something else because what is done is done." I couldn't bear prolonging this conversation.

"Am sorry I just wanted to give you my condolences."

"condolences or not but nothing will ever bring Joy back. I guess your sister is happy to have Mike all to herself."

I could feel my sarcasm cutting across to her like a sharp knife. Why did she had to say her condolences at that moment when at work she had been avoiding me like a plague? Whenever I entered the room she was in, she could immediately leave. She was acting like my sworn enemy and looking like she was the victim of circumstances that I triggered.

"It was nice of you calling but I have to go..."

"Wait...wait please." She almost begged me.

"Yes?"

"Marcy run off to Kenya with her boyfriend."

That was the most outrageous thing I had ever heard. Run off? Like the devil she had come to steal, kill and destroy when she didn't have the slightest love for Mike. She could have left them to keep their world as it was yet she had ventured on a campaign to put assunder that God had joined. Mike had urged her on, making the devil's plans fruitful for that which is forbidden is sweet but the devil always hides the price tag. For all the gold in the world, I didn't wish to be him at that moment and have a lick of what betrayal felt like...

## EPISODE 74

As long as the principle of nature stands, man shall reap what he sows. I didn't know what to say to that because my mind was reeling with confusion. Mike thought he had walked a step ahead of life but now fate had caught up with him and given him a dose of his own medicine. After I had finished talking to Marble, I had a burning desire to know how Joy's children were doing. Poor souls having had to endure hardship at such a tender age. I didn't know if Mike was in a good state of mind to take care of them.

I made a mental note of finding where I had written down the phone number of Joy's mother.

Time run down so fast and it was evening already. Ben was nowhere to be found. I couldn't go to his house because I didn't know where but even if I did, I couldn't go there. Cindy might have misinterpreted my presence for a mission to tear her home apart.

If this was a test I had to endure, I didn't know if I would pass. I could be uncontrollable when it came to my children.

The night passed and I went to bed with a heavy heart laden with fury and worry.

The following morning I had to get ready for work and asked Norah to stay home if she could so that when Ben brought the kids, they wouldn't be home alone.

I arrived on time at work and when i was signing in the attendance register, The Human Resources Manager called me to his office. My heart thumped so hard in my chest.

I meekly followed him as I wondered what he had in store for me.

When we arrived in his office, he motioned me to close the door and sit down. He wasn't in a mood of pleasantries because he immediately pulled out an envelope from his drawer and handed it to me without a word.

With a deep sigh, I received it and tore it open.

It was a letter of dismissal with immediate effect. Well it wasn't the job of the year or that which could make me stand on top of the world for all to hear that I had it but it was able to put food on the table for me and my children.

I felt a tightening sensation deep in my chest as this news sunk. Where



would I get another job?

" I am sorry Miss Banda but the boss asked me to do this."

I only managed to nod my head as he told me to go to the accounts department and get whatever money that I was entitled to receive after dismissal.

I only got a dismissal letter because I already got several verbal warnings. I went inside the accountant's office and got my severance pay stashed in an envelope silently.

The accountant was an old man who frightened me with his silence. He didn't like talking much unless he really had to.

When I got out and went to clear my drawer, I felt a hand touch my shoulder. I looked up and gazed into Marble's eyes. This time they were deep with genuine compassion and empathy. She smiled and I smiled back.

"It will be fine."

Just the word I needed to erupt the dam that was threatening to break out the dam inside me. The tears came. She handed me her handkerchief and patted me on the back until they were spent.

I took my things and packed them in my handbag.

"Before you go, there was a man who came looking for you while you were in the HR's office. He left this for you."

I took the folded paper from her and read it. It was Isaac's number inscribed inside.

"He said you should call him immediately because he can't get you on your mobile."

After I had finished talking to Isaac on my way from Nkhatabay, I put him on my blacklisted contacts. I simply didn't want to get involved too much with him.

I mumbled my thanks and took leave. To where? I had no idea but I just wanted to go home and see my kids before I remembered that they were not even there.

How much chance did I had of finding another job? The following day I had to start job hunting if I was to survive.

My mother, bad timing as usual called me and expressed her disappointment for my MIA at the wedding. I wasn't even bothered by her

ranting because she couldn't understand my present situation. When she realised that I had been quite, she thought I had hanged up on her. I simply told her that I had heard all that she has said but I had to go. When I arrived home, Norah wasn't there. Trust her to disobey me. Matters of the heart are peculiar and unfathomable.

I went to lie down on my bed and thought about my life. Something had to be done if I needed a change because I couldn't afford to keep on living a life of torment. A low paying job at a low standard company that didn't give me any job security.

What would become of me and my children in the next five years?

My life was becoming a gamble I couldn't afford. No qualification for a proper job. If people with degrees were suffering to find jobs, What chance did I have of securing one? If I needed God's grace then it was now when the blunt rope of unemployment was fresh and choking me.

At around past 3 pm, Norah came with her husband. She was shocked to find me home and was quick to say he just wanted to know where she was staying. Well silently I said to myself, here comes baby no. two.

I left them chatting while I went out for a walk. My thoughts were directed to my babies. Whatever mind games Ben was trying to play me, I was yet to find out.

I passed by the market and bought fresh fruits to make fruit salad with Chambico.

I arrived home and started making the salad. I heard a car screech to a halt outside and I looked through the window to see Ben's car.

I wiped my hands on a dish cloth and went outside. He walked towards me with arms outstretched for a hug. I folded my hands and ignored him.

"What is it with you? Are you always this serious? " His voice had an underlying mockery but still I ignored him.

"I came to see the kids. are they inside?" Was he kidding me or what?

"Which kids?" I asked.

"What do you mean? Go get them I don't have all day. I have a meeting in an hour's time, I just came by to say hello."

I looked at him for any trace of lies but there was none.

"You know what, you can't deny taking the kids because Norah was there. Let me call her then we shall hear all about it."

I started making for the door before he pulled me by the elbow and brought me back. He started laughing so hard.

"Take it easy... Kids you can come out now."

At that moment, The car door opened. Amanda and Lawrence came out, stifling giggles.

I reapt in excitement and hugged them so hard to me, forgetting my earlier worries.

"That's a lesson. If these kids trust me, why do you fail to do the same? "

Ben asked me after the excitement had died down. I didn't have time to answer because I was basking in the happiness of seeing my pumpkins. He took out the bags from the car and bade us farewell.

What a plank I had been pulled!!

I really had to stop worrying too hard before I made a fool of myself.

## EPISODE 75

A week after losing my job, I had dropped application letter almost at all companies I knew would employ me basing on my experience. I didn't want to limit God but always prayed that He would intervene in my situation and give me that which was best for me.

The kids were doing great and Ben was taking care of them. Since Amanda was growing up, I told her that if she wanted anything she had to be the one telling her father about it because Ben always had it in his mind that I wanted to play chess to con him behind the children's name.

I really didn't understand him at times.

Cindy once answered Ben's phone when I called him one day. The kids' had a school trip out of town and needed some money. The way she talked to me made me feel like I was a beggar.

Anyway I didn't blame her but it was unnecessary because never in my life did I ever dream of dating Ben again.

One Saturday afternoon I was ironing the kid's clothes. There was a knock on the door. I was alone in the house since I had sent the kids at the

corner shop to buy me airtime. Norah had gone back with her husband to heaven knew where. I couldn't tolerate her sleeping over at his place whenever he felt like. If he wanted her around him, no harm would be done if she went to stay there after all they were husband and wife. If anything happened, I would always be there to offer her my shoulder.

I went to open the door, Isaac was standing there grinning widely as if he was expected.

"Come in." I told him.

"Thanks. It's nice to see you again."

He was carrying a paper bag which he gave me and I took it hesitantly.

"You really shouldn't have bothered"

"Don't try to be polite with me come on Wangu it's just bread and juice for the kids."

I muttered my thanks and we sat down.

"What brought you here?" I asked.

"I was in the neighborhood and thought of saying hie"

We both knew he was lying because he didn't know anybody else there.

We were both lost of words. He was waiting for me to break the ice and I was waiting for him to speak.

"I heard that you lost your job. I'm sorry."

"Who told you? "

"Marble. don't blame her because I was a bit persistent to know why you were not at work at all the four times i have been coming there."

" oh I see."

"Is it okay if I can talk to some of my friends and see if they can offer you another job."

I wasn't sure if that was a good idea but it didn't sound so bad.

"I would appreciate it so much."

I was speechless.

"where are the kids?"he asked.

Immediately the door opened and laughter filled the room. Amanda and Laurent were chasing each other.

"Mumie tell Amanda to give me my sweet. She has three and I have two. I need to eat the other one

I'm a man."

Isaac and I burst into laughter but honestly it gave me food for thought. I didn't want to raise a man who would think being a man gave him power over everything. He had to learn that he must earn it or ask politely. Isaac carried him on his knees. As if he had read my mind, he said, "Listen here buddy. If you want an extra sweet, ask for it okay"

"Yes Uncle" he said.

"Now you two go and play." They run outside. Kids always seems to be running all the time.

"Can I take you out?"

he asked suddenly.

Immediately I touched my hair, honestly I was a mess. I didn't know how much it could cost to have it back in shape.

"Take this and do your hair." He must have seen my distressed look, he gave me five thousand kwacha.

We agreed for a date the following day at 7:00 pm. He would pick me up. We would go and leave Amanda and Laurent at his place with his daughter's babysitter.

I was over the moon to be able to be taken out again after a long time.

We went to city mall cinema and watched an Indian movie which we left mid way. We went to have dinner at Steers. It was a lovely evening and I felt happy. Problems aside, Isaac acted like a perfect gentleman, not pushing me too far and only commenting where required.

He was on a mission to get to know me more.

He laughed more and I felt at ease in his presence. We ate while talking and by 9:30 pm we decided to start going. He suggested that I sleep at his place since the kids were already there but I refused. We went to pick them up and they were asleep.

Throughout the drive, I felt truly happy. Once in a while he could pat me on the shoulder to emphasize a point.

We arrived at my place and he helped me carry Amanda while I carried Laurent.

I tucked them in bed and went to where Isaac was.

"Thank you very much for going out with me today. I really appreciate."

I didn't reply, I just smiled.

His phone rung. Since it was on the table, I saw who was calling, Marble. My heart thumped so hard in my chest. It was a terror considering the odd hour as well as the ignorance of how deep rooted their relationship was. He looked at me, sighed then picked up the call obviously irritated by the awkwardness the call had caused him. I waited...

I was in a maze of thoughts, too tangled up to get out. Thousand questions were invading my mind. I watched him talking on the phone cautiously to avoid saying what wasn't intended.

I could have interrupted him there and then, ordering him out of my house. couldn't he show a little respect?

The whole conversation was full of no.. yes...yeah...we will see... until they bade each other goodnight. By then my patience had run out and I was fuming with anger.

"Sorry about that."

I looked at him.

"Do I look like a fool to you? What are you playing at?"

He sat down and looked at me straight in the eyes.

"You should understand Wangu that some friends don't necessarily wish you well." He said.

"What do you mean?"

"Do you remember the day I came to your office and left a note with my number on it?" He asked.

"yeah I do remember. so?"

I was becoming more and more puzzled.

"Marble read the note apparently and saved my number because she has been calling me ever since"

"Do you want her to continue calling you?"

"How can I stop it?"

seriously I thought he must have been the dumbest man I had ever known.

"You mean you can't control who you want to talk to on your own phone?"

"

"She might think I'm being rude."

The way he was defending all this made me think he must have been enjoying the attention.

"Can she kill you if you tell her not to call you again? oh wait...wait maybe you want enjoy talking to her. I'm I missing something here?"

" Seriously I don't want to talk to her. She calls me everyday as if to remind to take my medication."

I laughed so hard.

"Well if you want us to continue being friends, please get rid of such unnecessary callers."

" After today, are we still 'just friends'?"

I laughed again.

" Listen here Wangu. I want us to be more than friends. I want you to be a mother of my children, the person I see everyday when I woke up in the morning. I love you Wangu so very much you are torturing me and giving me sleepless nights with your rejection. I have waited long enough and I'm sure you don't think I want anymore games."

The look on his face was of one who has gotten rid of a heavy burden. Was this what he was keeping inside him throughout the night?

"Please don't start again?"

I was trying to dismiss this issue as best as I could.

"I shouldn't start what? why are you afraid of yourself? You think running away from me is what will prevent a heartbreak? That's where you are wrong. You will keep on hurting from the past if you don't learn to let go. Love yourself enough to love again."

This lecture really got into me.

"Look I heard what you have told me and we will talk about it later. For now why don't you go home and catch some sleep."

"sure...good night then."

With that he came to me hugged and kissed me on the forehead.

He left me with too many questions I couldn't have been able to answer in one night. I watched him until his car was out of site.

I locked the door and went to the bedroom. My money was dwindling pretty fast yet there were electricity and water bills to pay.

I couldn't stop tossing as Isaac's words kept replaying in my mind. Perhaps it was true that I was pushing away a good man.

Old wounds had really hurt me and new love could have a tough time settling in. I wasn't in a rush anyway.

A week later I received a call from Beatrice that they would be coming to Lilongwe at her husband's uncle's place while they were waiting for their passports in Area 25. They were planning to go to South Africa in search of green pastures. Well good luck to them. I asked about what happened to the other two wives. Were they taking them too? Hahaha imagine a man with three wives and several children embarking on such a journey and creating pressure at his uncle's place would look like the whole village was migrating. I told her that if anything, she was free to pop in at my house and say hello.

I continued my job hunting without success. Isaac offered to give me money to do business but I refused because I wanted it to be a loan that I could repay but he wanted it to be a gift. I wasn't comfortable with that sort of arrangement. I could have easily received the money and moved on but my conscious wouldn't allow me. I was afraid of tomorrow, as much as it seemed to be a sign of goodwill but it might have also been a trap.

I was in City Centre at Live and Love it Foundation feeling tired, hungry and thirsty from the scorching heat that was draining my strength . I had gone to leave an application letter for the post of cleaner. The receptionist was one hell of a lady who acted like she owned the company. I could have easily told her some home truths if not for the fear of the rumour that some of them tear application letters when the fancy take them. I could still feel her gaze upon me like I was leprous. I knew my shoes were dusty but she couldn't have been so rude as to ask the security officer at the door to help me out so I could clean up. I felt so low, so out of place. The time I made it to the door, I was so consumed in my own thoughts that I bumped right into the person in front of me. I murmured my apologies and fearfully stepped aside as I watched him take out his sun glasses. I couldn't forget that face, especially those eyes that sometimes haunted me



deep in my sleep...

## EPISODE 76

He took off his glasses and I looked into his eyes.

I just couldn't believe it. I smiled shyly at him.

"Wangu what are you doing here?"

I looked back at the receptionist then to the envelope in my hands.

"I came to drop an application letter."

"How come you were leaving with it?"

I looked at the security guard then back to the receptionist who quickly looked down and started fumbling with papers on the desk.

"Come with me to my office and we can talk about everything."

I looked at his smart suit considering how shabby I looked.

He took my hand and we walked right past the reception.

We arrived in his office and he called his secretary to bring refreshments.

The office was cooler than the heat I had walked under for half of the day.

The refreshments were brought in and I greatfully digged in the cold drink and biscuits. All along Peter was looking at me as if we had just met.

"Tell me everything."

"About what?" I asked laughing.

"The kids, yourself and life generally."

"How is Chris?" I asked instead.

"He is fine. He went to the village for the holidays but he is back now and growing everyday."

I wanted to say Chris will absorb his grandmother's character like a sponge instead I just smiled.

I didn't know why Peter was now being nice after everything that happened including the last incident we had at Joy's funeral.

I hated telling him that I lost my job knowing that he might feel the push to help me.

He told me that he was now the Project Manager of this organization. He was really doing good for himself if I was to be honest. I told him about

the kids and how they have grown as well as Beatrice's wedding. His telephone rung. He answered and was a bit hesitant as he said, "Please let him in."

I wondered who was coming as I watched his face.

"Mike is coming." he said after putting the phone down.

I didn't know if I was ready to meet him.

In the next few minutes he strode in.

"Well did I walk in on something." He asked amused.

"Sit down bra."

I looked at his face and clothes. He needed a shave and a shower. Even his clothes didn't suit him as the Mike I used to know.

I greeted him and almost got tempted to ask after the kids to which I kept quite.

"I can see you two have a lot of catching up to do. I am off to Nkhatabay this afternoon. Mum called that the kids need some groceries and other stuff."

Joy must have been turning in her grave. Those kids were going to have their brains whitewashed and manipulated. I hoped they wouldn't end up with their grandmother messing up their lives like she had done with their father and uncle.

"Greet the kids for me." I said unable to restrain myself.

"Sure." Mike answered.

"Let me see him off. Wait for me I will be back in a few minutes."

I nodded in agreement.

They went out together and after some time Peter returned.

"Sorry for keeping you waiting. You know how Mike is like."

I shrugged my shoulders to mean I didn't mind waiting.

"So...tell me, what do you think about us?"

"Meaning?"

"Come on Wangu don't pretend you don't love and want me anymore because I know you do."

I had seen this coming the moment we had bumped into each other.

"Leave me alone. You and me are done thanks to your mother."

"I know my mum is not your most favorite person in the world but come on she is just a lonely woman with only her kids in the world that's why

she is overprotective."

I only sighed.

"I promise this time she won't come between us again"

"I don't want to go through all that drama again. Find a woman who will suit your mother's taste and you won't ever complain a day in your life."

He gazed at his wristwatch then said, "how about we discuss this over dinner tonight?"

Going out with him would mean betraying myself. I knew the tactics he was likely to use to get to me again. I couldn't deny that I still loved him so much more but there was enough baggage between us to last a life time that I couldn't stomach.

His habit of flirting with other girls was something I couldn't tolerate. I hated a man who made me feel like I was nothing to him compared to other girls he accommodated in his life for all the different reasons.

If other girls meant the world to him, why was he still tailing me? Wasn't it better that without me he was free to mingle and tangle with whoever he wanted when the fancy took him?

"I'm sorry but am not going anywhere with you."

"Give it time. If you change your mind just call me I still use the same number."

"Sure."

"If you need anything please don't hesitate to call me. Do you still use the same account number?" To which I said yes.

He started doing something on his phone and after some time I received a bank notification message that money amounting to twenty thousand kwacha has been deposited into my account. I was speechless. I knew it was him.

"Why did you do that?"

"Just keep quite we both know you need it."

I couldn't protest because it was true.

"Thank you very much. God will bless you for that. I should be on my way back home, the kids must be back from school by now."

"Alright let me drop you. I'm also knocking off. Give me your letter and I will personally take it to the HR's office."

"Thank you so much once again for your kindness."

"You are welcome."

I waited for him while he took his briefcase and car keys. He told his secretary to clear the desk and to remember to lock the office.

We walked out of the building to the car park, leaving the receptionist puzzled as she bade Peter a nice ride home. I was laughing inside as we were going towards his car.

Suddenly we heard someone calling his name behind us.

We stopped and looked. She was a beautiful lady in black stilettos, purple and pink floral dress.

She approached us and I watched almost mouth agape as they engaged in a hug and kiss.

"Sweetheart you didn't wait for me. I sent you a whatsapp message that I was coming. "

She said, her full red lips smacking his cheek again.

"Sorry honey I didn't see it."

I was irritated the way these two were carrying on. It was like I wasn't there at all.

"Forgive my lack of manners. Babe meet my good friend Wangu. Wangu this is my lovely wife Alice."

"Nice meeting you Wangu" she purred.

I only sighed...

## EPISODE 77

Love and deceit do not mix.

So Peter was married and he only wanted to take me for a fool's ride. I was free from his snare as I had resisted him and his charm. I was sitting on my bed and laughing to myself how close I had been to falling right into it.

I will never understand what else he wanted from me. One thing that intrigued me was how long he had known the lady for them to get married. Anyway that wasn't my headache. I wished them all the best in their married life and I hoped she was made of steel enough to withstand

Peter's mother.

I didn't like Peter's messages the moment I stepped into a minibus back home since he couldn't drop me anymore because he had to go home with his wife.

"Please let me explain. Its not what you think" read one of his messages.

What was there to explain? I didn't have time for married men, besides he owed me nothing. It was his life for him to live how he saw fit.

I didn't reply to all his flooding messages and eventually broke him.

Amanda came to tell me that her father had come. Ben was now coming to my house whenever he saw fit. I didn't like it one bit.

I put on my slippers and went outside. Ben was looking so jovial for a moment I thought he was a different person.

"What brings you here? I don't remember you calling me to say you were coming."

"Kids please go to your room I have to talk to your mum."

Laurent was reluctant to go until he was promised an ice cream if he did as he is told.

"Should I make you a cup of tea?" I asked him.

"No thanks."

I seriously didn't want another surprise after what happened with Peter that afternoon.

"I know I have wronged you countless times." He started.

oh please...

"I haven't treated you with the respect and kindness that you deserve.

Trust me that has given me sleepless nights..."

I interrupted him.

"If that's what you have come to say please don't bother because that is water under the bridge and I have forgotten all about it."

"Please hear me out."

In all the time I had known Ben he had never pleaded with me before because all he did was being bossy and ordering me about.

"I have come to ask for your forgiveness. "

If he expected me to play along with him just like Peter had wanted then he was in for a big shock.

"I already forgave you..."

"Thanks alot.I want to make up for lost time by being a better father. I have realised that while I was busy making your life hell, you never took revenge.You have been a good woman despite all our differences."

Was he drunk perhaps?

"What has made you say all this?" I couldn't help asking.

"Nothing only that I have taken time to reflect upon my life and if I'm not careful it will affect my future."

"Okay.I don't hold any grudges against you."

"Thank you very much. In case you should know, Cindy and I are expecting a baby."

That was it then. All the new softness that had risen was due to this news. I offered my warm congratulations and knew that Laurent and Amanda would fuss over the baby once it arrived.

If having more babies had the power to change Ben then I prayed that he should have more babies for him to have a big heart overflowing with love. God has His own divine way of doing things.

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A week later Beatrice came to visit. She was heavily pregnant and I was tempted to say she fall pregnant even before the wedding. The passports were not yet ready, her husband it seemed did not have extra money to bribe some Immigration officials for quick processing. You know how they work.

As we were talking about the village and her family. She told me that she had noticed some sores in her private Parts. I asked her if she had visited the hospital to which she said not yet. The husband was blaming the wives for sleeping around. If he had three wives what would stop him from having extra girlfriends? He had the guts to point fingers when he was the one entirely to blame. I told her to come with me so that I escort her to the hospital. We went to a government hospital because she didn't have enough money to go to a private hospital. We stayed on the queue for two hours before we saw a doctor.

She had an STI and couldn't be treated in the advanced stage of her pregnancy. She tested non reactive to HIV and She was advised to bring her husband for treatment.

"You should also bring those two owls here." I said on our way back home.

I told her to avoid sexual contact with him if she valued her life and her baby's. Sharing had its own disadvantage for real.

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Isaac couldn't just let me be. Day by day he was coming to my place to see me. He made it his business to be closer to me and I can't deny saying I let him. We talked and texted all day when he was at work until late at night when we both retired to bed. I was falling in love with him every passing day. I gave myself a chance to trust him and set aside the circumstances that had broken my heart previously. Isaac was just different, perhaps it was the maturity in him. He was some one who didn't make decisions based on his emotions. If I was in one of my 'moods' that came by because he didn't reply my text in time or didn't call me back after seeing a missed call. All that feeling of being betrayed would come tumbling back. Forcing me to imagine what was not there and anticipating the worst to happen any time. I taught myself to have self control over my emotions by trusting him and loving him. Trust is vital and many of us have trust issues basing on our past but we can't keep on harbouring distrust in our present relationships because somebody didn't think twice when betraying our feelings.

Isaac understood that I needed time to shed off the dead skin of my pains. He told me to ask him anything if I wasn't clear on it because it couldn't help to be angry with him based on speculations and imaginations... I didn't realise how serious he was with me until eight months into our relationship he proposed...

## EPISODE 78

The memories are still vivid as if it keep on happening every day. The day he proposed wasn't something I expected to happen any time soon. I never understood why Isaac was so interested in how matters stood with my mother. I chose not to say much because my mother was a difficult woman and I didn't know what she wanted of me. The more I kept out of her life, the more I stay out of her way which was better for both of us.

"Babe what do you think of us visiting your mother over the weekend?" Seriously his question over dinner took me unawares. He had no idea my mother wasn't somebody he would want to be in the same room with, not for now maybe later when things took a serious turn in our relationship. Introducing Isaac to my mother meant I had made myself vulnerable to her criticism and demeaning. This could be the third man in my life and to her it either meant I had serious problems on how to keep a man and make him put a ring on my finger or I simply wasn't woman enough for having two kids outside wedlock. I don't know why she made such conclusions on me. Can somebody make a man commit himself when commitment wasn't something on his mind yet? I don't think so.

"I don't think now is the right time to go there." I answered.

"Why not? I think it would be a nice surprise. Besides she will be happy to see her grandchildren."

Well my kids were not fond of my mother, until then I didn't realize that I was the cause of the gap between them.

I could see that Isaac was determined to go to Nkhatabay. It was a Wednesday so I only had Thursday to make preparations so that we leave on Friday evening.

Different thoughts were going through my mind at what drama tantrums my mother would throw this time. I hoped she didn't get to embarrass me in front of Isaac...

Friday came and when the kids went to school, I started packing. Isaac would pick us up at 5:30 pm and he hated to be kept waiting.

I prepared meals and set aside bottled water.

Beatrice didn't go to South Africa with her husband as they had planned because her pregnancy was in advanced stage and she couldn't travel. She had a baby girl a month later and I named her Ulunji wa Chiuta. They found a house for rent which was two bedroomed but it couldn't accommodate the other two wives and each of their two kids. They had to be sent to the village while awaiting for the husband to find a better paying job so they could afford a bigger house. Beatrice couldn't keep down her joy at having the man to herself after she had suffered bitterly at the hands of her co-wives. I told her that she had wished for herself to be tangled to a polygamous man so she didn't have to complain.



That Friday afternoon when I was waiting for the kids to be back from school, Beatrice came and wanted to join us. I told her not to because I didn't want her husband to think that I in anyway was enticing her to visit the village at such a short notice thereby undermining his authority. I made a mental note to visit Joy's children at the village. I was prepared to face Peter's mother with whatever criticism she could throw at me. I made the kids have early dinner. I didn't want any trouble as we had to start off on such a short notice. Right after eating Laurent fell asleep. It saved me from chasing him around the house as he had developed this habit of throwing the ball inside when I wasn't watching. He refused to play outside for fear of having it stolen by other kids. Amanda was an angel relieving me the duty of picking plastic water guns and cars back into their toy box that found themselves scattered when Laurent was awake. I found this job tiresome as I had to be doing it everyday. Laurent only knew how to play but putting the toys back in order was a taboo. Sometimes I was tempted to hide the toy box, but when I did, his puppy face and adorable eyes would melt my heart with love as he begged me to give him the toys with promises of putting them back in order. I always gave in. #joysofmotherhood.

When Isaac came, we were ready. He picked Laurent to the car as I started loading the bags. Twenty minutes later we were good to go. I didn't see the need to call Ben and tell him that I was taking the kids away for a weekend because we weren't going to stay long.

We chatted and listened to music along the way until Amanda fall asleep around 11. Isaac needed me to continue talking to him so that he shouldn't fall asleep while driving. He took energizer drinks until ten hours later when we arrived in Nkhatabay. It was so quite with a full moon. The lake was also calm and standing at my mother's house looking beyond, we could see the shimmering lake lazily hitting the shore and sparkling like an outstretched slate of diamond.

I knocked while Isaac was unloading our bags and it seemed like my mother had been waiting for us all night. She took Laurent from my arms. He was awake now and looking puzzled at the woman who I told him was

his granny. Amanda had some memories of her but she was also not used to seeing her around.

I put our things in the room which she had prepared for us. When I was back I found her kneeling at the far corner while she greeted Isaac. I watched in fascination because my mother had never kneeled when greeting Ben or Peter.

"Ma we will talk later. We just want to go to sleep... and please don't inform people early in the morning of my arrival. I don't want the whole village waking us up."

I told her because she had now started telling Isaac the history and gossip of the village. We went to bed.

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I woke up from the sun blinding my eyes. Isaac wasn't beside me and neither were the kids in the bed next to ours.

I got up and made my way outside. Nobody was in the sitting room but voices could be heard outside. I smiled to myself.

My mother was sitting on a bamboo mat while Isaac sat on a stool not very far from her. Amanda and Laurent were sitting on the ground eating fresh mangoes.

" Morning sunshine." Isaac said as he beckoned me to sit next to Him.

"Morning love." Then pointing to the kids I said,"don't tell me that you will be finishing that whole basin."

"The way they are carrying on I'm sure those mangoes are in trouble."

I laughed. My mum said she had prepared breakfast boiled yams and bananas as well as roasted nuts. She had a pot of tea on the fire. I went to freshen up before joining them again to eat.

Later on when the kids were outside with others, fascinated by cattle and goats that one of my uncles owned, Isaac sought for a word with my mother.

"I'm sorry if it will take your time mama but I have to ask you of this thing that has brought me this far."

My heart started beating because Isaac had not first discussed with me whatever he wanted to tell my mother. I didn't say a word.

"Go ahead my son I'm listening."

Wonders shall never end. These two were already on mother and son basis.

"I know sometimes things are hard but that doesn't mean we have to give up in life." He began.

"Trust me that I have made this decision with a sound mind and its how I want things to remain for the rest of my life. Life may give us lemons when we expect apples but we won't feel the pain when we learn to make lemonade."

I had no idea where this conversation was driving to.

"What I'm trying to say is er...er would you be kind enough to consent for me to have your daughter's hand in marriage?"

The bombshell had been dropped. Immediately my mother stood up and started doing a dance around the house while singing and ullulating. I thought I was dreaming for I had no idea things were this serious.

Personally I thought his decision was full of maturity and he wanted me to take him seriously by coming to my mother.

I was short of words as he came and gathered me in his arms. I was so happy.

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My mother called my uncle from my father's side and they set a date with Isaac when his people would come to pay lobola. My uncle loved money and alcohol so when he was offered a bottle of wine and some money, he was all smiles. He assured him that he would personally make sure nothing went wrong during the negotiations until Isaac had his bride in his house.

The date was set in three months time and I felt buoyant inside. My mother who looked like she had been waiting for this all her life as she couldn't stop smiling and she couldn't stop telling me how proud I had made her as her first born.

God is a God of second chances and He has great plans to bless us and make things right for us in His own divine time. I for one I'm one of testimonies...

whats yours? if it's not here yet keep praying until God will do it.

THE END