

The background of the entire image is a complex, swirling pattern of red and black. The red elements resemble smoke, ink, or perhaps stylized flames, creating a sense of movement and intensity. The black areas provide a stark contrast, making the red patterns stand out. The overall effect is dramatic and somewhat unsettling, fitting the provocative nature of the text.

I SUCKLE MY OLD MAN

FEJI KHAI

I

SUCKLE

MY OLD MAN

Feji khai

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For Igho

Chapter One

I am in a sad place. Alternatively, I could say a dark place. I wonder how I got here. I'm trying to rationalize and make an excuse for my being here and sincerely I find no grounds for it. How did my once so put together life become this fallen apart?

OK, here is my story, at least a part of it. I am pregnant! How I always thought this would leave me overjoyed and grateful since this is my first pregnancy ever. I have been married for 9 years but right now, instead of being elated, I am devastated, done for and ruined!

I got married at the age of 24 and that to the only love of my life, my special man. He loved me easily and I loved him back even more easily. I was only 22 when we met, a fresh graduate from one of the leading universities in Winidi. I remember how we met. It was in a bank. I smile as I remember. I have always had an eye for good-looking men and Yado is dapper. It was a rainy day. We were both stuck in the rain and were taking shelter in front of a bank. We were waiting for the rain to stop so we could all be about our day. That was how we got talking casually. By the way he gestured and the way he watched himself around the other people who took shelter with us, adjusting promptly to accommodate anyone who needed to join us, I concluded he was a well-mannered gentle man. What clinched it for me was how he handled a young woman that stepped on his toe. In a bid to quickly escape from the rain, she had walked into us, almost brushing me hard had I not tilted backwards, yet she picked a fight with Yado.

'I would have thought you would apologize for hitting me', She rudely said.

'Are you referring to me?' Yado asked.

'Of course it's you or are you blind? Didn't you see me approaching you?' She barked.

At this point, I was livid. I wanted to reply her but the words that came out from Yado shut me up.

'Oh dear, I didn't see you at all. I apologize.'

One would have thought our drama queen of a lady would let it go but she did not at all. Instead, she looked at Yado contemptuously before walking away. As she left, Yado immediately resumed talking from where we left off as though nothing had happened. What we were even discussing that day, I honestly can't

remember now. Well the rains stopped and we hurriedly ended our conversation to head out to our various destinations. You can imagine my surprise when one day in my former Shalace, I saw Yado on the pulpit sharing his testimony. He'd gotten a new job, in a leading construction company. He said he had gate crashed into the examination venue and though the examiners had threatened not to consider the attempts of all gate crashers, he had submitted his all the same and the rest as is said, is history. The testimony was indeed an exciting one and I was elated. Almost every one kept muttering to themselves, affirming that Yado's kind of testimony would be their portion. As he came down from the pulpit, I walked him with my eyes to where he sat. I decided in my heart that I would meet him after service. I did, he recognized me and he was excited. We left Shalace together and had lunch somewhere nice, thus we became friends and had many more lunches together. The day we met in Shalace was two weeks after our first meeting at the bank. I smile as I remember how we courted. It was fast, fun and formidable.

I was still busy reminiscing when suddenly the urge to vomit brought me back to my senses. I jumped down from the bed and sprinted into the bathroom. I vomited so badly, yet nothing but bile came out. I had not eaten anything since the previous afternoon when I discovered I was pregnant. It was now another afternoon and I had still not eaten anything, yet I did not feel hungry. In fact, I felt nothing but fear. I found my way back to my bed and I sat staring into thin air. It felt like I was in a trance, I actually wished I were. Thoughts filled my head. I could not believe I was pregnant for another man. It had to be a joke, a very expensive one at that. If I had been told by anyone, whosoever that this would happen, I would have disbelieved it the same way I will never be able to believe that lions will ever prefer eating grains and nuts to fresh meat. As impossible as this is, that was how impossible it was for me to have believed that I would ever be in this state. I began wondering if I was hypnotized by Kool, I knew I wasn't though in a way I might have been. I was carried away, it was crazy fun, and it was love until I became this pregnant mess who was carrying another man's child. An abomination for a Sharant sister and wife like me.

I was thinking about how I would face Yado. How could I do this to him? My thoughts drifted again. I thought about all we shared and still share and thought about his love for me. Yado just doesn't deserve this, not this weight of infidelity. I began remembering how years back, he promised to be completely faithful to me and of course I had promised him same. My thoughts kept travelling and now, it had arrived on our wedding day. It was a Wednesday morning. It was a simple wedding, but in our hearts, it was elaborate. We didn't

want too many people however, it was well attended by our family and friends. The wedding had taken place in a hall far away in the outskirts of town; it was my Daddy's property. We had chosen there for its serenity and for the nature of the wedding, we really wanted as few people as possible. We danced like never before, we had some tears of joy too. I had always wanted a man like Yado.

Yado had never really had time for relationships, he only had casual ones where he could satisfy himself sexually. I was the first person he had allowed himself experience love with and he never failed to tell me he was happy with his choice. We had written our vow and we exchanged it after the Reverendo had led us in the conventional one. We had composed it during our courtship. The words popped out passionately from our hearts as we read them to each other such that the Reverendo had tears in his eyes when we were done. I can still remember the lines. 'Forever starts now, our forever of love and only love, one of peace and joy, one of youth and laughter for in my heart, you will forever be young and lively, bubbling with passion. Our forever is sealed in Gonad, the Supreme, the One who is worthy of all praise and is always good. Our love will endure.' Now sad tears fall on my smiling face as I remember that day. Then I wondered how this day had become a far cry from that day, how I had become this unfaithful pregnant wife.

My phone rang and it ended my reminiscing. I knew by the ringing tone that it was Yado. It was lunchtime and it was his usual pattern to call me by then except when he unavoidably could not. I picked the call and we spoke. As usual, he was checking up on me and giving me some gists. I struggled to flow and I did. When our conversation was over, I smiled sadly. If I could feign fidelity for a whole year, I wonder what I couldn't feign. I shuddered at the thought of who I had become. How I arrived at this dark destination always leaves my imagination beaten.

Then my phone rang again and by the ringing tone, I knew who it was. It was Kool, the one whose sperm formed my pregnancy. I picked up and tried to sound like all was well but I just could not. How could I have? Obviously, I was more in love with him than I was with Yado, my husband. He had become a confidant, a soul mate. To me, it didn't mean that Yado was not any of these, it was that Kool and I let ourselves start something that had now consumed us. I was not proud of my actions, I was carried away and I was wrong!

'We are in a deep mess, Kool. I am pregnant.'

There was silence. I knew he was there and knew he was shocked. I waited for a few more seconds to see if he would respond, he didn't so I hung up. There was no doubt about who owned the pregnancy, I knew it was his and he knew too. He called back immediately and apologized for not saying anything. I told him that I didn't expect him not to be speechless then he told me we needed to see, that he could not talk over the phone. I agreed. So later that day, in the evening, we met. We always found a way to see. I lied to my husband when I had no other option, the other options being seeing each other during work hours or any other time I was away from home.

That evening at Kool's place, it was tears. Tears kept gathering in his eyes. He would clean it and it would return. As for me, I had not cried since I found out about the pregnancy. I was not surprised I didn't cry because I had had frequent times of crying since I met Kool. Whenever we had sex, I came home to cry. I cried for so many reasons. I cried for my husband, for our marriage, I cried for Kool and the love we shared, I cried for myself. I cried for my parents, I had let them down. I also cried for my siblings and friends. I just cried.

My parents! What would I tell them? How could I repay them with this bullshit? How? They had raised me in the ways of Gonad, our Holy Father and have loved me unreservedly. They gave me sound moral trainings which I took to heart and believed. I planned and lived my life by them and even taught them to people and to younger friends that doted on me.

I happen to be the first child of three, an only daughter too. I have two brothers who are twins. Ours is a close-knit family, bounded by Gonad's ways. My father is a good man. My mum is a special woman, special to me and to all except to the few that just don't like her basically because she's likeable by many. I grew up well and chaste. I was continually taught about sexual purity and I believed it, I was convinced it was the right way. I cherished my purity kept it and nurtured it proudly as a wedding night gift to the one I would marry. Yado got my gift.

Oh memories! They come rushing back.

Yado treated me like a queen and he called me so. I remember how surprised he was the time he found out I was a virgin. That was the only reason he refused to have us have sex before our wedding.

Our wedding night was not Yado's first time with a woman, so he knew quite well what to do. It was mine and it was blissful. I experienced pleasures I felt my body couldn't take. I have never been able to fully describe it. Yado and I used to have indescribable chemistry. We still do in a way. Our love has always been visible, palpable and undeniable. We did not struggle to make our relationship work, it just worked. We were best of friends until I met Kool.

Well, back to where I was before I was transported down memory lane. I went to see Kool in his house. He was in tears. He was not sobbing though but his eyes had become red and he didn't look the same at all, he looked very different. It was evident sadness had made him over. We sat in silence most of the time. 'I won't ask you how this happened, MiQ (pronounced Me-queue, which was short for Mi Quaya meaning 'my dear' in Hulanish). I knew we were always careful but that day I guess we were not careful enough.' I knew the day he talked about. It had not been a safe period for me but that couldn't stop us, he said he would not come inside of me and he didn't. Well, he didn't but obviously that was not a wise thing to do. In my opinion it had never been but in the heat of the passion that fateful day, I didn't care. 'I have always dreamed of the day my joy would be full, the day you would tell me you were pregnant for Yado. I never wanted this for us. I'm so sorry MiQ'

He paused then continued.

'I feel dirty and evil. How could I have loved you in the first place? OK and when I did, why didn't I murder the feelings? I have messed you up, so I am messed up and feel really terrible.' Now he broke down and sobbed.

I was sitting by him and all I could do was put my hand around his shoulders. There was no use talking him out of where he was now, a place he always checked into to blame himself. He always blamed himself for our affair, for my infidelity no matter how much I tried to disagree. I let him know I was not forced, lured or cajoled by him. What happened between us started on a platter of friendship and before we knew it, our emotions were in the way. There were times he wanted to end the relationship and I stopped him, I begged him. There were times I decided to end it and he begged. We were struck and bound by love. I call it love, because love it is. The only vice here is that the actions of our love was evil and it birthed evil.

Then he spoke again. 'So what would we do? Abort?'

As I heard the word 'Abort', a sudden fever engulfed me and I began shivering. I panicked. I vomited. Quickly, Kool attended to me, rubbing my back gently

while I continued to vomit. When I was done, he cleaned me up and made me to lie down on his green couch. As I lay there, I kept hearing the word 'abort.' Since I got wind of the pregnancy, the word had never crossed my mind. I did not even remember that it was an option and even now that it was before my face, I knew it was still not an option.

I was never for infidelity, it is wrong and I will never support it. That I fell deep into it doesn't make me immoral. For me, murder by abortion is wrong and so is adultery and I will never in my clear mind justify both on any grounds. However, as I laid there on the couch, another thought crept into my mind, I longed for a miscarriage.

Chapter Two

It had been two weeks since I discovered that my monthly period was missing, as well as other things. My peace of mind, joy, pride and identity were all gone. My world was becoming chaotic, my thoughts jumbled and scattered.

I am a religious person, a Sharant in every right and so are my family and friends. I am a Shalace girl to the core. No one can imagine how it feels to go on pretending to everyone that all is well especially in Shalace where most people have a way of innocently reminding me of my childless state, mentioning it at almost every given opportunity.

Just last week in my Shalace, a pretty little girl ran to me. She and her mum were first timers. She came to me and to the hearing of some women around said 'Aunty, how come you are so beautiful?' I laughed and thought she was such a cute girl. Others complimented her cuteness too. Then one woman said, 'Oh Yes, this is how cute your daughter will be too.' That was how the topic changed. The others chorused an Amen. I joined in too.

The most frequent meddling I suffered from the women happens whenever I wore a tight fitted dress, one decently accentuating my curves and enhancing my good looks. Truly, I score way above average by my looks, being rightly shaped in the right places. Some men are awed by my beauty while some women intimidated by it. Somehow, it is noticeable by everyone, however, any time I looked exceptionally gorgeous, my Shalace women would either individually or collectively tell me how I should enjoy my body while it lasted, that I still looked good because I was yet to have my children. No matter how I tried to tell them there are women all over that have exceptionally great bodies even after childbirth, they end up telling me that I would not know what they were talking about until I became a mother. They indirectly told me I was not supposed to be talking. I wasn't bothered, instead I made sure I flaunted my beauty the more whenever they came at me that way.

Then I couldn't flaunt my body anymore. Sad! Even though it was not yet obvious that I was pregnant, I felt like everyone could see me and see through me. So last Sunday, I was in Shalace and not for one minute was I myself. How ironical it was that it was a special gathering for awaiting mothers, those looking to the benevolence of Gonad for children. I came out and Reverendo Ralani laid hands on my head and prayed for me passionately. He spoke that in 9 months' time I would carry my baby. Yado was standing beside me, his hands sitting on my back. As Reverendo prayed, my mind walked and then jumped, actively moving back and forth. Then I felt a sudden headache. I was afraid. I was lost!

After service, people congratulated me and the other women who were in my shoes. As the manner of service is, congratulating awaiting mothers as though they are pregnant already was termed an act of faith. I played the part but hurriedly found my way to the car. Thankfully, Yado had no meeting at the close of service, I had but I just couldn't stay. I was sick in my body, a kind of sickness I couldn't explain.

Yado noticed I was not myself. He asked and I feigned ignorance. I pretended I was alright and told him I was. Being in an ecstatic mood from service, he took my response for the truth. I understood his excitement as it was the norm after a service like that. I was no more excited at such services, it's been four years since I stopped. I simply refused to raise my hopes and have them dashed. Whenever prayers were made for me to conceive, I humbly said an Amen and believed it to the best of my ability and that ended it. I never left that place of prayer expecting to miss my period. This was my resolve born from years of expecting but not getting. We have an agreement, Gonad and I. I let him know I am Cool with Him, that I know I will have my children, so I will wait. Then I met Kool and I am pregnant for him.

Memories! I remember how I met Kool Ampa.

We met on a social media platform, the Hub. We were both in a group that helped young people make the best of their talents, sharing ideas bordering on entrepreneurship and innovation. One day, the group headman encouraged us to strike up a conversation with anyone in the group, someone we were not familiar with. Kool was my striker. He struck up a conversation with me. After exchanging pleasantries, we got talking about business, the future of innovation and technology. We spent a lot of time talking about that, sharing ideas and realizing we had so much in common. For instance, I wanted to build a career in the food industry and he'd been considering that too. I also wanted to own a school only to discover he had future plans of working with children. He was even at that time undergoing an online training on that. As our conversation prolonged, we realized we had a lot to talk about. We ended the conversation that day on an informal note. No one that read our chat would believe we were just meeting each other for the first time, except for the obvious phrases that indicated so.

When the chat ended, it was with a smile on my face and so was my face almost throughout the day. Whenever I remembered any line from our conversation, I would either smile or giggle. Amidst all the business talk, Kool found a way to

chip in some humour and it warmed my heart. I knew I had met a friend and I knew I would keep in touch just like I knew he would.

The next day, we virtually chatted all through the day, as he was off duty from work, while I chatted in between work. We told each other about our day, we talked about everything; it was as though we had known each other all our lives. I found out he was not in a relationship, and that he had even given up on that, his complain being that all the girls he met didn't just seem to want to stick with him for the long run while that was exactly what he wanted. He didn't believe in being in a relationship where the girl makes statements like 'Well, let's see how this goes, let's just be friends only.' He didn't like being friend zoned. He said he believed in deciding from the beginning to believe and act as though they both have a future together. I found that commendable and I kept encouraging him, telling him that the right girl for him will show up.

Chatting with each other was fast becoming the highest points of our days. By this time, we had looked up each other's picture on the internet and oh, how he never stopped singing the praise of my beauty and how I almost drowned in them. He spoke of how simple I presented myself on every ground, yet I was so gorgeous. He was not so gorgeous, but I was really attracted to him. I like guys that are witty, intelligent and hilarious and he was all of these. Yado is one of these, he is intelligent! Then calmly Kool commented on a picture of Yado and I. He said he loved the picture, that he liked what he saw. In the picture, I was leaning into Yado's arms, tilting my head upwards, so I could look into his eyes with Yado looking down into my eyes. Then he said he wished I was not married that were it so, he would have been overjoyed because it would mean his days of searching were over. I smiled. I consoled him, telling him he would meet his perfect mate soon. Thus was our relationship blooming and we soon became each other's confidant. We talked all day except in the evenings when I had to be with Yado. As time went on, the desire to see him grew, so I asked him if we could see. He said he had wanted to see me since the first day we got talking, but held back because he was skeptical and also didn't want to offend or scare me away.

We agreed to see. How to see each other became the next thing to consider. How will I get to see him without Yado knowing, since it was normal that we knew each other's daily itinerary? Kool had more liberty of time than I had so the ball was in my court, it was left for me to make time for us to see. He told me not to be pressured about it and that if we couldn't see anytime soon, we eventually would someday. So I relaxed, however after only two days, he said he couldn't wait anymore, that we had to see. I wanted to see him too. We laughed, teasing

ourselves about the way we were behaving, like two teens in love for the first time. We really found it funny, because we did not see it coming. Then I found a way. I had a wedding to attend during the weekend, so I reasoned that he could attend with me as Yado had to be at work that particular Saturday. Yado was not even the outgoing type, except it was important you will not find him in social functions. When I told Kool about what I had come up with, he was excited about it as I was myself. He mentioned to me again how he had longed to spend time with me in person.

I spent the next two days thinking about the wedding not because my colleague was finally getting married after so many heartbreaks but because I would see Kool for the first time in person. I had troubles choosing what to wear. I wanted to be all beautiful. I was normally not one to bother about how I dressed, never paying so much attention to looking good, yet looking good all the same. This time around, I got the tension fever, I was confused and everything I picked seemed not to fit as perfectly as I would have wanted. This was obviously because I was nervous as I never used to have any issues with these same clothes. I had tried out about seven dresses, yet I was still unsure. Miffed, on Friday evening, I picked a dress to wear. It was a pale green dress, one Yado had bought for me from Abbai the last time he travelled. It was a body fitting dress that stopped just right above my knees. It had silver embellishments all over so that I easily picked my silver stilettos sandals to wear with it. For jewelry, I made a mental note of wearing my red post earrings matching with my red clutch bag.

The next morning as I dressed up, Yado looked at me, a smile on his face. I knew that smile because it was the one that played on his face whenever he was admiring me, which was once in a while. Yado was never really given to worshipping the outward appearance. He knew I was beautiful, he had heard it countless times from people who never got tired of saying it. No one met me for the first time without leaving that comment one way or the other, directly or indirectly. I liked to hear it always but Yado hardly said it. It is not that he didn't find me beautiful, he did, but he rarely was excited about it or overwhelmed by it. However, this morning, as he looked at me, he said I was beautiful, and he said it somewhat passionately. I smiled, but something was missing from me. I realized I was not as excited about it as I should have been. Instead, I found myself remembering what it felt like when Kool talked about how beautiful I was. He'd said it countless times over the phone, but I pictured him saying it to me in person and I smiled. Yado had gotten up to get himself ready to go out too. I was glad he didn't see my face, I don't know if he would have noticed I was far away.

In another forty minutes, we were done dressing up. We had only one car as mine was faulty and undergoing repairs. I hardly drove by myself though, that was one thing I have never really fancied. I enjoyed being driven. That was my thing. Yado dropped me off at the wedding venue promising to pick me up when the wedding was over.

As I got out from the car and walked into the venue, I felt happy, I was excited that in a matter of minutes I would be sitting down with my newfound friend, Kool. I walked into the hall, and it was shocking that the first person I sighted was Kool as he was sitting just a few feet away from the entrance of the hall, strategically positioned in such a way that no one entering would miss him. I believe we spotted each other the same time. Seeing him, my heart skipped, my lips parted and a shy smile unfolded. Kool got up as I got to where he sat and he walked us to find a suitable seat.

I chose a table close to the wall, on the left wing of the hall, where the time we had to spend together would be safe from innocent intruders. When we were seated, it felt awkward and I knew it, Kool did too. It was more of excessive happiness. Thankfully, the wedding ceremony was about to start as the master of ceremony asked everyone to rise for an opening prayer. Throughout the ceremony, we kept exchanging glances, smiling at each other, talking to each other quietly and also chatting with other guests at the table. When it was time for the reception, we knew it was our time to go be alone, so we left the hall for his car where we sat talking, laughing and enjoying each other's company.

When he told me I was extremely beautiful, I was taken aback by the way it made me feel. It was as if I had never heard it said before. He stared at me for a few seconds and told me how fortunate Yado was. He said he liked that I was so caring and gentle, I actually am. I didn't however know what particularly made him say so. He then asked to know how long I had been married and I told him to take a wild guess. He did and failed as he had said I was at most two years in marriage. How I had laughed so hard! He was at loss for words when I told him I had been married for 9 years. He asked me if I had kids and I said no, surprised that he was asking again because I was sure I had told him before. When I voiced my thoughts, he said he knew I had told him before but he needed to be sure he had heard me right. He paused for a while and said 'The Merciful Gonad will give you and your husband a child this year.' I laughed and said an Amen. This was in July.

The next question he quietly, mischievously asked was about my age. I laughed and excitedly told him to take another guess. I already knew he was up to failing

again. Without hesitating, he said I was between 25 and 27 and here, I laughed harder. I held my tummy and folded over. When I was done laughing, I began by asking him to do the math. I told him that he was trying to say I got married between the ages of 16 and 18. He gave up and asked that I just tell him straight up. When I told him I was 33, he didn't believe me. He was speechless. When he eventually found his voice, he complimented me a little bit more saying how nice it was that no one would even think I was married nor believe I was 33 years old. I laughed at the way he seemed awed though I wasn't in any way surprised because that was usually how I was perceived. No one had ever guessed my age right. I was waiting for the day somebody would, I would buy that person something even if it's something as small as one bubble gum. Then I asked him how old he was, and he told me he was 29. I knew from the onset that I was older than him, but didn't expect this much difference. I had thought I would be older than him with about two years. So, we sat there talking, completely oblivious of the time. When the reception ended, we knew our time would soon be over. Then out of the blues, he picked up my hand and kissed the back of my palm. My heart skipped. When he opened his eyes and dropped my hands, his eyes were teary. Then he said he liked me and it hurts that I was already taken. I didn't know what to say so I decided to ease off tension in the air by laughing and at the same time telling him he would find someone perfect for him. He agreed and said he couldn't wait for that.

Earlier on, I had gotten a message from Yado pleading with me to find my way home myself, work for him was hectic. When it came in, I had told Kool and he offered to drop me off. On our way, I didn't quite like the way he drove as it was somewhat rough however, by the time we approached my house, I had gotten quite comfortable with it, I realized that though he drove rough, he was good too. He dropped me off and we said our goodbyes. We knew where we would meet again, in our phones.

When I entered my house, I felt alive and I knew I wanted more of Kool. I had agreed before now that he was a special one because he made me feel so, like I had not felt in a long time. Yes! I settled down to undress and when I was done, I laid on the bed watching the movie of my day, my face lit with smiles. As I reminisced, I remember when suddenly Kool had stopped our conversation at a point because he had to dance to a song that drifted our way from the Wedding party. Oh, Kool is a bad dancer! He just doesn't know how to move to the beats but because he so loved the song, he danced heartily. A bad hearty dancer he is but I liked him so. I was about an hour into the movie when my phone rang. It was Yado indicating he was on his way home. I thought of dinner, and I realized

how hungry I was. Kool and I hadn't even remembered to eat at the wedding. I decided to make some fried plantain and beef sauce, Yado liked that.

The thought of beef sauce made my tummy quake and I had the urge to throw up. Shocked, I remembered I was pregnant, I began sweating. I rushed to the toilet to throw up. I wished as I bent down there I would rise to realize I was dreaming that in reality I was faithful to Yado, had children with him already and life was beautiful. I wished Kool and the pregnancy was a beautiful dream. I left the bathroom to my bed and sat. I can't say for how long I was there because it was the sound of Yado's car horn that brought me back to my senses. I was still seated on the bed when he unlocked the door with his own keys. Calling out my name excitedly as he walked to the room, I got up and met him at the corridor. He greeted me warmly, planting a kiss on my lips and then he told me my mum was visiting us the next day. I smiled and feigned excitement. I imagined how I would face her without her knowing I was pregnant. She had an eye for details and then when she found out I feared what would happen.

As I prepared dinner, my mind fretted. I was sure the egg sauce didn't taste like one, but Yado ate it gratefully. He is a nice man!

Chapter Three

I panicked! My mum is a pious woman. I grew up knowing her to be and she raised us so. We loved Gonad and tried as much as we could to obey Him and live for Him. Yes, I am piously of Gonad or was! It bothered my soul that now I had failed my family, myself and my Gonad. I worried about how I would face them all, my mum, my dad, Zohi and Beni I laughed at the thought of it and then I cringed too. I didn't even know how I was facing myself now.

My mum had been my sole confidant until I met Yado and until Kool Yado was. Mum had gladly relinquished that position to Yado. However, now it felt like I was all alone. Kool, I could no more call a confidant though he had been trying to get in touch with me. I needed a break from him, I needed to think clearly and it was evident being around him would impede that as being around him made me forget I had vows to uphold.

Kool called several times over the past days but I declined his calls. He had sent many messages. Since we had always been in touch, I knew he would be worried sick so I eventually reached him. I let him know I was fine but just needed time. His messages didn't stop though. He sent love messages, telling me he was ready to stand by any decision I took. He kept apologizing for everything, regretting too and asking the merciful Gonad for mercy. He had always been able to express himself well and now was no exception.

So my mum visited. By this time, it was only three weeks from when I discovered I was pregnant and truthfully, there were no visible differences or changes in my body. I vomited a few times though. The only way I was able to really tell was because I had missed my period and a home urine test had proved it. It only crossed my mind some few days ago that a blood test was the most reliable. I started thinking that it was possible that I wasn't pregnant and I began to feel that the home urine test may have been faulty. So I knew I had to do a blood test as soon as possible and how I prayed that I would be tested negative. 'It had to be.' I whispered to myself.

My mum visited and came along with my siblings. I was glad she had come with them because it meant she would not have so much freedom to see me well. When we were together like this, we usually did have so much fun. Mum was down to earth, she could play with anyone. We played and related with her as though we were siblings and because she was not big statured and had me early, she could pass for our sibling. She had gotten married at 25 and had me at 26. That had been my dream and yes, I got married at 24 but was met with a shocker when children didn't follow. Mum had some delays after me, as the

twins didn't come till I was 10 years old, Mum being 36. No matter how anyone looked at it, I still say she had her children very early.

Yado had bought some latest movies, and though he hardly had time to watch, he liked to have them archived so we settled down to movies. We watched one movie, then another and another. In between, I fried prawn crackers and popped some corn. After the second movie as was usual, Mum and I began feeling drowsy. We left the boys in the parlor and went into the visitor's room. I lay on the bed with her and we chatted about little nothings until she remembered a dream she'd had. She was telling me that she saw me some days back in a dream, that I was pregnant. At the mention of the 'P' word, I stiffened. I tucked in my tummy needlessly because I was wearing a big tee-shirt that sufficiently hid my tummy. She said in the dream, I was wearing a yellow dress, that I looked very lovely and that Yado had mentioned the name of my baby. She said we knew in the dream that it was a boy. In my response to her, I told her coldly that the dream didn't mean a thing since it wasn't the first time we were dreaming of me being pregnant. She sighed, concurred and then yawned. Some few minutes later, she was asleep and I was grateful. I didn't want any further discussions along that line. Good enough for me, I was also sleepy so I engaged my head properly on my pillow and set myself to sleep. I knew I would be having a good sleep, none like I had had in a while.

When a tap from Beni woke me up, I realized it was almost 4pm. We had been sleeping for about two hours. He wanted to find out if I had dinner plans for them. Mum woke up in the process and responded on my behalf. She told them they would have dinner at home and with that we both went back to sleep. I knew he would however find himself something to eat from my kitchen or fridge in the meantime. We didn't get up again till it was 6pm and by then, it was time for them to go back home. Mum had to go prepare bean pudding, Ukuli for supper but decided against it because following through with it would mean them having a late dinner. She told me she would fix them fried yam and egg sauce instead. She asked me what Yado and I would have for dinner and I told her I didn't know at the moment but that the last resort would be to ask Yado to get us dinner from his office cafeteria. They had longed to stay till Yado returned but it was getting late. Yado too had hoped to get back home early enough to meet them, but he didn't make it. It was obvious he couldn't steal away from work. Shortly before they left, we rallied round each other, whispering sweet nothings and then they were on their way.

Their departure made the house feel unusually empty. I imagined that the next time we all would be together again would be an unpleasant gathering and a sad

one. I imagined how shocked they all would be at the knowledge of what will soon be out. I couldn't go on imagining how my mum would feel, it was torture. Then I thought of Yado. I feared he would lose it when he found out. I reasoned that just as it would be impossible for me to imagine Yado cheating on me, even more was it impossible for Yado to ever think that I would cheat on him and even get pregnant in the process.

'Father Lord!' I exclaimed. I was losing it myself. My head was trying to explode. I sat there in the Sitting room lost in thoughts. I saw how this mess was my fault. I didn't have any reason to be in such a cold dark place, neither did I need to have dragged anyone with me but there I was shivering, afraid and I was fast dragging others with me. I knew I had to find a way to tell Yado or tell someone who could help me tell him but I also knew I couldn't involve a third party before putting Yado in the know. I had to tell him myself and at the thought of it, fear engulfed me. It was like I was swimming in a sea of lost things because I was gradually losing it. I asked myself how I could betray so many people just for two people's freaking pleasures, how I never even thought about the consequences of my actions. I couldn't believe that as refined as I was I would let myself into this kind of mess. I loathed myself and was disgusted. All the moments of pleasure with Kool paled in the face of what I now felt. I had three resolves. I would do a blood test, I prayed it would be negative but if it wasn't, I would meet with Kool to discuss, we had a lot to talk about. The outcome of the test would determine if I would carry out the last.

Chapter Four

I woke up the next morning to feel Yado's hands on me. It was early, say around 4am. He was praying and speaking words over me, words in the lines of peace to my soul to wade of every fear or attack. I put one and two together and knew I must have had a nightmare. As he prayed, I laid still but said an Amen in my heart. I wanted the peace he prayed about, to have things go back to the way they were before I met Kool. I was panting for peace and prayed in my heart that this prayer would be the air I needed. I remained still as though I was asleep, I didn't want to interrupt his prayer. If he knew I was awake, he would end the prayers. He continued in prayers placing his hands on my tummy, he was silent for a few minutes before continuing with prayers for us, for a stronger bond between us and for greater doors of blessings. When he was done, he slid back under the duvet and lay down. I held my breath and it felt like I would choke, like I couldn't conceal my evil deed anymore. I began to cry quietly so Yado wouldn't find out. Thankfully, my back was turned to him, so he couldn't see my wet face. Tears spilled much and my sobs were getting audible so I tried to pull myself together but before I could, a muffled cry escaped my lips. Yado heard and called my name, asking if I was awake. Another muffled cry escaped my lips then I burst into tears. Startled, he crossed over to face me and was alarmed when he realized that my face and pillow were wet.

'Liki, what is it? Why are you crying?' He had questioned. I couldn't respond, instead I cried more. Asking again and still not getting any response, he wiped away the tears on my face and patted my back, consoling me as he tried to find out why I was crying. It was a battle within me not knowing whether to tell him or not. I didn't expect to be so messed up emotionally and I wondered if the next time that happened my body would be able to handle it. The tears kept flowing for my heart was broken. I cried for Yado, I cried because it was evident to me now that my life was changed forever. I would have spilled the truth out there and then but I remembered I was supposed to do a blood test. This boosted my emotions and gave me some relief. I believed I could test negative.

I sat up. Yado was looking at me expectantly and worriedly. I knew he was waiting to hear why I woke up crying so I told him I just was feeling sad because we still were yet to have our children. He was surprised and hadn't expected to hear that because I rarely bothered about that. However, he smiled and wrapped me in his arms, speaking to me calmly, sweetly, assuring me that I would

definitely bear our own children, also telling me he would always love me come what may. His words calmed me a bit but fear and guilt was with me, choking every word of love Yado put in my heart so that Yado's words couldn't really calm my heart. I also imagined if he would still love me when he eventually got to know of the abominable situation I was in.

Yado continued talking to me, telling me he'd prayed for me, that I was having nightmares. According to him, he said I was jerking and tossing for about 2 minutes. I wasn't bothered as no nightmare could be more than what my life was becoming. He assured me that I would be fine. I agreed, nodding my head to indicate so but in my heart I didn't see how on earth I would be fine. I stopped being fine the moment I realized I was pregnant.

Yado, now getting up to prepare for work, planted a kiss on my forehead. I too had an appointment with a school. Among other things, I am an educationist and I consult for schools. A school that catered for children with special needs needed my services and the meeting had been scheduled for 11am. As it were at that moment, I didn't feel like going anywhere, but I had to. I also intended to go do a blood test so my plan was to leave the house by 9am so I could be done before my appointment. Yado was in the bathroom bathing and on a good day, we would have had a bath together but I hadn't been able to do so for a while and since it was mostly my initiative, Yado didn't seem to notice. This was one of my problems with him. He loved me undeniably but didn't usually express it enough, he didn't know how to make me feel wanted. His mind being too full and active, he had little or no time to drool over me and I loved to be drooled over, I loved attention. Coming out of the bathroom, he looked so gorgeous and my heart went out to him but before I could even bask in the sweetness his looks gave my body, I remembered I was an adulterer and my conscience accused me again. This had become the case with me.

Yado, as he dressed up, gave me a rundown of his plans for the day. My appointment with the school had been in our faces so he was already aware I would be there. Since the morning began the way it did, he didn't expect me to make him breakfast so he opted to serve himself to cereals in his office. I was grateful and apologized for not being able to fix him something but he waved it off. Yado, was the easiest person to live with when it was about domestic chores, he could excuse me from any chore at the slightest opportunity but I stopped falling for that a long time ago since I had to still do it eventually, except for some occasions when he opted to help me.

Yado set to leave, I saw him off to the car. It was 8am by the time. When I got back into the house, I reminisced about how the morning had begun. Then spontaneously I prayed. I didn't talk to Gonad about the pregnancy nor did I ask for forgiveness, but thanked Him for my life and for everything I could think of. After that, I encouraged myself, telling myself that all would be well. Though I felt numb all through my prayers, I prayed all the same. When I was done praying, I laid back on the bed thinking about the lab test. Suddenly I felt I couldn't go to the lab alone so I called Kool. He picked at the first ring. He was surprised I had called him. I told him what I wanted to do and asked him to accompany me. He agreed saying he would ask for permission from his superior at work. We agreed to meet at the lab. I had used several search engines and found one in the outskirts of town where no one would know us, about 30 minutes' drive from town. We agreed to meet there by 9.30am, so we had about one hour to get there from the time I called him. He wanted to come pick me but I declined and chose to use a cab instead moreover, I didn't want him coming around my house. He had never been there except for the day he dropped me off after my colleague's wedding. As soon as I ended the call, I headed to the kitchen to get food. I fished out a left over porridge from the freezer and microwaved it. It surprisingly still tasted so fresh despite having lived in and of the cold for weeks due to the usual epileptic power supply. Sleep set in as soon as I was done eating, but I disrupted it by going right into the bathroom. Bathing done, I dressed up and left the house.

Getting to the lab was not much of a hassle as I went against the traffic. I got there about ten minutes before Kool arrived. However, I told him to wait in his car for me. I realized we couldn't go in together, we would look too much like a couple and I couldn't risk that. He understood and watched me go in alone. In twenty minutes I was out. I could return in the evening for the result or they could send it to me by mail.

We headed back in silence, a very comfortable one. From time to time, Kool would turn to look at me or touch my hands. It was evident that the love we shared was still breathing and it surprised me. Along the way he had to stop to fill up his fuel tank and in the process, he got me my favorites: yoghurt and wafers. As we approached the school where I was to have the appointment, tears flowed from my eyes. When he noticed it, he simply consoled me as he fought the flow of his own tears and when they eventually spilled, I consoled him too. We relapsed into silence for the remaining few minutes' drive to the school. When we got there, I alighted and waved. He waved back and drove off.

The meeting began, lasted and ended successfully. My proposal was accepted and I was contracted. It was a big one such that I left there smiling. I knew this would really please Yado as he was the brain behind it, the engine and the life. I owed it to him as he was the one that coached me through drafting the proposal. I wasn't so excited about it though, I couldn't be because I was becoming surer about the result of my pregnancy test. My heart told me it would be positive and for that, I couldn't be as happy as I would have been on a normal day. By reflex, I picked up my phone to call Kool then realized what I was doing and stopped. I dialed Yado instead but he didn't pick and even on the second dial, he still didn't. I knew he must have been in the middle of work. Then Kool's call came in as soon as I was done dialing Yado's number.

'You called me, anything?' He'd said.

'Emm' I stuttered. 'Well, I wanted to tell you that the meeting was a success. I'm on board.' I told him. He expressed his joy and asked if I had told Yado and I explained. He said he could imagine how pleased Yado would be. Then we were silent on each other and I hung up. A minute later, his message came in. It read 'Liki, I understand everything you are going through. Please be strong. I will always love you and you will always be in my heart'. As I read the message, I fought tears. Kool was sweet, genuine and right for me and I was for him too but like he always said, our union was wrong and we had both admitted it.

I checked my mail in the evening and I was positive. I discarded the report, deleted it like it was a plague. I told Kool about it in a chat which I immediately deleted too. I told him I didn't want a reply from him that I would reach him when I wanted to. He ignored me and replied anyway.

'I don't know what to say or what not to say, but I am with you and I love you.' I responded loving him back. Then I settled down to my chilled yoghurt and wafers deciding not to even worry.

Chapter Five

I was left with the last resolve, I had to find a way to tell Yado. I had to tell my husband that his wife was pregnant for another man. I had to find a way to tell my kindhearted, hardworking, easy going, Gonad lover, helpful and handsome husband that his Gonad lover, beautiful and faithful wife is pregnant for another man.

'How does one do that, anybody has an idea?' I called out in a whisper.

How, where, when would I tell him?

I was now five weeks gone and I feared that he would soon notice. Though I hadn't changed outwardly, still I just feared that he would read my eyes, see something on my nose or teeth that would make him know. I felt anything could give me away. I had told Kool earlier that I needed to find someone who could go between Yado and I but he objected, telling me not to tell any person before Yado that he had the right to be the first to know, so he could decide whom he wanted in on the matter. I agreed.

Having agreed, I was faced with deciding when the appropriate time was to let Yado in on my mess. I felt helpless and lost. I couldn't think. The pain and emotional madness that engulfed me had never been and I was certain would never be for me again, because no one could take this twice in a lifetime and survive it.

Now, Yado travelled and would not be back for three days. I decided to spend these days strategizing on how to open up to him. Coincidentally too, Kool had to be away from town, so there would be no excuse for me to see him or him, me. I had a whole lot to think through. I imagined how let loose all hell will be when I confessed to Yado. At the thought of the word 'confess', I was convicted in my heart that I had not even asked Gonad for forgiveness, I had not spoken to Him about it. I wanted to do so, there and then but I couldn't find the strength to begin, I felt numb. I wondered if I was even forgivable. Then a verse from the Rennet danced around my mind. It voiced, 'No matter how dirty your sins make you, you shall be made sparkling clean.' I pondered on these words. It was beyond my imagination, I didn't understand it and my mind couldn't, even though the verse was not strange to me. I knew the words were true, but I found it difficult to accept them. I was certain I had to pay a price for my evil act and oh, how I wanted to pay it!

I found myself opening my mouth to talk.

'Father, I know what I did was wrong and I am ready to receive punishment for it.'

As though I was been replied, instantly, I thought I heard a voice inside of me. It was not a voice though as it was more like an inner witness. I heard 'you can't pay dear. Someone did already. Shar!' I paused, and was about to settle for these words, console myself with them when something welled up in my mind.

My mouth spoke. 'But why do I feel so much guile, so much pain and how do I save my marriage. How do I tell Yado?' The questions seemed endless. Then right again was that knowing in my inside. It was as if I saw these words written in my mind: 'Be not afraid, I am with you and I'm not leaving, ever'. That moment, I understood why the phrase 'fear not' was scattered all over the Rennet. Oh, how I had needed to hear those words more than ever before. They soothed me, but as soon as I allowed my mind drift back to reality, fear resurfaced. Then I began experiencing a choking feeling. By reflex, I called Kool, I didn't know who else to call. Crying, I pleaded with him to come over to the house. I knew he was due to travel the next day and would be busy preparing for that but I was losing it, I needed to talk to someone. 'I'll be with you by noon, dear' he had responded. Seeing that I had two hours to noon, I had no choice but to force myself to focus on something else. So, I picked up the term paper I had drafted for the school I was to begin work with.

I struggled with tears as I tried to focus. It was that my mind didn't want to do anything else but stay sad. Everything in the room reminded me of my plight, my sorry state. The picture of Yado and I, fitted in a frame on my table spoke to me. It was as though it mocked me, calling me a cheat. I looked at myself in the picture and wondered if I was ever that person. In the picture, I was smiling innocently and sweetly into the camera. Now, I looked at myself on the bed and I didn't need to be told what I looked like. As true as it is that beauty is from within, so it is that ugliness is from within. I felt ugly inside, I felt dirty. I stole a glance at the face of my Yado, the one I had sworn my love and loyalty to, the one I knew I still loved, even though those strong feelings I felt when we first fell in love had waned.

Yado had never hurt me but now I wish he had, then maybe somehow I would have been able to justify this hurt he was about to experience. He cared for me, he did. My issue with him had been that he never did really express it the way I wanted, the way I needed to have it expressed. I loved been complimented and

admired, I loved it fully. I was a master at complimenting others and they loved it. Whenever I drew his attention to it, he ended up saying that we could never be the same, that he couldn't be me. He would say I should understand that he loved me dearly so I should bear with him if he didn't come around to saying it or showing admiration for me often. He however would promise to try better. I tried to understand, but it was hard because I didn't see him making any conscious effort to becoming better. If only I had accepted him that way, not wanting to change him.

Looking back, I realized that I easily got attracted to Kool because he was very liberal with words of admiration and affection. He was very expressive with his words, he knew how to genuinely admire, compliment and encourage. He was like that to me and even to others. He had a passion that Yado lacked. Kool had to only look at me and I could see right into his heart. When he is teasing and playing, he did so passionately and even when he is angry, it is passionately still. He has a fierce sweetness he brings into everything he does and says. He was endearing.

Yado is the picture of a perfect husband while Kool is the expression of it. I knew how many times in my heart I had wished it was Kool I married. As these thoughts flooded my heart, I felt even guiltier. I wished I had not followed through to arrive here. I wish I was strong enough to resist the thoughts. How guilt tore at my heart, piercing it freely and joyfully as I sobbed. After some minutes, I found some strength. The guilt that weighed me down had reduced as some had escaped with the tears. I found my way into the bathroom and when I was done, I fixed myself something to eat. I had just finished eating when Kool informed me that he was on his way to my house. Numbly, I sat waiting for him. The drive from his office to my house was about 15 minutes, so that in no time he had arrived.

As soon as he stepped into my house, I knew it was a wrong move and I sensed he knew too because he stopped abruptly and made a move to go back. I stopped him, telling him it was OK he stayed. He hesitated and then continued in. I offered him a sit opposite mine. I made to offer him something to eat but he declined, saying he was in no mood to eat. He asked about my wellbeing and jokingly said I still looked gorgeous, that he wasn't sure I was even pregnant. I smiled and told him he still looked decent, but that I was sure he was a petty fornicator. He laughed and raised his hands in surrender. I laughed too. Then in a more serious tone and look, he asked me again how I was faring, and I knew he was referring to how I was holding up. As he awaited my response, he moved over to the three seater sofa that I sat on. He held my hands and squeezed

them, my body reacted. I withdrew my hands and he understood. Then I told him I was alright except that I had been crying and that I hated myself for what hurt and pain Yado was about to experience because of me.

As I talked, he just looked at me and I could see pain and fear in his eyes. He stayed with me for about an hour as we sat together in silence. It was soothing, our silence always was. Even in the middle of this dilemma, we could still sit together and feel this quiet peace. When it was time for him to go, he stood up and I stood too. He moved towards me with his arms open. I walked into them and my head found a space to rest. I felt him holding me tighter and I snuggled closer. He pecked my neck and then my ears and I snuggled yet closer, pressing my body into his. I raised my head, and with my eyes closed, I found his lips. My lips on his lips, we stayed that way for minutes, my tears were the first to flow, then his. They met on our lips and mixed. Sighing deeply, he tried to withdraw from me but I held him tighter and Kool gave in. I felt his lips all over mine, and as he ravished them, I sought to ravish his.

Chapter Six

Yado returned from his journey full of zest and life. He was usually excited about work and never got tired of work, he even came back home with work. He also brought back some goodies for me. The evening he returned was one of mixed feelings for me. I was happy and yet unhappy; happy because he was happy to see me and because he is my husband, the one I still loved, unhappy because I knew what untold pain was before us. That same evening, Yado decided he wanted us to go out for fun, this we had not done in a while. We went out and it was fun. We actually went to two different places. All through the outing, as Yado talked to me, I died inside. At a point, he almost noticed I was lost in deep thoughts, and asked if I was OK. I told him I was and quickly put myself together. Yado looked at me too much that night, looking into my eyes. At first, I tried to avoid it, but then I knew if I did, it would make him suspicious, he would feel that something was not right so I looked him in the eyes and the more I did, the number I was inside. We kissed, Yado kissed me more, and I knew we would have to 'go down low' when we got home. On our way home, I forbade my mind to think about what was before me. I wanted to make love to Yado in a way I never had. I presumed it to be our last, so I wanted to give him my best. As I thought about that, the ugly voice in my head attacked me. It asked me what best I still had left to give. It taunted me and mocked me, telling me I was nothing but a filthy rag. It told me I was evil, in every way. Then Yado held my hands and squeezed them. This gesture rescued me from my haunted thoughts and I was grateful for it.

When we got home, we headed straight for our bedroom and we made love. It was plain but beautiful. Yado was always gentle and patient, he knew how to satisfy me, however this time around I was not in any way satisfied, how could I have when disaster was looming? I poured all my guilt, pain and fear into pleasuring my husband. Yado knew something was different this time and as he asked excitedly, I just smiled and lied. I told him I thought it was just us, that I was equally surprised. We cuddled and in no time, Yado drifted to sleep. As my head remained on his chest, moving slowly to the rhythm of his breathing, I cried silently thinking of how to reveal my mess to Yado. Suddenly I found a way. I decided I would write it and would have him read it in my presence. Oh, the thought of it made my heart skip, my stomach quaked and ran. I got up hurriedly and went to the toilet to let out watery faeces as I cried at the same time. I put my hands over my mouth and cried. I cried till I physically didn't have any more strength to cry. I got out of the toilet and reclaimed my space on the bed. I wish I would sleep and not wake up. I wished Yado would too, that something

would happen to take away this pain that I knew would never leave on its own. Somewhere in the midst of all the chaos, I heard a voice from within me. 'All is well Liki, sleep!' With these words came an unusual drowsy effect that sent me to sleep. I woke up the next morning refreshed. Yado was already gone to the office, it was 9.45am by the time. I was surprised by the way I had slept until then without waking up at all through the night. I had slept like a baby. Before I slept the last time I checked the time, it was 12.37am. I had slept straight for about 9 hours. It was unusual. I hadn't slept this peacefully and woken up this refreshed since the whole saga began. Then again, it felt like I had a witness on my inside, 'I have strengthened you for the days ahead. Now pick up your pen and write to Yado'. Again, with those words came an enablement to do as I was prompted. I found a piece of paper and a pen and I wrote.

'Dear Yado, I love you specially and will always do. The next words you read will contradict this but it remains true that I love you. I can never ask for your forgiveness, for it will be asking for too much. You have been a good man, please remain so. May what which you are about to know not turn your good heart into a bad one. Yado, I have been unfaithful to you with another man and it has resulted into a pregnancy. I have cheated on you. I apologize that I had to tell you this way, I didn't know any other way and I don't know so much anymore.'

When I was done writing, I put the note inside the Rennet that he used at home which usually sat on his bed side drawer. I knew he would see it later on in the day because I would tell him I left something for him inside his Rennet. I would sit before him as he read it and I would take whatever happens. The worse would be him strangling me to death, which I feared he wouldn't do, but wished he would for I really didn't think I could handle living on like I was at the moment, nor could I handle living with Yado after telling him what I had done. Night fell and my plan to have him read his Rennet didn't work because he came back home really late. I was however surprised when he woke up the next morning and picked up his Rennet. It was unusual of him. Usually, when he wakes up, if it was a morning free of sex, he either goes straight to the bathroom or prays. He usually read his Rennet at night or at work during his break times. Seeing him pick up his Rennet, I wished somehow he had managed to read it in the night as I reasoned that reading it in the morning, would be worse. I there and then had to accept that no time would ever be appropriate for this type of revelation.

Seated by the edge of his side of the bed, Yado read his Rennet. I laid on the bed in silence, my heart racing. When he was done, I could see him smiling, holding the letter in his hand. He knew the letter was from me but little did he

know it wouldn't be a pleasant read. As I saw the smile grow broader on his face, I cringed in pain. He smiled more. He expected a love letter from me. In the past, I was fond of leaving him love notes in his Rennet. He opened the letter, and as he did, I sat up. He stretched his hand to touch me, in a bid to let me know he was aware that I was awake though he didn't look at me. In seconds, the smile on his face vanished and on it, I saw an expression which I can't describe in words, a combination of disbelief, confusion and utter despair. I got up from the bed, and moved towards the door and by reflex, I was on my knees and was shivering as my eyes produced tears. Yado looked up from reading to look at me. He opened his mouth but shut them. He did that for about five times. Words found no power, words were shocked as well. Then he read the letter again, and then again.

As he read, he kept looking at me as though he was expecting me to say something. I just remained on my knees, crying. Then he spoke. 'Is this true Liki?' I looked for my voice but it was gone. To respond to him, I nodded. 'No, answer me', He had said in a low tone. 'Please tell me this is a joke', he added. I managed to reply him weakly, telling him it was no joke, but the truth.

He picked up his phone and called his office. He was calm. He told them he would be absent from work for the day saying he wasn't feeling too well. When he was done, he picked up the letter again but stopped as he was about to read further, rather he folded it and put it back inside the Rennet. Then he spoke again. He asked that I get dressed. We had to see Dr Fitana.

Now I was no more crying, I didn't have any more strength to cry. I got into the bathroom, cleaned up and dressed up. Yado got dressed too, silently. He'd had his bath in the guest room and when we were done, we went into the car.

The drive to Dr Fitana's was the most awkward one I have ever had to endure. We drove in loud silence and it seemed like we were complete strangers. We didn't even as much as look at each other, we couldn't. After a while, thoughts of Kool filled my mind. I had not spoken to him since his last visit to my house which so happened to be his first too. I knew Yado would not forgive me, I knew it was over between us. I wondered now if Kool would stand by me.

Yes, I knew it was bad enough that I got pregnant for another, however I felt it would be unbearable if the one responsible would not be willing to go all the way with me if it came to that. I knew I couldn't continue in a relationship with Kool no matter what but a part of me just cared to know if he'd care to. I hadn't heard from him in days and so I began to wonder if he hadn't forgotten about

me even though I was the one who made him stay away. We got to the hospital and Dr Fitana was at the reception waiting for us. I am sure he came out to welcome us so we wouldn't be delayed in any way and from the look on his face I sensed he was in the know. I suppose Yado must have called him. I tried to figure out when that must have been. On getting into his office, he exchanged a handshake with Yado then hugged me. His hug lasted a bit longer than usual. My heart was frail, I could hear it beat slowly. Dr Fitana then sat as we sat too and waited for us to start a conversation while we also waited for him. There was a few seconds of awkward silence, filled with so much tension. Then Dr Fitana spoke into the silence by welcoming us again before facing me to ask how I was doing, how I felt health wise. I told him I was very fine though I hadn't been for days as I had been having bouts of dizziness and headaches, however, I didn't care to tell him because I didn't care myself.

When he was through interrogating me by asking the usual routine questions doctors ask, he called in a nurse to take my samples for a pregnancy test. When I heard that, I told him there really was no need because I had done that already. Immediately, Yado responded calmly but with so much palpable anger that he literally ordered the nurse to go do what she was told. Dr Fitana and the nurse were taken aback, I wasn't. I knew Yado enough. He could be calm when angry but he barked out his words with so much silent energy and fury. So I got up and went with the nurse. I was given a small container wherein I deposited my urine. Thereafter I came back to the doctor's room, it was grave yard silent. I sat down wondering why Yado wanted a fresh test even when I already told him I was pregnant. Then I knew, it rose up in my heart as a knowing, that hearing it directly from Dr Fitana was his way of accepting this poignant truth. Thus we sat in silence, Dr Fitana looking through files and answering some phone calls. It was obvious that he was busy but more obvious was it that his heart was with us.

Dr Fitana is elderly, about 65 years of age and as I looked round the office, I saw a portrait of him and his family sitting on the wall beside him. Then I thought of my family, my parents and siblings, I remembered others and the common factor with all of them was the fact that soon hurt will tug at them forcefully when they get to know of this unpalatable truth, this saga of my life. The nurse got back. It took her about twenty minutes. She had a sheet of paper in her hand that she handed over to Dr Fitana. When he was done looking into it, he gave it to Yado who didn't hesitate at all before looking at it. When he was done, he heaved a sigh and rose, thanking Dr Fitana. who asked him if he would want me to have an ultra-sound to know how far gone I was. Yado nodded in the affirmative and then almost immediately changed his mind. Instead, he walked

towards the door, leaving me behind as though I was not there. Dr Fitana looked at me and gestured for me to go with my husband. I did sheepishly. In the car, Yado still said nothing. I wanted so much for him to vent or just talk or even hit me but none of it came. I wish any one came, I knew I would have felt better by it.

So as he drove, I realized we were not going by the way of our house, instead it seemed as though he was heading for my parent's. I eventually became sure of that when I saw the mall that led to their neighborhood. Oh my heart skipped so high and from my mouth escaped a gasp of despair. My eyes began to bleed tears. I began wailing and screaming hysterically yet Yado didn't even as much as look at me. I was shivering in fear when suddenly, the baby in me moved vigorously I felt it unmistakably even though it was the first time it was happening. I swallowed my sobs, I became still, it felt as though sobbing or moving at all would cause my baby harm. As the words 'my baby' registered in my mind, it was as if something left me. The silent desire for him to be a fallacy vanished. My silent prayers for a miscarriage went into the abyss. He moved again!

Yado was looking at me now as he drove. I guess he was surprised at the way I suddenly stopped wailing. He kept stealing glances at me as he drove, then he asked if I was OK. I didn't know what to say. How I would have loved to tell him what I just experienced, but I knew it would cause him more pain. So I simply told him I was OK. We got to my parents' house. I heard the inner voice again. It simply said 'fear not!'

Chapter Seven

Yado had never been one given to bottling up his feelings. So as we got into my parent's house, the air became defiled. Our negative emotions were that strong. My dad and mum were home. Zohi and Beni too. Dad and mum looked from me to Yado uneasily. There was no need for any pleasantries, there was no spirit for that in the first place. From what I immediately perceived, Yado had called them to expect us and from their disposition, they knew something was wrong. I began racking my brain to recall when he could have called them as we had been together all morning and then I reckoned that it must have been when he was getting dressed in the guest room, the same time he must have called Dr Fitana.

Yado spoke up shortly after we got seated, both of us on the same sofa. My brothers seeing the way we all looked sick left us to talk. When they'd left, Yado simply said 'Liki has done the unthinkable.' He sighed deeply, fighting back tears. I held his palm by reflex and he stiffened, but didn't withdraw. I saw my mum look from me to Yado then to dad. I opened my mouth to continue on his behalf. I didn't know what I was doing but it was obvious Yado could no more empower himself to speak as he was seriously fighting tears and it seemed he was losing. I voiced out murderous words, beautiful too but in this case, poisonous.

'It's an unthinkable thing mum.' I looked only at her, I couldn't face my dad. Mum looked at me, she was still but I could see she was full of fear. Then I said it. I told them I was pregnant. I hesitated for some seconds then added the poison, telling them it was for another man.

What happened next sent me screaming. My mum had slumped. She fell to her side as she sat, and went limp. Dad rushed to her, Yado too. My brothers rushed out on hearing me scream. Dad was shaking her and calling her name but she didn't respond. Immediately, Yado lifted her and rushed towards the door, my dad following, and my brothers too.

Zohi the oldest of the twins had gone out through the back door and was starting the car. As quickly as was possible, mum was in the car with Yado. Zohi was behind the steering while dad hopped into the front seat. They zoomed off. Ila, the gateman was about closing the gate behind them when Beni ordered him to hold on. He ran into the house to get the key for the other car and when he returned, he practically dragged me into the car because I stood transfixed, dazed beyond help. We followed as fast as we could to the hospital. Beni

panicked. He is my favorite sibling. He is caring, gentle and very understanding. He asked me why Mum slumped and I could say nothing. He kept asking me telling me he could handle it and urging me to relax. I couldn't resist his sweetness and even when I told him he remained calm. I told him I was sorry, and that I was scared. Then I began crying. He tried to calm me down by telling me that I would be fine, Mum too and that all will be well. However, I continued crying and he continued driving.

By the time we got to the hospital, they had taken Mum into a room and Dr Fitana was attending to her. Dad was obviously with her because he wasn't in sight. I saw Zohi and Yado, they were standing somewhere in the reception talking quietly. They had not seen us enter. Zohi had his hand on Yado's back whose head was also bent. I knew he was crying. A feeling of self loathe overwhelmed me alongside a sudden physical weakness. I didn't see any way out of this mess and so my heart panicked. Beni, holding my hand sensed I wasn't OK. Suddenly I felt a weight on me, such that I could hardly move my legs. I told him I needed to seat so he helped me to a Chair. It was at this point Zohi sighted us. He looked at me once then turned away. He continued talking to Yado who was still in tears. I even saw his shoulder shake. About then, Dad came out from the ward, Dr Fitana with him. Dad told us mum had regained consciousness and was OK. Dr Fitana repeated about the same thing. Her blood pressure had risen though, but not beyond what couldn't be managed medically. She had to stay in the hospital till the next day.

Yado spoke up almost as soon as the Doctor was done, saying he had to leave to return in the evening. This was around noon. Zohi asked to know where he was headed and he said he was heading to his uncle's, uncle Dawani. My dad nodded and went to him, walking him out. Beni and Zohi stayed and while Zohi deliberately avoided eye contact with me, Beni seemed to have eyes for me alone. I wanted so much to go with Yado, I wanted to hold and beg him and just love him but I couldn't. It was as if a massive wall was between us. It felt like we could neither see each other nor touch either and this bled my heart. As I watched Yado walk out through the door, I sensed he was walking out of my life. The thought of it sent an uncomfortable sensation down my legs, and I was grateful Beni was holding me else I would have fallen to ground. I longed to pass out or even die. Then I remembered mum who had passed out at the news of my ugly saga, I wondered why I was still conscious. Thoughts of Kool suddenly came crashing in on me but it didn't have a lasting effect because about the same time, Dad was walking back into the hospital from seeing Yado off. He got to us and asked us to go home saying Dr Fitana wouldn't want anyone disturbing mum.

I wanted to ask him to permit me see her, but I couldn't, it was as if a wall was now between the two of us. Zohi nodded and was set to leave but Beni hesitated and surprisingly spoke my mind. He asked dad to permit us to see her before we left. Dad made to refuse but there was something about Beni that was irresistible. He had always been a sweet person, however recently there had been another level of calmness and glory about him. Dad agreed and called out to Zohi who was already at the exit door.

So we went in and saw Mum lying on a bed. Everyone stared at her with clear eyes except me for my eyes were teary so I couldn't see her well. She was sleeping and looked so peaceful. I admired her and loathed myself. She had turned out so well like her mother raised her, I wondered why I couldn't have followed suit, why I didn't turn out better even with all the good Upbringing Mum and Dad had baptized me with. As we turned to leave the intensive care unit, silently in my heart, I prayed to Gonad for her recovery, I knew if she came out scarred I would find it hard to forgive myself. A thought crossed my heart, I rebuked it with all the strength I had left. I would not bury my mum, not now, not anytime soon.

Chapter Eight

* * * *

I left the hospital and didn't know where to go to. I know I told everyone I was going to Uncle Dawani's but as I drove, my head full of thoughts, I just kept wandering from one thought to the other. I wondered how this was happening to me. I had always subtly boasted about my marriage, my wife; perfect, beautiful, chaste and intelligent. Now I searched and couldn't find any iota of beauty in her. Beauty? No, she was now antonyms with the word. I was seeing her in the light of pain, betrayal and every shade of evil. She used to be chaste, but not anymore, not ever again. She was my chaste girl, the one no one had slept with, the one I ushered into the world of marital sexuality, wherein we both lived until she let another into her. I jerked at the thought if it; I tried to imagine it but I couldn't, as I ended up gasping for breath.

'Liki', I had called out her name in disgust. I could not believe she had been on this for about a year, passionately mingling with another yet fronting as my lovely wife. 'How could you have been so naive and foolish? How could you not have seen any signs?' I asked myself. 'Oh Liki!' I fumed. Her name escaped my lips in agony. I felt used and cheated. I felt foolish. I was bitter. I felt I had to do something. I wanted to see her. I needed to have her tell me everything. I wanted to hear her say out the words that have sealed her doom. I felt the venom of revenge rise up from within me, I felt it consume me and I let it. Immediately, I cleared off the road and parked. I called her number. I told her to meet me in Fifty's hotel. She agreed. She knew the place, we had always talked of spending sometime there but we hadn't. I started my car again and headed straight for the hotel. As I drove, I plotted in my head what I would do. As she'd let the beast in her out, I would not hold mine back. However, somewhere in the darkness of my mind, I heard a voice I was so familiar with, he said things to calm me but I didn't pay attention to him, I didn't want to because I didn't want to be calm or pacified. I wanted to vent, hurt and revenge.

I got to the hotel before Liki. The room that was allotted me was number 21. It was on the topmost floor of the hotel, I liked that it would afford us more privacy. Getting into the room, I was blown away. Even in my fury, I couldn't catch my breath for the splendour of the room. What we had seen of the hotel on Television adverts was child's play compared to this live version of the hotel. The room spelt class in all its ways, painted white and embellished with gold. The beauty of the room weakened me so much so that I didn't remember that Liki

was fast becoming a thing of the past. I caught myself fantasizing about having a steamy hot time of pleasure with her.

The bed beckoned. I saw images of us on it, then I saw unpleasant images of us, I saw blood, I saw water. I saw me in another way, as though I was a beast. Then I saw us laughing but that didn't last a second for it was replaced by us crying, and then I saw it, and I snapped. What did I see? I saw Liki and another man, I saw her alive in ways I had never known. I surprisingly admired the Liki that I saw, but loathed the man that was with her. She was beautiful, I saw her lost in pleasures and as I saw her pleasures heighten, I snapped. How? I groaned, I shook and I vomited all over my body. Sweat broke out all over me and I began to itch. I was under a panic attack and I knew it. Then some five minutes later, I heard a knock on the door. I knew it was Liki, I had instructed that she be let in when she came. Now I didn't know whether to answer her or not. She called out my name. I answered her and told her to wait. The part of the Suite where I sat was a mess, I had vomited so much and it was almost unbelievable that so much could come out of me. But then, I didn't have the strength to do anything, so I got to the door to open for her. She came in immediately and taking in the room, she looked back at me puzzled. She questioned me to know if I was OK, I couldn't respond so she quickly scanned around for the Telephone, found it on the bedside drawer and called for room service. She asked for a cleaner, then asked me to go into the bathroom to freshen up and like a zombie, I did. I stayed in there, sitting on the edge of the bathtub looking at myself in the mirror. I heard the cleaner come in and in some ten minutes time, I heard the cleaner leave. Liki came into the bathroom, she looked at me and I could see she almost turned back in fear. I was sure she couldn't recognize the person she saw because I didn't look like me or maybe the mirror was faulty. She stood at the door, her back at me for some seconds, before she turned again to face me. I looked at her and didn't feel anything, I was numb. No hate, no fear, no sadness, I was plain numb.

She approached me and started removing my clothes

one after the other as she helped me into the bathtub. She made to bathe me, I stiffened, she hesitated and then made to continue. I allowed her and shut my eyes. They were shut all the while she bathed me. When I opened them, she was almost done and was reaching for the towel. As she dried my body, I realized she had been crying, her eyes were dripping tears and her nose, mucus. I wanted to reach out to her but I couldn't. The bath had helped me, and I was feeling

less numb but I still wasn't angry. However, I knew one thing was sure, I knew our future together was now as history as our past.

I spoke, she was startled. I wonder if she thought I had become dumb for a season. I told her we needed to talk. I saw fear in her eyes but I looked past them. She was washing my soiled tee-shirt and cleaning up my Jean. I left her and went into the room. When she was done, she joined me. She came to sit by me on the red sofa. I looked around the room again and wished we weren't here for such a time as this. I looked at her and went straight to the point, I asked her to tell me everything. I stared at her adamantly, letting her know she had to talk. There was silence for about five minutes and then she began talking as I began listening.

Chapter Nine

* * * *

I sat facing my husband. I couldn't believe I was about to do what I was about to do. How could he ask such of me? What more did he want to hear or know? I thought to myself. I sat staring at him, expecting him to just have a rethink, to understand that this would not help us. At a point, I couldn't even look at him anymore because the words his eyes spoke were heavy. I could read mockery, I could read disgust and it was obvious he would not change his mind.

I suddenly became sore. I decided that if he had to make me talk, I would tell him everything, not leaving out any detail, dirty or not. Then as I was about to begin, he asked me to hold on. He was calling for room service. He ordered for cold guava juice and beef kebab. He had ordered for one. My soreness grew fresher and without hesitating, I began narrating.

I told Yado his name is Kool and that we had met on the Hub. We were both members of a particular group. During one of our group tasks, we were to chat up a person in the group, someone we didn't know outside the group. We were randomly paired by the group headman. The sole aim was for networking. We got talking and as time went on, we got talking more. As I narrated to Yado, I tried so hard not to show any emotions even though I had made up my mind to say everything as it was.

So I continued by telling Yado how after a while, about three months, we had become so intimate, that we talked about everything and then we started wanting more. We desired to see each other, so we arranged to see. One Saturday, I invited him to a former colleague's wedding so we could see. Throughout the wedding we talked excitedly. It was as though we had known each other all our lives. He liked me a lot. It was obvious. I liked him too and enjoyed the way he liked me. When we were to part that day, he pecked my hands and forehead. He said he wished I wasn't married.

Here I paused. I was remembering my response to Kool that day. I remembered telling him I wished I wasn't married too and I wanted to explain, to tell him that it didn't mean I was having a bad marriage but he didn't let me. He said he understood and that he knew my marriage was good. I knew I couldn't tell Yado this part so I held back. How would I explain to him that my wishing I was free

to be Kool's forever didn't mean I didn't love him. I had paused for too long so Yado spoke.

'Isn't it obvious that you are trying to keep back some details? Well, it's alright. Just go ahead please.'

I swallowed saliva and continued talking. I told him how after the wedding, we continued to talk on phone and through chats. We met anywhere we could think of. He came to our Shalace sometimes and I went to his place whenever he was off duty at work. We always found a way to see each other often.

One day, we were together, just talking as usual when he started telling me we needed to stop seeing each other. I asked to know his reasons and getting up from the chair on which we both sat, he said he wasn't sure he could control himself around me anymore. I smiled and made to laugh at him even though I knew he was speaking the truth. I laughed because I knew I had started having feelings for him.

I paused. I couldn't continue, I was afraid. I could see that Yado was getting uneasy and could see his eyes were reddening in anger. Suddenly, Yado banged his hands on the bed, hardly. I was startled. He apologized and then begged me to continue. I was confused, I didn't understand why he needed to hear me talk. Then as if he read my mind, he answered me. He said he didn't want to keep imagining what happened and what did not, that he feared it would mess with his mind. He begged me further, saying if I still had any love for him, I should say it as it is. So, with tears in my eyes I continued, I had to. There was no wriggling out of it. I wanted to look at Yado to see his expression but I couldn't raise my head, I couldn't look at his eyes however I had to continue narrating. I told him that as I made to laugh at Kool, he held my head in his hands and kissed me, long and passionately. I was not shocked, because I had fantasized about this for weeks. However, I wasn't expecting a long kiss. I wanted to stop him, but I couldn't, then I felt his hands on my neck. At this point I stopped and went straight to the end, there was no point choking Yado with the details. So I told him Kool and I made love. When I had said that, I immediately began pleading with him but he cut me short.

'No go ahead Liki, don't apologize. Tell me about it, about your love making.' He'd said. So I continued talking.

I told him we had been talking in Kool's sitting room, so when he started touching my neck and ears, he lifted me and carried me into his bedroom. When he put me on his bed, I sat up and wanted to pull myself together, but Kool made to go ahead and somehow, I wanted him to. Since I was wearing a gown, he found his way to kissing my thighs.'

I sighed loudly, shaking my head and crying. I couldn't continue. I told Yado I couldn't. I looked into his eyes and saw a magnitude of pain I am certain I would never forget. Then he said to make it easier for both of us, that he would ask questions and would want honest answers. He made me promise. I did. I couldn't imagine how he expected to know if I didn't keep to it. I shook my head sorrowfully. He breathed in and out then he began.

'Was that the only time you ever made love?'

'No, Yado.' I was surprised I couldn't lie anymore.

'OK, so how many times after then?'

There was silence. I had feared this part of my confession. The way Yado stared drove me into more fear. Oh I felt like disappearing.

'Go ahead Liki, tell me.' He calmly said, and that to my surprise.

'Yado, about... OK Yado, I really can't remember, I lost count.'

Yado stared at me wide eyed. It was obvious he couldn't believe his ears. Then he blinked rapidly several times, coughed and coughed again. It appeared saliva went a wrong way. He reached out for the guava juice by him. How we had both forgotten it was there. He opened it and took a gulp, then another and then a sip. The beef kebab remained in its place on the tray.

When he was done drinking, he got up and paced. I followed him with my eyes. Now, I was sweating, he was too. I picked up the remote for the air conditioner to increase it's intensity, we needed cooler air. When our eyes met, I dropped mine. Then he spoke.

'Did you enjoy it every time?' I couldn't go on, this was too much torture. I tried to plead with him, telling him I couldn't go on with the torture but he smilingly told me I would answer all his questions because I had promised him and then he paused before adding that I had no choice but to tell him because I was nothing but a cheat, a liar and a filthy rag. He said it so calmly and sweetly I almost thought they were compliments. Yado looked different. Calm yet fierce.

He looked like he was capable of evil. I was scared. I made up my mind to cooperate with him and talk.

'So answer me, my dear wife, did you enjoy it every time?'

'Yes, I did, though it was different from ours.'

'OK, you didn't have to add that', he said mockingly. He paused, and stared outside the window. We were on the topmost floor. I could see the town and the night lights and life. It was dark and beautiful. I could relate with the darkness but not with the beauty. My life had become nothing but beautiful, it was dark like a horror movie. I was watching the movie of my life and it was not my normal kind of romantic comedy. It was scary and I was the object of my fear.

'So tell me, when was the last time you guys did it?'

I froze, and then I unfroze. He said when, not where I thought. I quickly answered before he asked me where. How could I have been able to tell him I slept with another man in our matrimonial home.

'It was last week Yado. Last week.'

'Where?'

I couldn't answer. He moved towards me. As he did he unbuttoned his shirt impatiently with one hand and made to loosen his belt with the other. I was afraid. I had never seen him like this. He was sweating, now his trousers were down and he was stepping out of it. His shirt now on the bed, he was now down to his boxers. Then realization hit me when I saw how erect he was. I was relieved I wouldn't have to answer his next question. If I had to lie about it, I would. And just then, he asked again.

'Where, where was the last one?' He gently pushed me and I fell with my back to the bed. I closed my eyes. I couldn't bear to look into his eyes.

'Open your eyes Liki and tell me. Tell me where. Was it in a place as cozy as this, or a cozier place? Tell me Liki.'

'In our Sitting room!' And again, I couldn't lie.

As I said that, he parted my legs forcefully and went into me thrusting angrily.

When he was done, He asked if I felt any pains in my stomach. I told him I didn't feel any pains. He nodded absent-mindedly then asked me to call Kool. I didn't want to but he insisted. I knew I had to. He told me to tell him to meet

me in the hotel room. I wanted to call my brother, Beni but Yado refused so I called Kool. When I was through with the call, he told me he was leaving for good that it was over and that he wished me all the best with Kool. With that, he walked out in his damp clothes.

I sat there numb. Truly, I didn't feel any pains in my stomach, but my heart ached, my head too. I felt the pain of infidelity, pain of betrayal. I felt a new kind of pain, it attached itself to me firmly, the pain of bringing out the beast in a good man.

Chapter Ten

Kool arrived at the hotel shortly after Yado left. He met me crying, I was weak. I was emotionally drained, but I had all the strength in the world to cry. It seemed that was all I could do, so cry I did cry.

When he walked into the room and saw me crying helplessly, he rushed to me and knelt before me so he could level up with my face. He cupped my face in his hands. He seemed confused, he wondered what was up. I tried to talk but I couldn't, tears interfered, so he asked that I stay calm. After a while, he got up to sit by me on the bed. Then he carried my small frame in his arms. He rocked me, stroked my hair as he kissed my forehead intermittently. When I was finally able to talk, I asked him to allow me sit by myself. Then I told him all that happened.

Shocked and angry, he kept pacing the room. Several times he was tempted to rain abuses on Yado but I stopped him the first time with the raise of my hands. I told him Yado was the victim here that he was a good man too. I was the one that allowed my misplaced affection lead me to place that has brought him shame and pain, a place that has brought out the beast in him. As I spoke, Kool melted in remorse. He realized that any abuse to be rained on Yado, he deserved in a greater measure. When I was done talking, I felt hunger pangs so I made to eat the beef kebab that Yado had ordered. Kool stopped me from eating it cold and called room service to have it microwaved.

When I had eaten some, he sat up and positioned himself in a way that suggested that he wanted us to talk. He asked me what we would do. I replied him saying I didn't know that at the moment, I was numb to the core. I told him I couldn't get myself to think past the present moment. However, I knew I had to go home, my parents'. Everyone would be expecting me, moreover my mum was due back from the hospital the next day. Kool agreed with me. He moved closer to me and hugged me. He pleaded with me to keep in touch and not shut him out like I had done for the past days. I told him I would try. He made to kiss me but held back. He was that expressive. I kissed him instead, hurriedly but passionately.

It was now about 7pm. I marveled at how the day had played out. It had been such a long one. I woke up, messed Yado up, went to see Dr Fitana, my parents and then to the hotel. I had envisaged that the day would be far from calm but I hadn't expected it to be this turbulent, this draining. What a Friday! We left the hotel for my house. I had to stop by to pick some things I would need for my stay at my parent's. On our way, my phone rang. It was my mum. I picked up

immediately. She told me she was home, she had requested to be discharged and was allowed since she seemed to have improved well enough. She said she needed to see me as soon as was possible, so I told her I would be with her in an hour. Though she didn't sound upset, she was however not cheerful. I was relieved, I had feared she would be all charged up in anger. I felt a sense of relief knowing she wasn't set to abandon me also.

As we drove, I had tears in my eyes. I wished Yado had not left me. I knew it took my mum a lot to still want to see me, and I was grateful. I only wished Yado was as strong, he wasn't and I didn't hate him for that. I cried because I missed him already. I cried!

Kool watched me as he drove, not saying anything, but I could tell he was empathizing with me. I knew he didn't mind me crying, he just didn't understand why the call made me cry for he had heard the conversation as my phone had been on speaker. He said it was, however, OK to cry that it would have been worse if I should refuse to cry, if I fought the tears. I agreed. I was of the same opinion. He mentioned that on our way to my Parents', he would stop by a pharmacy to get me some medication. He said I was too weak, and needed to take something for myself and the baby. There was a pharmacy very close to my parents.

The rest of the drive to my house was in silence, a comfortable one as usual. We exchanged glances though and held hands as much as we could. When we got home, he stayed back in his car while I went in to gather the few things I needed. In a few minutes I was done. I had picked my night wear, some undies, a pair of jeans, my yellow skirt and two tops. I hadn't picked any toiletries, I would make use of my mum's. Having packed all I needed, I joined Kool in the car.

As we drove, Kool did something surprising, he began praying. He just opened his mouth and prayed. I joined in with my Amen. He began by reverencing Gonad then went ahead to thank Him for his everlasting love for us. Kool got emotional as he expressed gratitude to Gonad for his love. In his words, he had said. 'Thank you Father for your stalking love, your persistent love and your unending love.' He continued along these lines. Then he thanked Gonad for the forgiveness of our sins and boldly obtained our forgiveness, as he acknowledged that we had erred. As he said this, he held my hands more firmly. I held his same way and muttered words of repentance. Then he thanked Gonad for protection for me and our baby. For respect for the moment, I didn't have the time to really process the word 'our baby'. Then he prayed for Yado, asking for strength to bear this pain and as he did, he spilled tears and choked on his

words, yet he prayed on. He mentioned that our marriage be restored miraculously. Here, he broke down and couldn't continue. My eyes filled with tears of their own, my heart heavy, I continued the prayer on Kool's behalf. I told Gonad to keep me strong, and to keep Yado for him, to help him overcome this trying times and to keep him intact. I said to Gonad that I couldn't bear to have Yado change because of this shameful act of mine. Then I prayed for Kool, I asked Gonad to help him rise above guilt and the feeling of condemnation. I prayed that his future will be as bright as he desired. Kool had found his voice now and had taken my place at the Amen stand. When I heard him say an Amen, I nudged him to continue with the prayers. He started thanking again and then rounded up the prayers. As I was about to open my eyes, he asked that Gonad help us move past each other, and grow to see ourselves as one in Shar, Gonad being our loving Father. I felt a sense of loss right there, but I knew it was the kind of loss that was for good.

When the prayer was over, I felt a sense of peace. It wasn't overwhelming, but it was worth it. I held on to it. I promised myself I won't let it go but would nurture it till it filled my heart completely, expelling shame, fear and guilt.

About two minutes after we were done praying, we got to the pharmacy. Kool went in alone. He came back shortly with some tablets. He said they were basic routine drugs for pregnant women. He mentioned B complex and folic acid. Before we continued to my parents', just about three minutes away from the pharmacy, Kool held my hands again. He told me to be strong, that all things worked together for our good, even this pregnancy. He made to touch my tummy, I tried to smile. He tried too. He let his hands rest on my tummy for a few minutes and then withdrew.

'I will miss you Liki, and I will always love you.' He also told me that it was best we stayed off communicating and try not to occupy the present with too much plans and thoughts of the future. I agreed and smiled through tears. I had been thinking of how I would cope without Yado and now without Kool too. However I knew what he said was right. Then we mutually accepted that the onus was on me to keep in touch. We didn't feel like parting, but we had to because time was strolling on. He started the car and drove, dropping me a pole away from my parents'. We hugged. We hugged again! Then he came out of the car and came over to help me out. I got out and walked straight to my parents' house. I wanted to look back, to steal a glance at him again but I didn't. I had to begin to learn how to move on. He was right about that.

Chapter Eleven

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When I left Liki in the hotel room that evening, I was certain I was done for good, but I only had to get to our home to realize I didn't want to leave her. Just this morning I had woken up to my Rennet, something I hadn't done in many mornings, Rennet reading for me was usually done during the course of my day. To think that in a way, Gonad was preparing my heart for this blow left me sadder. I had read from the book of Mosha and I had learnt about courage. I remembered the words 'Keep courage and embrace strength...!' Oh the more I remembered, the sadder I became. I hated that our All-knowing Gonad had to prepare me for something he could have averted. However, as I thought within myself, the answer came: Gonad's offer of freewill to us. His love doesn't force, he doesn't cage his own. He leaves us to choose, explore. However when we fall into wrong choices, he doesn't leave us still, he shows up with help, not judging or condemning, but restoring and healing. That was how Gonad related with all His heirs.

I knew this, I believed it and had shared it with others but at that moment, I couldn't take it. Not only was I feeling so much hurt from Liki's betrayal, I was beginning to feel abandoned by Gonad. I reasoned that if he truly had my back, he would have known that I couldn't handle this. His word rightly says he would not allow on us more than we can handle but what I had in my plate was way more than any could consume. I got so pissed and again I reasoned that if Gonad felt I could handle and accommodate this pungent mess, then it hurts to realize that he didn't so know me. I settled this in me angrily.

I was in my bedroom, our bedroom. I had been seated there for over an hour, not knowing what to do. I thought to leave the house, but I didn't know where to go. I felt like leaving the world, but I had work to do and I didn't know of any easy way to plot my exit. For a start, I had to be in the office the next day, the expansion project into the Upperlands was in full swing and I was the main man in charge, I had signed in for this just a week ago, during my official trip to Palado, a few towns away from Gara where we lived. I hadn't even shared the news with Liki. I had not told her that we would be leaving the country for the Upperlands, to have a better life. I had wanted to surprise her. I was waiting for the send forth party which was to be in a week's time. It no longer held as my spirit was too crushed for a party. I had planned an interesting surprise for her. I would call her up on the day of the party and ask her to come meet me in the office, saying there was an official document she needed to sign as my next

of kin. I would make her think that day was the deadline. I had pictured in my minds eyes how she would walk into the office and be shocked by cheers and laughter. Even as I recalled it all, I couldn't help but smile. I imagined her surprise, her shyness and her sweetness. Now, it would never be!

I got up from the chair I had been perching on, as I couldn't even sit relaxed. The whole room smelt of Liki and it choked me. I felt I was being attacked by soldier ants as I felt pricks all over my body. I managed to open my closet, I got more confused. I didn't know which particular clothes to take, not when I didn't even know where I was going or what I was doing. I reached out for my small suitcase that housed all my documents. Then I picked my suit bag and put in three shirts and two pairs of trouser. I saw a traveling bag at the corner of the wardrobe. I reached for it too. I realized it was empty. I was still wondering how it came about when I saw the inscription on it. On it was 'Pepene weds Fiti. Courtesy of Liki and Yado.' Then I remembered. It was a souvenir gift we made for a couple who got married in our Shalace. They hadn't been so buoyant financially thus I and Liki had supported them immensely. These kinds of gestures were typical of us. We always did find one course or the other to give to. We gave excitedly never expecting anything in return. It gave us such joy to give. I picked the bag and decided to make use of it to pack a few things. I didn't feel like carrying a suitcase. I picked a few wears and some under wears. I was in a confused state. I didn't know how to pack for a journey. The little I was able to put together was a far cry from what Liki would have come up with. I decided to make do with what I had packed. If I needed anything, I would simply buy it. I just had to leave. I couldn't stay in the house anymore. I was feeling like a tiny ant in the middle of a massive field of smoke. Suddenly, it felt like I couldn't breathe. I rushed out of the room with what I had gathered.

On getting to the sitting room, my mind didn't skip it this time around, it didn't. It recalled Liki's words, bringing to my memory the truth that Liki and her lover had made love there in our sitting room. I remembered everything at once, my action when she said it and the whole feeling came rushing back to me such that I even had an erection, but it didn't last. It fizzled out almost immediately. I broke out in a sweat, then broke down and began sobbing. I wanted to move but my legs couldn't carry me. I wanted more to escape from these nightmarish happenings but I didn't know just how at the moment. My knees knocked and I bent over on the floor. I cried. I felt different. My mind all jumbled up, my heart racing. It was as if I was in the hotel room again hearing Liki confess. Her voice grew louder in my ears, it filled the whole room. I began to shiver. This was obviously another panic attack.

Suddenly, I felt a presence around me and then I felt a tap on my shoulders. Then of its own accord, my heart stopped racing and I felt peace. Everything was sudden. I got up turned to see if there was someone at my back but I was alone. I had strength, it felt like the ordeal of the past few minutes was a mirage. So, I picked up my three bags; my small traveling bag, my laptop bag and my suit bag. As I stepped out of the house, I knew where to go, I would check into my company's guest house, stay there for the night or for as long as it took me to clear my head. I got into my car and drove off. I was still sad and hurt, but my heart was steady. I perceived I had just been saved from a heart attack and I knew I would be safe from all harm.

On arriving at the guest house, I settled in, took my bath for the night then stayed on my bed to sleep. My body felt weak, my mind too but my spirit was strengthened. The presence I had earlier on felt had definitely worked on me. Then I felt it again, this time I didn't bother to check around, I just knew it was there and I felt comforted. Then I remembered what I had read from the Rennet that morning. I remembered I had agreed to be strong and courageous however, I didn't know how that would play out in my life now but I knew for sure that I would be strong however I could.

My phone rang. I didn't want to answer to it but it rang a second time. I checked to see who it was. It was Liki's mum. I had in my sorrow forgotten to check up on her knowing she had been hospitalized. When I answered the call, she asked to know how I was and she spoke calmly and sweetly as was her manner. I told her I was OK then asked her about her welfare. She told me she was home as there was no need to stay back in the hospital. I asked her again if she was fine, she said she was. Then I kept mute, waiting for her to continue the conversation. She then asked about my where about and I told her. Then she told me to hold on for Liki's dad. When he came on line, we exchanged pleasantries, though coldly. He said he wanted to see me urgently and asked if he could come to the guest house. I told him I wouldn't want to put him through that stress that I would find a way to see him the next day. I made him know I was already in bed. He understood. After some minutes of silence, he thanked me and released me to continue my rest. I thanked him in return. Before he dropped, he chipped in that Liki was at their place, that he just felt I should know. When I didn't respond to that, he dropped the call. I put off my phone, rolled me over and set myself to sleep.

Chapter Twelve

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I got into my parents' house and walked straight to Beni's room. Mum and Dad were in the sitting room, I greeted them coldly before passing by. I let my gaze fix on my mum a bit and I noticed she looked well. In Beni's room, he smiled on seeing me and then got up to hug me. He looked into my eyes, but didn't say anything as he left the room. I sat on the bed, pulled myself in so my back could rest on the wall. The bulge of my tummy was beginning to show and I was beginning to feel pregnant. I felt foreign in my own skin. By my own calculations, I was in my ninth week and I thought it was too early for me to start showing. I was expecting my tummy to start being visible in my fifth month of pregnancy. When Beni returned to the room, he came with a cup of ice tea on a tray for me and Mum was with him. I wasn't surprised, I knew she had been itching to come see me from the moment I stepped into the house. Beni dropped the tray on the bed, kissed me on my forehead then left the room. Mum smiled lightly at him, patting him on the back. Beni was always sweet, he always seemed to have it all together. He hardly ever panicked. I remembered Zohi and asked of him from Mum and I was told he wasn't back from work. Zohi had a way of making me afraid. He was the exact opposite of his twin, in that he had zero tolerance for imperfections, for nonsense.

Mum found her way to the bed I was on. She held my hands and squeezed them. As she did, tears fell from her eyes. She gracefully wiped them away with the back of her other hand. I couldn't look at her, my heart was sad. Then she spoke. She told me my dad was furious with me but that she was unhappy but not angry. Mum had never been one given to anger, it's as though the ability to get furious was not wired into her. Dad on the other hand got easily angered. Zohi took after him here, impatient and temperamental. Beni and Mum were the same. In place of anger, they showed forth unusual strength and peace, even if it was coated with sadness, it was still easier to breathe around them in cases like this. The negative energy that Dad and Zohi always emitted whenever they were angry was never palatable, never!

Mum, still sitting beside me asked me how I was faring. She brought her hands to my eyes, pulling down my lower lids to see the color of my eyes. Then she turned my hands to see my palms. As she did, she placed her hands on my tummy and left it there. I just sat still sipping my ice tea. When she was done checking me out, she asked me to settle in for the night, that we would talk in the morning and then go see Dr Fitana. I asked her if dad would be involved in the

discussion and she said she did not know but would like to talk with me alone. My heart became heavy again but Kool's words in prayer passed by my ears, and it was followed by the peace we experienced after the prayers. I wanted more of it. It was the only thing that I craved for at the moment. I decided to find my way deeper in there before I retired to bed. Mum left after hugging me. I couldn't hug her back, I had a cup of tea in my hand and moreover, my heart was far away.

When Mum left, Beni came in. He picked some of his things as he intended to spend the night in the guest room. He thought I would feel more comfortable in his room and he was right. Before he left, he told me not to worry, that everything would be fine. Then he said something that shocked me, he said he would love to meet Kool. He didn't wait for my response before stepping out of the room. Not having the energy to begin to wonder why he wanted to see Kool, I got up, undressed and freshened up for sleep. I prayed thereafter. Again, like the other time, it was nothing like my normal, formal kind of prayer. It was informal and somehow, I felt bare. It was how I had been feeling for days, since the beginning of this phase of my life. I somehow didn't feel the need to approach Gonad with the normal protocols of thanksgiving and purification, I just went straight to pouring my heart to him. I told him to please help my dad calm down and also to help make the days ahead easy and bearable for me. I prayed for Yado too. With him, I just got stuck, so I simply prayed in the Spirit, I let my mind rest and just muttered words that came from my spirit. I prayed for Kool too, asking that this mistake does not become a stumbling block in his path, that his mind will be free of torments and condemnations. I prayed same for me too.

When I was done praying, I laid down to sleep. I picked up my phone and the urge to call Kool was stronger than the urge to call Yado. I struggled with it. I wanted so bad to call Kool but I knew I shouldn't so I didn't but then I cried. I cried because I missed him. However, this time around, my tears were not accompanied by the feeling of condemnation and regret rather, it was of pain from a love lost. That was it, and I didn't cry for long.

As I laid there in bed, I heard footsteps, then the door opened and Zohi walked in. He didn't even look towards me so I closed my eyes and pretended to be asleep. He opened a drawer and searched through. Eyes still closed, I listened. Then he closed it and walked towards the door. I could feel that he had walked back. I felt a presence over me, by my bed. I knew he was standing there. He was there for about two minutes, then the next thing I felt shocked me, I almost gasped, giving myself away. He had kissed my forehead, and walked out of

the room. As the door clicked to a close, I opened my eyes. Lost in thoughts, I knew he had no business coming into Beni's room, it was obvious he just wanted to see me. I was touched, then sad and I cried again! I asked myself how it was that I could cause my loved ones so much pain. When I had cried for a bit, I pulled the duvet over me and settled to sleep. I was exhausted from the day's frenzy so I knew finding sleep would be no issue.

My day flashed before my eyes and I took it all in. I saw how Mum had slumped, how we prayed she would be fine. I saw Yado sobbing before Zohi, I lingered there. I tried to move past it, but it kept coming back to me. I tried to imagine what Zohi must have been saying to him. My mind still on this picture, I still had flashes of the rest of the day, like the hotel room scene of Yado's strange behavior and the weird beastly love making. My left foot twitched at the thought of that. My ears suddenly began to itch me right inside. I grabbed the bobby pin in my hair, and helped my ear. I always kept a bobby pin in my hair handy for itchy scalp. My mind went back to taking in my day and fear fell on me, wrapping me. I panicked as sweat broke out all over my body. However, there was a funny feeling somewhere in my heart, a peaceful one though, like an assurance that I would be fine. There was no reason to believe this, but the feeling stayed inside. It stayed! Slowly, I began to become calmer. I didn't know when I slept off until I woke up in the early hours of the morning to ease myself. When I laid back on my bed, I picked up my phone by default to see if I had any messages. I was dazed at the one I saw. It was from Yado. It read, 'I will be coming to the house to see your dad tomorrow, just thought you should know.' Immediately, I tried to call him. It was 3.55am by the time and the message had come in five minutes before then. However, he didn't pick. I was certain he was awake and had seen the call but chose to ignore it. I called two more times, but I was still ignored. So, I replied saying 'Ok, noted. How are you?' I wanted to put in a line of apology for my betrayal but I thought against it. I didn't expect a response from him so I put away my phone to go back to sleep. It hurt though that I hadn't still had the opportunity to really apologize. However deep down, I didn't see the possibility of me apologizing my way out of the mess that was on ground. When I woke up in the morning, among many other messages, I saw a message from Kool, none from Yado. Kool was checking up on me, saying he couldn't hold up any more without keeping in touch with me.

Chapter Thirteen

Dr Fitana was excited to see us. I greeted him warmly. We had arrived at the hospital very early so we could finish on time and return home before Yado arrived to see my Dad. I didn't yet know how the meeting would play out though. I also thought about my own personal meeting with him, we had not spoken since he heard of my misconduct. When Dr Fitana returned to his office from attending to other necessities, he asked about Mum's welfare. Mum responded that she was very fine, however, he still advised her to take things easy and rest. He also encouraged her not to skip her medications. Then he turned to me, smiling. He asked of Yado and I told him I hoped he was fine. He smiled again without saying anything. His smile was unreal, kind of burdened, but it was sincere. Then he asked that I go to the corner of his office where he had the examination table. I laid on it and he got on his job. He spoke to me as he worked, showing me the foetus. I cringed! He noticed and paused to ask if I was OK. I told him I was, that I was just in a state, one I couldn't even explain. He smiled as though he understood. He continued intimating me with more information. He asked if I was ready to know the sex of the baby. I became surprised, I was wondering if it wasn't too early to know that. I was only about 9 weeks gone. I voiced my concern. He disagreed by telling me I was twenty weeks gone. I laughed hysterically. I didn't think it was possible. I wanted to refute but he asked that I relaxed and hold on. He cleaned up the Ultrasound gel off my tummy and led me back into his main office.

Mum saw the puzzled look on my face and the same became of her face. Dr Fitana now seated, asked me to go ahead to say what I wanted to say. I told him I didn't understand how I could be 20 weeks gone when I hadn't missed my period until 2 months back. He laughed and said it wasn't a strange occurrence. He explained that in some cases women bleed during the early stages of pregnancy. He asked me if I was still noticing any traces of blood, and I said no. Also, he told me that I should expect that my tummy becomes very visible within the next two weeks. Mum saw that I was panicking again so she held my hand. A lot was going on in my mind. I was not happy or sad, I was indifferent. I thought of Yado, I didn't even know what the future would be for both of us. I also couldn't imagine living with him, watching me go through the stages of a pregnancy that he wasn't responsible for. I was jolted back to the present when Dr Fitana asked if I had started taking any medications. I told him I hadn't though I had some. Mum asked how I got them. I couldn't lie, there was no need to and more over my head couldn't fabricate any more lies. I told her Kool had got them for me. I had mentioned the name so casually not minding that the

name was not supposed to be uttered, since it was like a taboo. Mum asked who he was. Without saying anything, I placed my hands on my tummy and shrugged my shoulders. They both got the message and kept mute. Dr Fitana asked to see the drugs, they were in my bag, I had dropped them in there and hadn't taken any. He inspected them and said they were good. He prescribed some more and asked that I picked them from the hospital pharmacy.

Mum just sat put looking at me. She seemed dazed. I was too. I remembered how mum had waited for the good news of my pregnancy, though she never bothered me or got anxious around me. Now, here I was pregnant but the circumstances surrounding it were just disheartening. There had not been any inclination that I would cheat on Yado. I still couldn't reconcile the fact that I kept myself before marriage for Yado and couldn't keep myself for him alone after marriage. Dr Fitana had to attend to other patients so we had to leave. We had been with him for about forty minutes. As we stood to leave, he told Mum he would send in the bill when the month ended. Our family was on a monthly payment plan, courtesy of the company that employed my Daddy. I noticed that Mum looked really tired so I volunteered to drive, she agreed and on our way, we stopped by at the pharmacy to get the medication.

As we drove home, she looked at the scan results with the roof light of the car. She asked if I knew the sex of the baby, I told her I hadn't asked. She then told me. I was carrying a boy. It bothered me that I still couldn't find a reason, a simple reason to rejoice about this pregnancy. I had expected that by this time, I would have gotten to the point of getting excited at the thought of becoming a mother. Mum began telling me how first pregnancies were. She said a woman's stomach was usually smaller in her first pregnancy than in the others. This was no new information to me, and she knew. I was sure she was just trying to hold a conversation. Staying silent made her think too much. However, I felt like changing the topic as I didn't feel like hearing any pregnancy stories so I asked her why she still hadn't showed any atom of disappointment about my mess and why she didn't seem to be angry with me. She responded, reminding me that it was only the previous day that we had broken the news to them and that it obviously hadn't gone down well with her seeing that she ended up in the hospital, so she said she had made up her mind to allow dad do all the venting. Then turning to face me, she added that she really still couldn't believe I slept with another man saying that somehow, it had not yet registered in her mind and that maybe she would react appropriately when finally it dawned on her. I couldn't believe my ears. I didn't like what they were hearing. Mum was living in denial. I got worried. I prayed it wouldn't affect her health in any way.

She started talking again. She told me to be calm as I could be when I got to meet with Dad. She also said I should get myself prepared for the worse as regards Yado's reactions and decisions. She said she foresaw my Dad asking me to leave his house and also foresaw Yado giving me a divorce.

I panicked, my heart skipped. I had to pull myself together because I was behind the steering. Fortunately for us, we were almost home. I began muttering words to myself under my breath, I was praying. I needed to calm down and that was the only thing that came to mind. I felt so weak, so ashamed of myself. I constantly felt so anyway, since the pregnancy. However this time around, the thought of facing Yado and my dad left me worse than ever. Tears found their way down my cheeks, sipping into my mouth. As I navigated into our drive way, I saw Yado's car. Mum saw it too. She held my arms, and patted them. I didn't respond in any way, I just drove. I made up my mind that I would be strong for my mum and myself. I would cooperate with Yado and my dad as much as I could. Not like I even had a choice!

We got into the compound and were finding our way out of the car. I felt pairs of eyes ravaging my body. I followed my instincts and looked up at the balcony, Yado and dad stared. I could feel their hurt and anger. I stared from one person to another and then walked into the house, Mum following behind me.

Chapter Fourteen

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As I saw her coming into the house, I was shocked to see she was already showing. She was visibly pregnant, wearing a black sleeveless tank top and a yellow skirt, just a bit above her knees. She looked as gorgeous as ever however, I couldn't dwell on it. I hadn't been able to think about her beauty or any other virtue since I found out. To me now, she looked evil, she looked wicked. I had tried to find a reason for this phase of my life but I had not found any. Nothing was adding up. Since Friday, I had been a faint shadow of myself and had spent most of my nights thinking, as sleep couldn't penetrate me.

I was due for my relocation to the Upperlands in two days so I had to come up with a decision. I had decided to latch on to this new job experience and exposure as a means to move on with my life. I couldn't bring myself to do what Uncle Dawani had asked of me. I couldn't forgive Liki. I hope I eventually would, but I just couldn't at the moment. He had asked me to forgive her and not leave her, saying that was the Sharant thing to do. I knew it was but I simply didn't have the emotional strength to follow through. I hadn't yet gone to see our Reverendo, but I knew I also wouldn't take his counsel which would surely be same as Uncle Dawani's.

I hadn't told anyone else. I couldn't. Telling anyone about it was part of my pain. I felt too ashamed to. The surge of anger rose up stronger within me at these thoughts. I couldn't remove from my mind that by cheating on me, Liki had disrespected all that I stood for and even all her family stood for. Oh, I felt like puking. I felt irritated. At this point, images filled my mind. I tried to picture her undress before Kool, and I couldn't go there. I turned my back on that movie with disgust. My mind was made up though. I had talked with her dad and he'd asked me when I wanted to begin the divorce proceedings. I was not surprised at his bluntness as I had always known him to be a very practical man. I told him I didn't know, that I hadn't thought about that but that I knew for sure that I couldn't live with her anymore, I couldn't cope with her life in mine. Then he asked me if I had told our Reverendo. My response was in the negative. So, I knew I had to find time between that day, Saturday and the next day, Sunday since I was set to travel on Monday. I could delay my journey for another two days but I didn't want to. It felt as if staying any extra day would kill me. I knew I was running, but I didn't care. It was all I could do to maintain my sanity. I had to see Reverendo Ralani so I decided I would see him the next day after service. I wouldn't attend service because I couldn't. If I did, I would

have to go with Liki, it was the norm. If I didn't go with her, friends would ask about her. I was in no mood to talk about her to anyone given that my feelings were not easily hidden. Moreover, I imagined how possible it was for me to sit in Shalace, as though everything was alright. I wished I could. I wished I was stronger than I was feeling. I concluded I would stay away from Shalace and visit Reverendo in the evening.

Liki's mum walked into the balcony where we were. I guess she'd expected her husband to have called her up upon returning from the Hospital with Liki but since he hadn't she came up. As I sat lost in my thoughts, it was obvious he had been so lost too. I greeted Liki's mum, standing up to hug her. She held me in her embrace, longer than usual. Her heart tried to speak to me, mine longed to hear her but somewhere along the line there was a breach, so I withdrew. She released me as she tried to hold back from crying. I looked into her eyes and smiled sadly, then hugged her again, I couldn't have not! This time, she broke down in tears. I didn't know what to do. Then Liki's dad got up and I excused him, he took his wife in his embrace and comforted her as she wailed.

Liki came in hastily, followed by Zohi. They obviously must have been alerted by their mother's cry. Our eyes met, Liki and I, but we couldn't sustain our gaze more than a second. Zohi having taken in the scenario, left. Liki stood confused, not knowing whether to stay or leave. I knew what to do, I chose to leave. Gently, I made my way past all three of them and walked into the house to find my way out. I met Beni in the Sitting room downstairs and we hugged. Zohi sat still where he was and just nodded his head to acknowledge he could see me. I went to him anyways and he stood up as I approached him. We hugged and he couldn't seem to look me in the eye. I could sense he was consumed by sadness.

It was one awkward moment for us all. I could feel the tension and pain in the air. I feared for them, for us all. We had been one big family, they had been my siblings. I could still hear Liki's mum sobbing upstairs and I wondered where Liki herself was. Just then, she walked in on us and as our eyes met again she made to go back but then changed her mind. She found a seat instead and made herself comfortable. Immediately, Zohi stood up and left angrily, Beni calmly left. Liki and I were left alone. I understood that Beni followed his brother out to afford us some privacy, but Zohi obviously hadn't cared about that. He was just plain angry.

I didn't plan to speak with Liki, so by reflex, I was about to leave but somehow I stayed back as I sat, perched on the edge of the two seater sofa opposite her. She looked at me then dropped her gaze. I was at a loss for words at first and

was losing my resolve when a look at her tummy sent anger waves down my spine. My mouth found its strength and I spoke. I hinted her that I would be leaving her, that I had failed her because I didn't think I could forgive her. I let her know it was over between us and that though I hadn't thought about the legal implications, I was ready for anything. I begged her not to call me. Now, I was fuming silently. I told her I hated her for what she'd done and that when I could I would forgive her. She tried to talk but I shut her up harshly. She trembled, I spat on, telling her how less of a man she'd made me feel. Then I stood up and told her I had to see Reverendo Ralani the next day. She gasped, she paled. I was touched again in a way but I hardened up. I realized she didn't realize that there was that to consider. Then I told her I was leaving for the UL the day after the next, Monday. She looked at me puzzled. I told her I was now in charge of the new project over there and told her a few more details. Then she found her voice and asked me if it meant I was relocating there. I replied her in the affirmative. She asked to know what would become of her. I stared at her speechlessly. Now all the anger had suddenly left me as she looked so fragile. I still loved her. I wish she had not messed up this bad as I would have told her that the plan was to have her join me in UL in some months' time, however, I couldn't seem to get the horrors of the past two days out of my head, how it had made me believe I no more loved her. Emotions leading me to forgive her were beginning to be stirred in me but then as she stood to come closer to me, I saw her again as she was. I saw her beautiful tummy and the realization that it was another's took over me but since I deeply longed to hold her in my arms one more time, I stepped closer to her as she got to me. I hugged her as she cried begging me not to leave her. I allowed my tears find their freedom, but my voice lost his at theirs. We stayed locked in each other's embrace for some minutes until reality hit me. I wanted to stay in her embrace for as long as I could, but I couldn't. I kissed her forehead and told her to allow me go. I added that should my heart heal, I would come back to her. Thus I left her sobbing uncontrollably while I walked away sadly.

The next evening, as I drove into Reverendo Ralani's beautiful compound, I was greeted by the happy voices of their children. Reverendo Ralani and I were about the same age, he was older with only a few years, at most four. It was however difficult to relate with him as a peer because of the many responsibilities he shoulders as a result of his office. How true it is that responsibilities have a way of imposing on one a certain disposition. His counsels were always sound, his heart very accommodating. I knew spilling on him what I was about to spill on him would mess him up but then being a Reverendo, he

would not be totally unfamiliar with cases like this, ones that could drain all the blood in any human.

I parked my car and came out. I was ushered in by their gateman. He knew me, so he asked of Liki calling her Madam. I just nodded awkwardly and entered into the house. I sat all by myself for some minutes before Reverendo Ralani joined me, accompanied by his wife. They greeted me warmly but a bit apprehensively. I knew what it was, they wondered about Liki's absence. Liki and I were almost always together moreover we had been absent from Shalace that day. When they asked about her, told them it was on that ground I came to see them. Reverendo Ralani immediately found his place by me on the sofa while his wife quietly left us. I told him everything. I told him about my decision. He sat silent for quite a while then began asking me some questions. He basically wanted to know if I had pushed Liki into this abomination. I would have been upset had the question come from someone else but I wasn't because I knew his intentions were right. I calmly told him that I didn't think I had been the cause of her misconduct. He then asked me how often I cared for her sexual needs. I made it clear to him that I never denied her in that light and also emphasized that I did not deny her any other thing she wanted. He let me know he wasn't trying to make excuses for her that he only wanted to be sure. As his manner is, he didn't coerce me to change my decision. He clearly declared his disapproval of it and didn't try to talk me out of it. He'd said he felt I knew the right thing but wasn't ready to do it. I didn't care. I had my job to go attend to. On that, he congratulated me.

After a little pause, he wanted to call Liki to come over to his house right away but he had a rethink saying he would see her soon. I still didn't care and he knew I didn't. At this point, I felt like leaving since we were done talking. I didn't feel like sitting back to interact with the children as I normally would as this particular visit was different and also I was becoming uneasy because of the way Reverendo Ralani seemed calm. He just sat staring into thin air. I was expecting him to be disappointed. I also expected him to ask me to forgive Liki but he didn't do any of those so I made it clear that I wanted to leave. He nodded but requested that I sit with him for another ten minutes. He called for drinks and nuts, he knew I liked nuts. We sat in silence as we sipped and chewed. He didn't say anything. From time to time, he would look at me, smile and then continue sipping and chewing. I didn't know how, but I found myself relaxing. Ten minutes elapsed and he got up to walk me out. I still sat while he was already standing, waiting for me. When I eventually reluctantly stood up, we hugged and then he said 'Gonad loves you, and I try to, too.' That got to me and I laughed. We both

laughed. I felt light. I couldn't explain it but I knew it was something about his presence. Now, I didn't want to leave but I had to. I was glad I went to see him.

Entering my car, him standing by my door, he dropped another word. He told me to go to the UL and heal. I didn't understand those words and I wasn't interested. I started and turned on the ignition. I waved then left. I was headed for my uncle's. Seeing him before travelling was a must. He was my closest family. After my parents died in a plane crash when I was 14, he became my guardian. I had other relatives though we weren't intimate. Uncle Dawani on the other hand, didn't marry. We lived together. He had been overjoyed when I met Liki. He was particularly grateful that she had wonderful parents who later became mine. This was why he asked me to tread carefully and not be too rash with my decisions, so I don't hurt Liki's parents.

Chapter Fifteen

* * * *

When I heard Yado drive off, I packed my wearied self into my room, Beni's room and locked myself in. I cried big. I screamed. I didn't care. I had no more reservations. All attempt to get me to open the door was futile, I didn't want to ever face anyone again, no one in the whole world. After a while, it took my dad to get me to open the door. I couldn't disrespect him by ignoring him coupled with the fact that he'd virtually ignored me since he got wind of my abominable act.

On entering the room, he closed the door behind him. I had returned to the bed where I had been manifesting in tears. He sat on a wooden chair in the room. Now that we were finally looking at each other, I wasn't afraid anymore. I was ready to swallow any hard words he would dish at me, as far as I was concerned, I had had it all.

I had never thought Yado and I would part ways, it had been as if nothing could separate us. Given that I was the genesis of this whole saga, I still didn't see our separation coming. This was too much a shock for me. Dad sat still just looking at me. We didn't say a word to each other. We had sat quiet for about ten minutes before he asked me how I was. I was too weak to talk so I just sighed. He saw I was weak, that was an obvious fact and his next move proved so. He got out of the room to return with a bottle of cold water and some pieces of fried chicken. Now, he sat by me on the bed. He put the opened bottle of water to my lips, I opened up and drank. I almost emptied the bottle with a few gulps. Then he began shredding the chicken and feeding me with it. He fed his 33 years old daughter like she was a baby. I ate, finished all and asked for more. I had not had anything since breakfast and it was now about 9pm. When I was done eating, he made me to lie down on Beni's brown bed while he resumed his position on the chair.

Spontaneously, I told him I was sorry, that I didn't mean to bring such pain upon the family. He nodded but said nothing. I didn't know what else to say, so I kept quiet. We sat together in silence until he dozed off. When it was time for me to sleep, I called on him to arouse him and asked him to go to his room. He asked me again if I was OK, I said I was. He told me he would talk with me the next day then left the room after pecking me on my cheek. I eagerly awaited our time together, the earlier we got it over with, the better.

The next day, when we met to discuss, mum inclusive, dad surprisingly didn't say much. He said he was so disappointed he had decided to handle the matter lightly to avert further damage. He said I was an adult and he had expected me to know better but obviously I hadn't and that he only hoped I had not completely ruined my future. He fought tears as he spoke. He further said I was his only daughter and first child so it would be difficult to reject me no matter what. Here I found tears running down my cheeks and mum had some on her cheeks too. He paused and waved his hands in surrender as though to say he couldn't go on. Then he asked me to tell them about Kool.

Reluctantly, seeing there was nothing else to hide, I told them how we met and how things got out of hand. They asked to meet with him. I also told them I wanted to go back to my house, telling them I couldn't live with them any more than I already had. They both objected but I insisted. I needed to face life on my own and weigh all my options. I had my life to go back to, businesses to attend to. They eventually agreed but convinced me to stay with them for some extra days.

Then I brought up Zohi's case. He still had not spoken to me in any way, and he had withdrawn from everyone else. I guess he didn't understand why no one seemed to be angry with me. I shared this concern with them, they promised to look into it. They however pointed that he was entitled to feel however he wanted to feel and that moreover not everyone handled hurt the same way. Since I had some extra days to spend in the house, I decided that I would find a way to talk with him. Before we ended our time together, I called Kool on the phone in front of my parents and told him they asked to see him. He freaked out and refused to see them. He said he couldn't face them so I told them so. They didn't like that he refused to see them but there was nothing they could do. Thus, we ended our discussion that day. We didn't sit back to chat. Somehow, Mum and Dad would have loved to too, but I was not in the mood for that.

Later in the evening, Kool called me back to find out if his refusal had caused any troubles. I told him it hadn't and he apologized again. Then I told him we needed to see, that I had missed him. He said same and asked about Yado. I told him I couldn't talk about that on the phone that I would let him know when I got back to the house so we could talk.

That same day, Reverendo Ralani had called to see me. When I saw the call, I didn't want to take it but on a second thought I did because I knew him, he would keep calling till I picked. He asked me where I was and said he needed to see me. I told him he could come to my parents'. He knew his way there. He'd

been there before when they celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary about four years back. When he arrived to see me, he gave me a warm hug and smiled sadly at the sight of my protruding stomach. We sat to talk and he told me Yado had told him everything. He asked me what my plans were and I told him I had none at the moment except to go back to my home. He tried to object too but I let him know that it was a done deal. Then he asked about Kool. I told him the bit I could about him. He asked if I ever loved him and I said yes, though I was sure I didn't anymore. He looked at me as though he didn't believe me, and I realized I didn't believe myself either. I smiled sadly and he did too. He told me I had misbehaved and that he was not in any way pleased with me. He asked me to promise him I would have nothing more to do with Kool and I did. It was what I even wanted, Kool too. We knew we had to stop loving each other.

Reverendo Ralani encouraged me to stand against this temptation that was seeking to destroy my home. I shook my head sadly and told him I felt it was already too late to stand against it seeing that my home had already been ravaged and damaged. He said I still had hope, that it hadn't been damaged beyond remedy. When I didn't seem convinced, he asked me to always pray for Yado. Then I asked him when Yado planned to leave the country and he told me he was on his way already. I was shocked. I didn't know he was leaving so soon. We had spoken on Saturday and barely two days after, he was gone. I was hurt and saddened by the fact that Yado didn't even think to give me the full details surrounding his relocation but then, I knew I couldn't blame him. Reverendo Ralani seemed to read my thoughts so he encouraged me telling me that Yado was hurt beyond words and needed all the love, affection and patience he could get from me. He made me know I had no right to fault him for any action he'd taken. I agreed and nodded to show so. I told him to inform me whenever Yado contacted him because I sensed he would refuse to keep in touch with me. He agreed then made to leave. He prayed for me and Yado, then for my child too. He encouraged me not to stay far from him that I should feel free to call him whenever I needed to. He then asked to see my parents. When they came downstairs, they exchanged pleasantries and he prayed with them too asking Gonad to strengthen them and give them the grace for whatever laid ahead.

When Reverendo Ralani left, I started having a stronger desire to go back to my house. I had planned to leave in two days but I changed my mind and decided to leave the next day. I had one more thing to fix before leaving, I had to talk to Zohi. I went in search of him and found him at the green house, reading a book. As he saw me coming, he got up and was about to walk past me when I told him I had come to see him. He stayed put but couldn't look at me despite the fact

that he was way bigger and taller than I was. He is big for a 23 years old chap. No one would imagine that I am 10 years older and it didn't even feel that way, we found a way to relate as peers. I loved my brothers indescribably and I knew they loved me so too. Looking at Zohi now, I saw raw pain in his eyes. I asked if I could hug him and though he hesitated for a while, he walked into my arms. Since I was way smaller, it would be more appropriate to say he embraced me. We were together in the embrace for about a minute before I asked him to sit so we could talk. I started by apologizing to him for my misconduct. I told him I was sorry for bringing such magnitude of pain and shame upon them. He asked to speak so I allowed him. He asked me how I had allowed this to happen telling me how he had always bragged about Yado and I to his friends. He said he had always prided in me that I kept myself a virgin till marriage. He further said that what hurt him the most was the way I hurt Yado saying Yado didn't deserve how I treated him, that he was a good man. Looking away from me, he added that I had made him lose faith in love. At this point, I was in tears and his eyes were moist as he's voice shook. He said if he'd trusted me so much and yet I could behave so untowardly, he didn't think he could trust any woman or anyone anymore. I was dumbfounded. I saw the gravity of my mess in another light. For lack of what to say to defend myself, I just kept apologizing. I begged him tearfully to forgive me. He calmly told me that he had already but that he needed to forget and move on but didn't think he could. He said he felt like he was stuck and said he was afraid as everyone now seemed to him like a potential Judas. I was scared now. I was hoping I had not pushed Zohi into having a psychological problem. I was afraid to admit he might need professional help.

I managed to hold his hands and asked him to look into my eyes, he did after many failed attempts but I was patient with him. When he did, I told him that he should keep calm that he would be fine and that I loved him with everything in me. He smiled sadly, thanked me then said he loved me too. He looked to my tummy and asked how I was. I told him I was OK but needed to rest. I also told him I was returning to my house the next day. He promised to visit me often. I smiled and thanked him. We walked back inside the house together and headed for my parents room. I told them all Zohi said and they urged him to confirm all I said, he did. Shocked as they were, their heart went out to him. They asked that I go call Beni. Beni clearly wasn't surprised. He said he'd known but followed Zohi's wish to not say anything to anyone.

We sat together on my parents' bed and talked. Mum said we all had to be strong for each other and that she wished Yado would come back to us but it was not in our capacity to demand that of him. She reminded us that we had

each other and we could forge ahead together in unity. Daddy concluded by suggesting that we ate out for dinner. We all agreed though not with so much excitement as our hearts were all heavy, we only just tried to be strong. I guess we had no choice.

Chapter Sixteen

It's three months since Yado relocated and since I returned to our home. Here is how my life has been.

About my career, I couldn't cope so I got hands on board to assist me while I was involved minimally from the house. The turmoil of my heart was enough work and it made my career suffer. I lost some money, but I was grateful I didn't lose all.

On Shalace grounds, Reverendo Ralani didn't allow me stay out of Shalace. He and his wife tried so well to keep my dirty linens inside. No one knew I was carrying another man's child, they all thought it was Yado's. They were happy for us. Most of them expressed their concerns over my having to be by myself at this period. They concluded by saying it was however for good. I usually just laughed along with them making sure I wasn't giving myself away in any way. They always asked me to extend their greetings to Yado. Reverendo Ralani however, made me know that when the time was right, he would have to let members of our Shalace know the truth, not so that I would be disgraced, but so that we won't be living a lie. I agreed and thanked him for the way he'd handled it thus far. He said I had to thank Yado too, because he had not disclosed to any of his friends. Whenever they called him to congratulate him or communicated with him on social media, he just played along. I tried to imagine how that must have made him feel.

On Yado, I hadn't spoken to him since he relocated. He wasn't taking my calls and I didn't want to call him with an unknown number. I wanted him to want to speak to me of his own accord. I respected his choice to stay away from me and no matter how much I missed him, how many nights I cried myself to sleep because of him, I could only wait and hope that he would have me back. On one occasion though, he replied my text message. I asked how he was doing and he said he was faring well and that I didn't need to bother about him saying I could find out whatever I needed to know about him from Reverendo Ralani. He had however called my parents once. He'd told them he was fine and that they could reach him freely. Though he didn't call them again, they kept in touch by calling him.

Staying in the house alone without Yado was hellish. He'd been my friend for over eight years and we had never leaved apart. Some nights I stayed up praying. Sometimes I faulted Gonad and cried out to Him in anger accusing Him of being responsible for my mess. I always reasoned that if I had had my children at the right time, I wouldn't have been in this disreputable condition.

Each day I looked forward to hearing from Yado but my desires were never actualized. I went on social media, I stalked him. Once I saw a picture of him with a lady and I crumbled, though there was nothing suggestive about the picture, it got my mind wandering. I wondered if Yado had not started seeing someone else since he had consistently mentioned to Reverendo Ralani that he wasn't coming back to me. Each time I heard this, I fell into the darkness of guilt and regrets and though I always struggled to come out, each plunge took a toll on me.

Now that aside, I also felt bad because I didn't feel completely happy about the pregnancy as I would have loved to. Each time my baby kicked, I tried to bond, but I couldn't. I felt bad for him but I was helpless. I couldn't love him. There was so much bile in my heart.

Once, Yado's uncle had visited me. In encouraging me, he told me to hold on that he was certain Yado would cool off and return to me. He said what we shared was unbreakable that it could be tried like it was currently being tried but that it would not be broken. Though I didn't see any truth in his words, I pretended I did just to give him hope. He wanted so bad to see us work. I wanted it more than everything else.

On Kool, he was never away. We couldn't stay apart. It was funny how I longed for Yado even when I was with Kool, but it didn't stop me from wanting Kool around. He eventually found the courage to see my parents and tendered his apologies extensively. They had no option but to accept it. In the process he'd met Beni and Zohi. He said they had been indifferent towards him and that it made him feel quite uncomfortable. I laughed at him asking him if he had expected a warm hug or a pat on the back.

We always laughed easily. He visited me on an average of thrice a week. He helped me around the house and took care of me. I never felt I was breaking my promise to Reverendo Ralani until the day Kool I and made love again. Oh, I felt so terrible afterwards. Kool had come to visit as usual and we were having our usual time of playing, chatting and just talking together when one thing led to the other and in a twinkling of an eye, we found ourselves overwhelmed with urges that overpowered us so much that we gave in. When we were done, we could hardly face each other. We realized we hadn't gotten over each other sexually. We actually thought we had until we failed again. We knew it would be hard to stay apart, but we decided that we would, we just had to do the right thing. It was going to be difficult, but we knew we had to try. He knew I wanted Yado back and he wanted that for me too. That day, he stayed the night in my

house and I slept in his arms. When I woke up in the morning, he was gone. He called later to say he knew that was the best thing for me, he knew how messed up I would be if I had to watch him go. I knew he was right and though I cried much when I realized he'd gone, it was a far cry from what would have been had I been awake when he left. After this time, we put a limit to our phone communications too, as much as we could because since it's constant communication that fosters the bond between two hearts, it would take deliberate acts of non-communication to sever the bond. However, whenever he called, he took his time to find out how I was doing, checked if I was taking my medications and if I was eating well. We both were trying to move on, to cut off from each other. I encouraged him to try to date other girls but it was hard for him. He kept comparing them to me while I kept nudging him to keep searching. Whenever we needed to see, we met outdoors, either at an eatery or we just drove around town. When I am on my own, sometimes for days, I coped between missing Yado and missing Kool, spending most of my time regretting and wishing.

One of the days Kool and I and drove round town, he informed me his mum was in town and had desired to see me. I couldn't respond for a while. I didn't know whether to see her or not. Then I came to terms with the fact that no matter how much I tried to ignore the truth, it was still breathing, the pregnancy I was carrying was his and he was entitled to it as much as I was. We had never discussed how the child would be raised, nor approached the topic. I decided it was time to begin to step into my new reality, so I told him I would see his mum. She had come for a function and decided to see me. She lived in Gara, another state in Winidi just about 3 hours from Mutaya where we lived. According to Kool, she wasn't insisting on seeing me, rather she was requesting.

When we met, she hugged me and didn't want to let go. When she released me, I saw tears in her eyes. I was surprised, wondering what it was. What she said next helped me understand why she had tears in her eyes. She said she was putting herself in my shoes and was trying to imagine what I was going through. I simply smiled since I didn't know what to say. Then she handed me the bag of fruits she had brought with her.

On our way to my house, as Kool had to drop me off, she told me to be strong, that she would uphold me in her prayers, and talk about me to her prayer partners. I believed her, I felt her and liked her. I didn't so care about her prayer partners, neither did I feel like I needed her prayers, I just liked the person of Kool's mum and I liked her spirit.

The next day, I went with them to the park and it was surprisingly difficult to say good bye. I didn't see it coming, giving that I had not spent more than an hour with her throughout her entire stay in Mutaya. Had I seen it coming, I probably would have stayed home as I wasn't so great at saying goodbyes. Well, since she had to leave, the bus being full and set to take off, we hugged. She said a short prayer for me and my baby, praying that the remaining two months of the pregnancy will be better than the months gone by. We chorused an Amen then she hurriedly went to take her seat in the bus. Almost immediately after she sat, the bus took off.

We left the park to my house. Kool left immediately to his house though since it was a Saturday, we still virtually spent the entire day together talking on the phone and chatting on the Hub messenger. We played online games together too and I won him in most of the games. Sometimes we completely stayed without any form of communication for weeks and other times, we just flowed. Kool was there for me. He was strong and never wanted to see me worried. He made missing Yado bearable.

On my family, Mum had a new hobby, fantasizing about my son, her grandson. Either she was looking for names for him or she was shopping for him. She had picked many names for him but the one I preferred the most was Phuda, meaning Mighty. I hadn't found a name for him as I hadn't been able to make up my mind on any. The real thing though was that I wasn't still happy deep down so I lacked inspiration. I was grateful Mum had enough of that and as the day for my delivery drew near, her excitement increased.

There were a few times too that she was not so excited, times when she worried about me and what my future would be. Sometimes, she would tell me to start preparing my mind to be a single mum, fearing that Yado may never return to me and then other times she would tell me not to give up on my marriage. My response to her was always the same, which was that I didn't know anything about the future and that I was not ready to bother about that. I told her I was content with living one day at a time. It was easy for me to do that because I didn't even have the power to worry. Her objection was always same too, which was that it was good we planned ahead of time so we don't get swamped. When she became overbearing, I usually would just pretend to see reasons with her, however whenever I was on my own, I maintained my stand refusing to analyze the future. I kept remembering the prayer Kool and I had months back. We had asked for grace not to worry about the future, believing that everything would be fine. I battled anxiety and fear with this memory.

About my dad, he continued life as though everything was OK. He was excited about his grandson though he didn't often show it and even when he did, he wasn't animated in his expressions. He once told me by passing that if Yado didn't take me back after two years that I would have to move on. He feared that if I waited for too long, I may get stuck in the rubbles of single parenting. Talks down this line always left me gloomy, I tried to avoid them. After a while, Mum and Dad discovered this too so they avoided discussing such with me. I preferred to live as though all was well and so I lived. Whenever friends tried to make us talk, we just told them that Yado would soon be back, most of them were actually my mum's friends. Most of my friends lived out of town so we only communicated over the phone or on social media. The ones that knew I was pregnant just assumed it was Yado's. Neighbors didn't need any explanations from us. When they stared at me inquisitively, I just smiled and carried on. Our neighborhood was a private one though, so people hardly meddled and gossiped. This whole period taught me how to live one day at a time and I was getting used to it.

Chapter Seventeen

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It's been three months since I left for Sky Land, UL. Three months since another chapter of my life opened up, but like it's typical of chapters, they hardly stand alone. There is always one reason or the other to refer to the previous chapter. This was my case. It seemed like I had moved on, but then it was like I hadn't. It felt like I was stuck.

On the work front, things were great. Working in the UL was a dream come through. The different cultures, different governmental policies made it a lot better compared to working in Mutaya, Winidi. In Sky Land, I worked four days a week. I had Fridays off, so I had long weekends, this I wasn't so excited about in any way. I had never been able to handle too much free time except when I was with loved ones, and even then, I still missed work. My first weekend was hell. Since I was new in town, not having made acquaintances, I hired a driver to take me to the important places around town. I asked him to feel free to talk with me and to be my tour guide. He was excited to do this, because I had offered to give him some extra money. I didn't think I needed to get a professional tour guide and I was right. Johand did a good job. Thus, he became my chauffeur. I called on him the next day and the day after and because of the way we got along, he invited me to worship with him in his Shalace, House of All. I went there but didn't go after my first visit. The service was great, awesome ambience and lovely content but the only challenge was that it reminded me of Liki as it reminded me of our Shalace in Mutaya and because I didn't need anything that would remind me of her, I never went back. Johand didn't understand why I refrained from revisiting because after my first visit, I had told him I loved the service. However, I told him I would let him know my reasons in the fullness of time.

One day, as I sat in my apartment watching TV, I got wind of an Old People's Home that was in need of volunteers. Immediately I saw it, it resonated with my spirit. I knew then that my boring weekends were over so I called uncle Dawani and shared my excitement with him. He was happy too but didn't fail to tell me that I couldn't use this to shade myself from what I was passing through. He tried to convince me to stop running, voicing his fears, which was that I would soon get weary and weak if I continued to; I understood him well. I in turn told him that if he believed in his prayers for me, he would be calm and worry less. I was being sarcastic there, but I couldn't help it. I had never known how to pray and worry at the same time. Whenever I committed anything into prayers, I

backed off leaving the outcome to Gonad. Then the times I chose to worry, as sometimes I am not able to help it, I worry until I finally choose to commit my cares to Gonad my divine Father without worrying anymore and usually solutions surface.

So, I volunteered for the OPH. I called the number I found on TV, discussed and indicated my interest. To participate, I would have to attend the seminar on the Thursday of any week I intend to start. Thereafter, volunteering begins on Friday through Sunday. So for me to follow through with it, I had to skip work on the Thursday of the week I chose to begin.

I attended the seminar and it was impactful. I was allotted a room that same day and I loved my room, it was plain but serene. I liked the serenity, it gave me a sort of repose from the troubles all around and it felt like a place where I could be alone with me. That same day, I was also introduced to the elderly man I was to cater for. The first thing I noticed about him was that he didn't appear sick in any way, he's agility altered my view of an OPH. My patient was aged 80. Looking through his profile, I was drawn to him. His reason for being in the OPH was because he didn't have any family so he came here simply for companionship. His wife had died ten years earlier and they never had children, nor did they ever adopt any one. This was all that was in his profile. The rest I would have to find out from him as we related together and it was his call to divulge them or not. My job there was to sit with him and talk with him as he chose.

The next day was my first full day with him. It was a Friday. When he saw me, he smiled and said he had been waiting for me and had so much for us to talk about. I surprisingly became nervous. I had not expected that his presence would unnerve me. His smile was therapeutic though, I couldn't miss that it did something to me. However, I managed to pull myself together so I would look the part: serious, confident and skilled. During the training, the need for us to always look in charge and be in control was emphasized. We were told to never appear like people who needed help but to appear like helpers. We were also told that it was important we learnt how to drop our worries outside the facility gate and come in ready to serve. So, I took a deep breath and fell in line with my course. I determined to be of utmost help to the man and decided within me that I could. I introduced myself again and he introduced himself as Fany. I looked around the room and saw lots of board games, I was familiar with Scrabble and Chess. Then I saw a plastic jar of mixed nuts, a plastic bottle of water and a pack of bubble gum. I was surprised to see he had some of the things I loved. I was also a lover of bubble gums. Beside his bed, were some

magazines and then I saw a Rennet. I guess he could still see that I was a bit nervous because he asked me to feel at home so I pretended I was and began to chatter away like I was so excited. We got talking. He mentioned to me that his wife had died ten years earlier from Common cold at the age of 66. They had been married for 42 years before she died. As he spoke, I realized that he purposely left out some details that I felt he didn't have to leave out and it left me really anxious yet I couldn't ask. During the volunteers training, we were told that we could ask them personal questions only if we were sure it wouldn't make them feel uneasy. It was obvious that Mr Fany didn't mind talking about his late wife however, there were moments when his voice gave away the fact that he was trying not to cry. Apart from that, he controlled his emotions well.

Also, he talked about his childhood. He was an only child so I understood why he didn't have anyone. He's father was a painter, his mother a farmer. She had vegetable farms and most of the proceeds were sold locally around the neighborhood and it was enough to run their family as virtually, everyone in their neighborhood depended on his mother and her vegetables and she served them well. He said so many things that honestly didn't really interest me however, I was just happy he felt comfortable talking to me. Then he politely requested of me that I tell him about me. I smiled as I wondered how he would feel when he found out that I was also an only child and that I also didn't have a wife for while his was dead and buried, mine was alive, but dead. So before retiring for the night, I told him some of my story.

Chapter Eighteen

We talked about me and how that I grew up an only child too and how my parents didn't seem happy about it. They loved me but sometimes, they made it look like I was not enough. They never stopped wanting another child. This was how I lived with them. At first, they were not bothered about the fact that I was their only child and we had an intimate rapport, but as Mum approached Menopause, she started becoming excessively worried about not having another child. Dad in the bid to care for her stopped having time for me. Mum dragged him along to prayer houses. Once, when I asked him why they moved from one Shalace to another, he said it was because medical science had failed them so they had to find Gonad by any means possible and because I was just a child then, I didn't know what to say to him. Had I known then what I know now, I would have told them to sit their bodies on their chairs, tune up to Gonad their maker and receive my siblings.

We were a Sharant family. As a child, I was well taught in Shalace and at home. I was only ten years old when mum started going around for prayers, hopping from one Shalace to the other like a prostitute. Gradually, she changed completely, becoming a shadow of herself. When she looked at me, it was as if she was looking past me and the few times she was herself were sweet and priceless because her love and affection for me were expressed in many sweet ways, it felt like heaven. It was equally like hell whenever her quest for another child overpowered her. Each time I had to think or talk about my parents, I still feel pain, the pain that is caused by ignorance. Truly ignorance is painful, expensive and causes perishing like they did in a plane crash on their way to see one of their powerful men of Gonad in another location. Everyone seemed to be talking about that man of Gonad who was a professional in making women conceive. My parents went too because they wanted a miracle child. I wondered if they never got tired and it baffled me that they couldn't trust Gonad who effortlessly blessed them with me. I wonder why they didn't realize that all the places they had gone to for prayers seemed to be the best places at first until there was nothing to show for it so that after all the money spent and time wasted, they stayed there until they found the next best place. The day they died, I cried mainly out of anger not so much because of their everlasting absence. I knew missing them wouldn't be an issue, because I didn't really have them when they were alive. I was only 14 when he died.

I felt lighter talking to Fany. I talked freely as though I was under an influence. I went ahead to tell him about Uncle Dawani, narrating to him how uncle Dawani became my guardian. He saw me through school effortlessly as he had my parents business to support him. They had a printing press and a bookshop and Mum had been a top civil servant in the educational sector. They were comfortable financially. Though my parents didn't leave any will behind, it didn't matter because there was no property tussle anywhere as our relatives were not the kind of people that did such, they knew and accepted that all my parents had was automatically mine. Thus, Uncle Dawani managed the businesses the way he could until they folded up some years later. Mum's pension was still sitting in the bank, I hadn't touched it and I hadn't needed it till date. Uncle Dawani had taken good care of me such that I didn't feel the loss of my parents when it came to matters of my upkeep. I told Fany so many other things, things I didn't know I could remember.

As I approached the part of my life where I met Liki, I couldn't talk further, so I wrapped up my narration. When I told him I was done, he opened his arms for me again and I surprisingly went into them. It was surprising how being around Fany made me feel like a child again. Then from nowhere, he asked me how old I was. Thirty eight, I told him. Then he smiled asking me why I didn't want to talk about my wife. I was dazed, and then he mockingly told me I didn't need to be dazed because he hadn't needed a soothsayer to know that I was married. Then he told me that the wedding band on my finger was enough proof that I was married. I looked at my finger, how I had forgotten that I still had my ring on? I thought I had removed it. I was almost sure I had.

I suddenly started feeling funny. I can't really explain it but it was like a heavy weight was put on my shoulders, then my head became heavy too and my body shook. It scared me to think that I must have been doing things unconsciously and aloofly. I felt drained emotionally. Fany got up and came over to me. He sat by me on the two seater sofa and held my shoulders. Looking me straight in the eye, he told me to let it out. I nodded my head affirming that I would but opening my mouth, words failed me as tears stole my words. Fany held me closer and I cried. I sobbed quietly for a long time. I just couldn't stop the tears and he didn't stop me, he allowed me cry. I was there crying for about 20 minutes, my head on his shoulder, tears and mucus soaking his shirt. After a while, he patted my back a few times and from within I felt a tingling sensation and with it I began to feel some calm. My sobs gradually reduced to sniffs until it stopped and when I stopped, I started smiling and then I began giggling. He released me and giggled too. We couldn't say anything more as we continued

giggling. Then he had to go lie down. I adjusted to rest my back on the sofa too and closed my eyes. I tried to stop smiling but I couldn't, so I just relaxed. Though I couldn't explain what was happening, I liked it. I felt an unusual calm, one I had not felt since the news of Liki's pregnancy and to my surprise, the uneasy painful jab I felt whenever I remembered her was gone. When later I looked at Fany, I realized he was asleep, a witty smile playing on his face.

I still had about an hour before my time was up so I relaxed further. I must have dozed off after a while because I woke up to the sound of the bell for departure time. Fany was still asleep. I didn't need to wake him, I just left quietly. My sleep had been interrupted and I certainly would go continue it. I needed all the sleep I could get. I was also happy. I was certain my decision to volunteer at the OPH was a good one.

Chapter Nineteen

The next day, a Saturday, Fany was reading his Rennet when I got in. As soon as he saw me, he smiled and put it aside. It felt awkward so I told him to go ahead. He smiled but refused, saying he had been waiting for me eagerly. I smiled too. He complimented my looks, he said I looked refreshed. I concurred telling him I even felt so. He smiled and looked straight into my eyes as he asked if I was ready to talk about my wife. By reflex, I started fiddling with my wedding ring again, just like the previous day. Sitting on my usual sofa, I began talking, beginning from where Liki and I met through to when we got married. As I talked, the gloomy feeling began to set in. Fany noticed it too because he told me I could stop if I didn't feel like continuing. I paused for some 2 minutes then felt the urge to go ahead. I proceeded to talk about how we expected to conceive immediately after we got married. I talked a little about her upbringing and her person, explaining how she'd been raised properly by her parents. It was alarming how it felt like I was talking about another person. The image of Liki that had filled my mind these past months was a totally different one, one I didn't know at all.

I told him we had a beautiful marriage until about 5 months back. At this point, I couldn't continue. He looked at me lovingly and handed me a bottle of water. I opened it, took a sip and I felt better. He asked me to take my time but I disapproved and rather decided to continue, I knew I had to get it over with. I wanted to, so I went ahead to spill it all. I told him of her infidelity, her pregnancy, her confession and my reaction. He didn't show any signs of surprise or disgust, no facial expressions in fact. I told him she had been unfaithful to me for about a year before she eventually let it out. The tears came again as I told him about my reaction, how I had forcefully had sex with her, in a beastly manner. I let him know how since that act, I had not stayed an hour without being tormented by the image of the act. I hated myself for it but hated Liki more for pushing me to do such. I told him how I no more felt life in my penis since that day and how I didn't care. I continued telling him how betrayed I felt, how ashamed I felt too. I shared my greatest pain with him, which was that it took another man to get Liki pregnant after we had been trying for about 9 years. Here, I broke down and cried again, but not for too long and then I couldn't talk anymore. I let Fany know with the wave of my hand that I was done talking. He sighed and then smiled.

Fany asked me if I would be able to answer some questions he had for me. I said yes. The first question he asked was a shocker. He asked me why I felt that the pregnancy wasn't mine. I found it difficult to answer then I told him that it

wasn't mine because Liki said it wasn't. She'd said the month she took in, she did not have sex with me as I had been away on a journey when she ovulated. He was, however, of the opinion that what Liki told me was not enough to determine whose child she was carrying. His opinion was staggering and meaningful but it didn't matter to me. What mattered most, what ate me up was her duplicity and I let Fany know. I told him I cared less who owned the child that I just couldn't believe that Liki would cheat on me in that magnitude.

Then he went ahead to ask me what would be my stand if I found out that Liki was carrying my child. I laughed hysterically but still couldn't answer. He asked if I could see myself forgiving her and I answered immediately, saying I couldn't. He looked at me long enough before he began talking. He was telling me about his wife. She had behaved exactly as Liki except that she had the baby and lost him. It was a still birth. He told me how she'd had an affair with his bosom friend when he was away at sea. He'd been a sailor so she conceived and gave birth while he was away and she and his friend concealed it until they could no more do so. One day out of the blues, she decided to open up. Fany said he hadn't believed her so he had called his friend who was already in the know about the confession and he had owned up too. At this point, Fany began crying but he was smiling through his tears. The next day, his friend was found dead in his room, he'd taken his own life. 'I was in a limbo, I couldn't believe his death, nor his betrayal nor that they'd both concealed it for about seven years.' Fany said.

Then he looked at me and shocked me more. 'I forgave her Yado, I did.' I asked him how that was possible. He told me he was helped by Gonad and that he had been exposed to Gonad's word all his life. He said his wife had been so exposed too, but somehow fell for wrong. I quickly quoted the portion in the Rennet where Shar said a man could put his wife away for adultery sake. He smiled and told me it didn't end there. Now, he'd opened the Rennet and read to me from the Holy writings. The whole verse read 'You may leave your wife for adultery sake but this was not how it was originally meant to be. The two have become one.' I didn't understand him. He went further to the letters of the early saints to read the part where husbands were asked to love their wives as Shar loved his members, the Sharants. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I wondered how that justified me having to forgive my wife of adultery. Seeing I wasn't quite clear, he explained further. He said Shar loves all humans unconditionally and gave himself for us while we were still lost in sin and now forgives every time we err, never putting us away. I told him out rightly that I couldn't take that and he equally told me that it meant I valued my feelings above Gonad's

word. Closing the Rennet, he said he wouldn't push me that I would have to decide for myself and was free to do as I choose.

Sitting on the black sofa, my heart as heavy as a corpse, I was burdened as well as shaken. The truth was staring me in the face. I only had to refuse or accept it. I sat for a while thinking and I kept hearing in my mind what the letters of the early saints said as regards unforgiveness. I realized for the first time that no sin was unforgivable simply because none of a Sharant's sin is unforgivable by Shar. This is the core of a Sharant's religion, a religion of love, peace, and everlasting forgiveness; a religion where every heir of Shar is accepted in the beloved. If Shar can forgive any kind of offence, then a true Sharant is expected to do same. Shar loves unconditionally! I had never seen it in this light else I would not have been consoling myself as the victim. I realized I hadn't behaved like Shar for I had not loved Liki unconditionally.

Now, I undoubtedly knew the truth, but wasn't ready to accept it. I wasn't! When it was almost time for me to leave for the day, I tried to strike up a lighter conversation with Fany but I found out he was asleep. I looked at him and love for him washed over me, I planted a peck on his forehead and left.

That night I couldn't sleep, I was restless. I thought of Liki and imagined that the child was ours. I thought of Fany, worried about him, thoughts of him filled my head. I looked at his life, his courage and feelings of admiration for him welled up inside of me. When I finally slept, it was not much. I slept late and woke up very early. I virtually tossed and turned all through the night. I got up from my bed to get set for the day. When I was done, I decided to take a walk before meeting up with Fany as I was way early. As I walked, I allowed so many thoughts pass through my mind and with them came tears. I still hurt from Liki's infidelity but I had unconsciously in the course of my night time of brooding agreed that it was my place to forgive her and though I didn't think I could I was convinced I should. Shar puts up with my everyday short comings, no matter how bad, so was I to do to Liki and even anyone. I even remembered our wedding vows, how we had promised to stay together forever, to be separated by death alone. I pushed the thought out of mind for a later time. It was too overwhelming a realization instead I set out to go see Fany. I decided I was going to see to it that we talked about something else entirely, something more fun. Getting to his room, it was locked. I went to the Lobby and I was told what was up. They said Fany died in his sleep and that he'd been moved to the mortuary. I went blank. It was a sunny Sunday morning.

Chapter Twenty

* * * *

I started feeling lower abdominal cramps. They were mild but uncomfortable. I was in my 36th week and had been told to expect such. During my last antenatal, Dr Fitana had told me to expect to give birth any moment from then, telling me to have my bags packed and ready, same things the midwives had related to us during most antenatal visits. I had been told my baby was big and was told to eat moderately. It was funny how big my baby was weighing when my tummy didn't look so big. I had been weighing 60Kg before pregnancy, and had now gone up to 67Kg. The cramps were uncomfortable, though not so painful however, I wasn't enjoying them at all.

Earlier on, I had promised Mum I would move over to her place when I was about a few weeks away from my expected date of delivery and so since I was getting close and was now having some discomfort, I decided to go to my parents', I didn't want to be stranded.

Kool was as scared as I was. I had assured him that moving to my parents' would not stop him from getting to see me whenever he desired to. We had already stopped meeting alone and were good. Did I still have feelings for him? Yes. Did he still have for me? Yes. However, some things are never just meant to be and we had agreed to that. We didn't seem to know anything about what would happen to us but we knew time had a way of leading and helping people sort things out so there we laid our hope. We hoped that Yado would have me back and that we would move on fine but his state of being incommunicado didn't help matters. I needed to talk to him, to feel his pulse. I needed to know if he would still be willingly to work things out. I felt we could, I strongly felt so though thinking it through, the chances of him wanting me back were slim and the future seemed bleak. The more the delivery day approached, the more I got preoccupied with thoughts of what would happen after the child came. I and Kool had not been able to still decide how he would be raised.

At my parents', all I did was eat, rest and take walks in the evening. Fortunately for me, I hadn't added so much weight. I was virtually just as I had been before the pregnancy. The only change that was obvious was the roundness of my tummy. Beni and Zohi eagerly anticipated the birth of their nephew as they always 'hi-fived' my protruding tummy. Mum and Dad too anticipated the arrival of their first grandchild, one long awaited. I wish I shared in their excitement, but as the day drew nearer, my feelings remained grey. I still cried myself to sleep sometimes, and still had some panic attacks. Sometimes, I still craved for

Kool and wanted Yado at all cost. The only means I however had at my disposal was to pray and believe that Yado came back home.

Bona, my best friend came to visit. She had taken some time from her work and family to spend some time with me so the times when I needed so much affection and didn't want to lean on Kool, she was my shoulder. I didn't tell her what had happened, some things are better left unsaid. When she asked how Yado and I were doing as a couple, I simply told her that we were fine but could be better. We had never been used to talking about private issues that concerned us and our spouses. We, including some of our other friends had agreed that it was only in cases of abuse, physical or emotional that we would speak up, so we had led our friendship. Another cogent reason why I didn't tell Bona about my infidelity was because it didn't only involve me, it involved Yado too. In my opinion, it was too private a matter for me to divulge to Bona or anyone else. Moreover no one else knew apart from Reverendo Ralani and his wife. It was best that way. Bona had planned to be with me till I delivered, but her annual leave didn't last that long. We were however content to be able to spend the time we had together. She was my every evening strolling partner and usually prayed with me while we strolled.

One of the days we strolled, about 7 days from the day of her arrival, my water broke. We panicked. I had expected to feel some pain but I didn't feel any. When we came out of the shock, we got a hold of ourselves and started returning home to get set for the hospital. Getting home, mum tried to calm me down even though I wasn't obviously nervous. I guess she was trying to calm me down because she was nervous. Dad was not around, he'd travelled out of the country as had he been around, he would have calmed Mum. Dr Fitana was already aware we were on our way and in no time, I got to the hospital in the company of mum, Bona, Zohi and Beni. Zohi came alone while Beni drove the rest of us. Getting to the hospital, I began to panic. I asked my mum to call Kool and as she tried to hesitate, I insisted, Dr Fitana insited too. Then I began to feel light headed and then I felt physically numb. Immediately, I was wheeled into a room. I couldn't feel my body, nor could I open my mouth. I could see though. I saw everyone looking at me strangely, and with fear. Mum began praying as Dr Fitana spoke to both of them. He told them I would have to undergo a caesarean section, and that I was having some form of paralysis, then he asked her and Bona to leave the room. Mum began to panic. Bona had tears in her eyes but held Mum, calming her. Dr Fitana seemed so in control, as he told them that the baby and I would be fine then I was wheeled away to the theatre. The nurses, all smart, seemed in control too as they took instructions from Dr Fitana.

Another doctor came in, they talked about anesthesia. I didn't quite understand what they were saying and then I heard the new doctor tell them to mind what they said because I could hear them. Dr Fitana smiled at me and I thought I smiled back, however his face fell. I was been poked by the other doctor, but I felt nothing then I realized I was paralyzed. I was surprisingly not afraid, I felt the same peace I had felt that day after Kool and I prayed for the first time, the same way I felt whenever I allowed myself to really relax. It seemed to be always there, but I only got to feel it when I was completely at rest in my mind. Now, the other doctor was injecting me, I didn't feel anything except that I felt drowsy. I knew I would fall asleep at any moment but then I didn't. I saw the other doctor leave as Dr Fitana began working on me, opening me up. I didn't feel a thing. He worked. I couldn't see what he was up to, but I knew he was trying to bring out my baby. I lay there peacefully, a heavy peace had enveloped me, and it almost tickled me, inside my mind. I knew I would have felt it physically if only my body could feel. In another ten minutes, I heard my baby cry, he was out and then the drowsy feeling intensified. This time around, I knew I would sleep and then I didn't know a thing again.

Chapter Twenty One

* * * * *

I sat lost at the reception area of the Old People's Home. I had spent only about 52 hours with Fany, yet it seemed like I had known him all my life. I tried to cry but I couldn't. I asked to be let back into his room and I was it was granted me. I sat on my chair, my black sofa, staring at his bed. All his belongings were gone though. I had asked about the funeral engagements and they had told me he would be buried the next day, by 10am. They said they wouldn't allow me see his corpse before that time. There was no need to rush. I didn't even want to see him as a corpse, I wanted to see him alive. According to the authorities, they were burying him as he had requested, having asked that his body be spared autopsy.

As I stared at his bed, I remembered the first day I met him, three days back. He had stood up and shook my hands. I had liked his height and his firm hand shake. He was taller than me and anyone who is that tall is a giant because I am very tall. He was good looking with a wide face though. Then I remembered how nervous I had been at first and how he'd calmed me, his smile was the trigger of my relaxation. Now I smiled as I remembered his smile and tears washed down my face. The past three days had been full of happy and sad moments and this for me was the saddest of them all. I felt alone as my heart ached from missing Fany. I had only stayed in the room for about 30 minutes before the room was relocked. I got up and left for my room, deciding I would stay indoors and just leave the next day after the funeral. I was about leaving the doors of the reception area of the dormitory when one of the Home Officials called me. He was handing me a blue Rennet and I immediately identified it as Fany's. He said it should be for me. I was trying to understand why he thought it was for me when he added that there was a note inside. So, I took it and opened it and the note that lay in between the front cover and the first page read 'Yado, this Rennet is for your child.' Then he added, 'Only those that are childlike in heart will find life easy and eventually partake of Shar's everlasting reward. Rest beloved one, love everyone the way you are being loved unconditionally by Shar and forgive because you have been forgiven. Let your love endure.'

I understood what message Fany was passing across to me. I could imagine how life would be if everyone chose to let love guide them and let their hearts be tender to always forgive. If only everyone knew how loved and forgiven they were then it would be easy to give same. However, I didn't understand what Fany meant by saying his Rennet is for my child. I thought he should have given

it to me because I had no child and I didn't see me ever having one, not when I had no functioning manhood and until now, I hadn't seen a reason to mourn it's loss. Now, I wish I hadn't lost it, at least I would have believed that maybe someday I would father a child who would have Fany's Rennet. Then suddenly as if in a flash, I understood what Fany meant. The child he referred to was the one Liki was carrying, he therefore was trying to say her child was mine. Now, I wished it was, if not for any other reason, just so that I could grant Fany's only wish of me, which was his last wish. About the last line of Fany's words, I understood perfectly what it meant. I however marveled at how it coincided with the last words of the wedding vow I shared with Liki. 'Our love will endure.'

I spent the whole day in my room thinking about Fany. I read one or two places in the Rennet. I found my way to Zoar's story. Zoar had died and after 4 days, his sister's needed Shar to wake him up; Shar was good at things like this. I wept. Fany was resting, he didn't need to be resurrected, I needed to be. Then, suddenly, I felt a tingling sensation in my testicles and then in my penis, the sensation heightened. I couldn't believe what my body felt, so I peeped into my trousers to have a good look, then I saw a resurrection and I wept all over again.

I was in and out of tears till in the night when I could no more ignore my hunger pangs so I found my way to the Cafeteria. I was there treating my appetite to spaghetti and vegetable sauce when my phone rang. It was Beni. I didn't pick it because I wanted to finish my food before doing so. He called again, it was around 9pm their time while it was 8pm our time. I ignored it still. Whatever it was could wait, I didn't see any reason to think there was an emergency and even if there was, there was nothing I could do from here. In another 10 minutes, I was done eating. I got up to go return the call when my phone rang again. This time I picked. Beni was calm as always and he greeted me calmly. He said he was calling to congratulate me, saying I now had a son. He went ahead to say he would be sending me a picture so I could better understand what he meant. I didn't say anything because I couldn't make sense of what he said so he dropped the call. In another two minutes my Hub messenger indicated that I had a message. I opened and was greeted by the picture of a baby boy, who looked just exactly like me. It clicked easily, Fany was right. Liki had been with my child. I didn't need any test, the resemblance was terrifying. Beni called me back almost immediately and I picked. I told him I couldn't talk, that when I was ready, I would get back to him. I looked at the pictures again. He'd sent two shots from different angles. I couldn't doubt what I saw, yet I couldn't bring myself to believe it. I suddenly began to feel feverish. My stomach felt like it was in turmoil, I needed to use the toilet. I hurriedly found one. As I sat there,

I called the office and asked them not to expect me in the morning that I was ill. Leaving the toilet, I headed back to my room, hit the bed and curled up under my duvet. I shivered, my head banged. I was overwhelmed and uncoordinated. My mind was blank yet it ran through the day's event, over and over again until I virtually begged Gonad for sleep. He is the one who gives sleep to His beloved ones. As long as I believed in Him, I was among his beloved. Waking up the next morning around 8am meant that I had slept for about 10 hours, without even waking up at all for anything. It was evident my body needed to rest. Getting up, I dressed up, picked my few things and hung my bag on my back. Since I didn't have a suit to wear for the funeral, I made do with my carton color chinos and maroon cotton shirt.

The OPH cemetery was far away from the dormitory. I left my room to wait at the reception area of the dormitory so I could join the Home Officials when they were set to go. The facility shuttle conveyed us to the cemetery. Arriving there, one of the Home Officials called the Priest to tell him we had arrived at the cemetery and in less than five minutes, another facility shuttle came with the Priest. The burial service was very short, beginning with a hymn after which the Priest asked the undertakers to open the coffin. It was open for about 2 minutes. I stepped a bit forward to look at Fany. He hadn't changed much. His smile was alive on his face and he looked at peace. I longed to say something but words eluded me. Then the coffin was closed and was lowered into the ground. The priest spoke for about five minutes then ended by leading us in the hymn 'May Gonad keep you till we meet again'. As we sang, the undertakers poured sand on the coffin and began covering him up. When the song ended, the priest and the two Home Officials in attendance headed back with one of the facility shuttles. I didn't join them, I stayed there with the undertakers just watching them do their work. I wondered how they coped with a job as such, wondering what went on in their minds. I concluded that they must be stronger than any individual, they all had to be. When they finished, they offered to drop me off at the faculty, I refused and asked if I could be dropped at the main entrance of the Home and they agreed. I expected they would ask me what my relationship with Fany was, or even empathize with me, seeing I was really disturbed. Well they didn't and I am sure they hadn't even noticed that I was disturbed. That was their life. Mine was different, and losses will never go down well with me. I have never lost the bitter taste of my parents' death and now the freshness of it filled my mouth as I acknowledged again that Fany was no more.

Chapter Twenty Two

I took a cab to the nearest train station and got on my way home, my head full of thoughts so much so that there was no way I would have been useful to anyone. Fortunately for me, my seat mate was a young girl who was glued to her phone all the while she was awake. She laughed alone and exclaimed to herself. The 50 minutes journey ended in no time for me. It felt like the journey lasted only 20 minutes. I had called Johand, my chauffeur, to meet me up at the train terminal and when he saw me, I could tell he wasn't pleased by my appearance. He asked me how I was feeling and because I didn't feel like talking, I told him I was fine and asked him to take me to my office. He did and I was grateful to him then asked him to pick me up at my usual time of 5pm. Even though I hadn't planned to go to the office, having called in sick the previous night, I realized that going home would do me no good and would simply provide me with an opportunity to wallow in gloom.

When I entered into the company premises, I went straight into my office. Work was grim as I was not in my elements. I had sat in my office throughout, doing nothing in particular. I couldn't seem to focus as I spent hours on a particular page of the report I was looking at. My mind was a mixture of thoughts bordering on Fany and my son. I had still not returned Beni's call. Liki's mum had called too but I didn't answer. I didn't want to interfere with their joy, I wasn't yet capable of rejoicing nor was I ready to conceal my feelings. I didn't have any problem believing the child was mine, I however didn't like that Liki's family thought that because I now had a son, I would suddenly forget all that had happened.

However, I noticed that the intensity of my anger and bitterness of heart was waning each time thoughts that usually put me in that mood surfaced, I remembered Fany's words and what I had found in the Rennet. Sometimes too, I still felt so bad that I was expected to forgive Liki. It didn't seem logical to me, until I recalled that I was loved by the loving Gonad with all my flaws. This was illogical too but a reality I wouldn't be able to live without. I fixed my eyes again on the report I was reading, an engineer was reporting about the durability of one of the pillars we were casting. From his report, around the line I was on, I saw the word 'strength', it leaped out to me, literally magnifying itself above the other words and it felt as if I heard a word from my inside, 'Be strong in me'. I was sure I heard them and with the words came the meaning. I knew it meant that the reason why I should do anything should be because it is the right thing by Gonad and not because I had or hadn't the ability to do it. 'Here, it is

never a question of your capabilities. I am your strength and ability', I seemed to hear again. With these words came peace and clarity and I knew what to do.

I picked up my phone and put a call to Liki's mum, and was surprised when I didn't hear any excitement in her voice. Then she told me that Liki had been unconscious for about 17 hours, since after the surgery. She had been operated upon around 8pm of the previous day and at my call to her, it was about 1pm. She also said Dr Fitana said that was not normal, that she should have been awake by this time. She said her vitals were perfect as said by Dr Fitana. When she started crying, I opened my mouth to calm her, and I was surprised at the words I spoke. I told her I would soon be with them and that everything would be alright. Her crying ceased immediately and I sensed surprise in the silence that followed. She definitely had not expected to hear what I had told her, I hadn't expected to say such either. I told her to stay strong and to pray. She thanked me and I hung up. Hanging up, I put a call through to my Director back home in Gara, Winidi telling him I had to return and told him my reason. He empathized with me and asked me to do what I could to make sure the work didn't suffer and then bring myself home as soon as I could. I told him I had everything covered and would return the next day. Done with the call, I assembled my team for a meeting. I briefed them about the latest with me. My team heads assured me they would be fine. We would carry on with work by correspondence. My secretary hurriedly made arrangements for my flight booking.

That night at my house, I invited Johand over and put him in the know. He was happy for me but was worried for Liki. I tried to assure him she would be fine. Also, he became sad when I couldn't assure him that I would be returning anytime soon. I gave him all I had stocked my house with and he was grateful. He was so excited that he called his wife on the phone right away to tell her that they had supplies to last them for three months. His joy was beautiful, it infected me. I knew from the first day I met him that he was a happy fella but I now realized why I hadn't seen so much of that, it was because I was perpetually gloomy, there was no way he could show his happiness around me. The way he spoke to his wife over the phone pleased my heart and I thought of Liki. I couldn't guarantee that it would be easy to move on with her, but I knew I could try and I would. I called Reverendo Ralani that night and told him of the developments. He wasn't pleased that he hadn't been informed of Liki's state. He said though he wasn't in town, he would have loved to have been informed. I told him that they must have been carried away with everything. He however prayed with me over the phone.

My flight was smooth so was the drive from the airport to the hospital. I had called Dr Fitana on my arrival at Gara and had called Liki's dad too only to find out that he was not in town but had been away on a journey outside the country. He said he was due back in two days. Zohi had offered to come pick me up from the airport but I chose to board a taxi so as to save him the stress. Everyone except Dr Fitana was at the hospital reception when I got in. One look at them, I knew I had missed them so bad. They were calmly excited to see me, like I was too. However, we didn't seem to find our words hence couldn't express how we felt but we touched and we hugged. The moment was a bit awkward and it was understandable for so much had happened in the previous months that shook to the last thread the very fiber that held us together.

I finally found my voice by asking to be taken to Dr Fitana. Zohi made to accompany me. In his office, Dr Fitana explained to me all that transpired and assured me that he believed Liki would come out stable. I asked him if there were no further medical actions to be taken, he said there wasn't, that we had to just wait for her to come out and then added that we could pray too. Seeing that I was scared, he began talking about my son. It was only then I remembered I actually had one. I panicked more as somehow I saw flashes of a young boy of about 7 years of age asking me about his mother, wanting to know why she'd died. I cut the thought short. I snapped out of it and asked to go see him. Dr Fitana was surprised at the sense of urgency he saw in my request. We headed to the nursery while Zohi chose to go back to his mum, brother and Bona.

One look at him and my heart collapsed, sobs escaping. The picture had not done any justice to the resemblance that we shared. How he looked every inch like me. Under my nose, I had a dark patch and I could see he had that too. He was so cute, so adorable. I felt the urge to carry him, but I didn't. I thought of Liki and wanted her to carry him first. Holding on to his tiny fingers, I told him fiercely that his mother would soon be with him. Though he was asleep, I kind of felt he heard me and when I looked away from him, tears filling my eyes again, it seemed as if I saw Fany standing beside Dr Fitana, he was smiling, tears in his eyes too. I blinked and the image was gone while the urge to see Liki heightened. I told Dr Fitana to lead me to her.

It simply felt as if she was asleep. She looked so peaceful. After some minutes, Dr Fitana had to leave to go attend to other duties. He said I could be with her for as long as I pleased. When he left, I panicked but had to pull myself together. I wanted to be my best for Liki's awakening, she just had to and soon. I held her hand, kissed them and then cried since I was alone with her, I was free. I talked to her, telling her to wake up, telling her I was around for her. I

asked for her forgiveness, telling her I didn't know better. I remembered how I had insulted her sexually and I shook my head in regrets. I continued talking to her, speaking of how I knew she never stopped loving me and that I would never know why she had cheated on me and I will never be able to understand it but that it was OK if I didn't. I pleaded with her to wake up so we could do us all over again, better this time and so we could take our vows again. I so wanted her, I feared she wasn't going to see our son so I prayed, no I ordered her angrily to wake up, she had to but then about 30 minutes passed and she was still still. I sat by her all the while. 'Let's be here together for our son, yes Liki, he's my son, my son.' I kept saying these words to her. I chanted it until I couldn't speak any more for tears that filled my eyes and tightened my throat. My voice was weak, my body shaking. I was fighting my pains, struggling to rise above them. Then Liki coughed. I jerked. Her eyes were wide opened, clear as though she had not even been sleeping at all, she stared at me and I at her. I wanted to press the bell, to alert the nurses but she held my hands, preventing me. I was confused. Then she spoke out. 'No, Yado. Don't.' I was confused, she looked hale and was even smiling while my face was contoured in fear and wet with tears. She held my hands firmly and assured me she would be fine and that we would be. Then her eyes grew moist and sad. She closed them. I knew where her thoughts had led her and her words affirmed so.

'I am not the Liki you married, I wish I was. I don't know what happened to her, or how she derailed, but please, let me be your new Liki, let me love you all over again. Yado, please forgive me, please.' She said all these in tears, she was sobbing. I worried that leaving her in this state could cause her hurt so I made to press the bell again but then I didn't because I realized she didn't look frail in any way, she only looked pained. I had never been able to stand her in pains and even right there, I couldn't but I didn't know how to help her. I wanted to talk but I didn't find the words, I couldn't just make sense of anything. The only thing that I was sure of at that moment was that I still loved her, I really couldn't understand why but I still did. So I told her just that, I told her I loved her and never did stop. Then I told her that I needed her to open her eyes and look at me. When she did after some failed attempts, I looked into them too and loved her. She saw my unspoken words, as I heard her unspoken promises. It was a solemn moment of victory, our victory. Then I pressed the bell.

* * * *

13 months after.

I picked up my phone to see who it was that sent me a message. I screamed for joy to see that it was Kool. We hadn't spoken since the day after the day I came out from coma. I remembered like it was yesterday though it's been about 13 months. I can't forget the relief in his face when he walked in to see me in the hospital. I

was still sore from the surgery so I couldn't do much but lie down. When he got to see Phuda, the relief that engulfed his entirety was unmistakable. He cried, not a little but much. I cried a little. When he was done crying, he said his tears were born from the relief that he was not the father of my child and also born from joy for Yado and I that finally, we were parents. His prayer that I would be a mother was now a reality. We were together for about an hour. Yado had not been around as he'd had cause to report to the office. When he returned and met Kool and I, he knew who he was, though he had never seen him. Kool became unavoidably uncomfortable while Yado and I weren't for the previous day had been the start of something new and deep for us. Yado had promised that he would relate with me as though I never cheated and had made me make the same promise, to relate with him as though I never broke trust. We had sealed it up in a heartfelt prayer to our Divine Father, Gonad. On seeing Kool, he looked at him, winked at me and left us be.

Kool didn't feel so comfortable anymore, so he had to leave earlier than planned. When he left that day, we both knew it was finally over between us and we would not be seeing each other anymore not because we couldn't but because the 'want to' was gone. Once upon a time, we did not believe that we could break away from each other. It was difficult but it wasn't impossible. That overwhelming passion that flowed uncontrollably from us was doused. We doused it! Each time I thought about it, I felt a kind of joy within. I had also come to realize that all emotions can be controlled. When we decided to stop communicating constantly, we sealed the trunk where all the overpowering sexual urges flowed from. When we took that decision, we were weakening the cord that bound us together. It was terrible at first, tortuous but when we refused to give in, we overcame. Every day, I realize that Gonad's mercy upon us was overwhelming, that I had Yado's child and not Kool's was an unmistakable act of mercy, to save our lives from intense mess. We had our second chances.

Now here I was reading his mail,

'MiQ, it's been such a while. How are you, Yado and little Yado.? How I have missed you!'

You know as soon as I left you in the hospital that day, it felt as though a part of me was gone. I wanted to be devastated but I found myself at peace. I called my mum immediately and her joy knew no bounds. Then guess what, she told me about a girl that had been in her mind for me. You won't believe that she was trying to matchmake us. Well I indulged her and met with the girl she had in mind and today we are together. Liki, she is like you, so pretty, so homely only that she's a smaller and darker version of you. Her name is Casan but I call her my E-doll, ' E ' for Ebony and we have been dating for 8 months. I know I should have told you earlier, but I didn't think I should bother you.

How's your new environment, Liki? I trust you and Yado are having a time of your lives. Liki I'm happy, for you and Yado and for me and my E-doll too. I hope you visit soon or if everything falls in place as I hope, maybe I will visit you.

Lastly MiQ, I am marrying Casan on her next birthday which is approximately 6months away and I wish you and Yado would be in attendance. My 'near miss son' will be a young man by then, maybe he will bear our ring on that day. I hope to hear from you. Take care of you dear.'

I couldn't wait to reply him and for Yado to read the letter. I wanted to begin punching my laptop's keyboard for a reply to Kool when Phuda, my 'old man' cried out seeking for my attention. I call him so because he came after he was long overdue. Remembering what Kool had called him, I laughed hard as I found my way to him. He was growing so fast and now that he is being compulsorily weaned because I am pregnant again, I miss the times I suckle him.

The end.

