

# THE LOVE ECLIPSE

*-DARKNESS IN THE LIGHT-*



EZEKIEL VENANT  
MILLINGA

*A NOVELETTE*



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–**Erica Festo**, Model and Medical student at MUHAS

I have read the book and I'm amazed at how magnificently life could be squeezed into words.

The book is alive...

–**Renatus Mihayo**, Poet and Medical student at KAIRUKI

I remember receiving the first part of the book via an email sent to me by Ezekiel on 15<sup>th</sup> May...due to various reasons I couldn't read the book till 22<sup>nd</sup> May... and telling the truth I couldn't stop myself from reading till the end of book. It has a fascinating story... start reading the first page it will take you to the next without even knowing it.

–**Albert Macha**, a Diagnostic Radiography student at MUHAS

**THE LOVE ECLIPSE: DARKNESS IN THE LIGHT**

**A NOVELETTE**

**EZEKIEL VENANT MILLINGA**

# DEDICATION

To my lovely family–

The world is colorful with them in it.

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THE LOVE ECLIPSE SERIES  
DARKNESS IN THE LIGHT– BOOK 1



## EPIGRAPH

“Cause Your love just keeps on healing me  
No matter how I bruise  
if I just trust you  
your love just keeps on healing me”

– Lyrics from “Healing” By Deniece Williams

# CHAPTER ONE

*TANZANIA SCHOOL OF TALENTS, DAR-ES-SALAAM*

Music professor Lucy Joseph was flowing out lectures and everyone in the class seemed happy and concentrated but that wasn't the case for Leo. His eyes were on the moon shadow-black hair of a girl at the front seat. He didn't know why but he couldn't stop staring at the girl. To him, maybe that was cooler than the long dreary lecture.

“Who dreams of becoming a great musician?” Lucy said

Everyone’s hand was up except Leo’s.

“Young man at the back!” Lucy shouted

Leo quickly dug into his notebook

"Talking to you, backbencher..."

“Me?” Leo mumbled

“Yeah, you in class..?”

Leo nodded

“What’s your dream?”

“What?”

Her face got red, “Your dream..?”

“Living alone...” Leo wheezed, “In a beautiful faraway place.”

The class giggled.

“Then, I don’t know why you are attending the music school”

*Neither do I*

"Listen, guys... you all have something special inside you. Something you know, something you do, something you can teach. You are all experts.

“We all in here have this something special inside us and if we use it right, we can change the world and eventually become rich in the process.” Lucy wound up her lecture and walked off the class.

It was break time. Leo rushed to the school canteen and took a bag of roasted peanuts. Each table was surrounded by at least five students chattering and squabbling. He looked at the empty table and sat. His thoughts were still on the girl he saw in class. For four years now, he had lost interest in ladies or perhaps life in general.

*20<sup>th</sup> October 2016*, he remembers the day very well. It was on that morning when even a little hope he had in life, vanished utterly. But now, out of blue, a girl was circulating in his brain. The girl he had just seen once. Who was the girl? Why is she in his mind? He kept scratching his head.

What jolted him from the deep imaginations was an hourglass figured lady with long ebony-black hair, standing in front of him.

“Hello!” the girl said

Leo raised his eyebrows

“Can I sit?”

Leo nodded

The girl placed two mugs on the table and sat, "I'm Rachel Simon" she said, extending her hand to Leo with a luminous smile enough to catch any man's attention but not Leo's.

“Leo Felix” he accepted the hand

“Seem aggravated. You okay?”

“Expecting a friend?”

“Why?”

Leo pointed his finger to the two mugs resting on the table.

Rachel smiled, “No... it's our first day in school and all I see around are new faces. I hoped to share this one mug with a new first friend I'll find.”

Leo smiled for the first time. The smile relaxed Rachel.

“Mind taking one?” she said, pushing one mug to Leo.

“What’s inside?”

“Coffee”

“Heard it’s not good for health”

“Once a week is not bad”

He smiled, “take some peanuts” Leo pushed his peanuts bag to Rachel

“Ooh no! Thank you.” The smile on her face disappeared

“Don’t take things from strangers?”

“It’s not like that Leo, I just—”

He pushed the mug back, “it’s called give and take.”

“Fine! I’ll take some” Rachel smiled, putting a peanut on her puffy lips.

Their conversation grew hot. Smiles and laughs conquered the table. It was as if it wasn’t their first meeting.

“You alright..?” Leo said suddenly

Rachel nodded, “why?”

“Didn’t put blue lipsticks, did you?”

Rachel smiled, “of course!”

“Look pale. You really okay?”

“I am –” Rachel’s hands dashed on her neck, holding it as if somebody was snatching it.

Leo licked his lips “What’s wrong?”

She was breathing heavily, the paleness of her skin increased. Her eyes grew weak and looked like they were fading out at any second. She started retching. Leo promptly sprinted to her side. As he reached there, Rachel’s eyes were fully closed and she fell into Leo’s arms.

Cold sweat seeping all over his tremulous body, he shook Rachel’s body

“HELP” he screamed.

## CHAPTER TWO

*TST*

Two hours had passed and no one came out of the room. Leo was at the bench, staring at the door written PATIENT'S ROOM. His two arms brought together and his chin resting on them.

“Leo Felix..?”

This soothing voice woke Leo. His eyes landed on an Amazonian figure sitting well on a wafer-thin body. His mouth was left wide open looking at the lady's decanter shaped waist. His heart stopped for a while when his eyes fell over the pencil-thin eyebrows eased down to her black beetle's leg eyelashes.

In front of him, it was a girl who subjugated his mind since morning. He didn't know how and when, but the badge on her shirt read *class representative*.

“I'm already famous!” he mumbled

“You scoundrel!” the girl shouted, “What did you do to her?”

“Her? Who..?”

“The girl on your table”

Leo shrugged, “nothing!”

Her face was flushed, “Nothing?”

Leo nodded

“Expecting us to believe?”

“That’s your choice”

“Something happens to her, it’s a murder case and you know it.”

Leo smiled, “You’re being so vindictive!”

“Pray she comes out alive”

Leo smiled

“You jerk!” she thumped his shoulder, “Someone is dying in there and all you can do is smiling. If she dies, you will rot in the—”

Leo’s lips landed over her heart-shaped lips. It was a nippy and unexpected kiss. The girl struggled to get off him.

“You scoundrel..! How dare—”

“What’s wrong?” a brawny man of about fifty-something appeared. The badge on his shirt read *warden*. “You are disturbing patients.”

The two laid their heads low

“You Leo Felix..?”

Leo nodded



“Follow me”

Leo followed the man to a well-arranged office. On the walls, he saw several pictures of the man in boxing outfits, holding medals.

“Went to boxing school?” Leo said

"You were with Rachel?" the warden asked, ordering Leo to sit

Leo nodded

“What did you do to her?”

“Why does everyone ask me that?”

Warden clenched his fist, “You were with her and she suddenly collapsed”

“Think I’m responsible?”

“Heard your dream is to live alone?”

"How does it relate to this?"

“Well” warden crossed his hands, “you were alone in your table until the girl appeared. After a few minutes, she was down.”

Leo chuckled

“What did you do to her?”

“Nothing”

"Mr. Felix" warden sighed, "I'm trying to help. If you tell us what you did to her, we can save her. If she dies, you won't escape the police's hands."

"I did nothing. We just sat, ate, and drunk. I—"

Warden pounded the table with his fist, "So what did you put in the food or drinks?"

*I wonder how long Adam sat with Eve. I just spent less than ten minutes with a girl and here I am, my life threatened.*

"If you can't talk then I'll hand this case to the police"

"I'm innocent!"

"Prove!"

Leo stared at the ceiling

Warden dug into his pocket and came out with a phone. He typed something Leo couldn't see. Before he did what he wanted, someone knocked and he rushed to the door. It was a woman Leo didn't know. The two talked to each other for a minute and warden returned to the table.

"You can go now," he said, leaning on the table. "Be at alert, we will need you at any time."

Leo walked out of the room, his head was baffled. He only wanted to know how Rachel was doing, so he hurried to the

school hospital. On the corridor, he saw four nurses coming out of the room that Rachel was sent. The nurses were pulling a wheeled stretcher and on it, a body covered by white sheets from head to a toe rested.

The group of nurses passed Leo whose legs were losing strength. He wanted to go to the room to check what happened but at the same time, he wanted to follow the nurses to confirm the body they were pulling. Being in a state of dilemma, somebody tapped his shoulder.

“Leo Felix, right?” said a man in a white coat

“Yes, I am”

“Follow me”

## CHAPTER THREE

*TST*

Leo followed the man in the white coat until they entered an office written *Doctor*, on the door.

“Doctor, what’s wrong? Is Rachel alright?” Leo said soon after sitting

“Your relationship with the girl?” the doctor said

“I just me—” he gasped, “She is my friend”

“She mentioned your name several times in her sleep”

“Meaning..?”

“Two possibilities,” the doctor cleared his throat, “When people are unconscious they call the people they fear the most or the people they love the most.”

*Everyone is suspecting me*, Leo scowled

“She ate something she shouldn’t”

“Like..?”

“I should be asking you”

“I didn’t do anything destructive to her”

“Didn’t say you did”

“Why do you keep interrogating me like a perpetrator?”

“A life is in peril”

Leo panted, his hands clenched

“She suffered anaphylaxis”

“What’s that?”

"Life-threatening allergic reaction"

“Will she endure?”

“She has”

A smirk blushed on Leo’s face, “Really?”

“Epinephrine did the magic”

"Thank you, doctor..!"

The doctor held up his hand, “what did she eat?”

“Not much, coffee and peanuts”

The doctor wrote in his notebook, "She's peanut-allergic!"

“Didn’t know that”

“Now you do”

“Can I see her?”

"Probably the nurses are discharging her by now," the doctor said, peeking at his watch. When a doctor raised his head, Leo was already at the door.

He hurried to the patient room where he found the class representative assisting Rachel to walk out.

"Let me help you," he said

"Can handle it by myself!" the CR replied

"Where were you, Leo?" Rachel said, a smile on her face

"Lot of stuff happened while you were on the bed"

Leo followed the two till they entered in Rachel's room. CR laid Rachel on the bed and helped to keep her room in order. Leo never stopped ogling at CR's face. She had a telegenic look and a statuesque figure. His mind forgot everything he had stumbled upon a moment ago.

"Thank you, CR. You can go, I'll be safe with him" Rachel said

"Want me to leave you with this jerk?" CR snapped

"He is my friend!" Rachel said and Leo nodded

"Your—"

"I'll escort her out, Rachel," Leo said, pulling CR's wrist and walked out of the room.

“Better don’t do anything dim-witted to her” CR snapped when they were out

“Who do you think I am?”

“A jerk who kisses girls without their consent”

Leo smiled, “Was just trying to thwart dirty words coming off from those pretty lips”

“Don’t smile, I haven’t forgiven you and I don’t trust you”

“Didn’t ask for any”

“You will lament your decision”

The girl left and Leo returned to the room. He sat, hands on his cheeks. Because of Rachel, he had been through a lot on that day. He didn’t censure, he knew that was human nature, it wasn’t his first time. When a problem occurs, people always find someone to throw the blame to.

“Aggravated again?” Rachel said, trying to sit on a bed

“Why did you do that?”

“What?”

“Eating peanuts... Knew it was perilous, didn’t you?”

"It was giving and take"

“It could have kill—”

“Wasn’t your fault, so don’t feel guilty”

Leo panted

“You are my friend, aren’t you?”

“Going to take some fruits...” Leo stood, “so get some rest”

“Don’t take so long, don’t want to remain like a lonely puppy”  
she snapped and both laughed

Leo hit the road back to the school canteen, where he bought some fruits and packed them. On his way back to Rachel’s room, he met about five men standing on his way.

“Look at our scholarship student” one man from the group who looked like the American martial artist Billy Blanks, shouted causing others to giggle

Leo pretended not to hear. He had just survived from one trouble and another trouble was inviting him. He forced his way but he found his neck tightly stuck on one’s man hand.

“After messing with my girlfriend, thought you would walk out alive?” Billy blanks doppelganger who seemed to be the leader said in a cracking voice

“What are you talking about?” Leo murmured, struggling to remove his neck from the man’s hand

“Forgot what you did to Isla?”



“Isla? Never heard such a name before”

“Jerk..!”

Leo grunted, “Don’t know her”

“You don’t know her?” Billy Blanks chuckled, “then we will help you remember her”

# CHAPTER FOUR

*TST*

The men took all the stuff Leo carried.

"This is just a warning," Billy Blanks said, "next time you mess with my girl, the world won't recognize that beautiful face of yours"

After leaving him empty-handed, the men vanished.

Leo sat hugging his feet, chin on the knees. He kept on smiling on how puny he was to let his fellow schoolmates mortify him considering they were all new to the school. He also thought about what he was going to tell Rachel since all the stuff he bought was taken and his pockets were bare.

\*\*\*\*\*

The week ran fast though not fastest to Leo. He was now used to the school and got to know a few people. He never made friends though Rachel kept on calling him a friend. He didn't know the meaning of friendship and didn't need one. It was Friday and everyone was preparing for their first weekend.

Leo, peanuts on his hand was on the way to his room when he found the crowd gathering at the notice board. He wasn't engrossed and kept on moving. After walking a few feet, he

bumped into two girls, one thin and other fat talking to each other loudly.

“What are all those people doing there?” the thin said, pointing her hand to the notice board

“Haven’t heard?” the fat said

“Of what..?”

“An assignment..!”

“What?”

“Group assignment”

“In our first week..?”

“Next week we won’t have classes, we will be doing the assignment,” the fat said, “It must be submitted on Friday”

The thin smiled, “Wow! So no Prof Lucy next week..?”

“Don’t smile, it is the hardest question I have ever seen” the fat sighed, “No one knows the answer up to now”

Leo heard enough of what he wanted to hear, so he left the girls who continued chattering. He didn’t walk long when he met Rachel.

“Hey!” Rachel said with a smile

“Want some peanuts?” Leo said and both smiled

“Seen the assignment?”

“Not yet”

“Seen your name, you’re with Isla”

“Isla..?”

“Yeah..! CR. Group number five”

Leo’s face glowed with a smile when he heard the name CR, the girl who had appeared to conquer his mind.

\*\*\*\*\*

Weekends don't last long, it was Monday already. Group number five was under the shade of the big tree a few meters from the school compound. They were three, one group member was missing.

“God!! Who is this Leo anyway?” said Baraka, one of the four group members

“I think I know where to find him!” Isla said, leaving the place

She walked fast and within a few minutes, she was in Leo's room.

Leo was on the bed, reading a comics magazine. He was very relaxed. The no-class week was a weekend to him.

“After sending a bunch of hooligans to assail me, seems like you came to authenticate if I’m still alive” Leo mumbled after Isla entered the room without knocking

“I’m not here to negotiate!”

“Making rules in my room?”

“Don’t you know that we have an assignment?”

“Thought you were Batman”

“What?”

“You prefer doing things alone!”

“Scoundrel..! Members are out there waiting for you”

“Is the question that hard?”

“Seems like you can’t move voluntarily”

Isla snatched his ear and started pulling him off the room. Leo kept on whimpering as Isla pulled his ear all over the way. Other students kept on staring at them but of the two, none seemed to have a caring nerve. After a few minutes, they were under the tree.

“Here is the jerk” Isla snapped, breathing heavily.

Leo’s hands were on his ear. When he raised his head, the smile on his face disappeared and he clenched his fist.

Leo chuckled, "Billy blanks?"

"I'm Daniel!" the man said, baring his teeth

"Whatever..."

"Call me that again and you'll be repentant"

Leo smiled, "think every day is Thursday?"

"You've got guts?" the man said

"Bothering you?"

"I'll tip off you again! Don't mess with my girlfriend"

Leo stood straight and followed the man, they were nose to nose.

"Do you know why scientists do not sing *gravity exists, gravity exists* every day..?" Leo sighed, "It is because they have proved to everyone that gravity exists"

"St—"

"And do you know why you keep on singing *she is my girlfriend, she is my girlfriend*" Leo's made a serious tone, "it is because you haven't proved that she is your girlfriend and no one knows that she is"

Daniel scowled "What are you trying to say, beautiful boy?"

“What I’m trying to say is,” Leo panted, “if what you want is a war, I’m in”

“You’re welcome”

“ENOUGH!!” Isla shouted after seeing the two men pushing each other

“Children of God, I know you have some history” Baraka opened papers on his hand, “but we have a hard-hitting assignment to solve and not a war to fight”

# CHAPTER FIVE

*MBEYA, 2014*

In the darkness, people call him daredevil but in light, he has got a name, Leo Felix. He has been the preeminent gambler in the region for the past two years but today the situation is different, there is a life not money at stake. He wins, he saves a life. He loses, someone loses a life. He is petrified.

He was in a gloomy room, not able to see anything around him. After hours, the door opened and lights flicked on. Leo squinted at a giant man in a black suit bending over the door to enter the room.

“Is my brother alive?” Leo shouted to the man

“For now he is,” the man smiled, “but later it will depend on how you perform”

“Mr. Patrick, you’re the cruelest man I have ever met”

“We are all endeavoring to survive kid”

“By killing..?”

“You don’t seem to understand” Mr. Patrick leaned on the table, “you win this game, I forgive your brother’s debt and you two will live contentedly after that. Is that what you call cruelty?”



“What if I lose?”

"Let's pray for you to not." Mr. Patrick peeked over his watch,  
"It's almost time for the match. You ready?"

“I’m not playing till I see my brother”

“You’re so obstinate”

“I need to confirm his safety first”

Mr. Patrick whispered and two men entered the room, “Take this kid to his brother, five minutes only.”

Leo was ushered to another dark room where his brother was restrained. After entering the room, they flicked on the lights.

“Don’t take the match, Leo!” Benjamin Benson, Leo’s brother mumbled after seeing him.

“You will die”

“If you lose, we all die”

“That’s fair. We both live or we both die”

“Your parents need you”

“I don’t have parents. You’re my parents”

“You can’t abhor them, Leo”

“I’ll get you—”

Mr. Patrick entered the room, "enough!! Go win the game and you will have the whole time on earth"

Leo was escorted to a nice, tranquil bedecked room. He had been gambling in Maisha club for two years but he hadn't seen a room well bedecked like this. This suggested the inimitability and weight of the challenge waiting for him.

He saw Mr. Patrick and the other white man sitting on the VIP table. Their faces were filled with smiles as their heads kept swinging slickly by the sweet melody of John Legend's hit, all of me.

He saw his competitor, a Chinese man whose body was filthy with tattoos. After greetings, the VIPs placed their bid and the match was about to begin. Leo and the Chinese man were at the sides of the high-quality pool table, cue sticks on their hands.

*For my brother,* Leo gripped his cue stick

Eightball pool table match began and Leo made a break shot. The game was hot and exigent. Both players were talented and skillful. Leo won the first round after pocketing all solid balls, finishing with the eighth black ball. Mr. Patrick's face was full of a grin.

The second round began, all prayers dogged to win the game. After pocketing two balls, Leo's eyes became hazy. He missed

his next shot. Leo tried to concentrate on the game but his hands grew weak and his eyes were fuzzy. He couldn't hold the cue stick, which tumbled from his hand. He turned his head to look at Mr. Patrick who stood from his seat. When their eyes met, Leo shook his head. He hardly saw the white man aside Mr. Patrick smiling

Leo grunted, rushing his hands on his head. His body was getting weak. He felt as if the whole place was rotating.

*What's happening to me? It can't be now, I have to save—*

# CHAPTER SIX

*TST*

The two men managed their rage and gathered for group discussion.

Baraka opened the papers to read the question, "In 428 B.C, goddess of war, wisdom, and civilization planted a tree. She named it lover of wisdom. This tree was watered and nurtured by the father of ethics. Before the tree died in 348 B.C, it left a very important law in music. What is the law?"

Baraka finished reading the question and everyone's hand was on their heads.

"Any idea?" Baraka said

Isla scratched her hair, "Not yet!"

Leo was not in the discussion, his mind was somewhere else. Daniel looked the same.

"Guys, this won't do. We must split" Isla said as if she noticed the two men were not in the discussion

"Why?" Baraka snapped

"Baraka go with Daniel, I'll handle this scoundrel"

"What?" Daniel snapped

“Go find whatever you can about the question,” Isla sighed,  
“we will inform each other if we find anything”

Everyone approved the plan except Daniel, who at the end had no choice but to leave with Baraka. They exchanged their phone numbers and then split.

Leo and Isla went to the school library where they found other students solving the question too. Isla dug into the books and started solving the question.

"It's not the time for storybooks" Isla scowled at Leo

“Don’t take life so seriously”

“What?”

“Nobody walks out alive anyway!”

“Can’t you be of any help?”

“Depends on your definition of help”

The whole day continued like that. Till the evening they found nothing, the same was for Baraka and Daniel. They went for dinner and at eight o'clock they returned to the library, Isla willingly and Leo hauled.

Leo was hectic exploring comic books when he found Isla asleep on the table. Her moon shadow hair rested well on her shoulders. He smiled looking at her beautiful face.

*She is awesome, isn't she?* He hadn't felt like that for years.

*What's wrong with you!* He slapped his cheeks, stopping his palm which swung a few inches from Isla's face.

He took off his coat and covered her. For the first time, he took the question and had a bird-eye on it.

He kept staring at the question for hours, scratching his head and musing around the empty library.

*Goddess of war..... Goddess of war, wisdom..... Who on earth is she?* he kept on moving around the library.

*Athena? Is she the goddess of war? Yes, she is..... Why on earth would she plant a tree? She named it—*

"You still up?" Isla said, stretching her body

"I guess!" Leo said

"Found anything?"

"Not yet"

"Updates from others?"

"No"

"O.M.G" Isla shouted after peeking over her watch, "its 2 A.M!"

Leo shrugged

"Hey, jerk! I'm going home"

“I’ll escort you”

“I can handle—”

“It myself” Leo raised his hand, “then, Good luck!”

Isla rushed to the door. After looking outside she hastily returned.

"Looks like I can't handle it by myself," she said at a low tone

Leo smiled, “Wow! Our batman has surrendered”

The two walked out of the library. The night was very quiet and the wind was very smooth. Leo wanted to initiate the talk several times but his heart pounded very fast each time he tried lifting his lips. They walked wordlessly till they reached Isla’s room.

“You should go to bed too,” Isla said, “we have a sturdy job tomorrow”

“I wish I would!” Leo said

“What’s wrong?”

Leo smiled, “Nothing”

“Thank you!”

“For what..?”

“Escort and a coat”

Leo grinned

“Scoundrel...” Isla chuckled, “don’t look at me like that, I might start liking you”

“You are welcome” Leo muttered and started leaving the place.

“Good night!” Isla shouted

He turned back and his eyes escorted Isla who entered her room, *you asked me what was wrong, I smiled and said nothing. When you turned around and a tear came down and I whispered to myself...everything is.*

The days ran very fast and it was Thursday. Leo and the three teammates gathered in one empty store to decide the fate of their group.

“So goddess of war is Athena...” Baraka said, looking at the question

“And lover of wisdom means philosopher” Daniel added

"Athena planted a philosopher," Isla said

Leo nodded

“Then what?” Daniel said

"Ooh, God! Please assist us" Baraka muttered

"Does he help?" Leo asked a question which seemed to stun everyone



“Who..?” Baraka said curiously

“The invisible man in the sky”

“Don’t tell me you are an anti-Christ”

Leo smiled, “anti-Christ, what’s that?”

“What’s your religion?”

“I wasn’t given one”

“Who do you believe?”

“Must I believe in someone else?”

"That is why we labor and strive because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the savior of all people and especially of those who believe"

Leo smiled, “Savior..?”

"Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved– you and your household”

“Every time I get into trouble, there is no God or Allah to sort me out. I have to do it myself”

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” Baraka raised his eyebrows, “it’s not too late... go repent”

Leo chuckled, “You believe that there an invisible man living in the sky... who watches everything you do, every minute of every day. And the invisible man has a special list of ten things he does not want you to do. And if you do any of these ten things, he has a special place, full of fire and smoke and burning and torture and anguish, where he will send you to live and suffer and burn and choke and scream and cry forever and ever 'til the end of time!

“But He loves you. He loves you, and He needs money! He always needs money! He's all-powerful, all-perfect, all-knowing, and all-wise, somehow just can't handle money!”

“What a sinful and evil soul?”

“Baraka... is that person you call God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil..? Or is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?”

“If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.”

“Belief is the death of intelligence—” Leo started moaning, rushing his hands on his head.

Baraka smiled, "God is punishing you now." His smile disappeared when Leo fell.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

*MBEYA, 2014*

Leo slowly opened his eyes. He squinted over the entire room. There was a ceiling fan rotating slowly and he was sleeping on a bed with hygienic white sheets.

*Where am—*

The door opened and he saw a young woman, maybe in her late twenties. The woman was on a white dress and she carried a tray on her hands.

“Where am I?” Leo muttered

The woman placed her tray on the table, “safe place”

“Where..?”

“Ifisi hospital”

“Need to leave now”

“In that situation, you can’t!”

“Need to save my brother”

“If you are talking about a man who brought you here,” the woman scratched her hair, “said he would come back at night.”

“Who..?”

“A man of about forty-something”

“Need to leave now,” Leo attempted to stand, “my brother is in danger”

The woman forced him back to the bed, “You can’t—”

“What’s wrong?” another woman, looking to be in her fifties entered the room.

“He wants to leave” the younger woman snapped, “keeps on saying he wants to save his brother”

"It's alright, I'll handle it from here," the older woman said.

The younger woman left the room, leaving Leo with the older woman.

“Hello!” the woman said

Leo stared at the rotating fan

"I'm Patricia, a nurse, and psychologist"

“My brother is in danger”

“If you want to save your brother, you must recuperate”

“I’m fine”

“You are not!” Patricia opened her files, “You are suffering from Insomnia”

Leo gasped

“Can a man who will crumple at anytime save his brother?”

The statement touched Leo, “what should I do?”

“Good! You must answer my questions well”

Leo panted

“How old are you?”

“12 years old”

Patricia stared at Leo for some minutes, “For how long have you been getting difficult in sleeping?”

Leo smiled, “seven years, I guess!”

“Why? What prevents you from sleeping?”

“Many things”

“If I’m to help you, I need to know everything”

“Why should I trust you?”

“Don’t have to trust me. It’s for your brother’s sake”

Leo breathed heavily. He had no choice but to tell the woman his whole story. When he was done, tears were flowing on his smiling face.

“That smile conceals a lot of soreness” Patricia mumbled

“You said you would help me”

Patricia removed her eyeglasses and sat, “a month ago, my husband and my daughter were on their way home after shopping.

“They got a dreadful accident and my husband died on the spot. My daughter who barely survived, witnessing her father’s death has been affected psychologically by that accident.

“Now she avoids people, she can’t go out of the house and she won’t talk to anyone including me. I tried counseling her but it didn’t work” her eyes were now filled with tears.

Leo looked at her forlornly, “How does that help me?”

“Insomnia has no cure” Patricia wore her eyeglasses, “but you can overcome it by getting rid of grief and anger inside you—the factors that affect your sleeping habits”

“Tried a thousand times but guess what?” Leo chuckled, “the more I strive to forget, the more they become more lucid”

“You’re still young... can share your troubles with others”

"In my damn life, there are no other"

“Talk to my daughter”

“How..?”

“Elucidate your story and grief to her,” she paused, “will help you let go of your stress and grief, and maybe it can help my lost daughter to come back to life.”

“Do you think life will change, for both of us?”

Patricia nodded

“What if it doesn’t?”

"Then we people must change"

After Leo's medications were done, he was taken with Patricia to her home. He thought about Benjamin all over the road until the car stopped outside a beautiful Bangalore.

After entering the house, Leo saw a girl of about his age staring at the TV screen.

“Macy, how have you been?” Patricia shouted but there was no rejoinder

“She is beautiful,” Leo said

"Go save yourself and try saving her," Patricia said in a low pathetic voice, mounting up the stairs.

Leo walked closer to Macy and sat on the same couch next to her. Her eyes just concentrated on the TV screen.

“Be careful with my heart” Leo read on the Samsung RU8000 LED TV screen, “a TV show?”

Macy's eyes were immobile on the screen

"Every human has that story he or she doesn't want to share," Leo chuckled, not believing he became some rousing man, "but sometimes—"

Macy increased the TV volume

"I don't know what your story is but I'll tell you mine"

Macy stood from the sofa and started walking away

Leo amplified his voice, "I was at the age of five... when my life unexpectedly tainted. It was at that age when I stopped living like a human being..."

Macy, who was already at the foot of the stairs stopped and turned her head, her eyes met with Leo's woeful eyes.



# CHAPTER EIGHT

*TST*

Leo gained consciousness and found himself in the hospital bed. There was a needle piercing into his skin, transfusing liquid from the bottle hanging on the top of the bed. Sitting beside the bed was Isla.

“Leo..?” Isla mumbled

Leo tried getting off the bed, “Did you find the answer?”

“Caring about the assignment now?”

“No, you”

“You’re wobbly”

“What happened?”

“When did you last sleep?”

“Does that matter now?”

“Doctor said you have—”

“Insomnia..?”

“Knew it?”

Leo nodded

“How long..?”

“Was twelve”

“Why does it happen?”

Leo shrugged

“Can’t be candid with me?”

“It won’t change anything”

“I can help”

Leo smiled, “You can’t!”

“Why?”

“There is no cure”

“Doctor said you can—”

“Time for his medications!” said a nurse carrying a tray with syringes and some bottles, “can you excuse us please?”

“Hey! Get well soon”

Leo smiled, “Always”

Leo's eyes escorted Isla until she disappeared out of his sight.

\*\*\*\*\*

It was Friday and music students congregated in their class to submit their answers. Isla, Baraka, and Daniel sat on the last row. Isla could read misery and qualms in many students’ faces.

After a few minutes, Music professor Lucy Joseph entered the class together with the school warden. After greetings, everybody sat.

“You all fine..?”

Everyone nodded

“Okay! Let’s start with group one” she thumbed on her files, “group one... your answers please”

Group one members at the first row bowed their heads.

“Group one, your answers please”

They remained hushed

“Last time, Group one?”

She took her pen and wrote something on the file. She moved to group two but the results were the same. Her face was getting red. She moved to group three and four but the results were the same.

“Guys you can’t be serious!” she snapped

The class was dreadfully unruffled that they could hear the sound of the wind blowing.

She scowled, “What did you do in the whole week? Do you think we are just playing around?” she sighed, “hope the last group won’t let me down”

Isla could feel her stomach growling. She looked at Baraka and Daniel who were all vacillating on a hot sunny day.

“Group number five... save my face please” Lucy said

Isla stared at her fellow members.

“Group five please... tell me you found something” she snapped

The class was even quieter

“Third and last time, group five... did you get the answer?”

The class was incredibly soundless. Professor took her pen.

“YES! WE GOT THE ANSWER” this voice stopped the professor whose pen was already on the sheet of paper.

# CHAPTER NINE

*MBEYA, 2014*

Macy returned to the sofa and sat. She reduced the TV volume.

Leo leaned on the couch, breathing heavily, "Our family lived well till I reached five. My father lost his accountant's work. Our assets and belongings were sequestered and we were left with zilch. My father, due to stress or whatever reason he had became a barmy drunkard. My mother, to save her own life became a home maid in an Indian man abode. I, having nowhere to go, the street became my new residence.

"A five years old child, having nowhere to go, nowhere to sleep, nothing to eat, nothing to wear, surviving each day was a miracle. Dumping sites were my favorites, leftovers were my blessings, and houseflies became friends.

"In the eyes of the people I wasn't a human being, I was just a thief and a dreadful example to their children. I loathed people and abhorred my parents more. For five years, that was my life.

"In 2012 I met a man who became my brother, Benjamin Benson. He was the first person who was engrossed in my life story. He was a gambler and took me with him to the gambling house. That's when we realized I was good at the pool table.

"For two years now, we survive by gambling. It's tough but better than dumping sites. Benjamin taught me one thing... no one is responsible for my life. The government, my parents, and people are not responsible for my life. I am the one who is responsible for my life. I stopped blaming and thinking others were responsible for the life I was living. Now, I live my own damn life"

Though his face gave out a smile, he couldn't stop tears from flowing out.

"It's alright... you can cry" Macy said leaning Leo's head to her shoulder.

They remained in that posture for an hour. Leo sniveled, imagining what he had been through for seven years. After an hour, he felt better, his heart was light and for some reason, he thought his resentment was gone.

"Feeling better now?" Macy asked

Leo nodded with a smile

"Used to think I was the only one tormenting on earth"

"Just because people smile all the time doesn't mean their life is perfect. That smile is just a symbol of hope and strength"

"You in touch with your parents..?"

“My father is the maddest drunkard man in Mbeya,” he sighed,  
“My mother left the Indian abode and is now living at Mbalizi.”

“You hate them?”

“Don’t know... apart from the fact that they gave birth to me,  
we don’t any other special bond”

“My father was a good man!”

“Good men must die but death can’t kill their names”

That day was one of the unsurpassed days to Leo. He enjoyed  
Macy’s company and felt at ease. He even forgot about  
Benjamin.

“Can we go out for fresh air?” Macy said

Leo stood, “You sure?”

They held each others' hands and walked into the light.

# CHAPTER TEN

*TST*

The whole class turned around to look at Leo who limped, holding his left forearm with his right palm.

“Music is the moral law,” Leo sat with his teammates, “That’s the law left by the tree”

Professor Lucy narrowed her eyes, “how?”

“Goddess of war, Athena planted a lover of wisdom and that is a philosopher.” Leo gasped, “Athenian philosopher born in 428 B.C and died in 348 B.C is Plato.

“He was taught by Socrates, the father of ethics”

The whole class remained hushed while Prof Lucy thumbed her notebook. *What if I'm wrong? Why isn't a professor saying anything?* His lips were trembling and he could feel his stomach burning.

“Can you state the law?”

Leo stood, “Music is a moral law. It gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, a charm to sadness, and life to everything. It is the essence of order and leads to all that is good, just and beautiful, of which it is the



invisible, but nevertheless dazzling, passionate, and eternal form”

Prof Lucy cleared her throat and the class was hushed,  
“EXCELLENT!!”

The class busted with thundering ovations.

"This assignment aimed to kindle cooperation” Prof Lucy shouted and the class went silent, “and important enough to attest you that you are taking the right course.

Music would never make the traditional list of basic human needs... food, shelter, and clothing. But just see how long you could get along without it.”

When the professor left, Leo became the talk of the city. After a while, everyone left the class except Leo who was staring at his left forearm.

“You are bleeding!” Isla said

“Ah!! You startled me!” Leo hid his forearm, “I’m fine”

Isla rushed and pulled Leo's left arm, "Is this what you call fine?”

“It will be fine, that’s what I meant”

“Got away from the hospital, didn’t you?”

“Isla I—”

“It’s alright” Isla looked at his sore, “I have bandages in my room. I can dress it, let’s go.”

Isla started moving but Leo held her wrist and pulled her back. Their faces being few inches apart, the two stared at each other.

“Isla...” Leo mumbled

“Leo!”

“About the kiss last time...”

Isla could feel Leo’s breath on her face.

“Should I ask for forgiveness or confess my love?”

# CHAPTER ELEVEN

*MBEYA, 2014*

For the first time after many years, Leo thought he felt what a normal human must but when he thought about his brother, the happiness on his face faded out.

He ran back lyunga. He was stunned after opening the door.

“Where did you sleep?” Benjamin said

“What happened to you?” said Leo

“Told you were discharged when I came to the hospital”

“Mr. Patrick did let you go?”

“I think we should stop gambling”

“What?”

“You heard what I said”

“You’re not stern, are you?”

“Very stern..!”

“After quitting, how will we survive?”

“We’ll figure another way out”

Leo chuckled, “Our dead bodies will”

“Leo, I don’t want to raise you as a gambler”

Leo moved around the room

“As a custodian, I need you to have a better future”

“To people like me, there is no better future”

“You–”

Leo walked out, slamming the door.

He took a minibus to Mbalizi and stopped a few meters from a local pub. He leaned on a tree watching over an old man of about fifty-five, dancing and singing. It was noon and the man was frantically drunk.

“Leo” a young man of about eighteen stopped before him,  
“when did you come at Mbalizi?”

Leo’s eyes were on the man at the pub.

The man patted Leo’s shoulder, “LEO”

“Juma..!” Leo mumbled. He was his childhood friend

Juma looked at the pub, “You alright..?”

Leo’s face was drowned

“Hey, you should advise him to renounce”

“He has been like that since 2007”

“You’re his son, he’ll heed”

“There are things that you cannot change no matter how many clothes you change”

“He has taken more out of alcohol than alcohol has taken out of him”

Leo dug into his pocket and came out with a five hundred note, “please take him home after he’s done”

Juma grabbed the note, “I’ll, but try—”

Leo was already gone. His next stop was Tarafani market. The market was as hectic as it used to be. He hadn't been to Mbalizi for a year. Few things had changed but not people. They had the same life as the previous year and doubtless, worse.

He stopped near one vendor stall. He gazed at a woman who looked like a sixty years old woman but she was just forty-eight years old. The woman was so busy selling fruits and vegetables. Leo couldn’t stop looking at her.

“Leo? My son!” the woman snapped after seeing Leo.

Leo smiled

“For how long have you been here? Have you eaten?”

“I’m fine!”

“No, let's go home... I'll make lunch for you”

“I just stopped to say Hi”

“Don’t want to see where I live?”

“I think I should go now”

“Leo p—”

Leo was already meters away.

Leo sat, waiting for a minibus at a bus stop. A school bus swiftly stopped a few feet from him. A child of about seven years old dropped from the school bus. The child ran to his mother who was waiting for him. The two hugged each other, their faces expressing ecstasy and pleasure in their hearts. The mother helped her child with a bag and held his hand as they walked away, cheery and banter.

*Keep smiling, one day life will get tired of upsetting you,* Leo chuckled, looking at the mother and a child who after a while disappeared on his sight.

# CHAPTER TWELVE

*TST*

Their faces were a few inches apart that they could feel each others' breath

“Leo” Isla mumbled

Leo raised his eyebrows

“Leo I—”

“Guys, c’mon... you will need to see this” Baraka rushed into the room

The three walked out of the room, Isla assisting Leo walking. Though it was noon, the place grew dark. All students were out staring at the sky.

Baraka smiled, “it is a solar eclipse!”

Isla smirked, “What?”

“The moon meets with the sun... they make love and give birth to the stars” said Leo as he gazed over the sky. These words reminded him of someone he almost started to put out of his mind. He smiled.

Isla held Leo’s hand, “need to get rest or else you will collapse again”

“As you wish—”

“My whiz kid..!” Rachel ran towards Leo and hugged him, “I missed you”

Leo smiled, Isla gasped.

“Didn’t know you were that witty” Rachel still clinging over Leo, “the whole school is now talking about—”

“Hey, sorry but he needs to rest” Isla snapped

“You hurt?” Rachel scrutinized Leo, “OMG! Thanks, CR...but I’ll take care of him from here.”

Rachel pulled Leo’s wrist and pulled him with her. Leo turned his head and winked to Isla who looked disenchanted.

\*\*\*\*\*

Leo sat at his room staring at the window. He liked this room because through the window he could see the whole school campus. It was the weekend and he watched the students moving here and there. He had nothing to do, no gambling, and no friends.

He texted Benjamin, “Big bro”

Benjamin replied, “Tsup?”

“Got a job?”



"Yah, at the construction site"

"Makin money?"

"Enough to keep me alive... how is school?"

"Worst"

"Work hard"

"That's not my style"

"It's better than gambling"

"Thinking of quitting"

"I'll eat u alive"

Before he replied, his phone buzzed, he picked it up, "Rachel..."

"My whiz kid, you free?"

"Think so, what's up?"

"Get yourself ready, I'll pick you after an hour"

"Where to..?"

"Just get ready... you will like it"

"Tell—"

"See you after an hour"

"Hey... hey...hey," Rachel already hung up, "what on earth is she thinking?"

*What should I wear? What should I wear?* He scratched his head moving around his closet.

As he was thinking, a message came into his phone. *Batman*, he smiled after reading the sender of the message.

“U free?” the message read

Leo scratched his head and replied, “Yes”

“Can u come 2 my room?”

“Now..?”

“The earlier the better”

“Give me a sec”

Leo dug into the closet and changed his clothes. He thought about Rachel for a while and took his phone. He wrote her a message.

“I’ve got an urgent situation. We can’t meet today”

He switched off his phone and walked away.

\*\*\*\*\*

Leo was asleep at the coach and Isla was in her kitchenette. She unexpectedly heard a knock on the door. She hastily ran towards the door.

“Rachel..?” she whispered after opening the door

Rachel smiled, "How are you I—"

"Shii... someone is asleep"

Rachel nodded, pacing in, cautiously. She was stunned after seeing Leo on the couch, "how long has he been here?"

"An hour... fell asleep a few minutes ago" Isla sat, "what's up? Seems like you are going out"

"It's nothing"

"C'mon Rachel" Isla stood, "came all the way here to tell me nothing"

"Think I need to go"

"You alright..?"

Rachel walked out slamming the door.

Isla locked the door and returned to her kitchen.

Rachel walked out, her face filled with fury and twinges. Few meters from Isla's room, she met with Daniel.

"Rachel!" Daniel said

"What's up?"

"You alright..?"

"Do I look so?"

Daniel chuckled, "hitch shared is half solved"

"Good luck, hitch solver," Rachel said and walked away but Daniel pulled her arm

"Stop pretending," Daniel looked directly at Rachel's eyes, "Isla has got what you want and Leo has got what I want. If we work together, we will both get what we want"

Rachel snapped, "Work together?"

"Sounds good?"

"Don't need a rally round. It's better to deserve honors and not have them than to have them and not deserve them" Rachel mumbled and walked away.

"Who knows?" Daniel shouted, "Today's enemy can be tomorrow's friend"

# CHAPTER THIRTEEN

*MBEYA, 2014*

On the top of a gorgeous posh Bangalore, Leo and Macy stood exploring the mountainous landscape God has blessed Mbeya with. Leo was a blissful person with Macy next to him.

“Leo...” Macy said, “Do you have a dream?”

Leo shrugged, “I used to have”

“Used to..?”

“Always wished to go to a beautiful faraway place” Leo gasped, “and just live there for the rest of my life”

“But now..?”

“Maybe I have already found that beautiful faraway place”

They both laughed, avoiding eye contact.

“My dream is to be a grand musician”

“Nice dream”

“You’re the first person to ever say that”

“That so..?”

“Everyone says it is a daydream in Tanzania”

“Why?”

“They say I can’t thrive as a musician. No support”

“No one is responsible for your life”

“You think I might become a great musician?”

"If you do things right..." Leo smiled, "you will become, not only great but unforgettable musician"

Leo could see a dazzling smile on Macy’s face. The sun suddenly disappeared and the place turned dark.

Leo was puzzled, “what’s happening?”

“It’s called solar eclipse”

Leo chuckled, “what’s so hilarious with it?”

“The sun meets with the moon to make love and give birth to stars”

Leo smiled

“Know what?”

Leo raised his eyebrows

“You have been smiling a lot recently”

Leo smiled

“See... did it again”

“With you around, I feel free to smile”

“Yeah, People seldom notice old clothes if you wear a big smile”

They laughed

Leo got a new hope about life. He wanted to live more and more each day so that he could always be with Macy. He wasn't fighting to survive anymore, he was fighting to live. He was contented with his new life.

Leo and Macy lived like that for two years.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

*TST*

Isla sat in her room watching the Money Heist series on her phone. A message popped up on the screen.

*Leo the scoundrel*, she smiled after reading the sender's name

"U free?" she read the message

"Thoroughly free"

"Get ready... comin 2 pick u after 5 minutes"

"5 mins? I need 2 prepare myself"

"Don look so beautiful... don't want 2 brawl with men on streets"

She smiled, threw her phone on the bed, and ran to the bathroom. She was coming out of the bathroom when Leo opened the door

"You scoundrel!" she covered herself well, "How can you enter into a lady's room without knocking?"

Leo chuckled, "Do girls knock when they enter into the man's heart?"

Isla smiled, "Thought you were jesting"



“About?”

“Five minutes”

“I presaged you”

Isla laughed, “Give me five more minutes”

“Don’t have to put a lot of makeups” Leo jumped onto the couch, “men will start falling for you”

When she was done, they walked out of the school. They stopped at Kigamboni's fun city. Leo stopped at one tower where he could see children, people, and their beloved ones enjoying their moments.

*If only... these must be the two saddest words in the world,* he smiled while looking at waterslides and the wave pool.

Isla came with two glasses, “believe you’re not allergic of mangoes”

Leo chuckled, taking one glass.

“Were you serious..?” Isla asked

“About?”

“Strange dream you mentioned in class”

“Beautiful faraway place..?”

Isla nodded

“I was serious”

“Why did you come to school?”

“Forced”

Isla smiled, “You didn’t want school?”

“I now know the reason to why I was supposed to come here”

“What’s it?”

Leo looked at her face, “to meet someone”

Isla smiled, “Not afraid of men anymore?”

“What you fear the most is what you attract the most!”

“From bible..?”

“No, Street!!”

They both laughed

“You know what?” Isla sipped her juice, “at first, I thought you were a jerk, scoundrel, don’t-care, trouble maker but now I feel different whenever I’m with you. Happiness, joy, and smiles are what I feel when with you. In your presence, I feel comfortable”

Leo smiled, “Good girls love bad boys”

They laughed

“Let’s go have some fun down there”

“You sure..?”

“Don’t let the little moments pass you by, Leo, because regret is forever”

“So... she’s not serious sometimes”

Isla smiled, “Nobody gets out alive anyway”

Leo laughed, “After you!”

They clinked.

He held her hand and they walked down.

\*\*\*\*\*

Daniel was outside Isla’s room for hours. As the sun was setting, he saw Isla coming. The smile on her face manifested the good moments she had.

“Where are you coming from?”

“When did you become my sentinel?”

“I waited here for so long”

“You should stop going to other peoples’ places without notice”

“Isla—”

“I’m going to get some rest”

“What’s wro—”

Isla walked in and slammed the door

Daniel breathed heavily, his fists clenched. He walked to his room where he met his two friends, one short and the other tall.

"Bro, it's confirmed," the short said

Daniel gasped, "She was with Leo?"

"Yes, since noon"

Daniel smiled, "So, Leo was serious with the war"

"Are you just going to let it slide?" the tall snapped

Daniel grabbed the glass tightly, "NEVER"

The short stood, "What should we do?"

"I'll show Leo that he chose the wrong battle and the wrong battlefield"

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

*TST*

Leo and Isla became very close in a short period. Their rapport grew stronger each day. This bothered Daniel and Rachel.

Leo escorted Isla shopping when his phone buzzed.

“Benjamin?” Leo said after accepting the call

Isla tapped his shoulder, “hey Leo... is this dress—”

“Talking to someone”, Leo shouted, “Yes Benjamin, I’m listening”

Isla ran in front of him, “How do I—”

“Can’t you be quiet?” Leo whispered and returned to his phone, “my father, what—”

“Leo... you said you like red. Take a look—”

Leo placed his palm on Isla’s lips, “When?”

After the call was over, Leo drooped.

Isla looked at Leo, “You alright..?”

Leo panted

“Everything ok..?”

Leo stared at his phone

“Who were you talking with?”

Leo looked at Isla, “my father is gone”

“What?”

“Long gone”

Isla dropped the clothes on her hand, “I’m sorry”

Leo smiled, “Don’t”

Isla hugged Leo, but it was her eyes filled with tears, not Leo's.

They returned to school and Leo took permission to go and attend his father's interment.

\*\*\*\*\*

After two weeks the memorial service was over and Leo returned to school. He arrived in Dar-es-salaam at 9 PM and he headed directly to the school. It was tardy but the school hall was full of lights and decorations, crazy beats and music came from the hall. It was weekend so Leo knew students were partying as usual.

“Leo?” said Baraka, who came from the hall

"What's up, man?"

“I’m good. How did things go in Mbeya”

“Cool...” Leo said, “What’s going on?”

“Revelry..!”

Leo smiled, “wow... you attend parties nowadays?”

“No, Isla invited...” Baraka closed his mouth with his palms

“What..?”

“Leo, it is...”

“What?” Leo shouted, “What’s with Isla?”

“Daniel and Isla...”

“C’mon man, tell me”

“Daniel is proposing to Isla tonight,” Baraka mumbled, “they have invited us to the revelry”

Leo breathed heavily, his bag fell off his hands.

“You alright..?”

“Would you?”

“Leo—”

“I’ll go get some rest” Leo whispered and slowly walked away.

“Hey...” Baraka shouted running after him, “your bag!!”

*It's funny how you thought you meant something to someone, but then they go and prove you wrong,* his whole body was trembling. His expectations were all buried.

He entered into his room and he was stunned after flicking on the lights.

“Warden..!” Leo mumbled, “What are you doing in—”

“I have your message from school’s Dean” warden said digging into his pocket. He removed a letter and handed it to Leo.

“What is it?”

“He wanted me to tell you to be cautious”

“Why?”

"You know what I know," the warden said, leaving Leo’s room.

Leo quickly unfolded the tri-folded letter

*If you want to remain in this school and keep your scholarship safe, stay far away from my daughter.*

Leo felt a megawatt shot running through his entire body. He threw the letter on his bed and walked to his window. He opened the curtains and stared at the hall where loud music, cheers, and noises dominated. He stared at the window, a sour smile coming off his face.



He remembered when he was eight. He made his toy and a kid from a well-heeled family liked the toy. The kid wanted to take Leo's toy. As they were quarreling, the kid's mother appeared and reprimanded Leo... calling him a thief. His toy was taken and he was branded as a thief and the source of conflict. He knew he was now in the same situation.

No one has ever been on his side, even his parents. He has always been fighting alone and in those sorts of a fight— he always loses.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

*TST*

Leo was at the bench near the school's main gate. His head was trying to stop thinking about how the atmosphere changed in the two weeks he was away.

*Heliconia Pendula*, he looked at the beautiful flower in the garden in front of him. He had been in the school for two months but he never realized that there was such a beautiful garden on the campus. He was just stomping from one trouble to another. He smiled. But was he out of trouble now? No, troubles are part of his life. He is always in trouble.

*Don't cry for a woman who has left you... the next one may fall for your smile*, it was Benjamin's advice to his friend years ago.

"Waiting for someone?" Baraka said, sitting

Leo raised his head, "Baraka!"

"Sitting alone, bowing like an abandoned puppy" Baraka mumbled, leaning on the bench

"Waiting for Rachel"

"Anha!" Baraka said looking at Leo, "how comes a man who doesn't believe in God wear a rosary?"

Leo smiled, "there is nothing to lose"

“Looks like somebody gave it to you” Baraka scratched his head, “and that person must be exceptionally imperative to make you hang that rosary forever on your neck”

Leo looked at the sky and panted, "I wish I could see her again!"

“So it’s a girl...” Baraka slapped his cheeks, “why didn’t I think of that?”

“What are –”

“Was she your first love?”

“None of your business”

“C’mon Leo... you’re confusing the world”

“What?”

“Who is real inside that heart of yours?” Baraka panted, “Isla? Rachel? Rosary girl..?”

“Who do you think is good?”

Baraka scratched his head, “I don’t know about the rosary girl but do you think the other two can make you a good wife?”

“Good wife..?”

“Don’t tell me you’re just planning to hit and run”

“What’s your definition of a good wife?”

Baraka smiled and cleared his throat, "She must be God sent, God-fearing, beautiful, hard worker, should have patience, well behaving—"

Leo busted into a laugh

"You don't believe in God" Baraka mumbled, "I forgot that!"

"Last time seeing that kind of woman, was in a movie called Red valentine"

"Do you mean they don't exist?"

Leo smiled, "Maybe they're out there but I've never seen one"

"Hey, Leo... I try to think about this stuff hard but I can't figure out the reason"

"What?"

"Did you know that Daniel is the son of the head of this school's board directors?"

"It's none of my business"

"And did you know Isla is the daughter of—"

"School's dean"

"You knew that?" Baraka said, "So Isla told you"

Leo shrugged

“What bothers me is... why would they compel their children to propose to each other publicly?” Baraka lifted his hands to his cheeks, “no matter how hard I think about it, there must be something going on out there”

“What do you mean forced?”

“Seen Isla recently?”

Leo shrugged

“She has changed” Baraka sighed, “she looks sad, not as charming as before. If she wasn’t forced, why would she be like that?”

“Spying other people’s lives?”

“No... just trying to find out what is going on behind the scenes”

“Don’t try to dig things that have been well hidden”

“You are a don’t-care...” Baraka panted, “Why did I forget that?”

*Why is she taking so long?* Leo peeked at his watch

“Hey! Guess you have a visitor” Baraka snapped

Leo raised his head and his eyes met with Isla’s eyes

“I almost forgot it’s time for my medications” Baraka snapped as he stood and walked away leaving Leo and Isla

“Leo” Isla muttered as she sat

“If you want to say you’re sorry...there is no need”

“Leo... I want to explain—”

Leo held up his hand, “that too... there is no need”

“Leo it wasn’t—”

Leo raised both hands, “if you are waiting for someone, I can tolerate your presence but if you are here to explain your stories... then I’ll have to say goodbye”

“Leo please list—”

“LEO” shouted Rachel who ran towards the bench

Leo stood

“I’m sorry... I made you wait longer” she said, hugging Leo

“Isla, how are —”

“We should go” Leo snapped pulling Rachel away

# CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

*TST*

Leo was in his room, peeking out of his favorite window. His phone buzzed and he was staggered after looking at it. He gazed over it for several minutes and picked it.

“Daniel?”

“Leo, how are you?” Daniel replied on the other side

“What’s up?”

“You free..?”

“Never ask a man for his time”

“Can we meet at the school cafeteria?”

“Now..?”

“Have something vital to tell you”

Leo gasped, "There are a lot of cafeterias in this school"

“The one near forbidden library”

“Time..?”

“After thirty minutes”

“Fine”

“Tha—”

Leo hung the phone

Leo looked at his watch and it was 8 PM, *What does a board of director's kid want to tell me at this night? Menacing me?*

After changing his clothes he walked to the cafeteria.

*Why is it called the forbidden library?* He passed near the library that was snugly fortified. As he was walking, he saw some eccentric people coming off a bizarre car. It was dark but he was in no doubt that he had never seen those people before.

He stumbled and moaned mutely. *Looks like you are too busy minding other people's business, who is busy minding yours?* He kept on moving. He had never been interested in other people's businesses.

He reached the cafeteria and Daniel raised his hand after seeing him, so he walked to where Daniel sat.

“Leo” Daniel smiled, “I didn't expect you to accept my summon”

“Here I am”

“What would you like to drink?”

“I don't drink at nights”



“C’mon man” Daniel called a waitress, “please listen to my friend”

The waitress walked near Leo, “what would—”

“A bottle of water”

The waitress ran to the counter and returned with a bottle of water and glass. After serving her customers, she walked away.

“Thanks for accepting—”

“Why am I here?”

“Leo, I have a favor to ask you”

“Don’t have any favors, especially for someone like you”

“I know you are mad at me—”

Leo pounded the table with his fist, “if that’s what you called me for, goodbye”

“No... don’t leave. It’s about Isla”

Leo calmed down, “what’s with Isla?”

“She has become the saddest person I have ever met. She doesn't go out nowadays, she just locks herself in her room”

“That’s none of my business”

“You know what?” Daniel cleared his throat, “Isla and I were born at the same neighborhood. We attended the same

primary school, secondary school, and here we are today, taking the same course. In her heart, I was the only one till the day you appeared in her life"

"What a love story!"

"Leo, I know you have feelings for her and she does the same for you"

"Didn't know that..!"

"But I can't give up on her"

Leo clapped, "I'm proud of you!"

"I need your help"

"Should I sing this song ceaselessly" Leo leaned on the table, "there is nothing I can help you with"

"There is one"

Leo smiled

"Give up on Isla"

Leo laughed

"Tell her you never loved her, stay away from her. Maybe she will come back to the person she used to be"

Leo leaned on the chair, crossing his legs.

"I'm asking this as a fellow man and as a friend"

Leo chuckled, “Fine!”

Daniel was astonished, “real? You will do that for me?”

Leo stood up, “You heard me” and he started walking away

“Hey! You haven’t drunk anything. Where are you going?”

“To make things better..!” Leo smiled and walked away

It was already 9 PM, so he headed back to his room. He tried to get some sleep but he ended up rolling on the bed for hours.

He went to his favorite window and stared over the school campus. It was very quiet. He thought about what Daniel told him. He thought about the message from dean, Isla’s father. He smiled.

*Should I just give up?* He kept moving around his room. The watch on the wall read 2 AM.

What jolted him from the thoughts was a mammoth smoke coming from the school campus. He walked closer to his window.

*Fire..?*

# CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

*MBEYA, 2016*

Leo finished his chores early and rushed to the New forest to see Macy. He knocked on the door several times but no one opened. It was outlandish. He pushed the door, it wasn't locked. He vigilantly walked inside, his heartbeat rate increasing. He saw Macy sitting on the stairs, hugging her feet and her chin on the knees. At least he was reassured after seeing her.

"You okay?" Leo said

"Leo..." Macy muttered

"Why crying?"

Macy hugged Leo

"It's alright. Tell me"

"It's my mother"

"What's with her?"

"She's been transferred"

"To..?"

"Mwanza"

“That’s good news”

“We’re leaving”

“What?”

“That means I’ll never be able to see you again”

Leo drooped, the smile on his face disappeared, “You won’t come back to Mbeya”

“Our home is in Mwanza. We came to Mbeya because dad was transferred here. Now mom has been transferred back”

“When are you living?”

“October”

“So we have eight months?”

“Leo... I don’t want to leave you”

“Neither do I”

The two hugged each other.

They decided to spend the remaining eight months together. They spent their first month clinging to each other, more than before. They spent most of the time walking, talking, and tell each other the stories about the memories they had in their lives.

Later in the third month, they agreed to spend less time together. They were preparing for the day they would part forever. Leo agreed to see Macy only twice a week. The five days of every week were miserable to Leo. And for the two days they met, they clung together even more desperately. But they were practicing for the future which was about to come.

"After five months, the five days of the week will be forever," Macy said

Leo gasped, "I will live a forlorn life without you"

"So will I"

Leo breathed heavily

"Maybe one day you will come to visit me at Mwanza"

"To find you with a happy Sukuma husband and a couple of kids..?"

"Don't say that" Macy cried, "you are the first to me and maybe you'll be the last"

"I wonder how life will be after you leave"

"Just promise me you'll be happy"

"Happy?" Leo chuckled, "You are the only happiness I have"

"Leo, I don't want to leave you but there is no way" Macy sighed, "and I won't want to think you're sad when I'm gone"

“I can’t forget you”

“We have five months only. Let’s not spend them in this sad way”

“Sure!” Leo said with a smile but inside his heart, the wound which was about to heal and the hope about life that began growing were vanishing little by little.

The months were running very fast and later the two agreed to meet only once per week, on Mondays.

# CHAPTER NINETEEN

*TST*

Leo promptly ran out of his room to the place the smoke came from. It was eccentric. He saw no one on the way. It was late at night but there was a building on fire and no one seemed to realize that except him.

He stopped in front of the prohibited library. He comprehended that the fire didn't start long but where was everybody else? Guards..? The situation intimidated him. The place which is tightly fortified twenty-four hours each day is burning and no one was around.

As he was hypothesizing, he heard someone blaring for help from inside. It was a familiar voice.

Since the fire wasn't strong enough, he ran inside the building. He was stunned finding Isla on the floor. He carried her and ran out of the building.

"What were you doing in the prohibited place?" Leo said laying Isla on the grasses.

"Run..." Isla muttered

"What?"

"Run before they catch you"



“Who, why..?”

“It’s only two of us here... anyone comes, they will think we are responsible for the fire”

“I’m not leaving you behind”

“Leo plea—”

“THIS WAY!” a voice came on the other side of the burning library followed by stomping footsteps

"Let's leave," Leo said, carrying Isla on his back and started running away

“I’m slowing you down... they will catch us”

“Just keep quiet”

The footsteps and the voices of guards were near. Leo dropped Isla down.

“What are you doing?” Isla said

“Go... run”

“What?”

“I’ll handle the rest”

“Leo... if they catch you, you’re done with school”

“I have nothing to lose”

“Don’t do this Leo” Isla cried, “this is my case, I’ll pay for it”

“Please... go”

“I can’t”

“We’ll both be caught here”

“You can leave”

“I’m not leaving you”

“Leo—”

“RUN!!”

Leo forced Isla to run and lastly, she limped away. He had to save his life.

“THERE IS SOMEONE HERE!” one guard shouted

# CHAPTER TWENTY

*MBEYA, 2016*

One day remained to 20<sup>th</sup> October, the day Macy and her mother were leaving to Mwanza. Leo was on the bed with Macy, staring at the roof.

“I can’t believe after tomorrow, everything will just be a memory” Leo muttered

“If it was my will, I could’ve stayed”

“I’m not blaming you”

“I’m blaming myself”

“Maybe we will meet again”

Macy removed the rosary from her neck, “this was from my father. He said it will protect me” she handed it to Leo

“It’s the only thing from your father”

“Yeah”

“I can protect myself, you can keep it”

“Keep it with you... it’ll remind you about me and protect you”

Leo smiled, “How will this protect me?”

“What’s your religion?”

“I don’t have one”

“There is this saying, it is better to believe that God is there because if he is... the results will be infinitely and if he is not there, there is nothing to lose” Macy placed the rosary on Leo’s neck, “keep it, because there is nothing to lose”

Leo smiled, "At what time are you leaving?"

"Seven-thirty, I guess... we're using a private car" Macy gasped, "will I see you again before I leave?"

“Yes”

“Promise me”

“I’ll be here early in the morning to say goodbye”

The two stared at each other. As if some force was heaving them, their faces got closer and closer. They could feel each others’ breath. At a snail's pace, their lips came into contact and they fell deep inside their beddings.

Leo couldn't sleep that night. He drew the pictures of the imperative moments he had with Macy. He wanted to give the pictures to Macy on the next day. Hours were running exceedingly swift but his eyes were wide open.

When he heard the first cock's crow, Leo wrapped his drawings into an envelope. He swiftly changed into his much-loved clothes and walked out of his room.

His eyebrows rose and his body froze when he reached the sitting room. He saw Benjamin rolling on the floor, his hands on the stomach. He was rolling around the floor, moaning and screaming.

# CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

*TST*

Leo was taken to the warden's office, not as a student but as a criminal. He had to sleep there till morning. Things seemed weird to him. He thought about the eccentric men he saw earlier in the night. He thought about the forbidden library, a place effusively guarded every second. But at the time of the fire, no one was around the library. He thought about Isla. What was she doing in the forbidden library? Peculiarly, she was alone... late at night. He thought something anomalous was going on.

The first person to enter the office in the morning was warden. He wasn't wearing his official dresses as he normally, he was in sports outfits.

"I knew you were after something since the first day I met you?" warden snapped after sitting

"I know you hate me"

Warden chuckled, "I hate those who are against laws"

"Didn't do anything"

"Give me five reasons to believe that"

“I was in my room... saw fire exploding, that’s why I ran to the place”

Warden crossed his arms, “wanted to be a superman? Putting off the fire by yourself”

“I—”

“Did you scream or report anywhere?”

Leo breathed heavily. Warden’s face was flushed

“Why were you running away?”

“I wasn’t running, I was saving myself”

Warden sipped his coffee, stood, and walked around the office for five minutes. He sat and gazed at Leo, “Okay, let’s start afresh”

“Can I ask you something?”

“Your job is to retort my questions”

“Where were the guards when the library was burning?”

Warden gave a glazed look, “That’s none of your business”

“You should be interrogating them, not me”

“Who are you to choose who I interrogate?”

“You are being dogmatic”

Warden stood up, "Answer my questions!"

"Have told you—"

"What did you take from the library?"

"Nothing"

Warden leaned on the table, "Fine! Did you see anyone when you got there?"

Leo gasped, dodging warden's eyes "I didn't—"

Warden pounded the table, "LIAR!!"

Leo sighed

Warden called the school guards, "Lock him in the school cell... make sure no one comes visiting him. Search his entire room and see if you can find any clue. Let's see for how long he will keep that mouth of his shut."

\*\*\*\*\*

Rachel entered into Leo's room. It was wholly a mess, everything was wrecked. She started arranging the room when she heard Leo's phone buzzing.

"Hello" she whispered at a low tone

"You Leo?" replied the woman on the other side

"No, you can talk to me"



“A man called Benjamin Benson is under the Intensive Care Unit at Muhimbili hospital. Tell him to come soon”

“What happened?”

“He’ll know when he gets there”

“I’m sorry but—”

The phone was aborted.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

*MBEYA, 2016*

Leo couldn't park himself at the patient's desk. He stood in front of the door his brother was sent. He couldn't stand still, he moved back and forth. A doctor came out of the room and Leo ran after him. His coat was written Inyala dispensary.

"Sorry doc, how is my brother?" Leo said

"Please be unwearied, young man"

Leo couldn't be unwearied. Macy and her mother were leaving and it was his only chance to say goodbye to a girl he might never see again. He promised Macy to see her off. How could he be tolerant?

The sun rays piercing the windows in the dispensary baffled Leo. He wanted to run but his brother was in bed. He kept on scratching his head.

"Leo Felix" a nurse, perhaps in her late fifties called Leo

Leo stomped to her

"Your brother is doing better. We've given him a bed"

"What am I supposed to do?"

"He may need to eat after waking"

“I’ll be right back”

“You don’t—”

Leo was already at the door. He boarded a motorbike from Iyunga to New Forest. The motorbike dropped him out of Macy’s home.

After knocking the gate for fifteen minutes is when he realized that he was too late. Macy and her mother were long gone. He didn’t want to admit and kept on knocking. As he knocked, a tri-folded letter slipped off from the gate. He ran after it and unfolded it.

*I have waited for you but it seems like I won’t see your face for the last time. If you are reading this letter, I just wanted you to know that wherever on earth I will be, I’ll always wait for you. Days might pass into months, months might pass into years, and years might pass into decades, but I will always keep on waiting for you. Stay safe. I love you!*

Leo fell on his knees, moaning. He regretted breaking the promise and for not letting the girl know that he loved her. *I love you madly Macy and if I never see you again, know this... whether it is today or a hundred years from now, I’ll die with you on my mind.*

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

*TST*

“Someone is here to grill you” warden notified Leo after entering the school cell

“Police, soldier or—”

“You should answer her questions”

“Have nothing new to say”

“Didn’t come to ask for consent” warden snapped. “I came to tell you to get ready”

After five minutes, a woman of about fifty-five in a majestic dress entered into the cell. She sat on the opposite side, facing Leo

“So, you’re Leo?” the woman said

“Don’t fritter away your time, I have—”

Warden pounded the table with his fist, “silence! She’s the dean’s wife. Show respect”

The woman raised her hand, “it’s alright... you can leave us alone”

“Madam—”

“I said it’s alright”

Warden left the cell, looking at Leo heatedly.

Leo had heard rumors of Dean’s wife before. She was a stringent woman when it comes to laws and orders. He also heard the school was firm and unwavering because of the woman. She's the woman who had managed to live with the Dean for ten years, many lasted a month. She never gives a shit.

“I’m Sonia Japheth, you can call me SJ!” Dean’s wife said

“I didn’t do anything—”

“I know”

“What?”

“You saved my daughter’s life”

“Why am I still here?”

“We have an urgent matter to discuss”

“About forsaking your daughter?”

SJ smiled, “about the future of the school”

Leo chuckled, “dean’s wife and scholarship student..?”

“The fate of the school is at the stake”

“That’s none of my business!”

“I’m trying to help you”

“You can’t save someone who doesn’t want to be saved”

“If we don’t find the real culprit behind the fire break, the whole guilt will fall on your shoulders”

“I have nothing to lose”

SJ smiled, “I know... but you have something to pay”

Leo leaned on the table, “How will you help me?”

"Good" SJ smiled, "there is a document in the forbidden library, if it falls in the wrong hands the school will collapse. Want you to get that document for me"

“You mean ashes?” Leo chuckled, “because that’s what I’ll find in the forbidden library by now”

“Burning the library was just the first step” SJ cleared her throat, “they are now after the document”

“I think I’m confused”

“The document isn’t in the library... it was buried under the library”

"Looks like you know much... why don't you go and take it yourself?"

“This is not a physical war, Leo... it is a brains' war. Go get the document for me and I clear off your charges”

“Why should I believe the school will be safe with the document in your hands?”

“It has always been”

“And what if when the document falls in those *wrong-hands* the school will improve?”

“People in your generation perplex between improvement offers and new opportunities” she chuckled, “people need new opportunities and not improvement offers”

“Babysitting me?”

“Get the document to me and I clear off your accusations. You will be safe and so will the school”

“You’re as cunning as the rumors suggest”

She extended her hand to Leo, “Are you in?”

Leo dodged the hand, “the only bond we have is the fact that I give you the document, and you clear off my accusations. Out of that, we never met”

SJ smiled, “thought you were my future son-in-law”

“I’ll need more information to get the document”

“Tonight, at my office. Come discreetly”

# CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

*MUHIMBILI HOSPITAL, DAR*

Rachel tried to get in touch with Leo but the guards rejected. She decided to take the trouble and rushed to Muhimbili hospital by herself.

She went directly to the reception office where she checked the list of all patients registered on that day and she was ushered by a young nurse to Benjamin, who was in the emergency room.

“What’s wrong with him?” Rachel asked the nurse escorting her

“Gun wound”

“How is he doing now?”

“He’s getting worse”

They entered into the emergency room. Benjamin was on the bed, his chest covered with bandages.

Rachel was puzzled, “have you removed the bullets?”

“That will need an operation”

“Why is he not in the operation room?”

“You’ll need to pay first”



“Pardon..?”

“Pay first!”

“Are you going to let the man die because of money?”

“Madam, we have—”

“Is this how you were trained?”

“I just follow my orders”

“Are schools training killers or healers?”

“Madam Please—”

“LEO” Benjamin whispered hardly

Rachel rushed to the bed, “How do you feel?”

“Who are you? Where’s Leo?”

“I’m Leo’s friend... Leo has got an urgent situation” Rachel knelt and held Benjamin’s trembling hand, “He’ll be here soon”

Benjamin smiled, “You are very fluky!”

“Pardon..?”

“He never makes friends” Benjamin coughed up blood, “You must be very special to him”

Rachel forced a smile, her whole body trembling

“Why is he taking so long?”

“He’ll be here soon”

“I don’t have much time”

“Don’t say that”

Benjamin coughed up blood, “He will be so lonely, that poor kid”

“You won’t die”

Benjamin dug into his pocket and came out with an envelope,  
“Can you give this to Leo?”

“No... you are not dying”

“Please... promise me... for me to go peacefully”

Rachel took the paper, “You won’t die”

Benjamin held Rachel’s hand, “tell Leo that I’m sorry”

“Please... don’t talk, get some rest”

“I forced him to go to that school, he didn’t like it. Tell him I just wanted him to have a better future”

Rachel wept, “Leo is blissful with the school... he is blissful with us as his friends”

“I’m glad” Benjamin coughed up blood, “tell him to forgive his mother too. She is very lonely”

“Why are you saying all these?”

“Please take good care of my Leo”

“I will, I always do”

Benjamin smiled, “I’m glad to see Leo’s friend before my death”

“Nurse!” Rachel shouted, “Call doctors!”

Benjamin held her wrist, “It’s too late!”

“No!”

Benjamin’s hand which held Rachel’s wrist fell. Rachel stood and tried to shake Benjamin's body which gave no response. She fell on her knees weeping deafeningly.

# CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

*TST*

When darkness conquered the sky, Leo was released from the cell. One of the guards, calling himself Buster gave Leo a piece of paper.

*Don't go anywhere. Come to the parking lot, now. No one must see you.* He panted, dropping the paper into his pocket.

He walked circumspectly to the parking lot. Someone inside a black Toyota IST whispered to him. It was SJ. She wore a long pullover. They walked to her office which was within the school campus.

It was a huge office. Leo stared at the gorgeous curtains hanging over the window, reflecting the exquisiteness of the office. On the wall hanged a photo of SJ and dean, in their nuptial dresses. Leo's eyes were wide open and so was his mouth, after looking at the three people sitting comfortably around the pricey meeting table.

"You look puzzled," SJ said. "This is your team!"

"Didn't ask for a team" Leo walked to the table and sat at the only chair left. On his left-hand side, Isla sat with Daniel and on his right-hand side, Baraka sat. In front of him sat SJ.

"If we need to succeed, we must work together," SJ said

Leo panted, staring at the rotating fan

"We aim to get the document before they do," SJ said, "The document is inside a box buried under the library"

"Who are those people you call *they*?" Baraka said

"For now, I'm not certain. I'm chary to all board members. This is a fight for power"

Daniel chuckled, "Expecting us to win the foe we don't know?"

"We'll fathom out soon," Isla said

"How..?" Baraka asked

Isla breathed heavily, "On that day, I received a call. The number was unfamiliar. The caller talked like my father and asked me to meet him at the school parking. He told me to go there discreetly. I was suspicious but I went alone.

"The only thing I remember is that I entered in the car he directed me to and when I woke up, I was inside the burning library. I don't remember anything in between"

"Chemical toxicological analysis indicated that she had consumed flunitrazepam" SJ said

"What's that?" Baraka muttered

"Knock-out drug," SJ said

“Who did it?” Daniel snapped

“My tech guy is working on the number. We’ll soon track the caller”

Leo chuckled, “looks like the fight is real”

SJ narrowed her eyes, “whoever it is, the person is dangerous. They kidnapped my daughter, burnt the library and they’re now after the document. These people are threatening the school’s well being”

“Things look knotty, why don’t we tell the police?” Baraka said

SJ held up her hand, “this is a brains’ fight. Just get the document to me and I’ll handle the rest”

“So... where do we start?” Daniel said

"When the reconstruction of the library begins," SJ said, “our mission starts”

The three students bowed their heads. Leo’s eyes were straight to SJ’s eyes. She was the type of woman who can do anything to protect her husband’s power. She had a strong heart. Leo envied her.

*Not getting what you want either means you don’t want it enough, or you have been dealing too long with the price you have to pay.* Mr. Patrick told him these words on his first day in a gambling house.

“You need to be vigilant. Our enemy is powerful and smart. If something goes erroneous, you are on your own. I won’t be able to help” she turned her eyes to Leo, “you need to be superfluous vigilant. Everyone out there has focused an eye on you”

Leo nodded

“The fate of this school is in your hands”

Baraka gasped, “Ms. SJ, don’t worry. This team is fully stable. We have got a don’t-care but smart person, a beautiful charismatic leader, Billy blanks and me, a consecrated person. Our probability of winning is almost one”

The four smiled, Leo’s head was still thinking about something. No matter how hard he tried to think, something seemed strange to him.

After two long hours, their discrete meeting was over.

“We’ll be meeting in this office often,” SJ said, “good luck!”

Leo was the first one to walk out. After two days of being locked in the cell, he was free. Not totally free, there was another battle ahead. That was his life anyway.

*I might be sad, hurt, angry, mad, and disappointed. But you know what? I'll put on a happy face and move on. It will hurt*

*but I always survive*, he smiled and breathed heavily, staring at the blue sky.

“Leo!” Isla called running towards him

Leo slowed his pace

“Leo, I wanted to say thank you”

“Don’t be so proud of yourself. Just did what I could’ve done to anyone”

“Leo let—”

Leo was already hitting the road, leaving Isla in a disenchanted state. Behind his smile was a hurting heart, behind his laugh he was falling apart.

He found Rachel sitting on the porch outside his room.

“Looking at your face” Leo said, “one can say you were the one locked not me”

Rachel quickly ran and hugged him, “Leo!”

“Don’t tell me you’re crying because missed me”

“It’s your brother”

“What’s with Benjamin?”

“He is ...”

Leo pulled Rachel from his body, “What?”



“He has passed away”

The smile on Leo’s face vanished. Benjamin was the only family he had. Benjamin was the only royal person to him. Blood makes people related, royalty makes people family.

“How?” he mumbled

“Gun wound”

“When..?”

“Yesterday”

“His body..?”

"Still in the morgue"

“How long can they keep it there?”

“Don’t know! But not so long”

Leo panted, looking at the sky

“We have to go and take it”

“Rachel, right now there is something I must do—”

"Your brother's body is in the morgue"

“I know” tears flowed over his face, “If I don’t finish this thing, I can’t be free”

“What’s it?”

“I’ll tell you once I’m done”

“Leo—”

Leo rushed his hands on her cheeks, “I’ll do it as fast as I can. So please bear with me a little longer”

Rachel removed the roughly folded envelope, “He told me to give you this”

Leo took the four-bar baronial envelope.

“He also said he’s sorry” Rachel gasped, “And asked you to forgive your mother”

Leo chuckled, “he did?”

“His last words”

Leo grabbed the envelope and hugged Rachel snugly. He could feel Rachel’s heartbeats on his chest “Rachel... for being on my side, thank you very much!”

He slowly started walking to his room

“Leo!”

He stopped and turned around

Rachel’s eyes were full of tears, “I know your heart is somewhere else but I’ll wait. Till the day you find the place for me in your heart, till the day you’ll consider my feelings... I’ll wait”

Leo walked slowly towards Rachel and held her shoulder, “Rachel, don’t waste that precious time of yours waiting for someone who doesn’t know where he’s going because you never know when he’ll get there and when he’ll decide to get back” his eyes were mourning and pathetic. “It’s not an advice, it is a warning”

He disappeared into his room and jumped on his bed. He couldn’t sleep... his head was full of stuff. He opened the envelope. There were an ATM card and a piece of letter. He unfolded it.

*Leo, my son,*

*I’m very sorry for being an irresponsible father.*

*I’m regretting leaving this earth without being a good teacher to my only son.*

*I know you hate me and I don’t blame you for that but I’ll rest in peace if you’ll forgive your mother. She is very lonely. Please don’t let her die like me.*

*I saved a little money for you and your mother. I hope it will help you both.*

*Darkness can’t remove darkness only light can do so. Therefore hate can’t remove hate, only love can do so.*

*Live a happy life.*

Leo's hands were on his sobbing eyes, trying to stop the tears from flowing out. He threw the letter on the bed and walked to his favorite window.

He leaned his hands on the window, *what kind of a person am I? Why am I filled with anger, hate, and vengeance? Will my hate remove hate?*

# CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

*MBEYA, 2020*

Leo at a snail's pace pressed the door handle to enter the house. It was 5:30 AM. He walked in cautiously and flicked on the lights. His heart pounded faster.

“Went gambling again?” Benjamin said, sitting on the chair

“We’ll starve”

“Told you we will find another way”

“So, we just sit and starve...” Leo sat, “till you find another way”

Benjamin threw an envelope on the table, “good news for you!”

Leo chuckled, “Good news?”

“Two months ago, I applied you a scholarship.” Benjamin sat well, “the results are out and you have been granted full scholarship”

The smile on Leo's face disappeared, "what do you mean by the scholarship?"

“You have been chosen to attend Tanzania School of Talents”

“Didn’t ask for that”

“You have talents”

“I don’t need to be taught—”

“I won’t let you live as a gambler”

“I won’t go to school?”

“The fact that you have talent is not sufficient, hence the importance of developing talent through learning.”

“Never said I needed that”

Benjamin leaned on the chair, “Leo... fifteen years ago, I graduated with a GPA of 4.0 in the Bachelor of Science in Information Technology. I wandered in the streets for two consecutive years looking for a job. I got nothing and ended up as a gambler in gambling houses”

For the first time since 2012, Benjamin talked to Leo about his past. He had never done that before. Leo was ten, wandering in the streets when Benjamin took him. Benjamin believed that everyone was responsible for his or her own life. He’s the one who taught Leo to smile in tough times. He never exposed his past to Leo.

Benjamin stood and walked close to Leo, “People don’t need your certificates... they need your impacts on their lives. The results of your impacts on their lives will be your certificates

"I don't want you to be a gambler. I want you to be an expert who uses his talents to change peoples' lives. That's what I'm sending you to school for and not for the papers with A's and B's. I made that mistake and here I am today"

Leo smiled, "I appreciate but won't take your offer"

Benjamin's face grew red "this is not a request, it's a command"

"What?"

"You like it or not... you are going to school"

Leo smiled, "yeah! You gave me this life anyway. You are free to decide whatever I should do with it"

# CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

*TST*

Isla entered the class late after the break. She looked at the back seat, it was empty. Her heart was heavy, heavy enough to make her body less strong to bear the heart's weight. She walked unhurriedly to her seat.

She sat and took her notebook out. On the first page, she found a memo. A scrawl in black crayon was everything inside the memo. Her heartbeat rate accelerated.

*I'm waiting in the empty school store*

*P.S: not leaving until I see you*

She was puzzled, *is it another trap?*

Her heart pounded even faster, *should I alert mom?*

After thinking for a while, she headed out of the class. She stopped in front of the empty store. She breathed heavily, her hands on the latch. It was murky inside and the lights were off. She walked in, cautiously.

"Anybody here?" she whispered

All of a sudden, someone appeared behind her and hugged her.



She struggled to pull herself off, “Who is—”

“Can we remain like this for a little longer?” Leo muttered

“Leo?”

Leo panted, his hands met around her belly.

Isla grinned, holding Leo’s arms, “Leo, I’m very sorry”

“Don’t be. I understand!”

“It was my parents’ plan”

“Parents always struggle for the better of their children”

“Not my parents!” Isla sobbed, “They only think about what is better to them”

“Used to think the same”

"My parents think about power only," she said, “They can do anything to get it”

“They are not getting any younger” Leo panted, “Who do you think they are fighting for?”

“I know but they can’t choose what my heart must”

“They love you”

“They love power”

“When love is too much, it becomes possession”

“Pardon..?”

“Lucifer loved God too much that he wanted to possess him”

“My parents possess me?”

“Not sure!” Leo gasped, “But the only sign that love has turned to the possession, is when lovers start to choose who their lovers should meet, talk to or form a friendship with”

“I won’t give up on you”

“Neither will I!”

“Leo Felix, I love you!”

“I love you too, Isla Theodore”

“Thought I might lose you forever”

“Tried saying I was over with you. But every time my phone vibrated, my heart still wished it was a text from you”

“Thank you for coming back”

“I knew that looking back on the tears would make me laugh but I never knew that looking back on the laughs would bring tears”

“I very sorry. It was my entire fault”

“No... I acted like your absence doesn’t bother me at all” he sobbed, “but it was killing me inside”

Isla turned around to face Leo. Their eyes met. Through his eyes, she could see all the memories of the time they spent together. She felt safe and comfortable inside the murky store with Leo around her.

"It won't be easy," Isla said

"We'll fight together!"

"Promise me I won't lose you"

Leo held Isla's head and looked at her eyes, "I promise"

Their bodies were pulled by a mistral wind to zero distance. Their faces expressed the feelings their mouth couldn't, at that time. Isla passed her arms around Leo's neck and Leo's arms were around her waist. Their lips bit by bit moved closer to each other and finally met.

"Guys..!" Baraka shouted after opening the door suddenly

The two pulled away from each other

"Knocking is not your style?" Isla snapped

"Sorry for interrupting... Ms. SJ needs us, now"

\*\*\*\*\*

Leo was in the class, musingly sketching the plan for the mission. He heard the footsteps entering the class but he didn't care and kept on sketching.

"Good morning class!" said the person

*Prof Lucy, she doesn't have a period today*, he kept on staring at the papers scattering on his desk.

"I came to introduce a new class member" Prof Lucy shouted, Leo still on his papers. "She'll be taking the music class like us, please show her your utmost collaboration. She'll introduce herself"

There was a moment of silence.

"Morning classmates!" the voice pierced Leo's ears and caused all of his hands to freeze. The blood in his body was flowing faster than before.

"My name is Macy Michael and I ask for your cooperation"

Leo found himself up and his eyes met directly with Macy's eyes. He squinted but what he saw was still the same. His heart stopped beating for a second.

*Macy?* His mouth was wide open as he landed on his chair, causing the chair to creak and crackle.

"Leo?" this voice jolted him. Standing in front of him was Macy.

*It is her!* It had been four years, Macy didn't change much. Her songbird sweet voice grew sweeter, her languorous rapture-blue eyes grew more beautiful and her sculpted figure was

more perfectly twine-thin. Time changed her height, age, and made her more beautiful.

“Leo” she looked at his face, “I missed you”

Leo looked around the class. Everyone’s eye was on his side.

“There is a store behind the school’s lavatory. Go first... I’ll come after five minutes”

“Leo—”

He murmured, “Please... we’ll talk there”

Macy nodded and left the class. Leo breathed heavily. He could feel his whole body trembling. All the memories she had with Macy began repeating on his mind. The clock was faster than it had ever been. Five minutes were over within a blink of an eye.

He stood and headed out of the class. When he reached the front seat, Isla gave him a healthy smile and winked to him. He smiled back and walked out quickly. He entered the store after confirming that no one was trailing him.

"Leo, I always prayed to see you again," Macy said, clinging on Leo

Leo gasped, “That morning, I was late”

“I have always been waiting for you”

“I’m glad you are back”

“I won’t leave you again, Leo”

“How did you end up here?”

“Fulfilling my dream, you?”

“Surviving..!”

“Leo, I love you”

Leo snorted. His body was trembling. Macy was still hugging him.

Macy pulled Leo away from her body, “You alright?”

Leo remained silent

“Leo!!”

“Macy...”

“What’s wrong?”

Leo looked at the door

“Thought you would be happy to see me”

Leo gasped, “I am”

“Hiding something from me, aren’t you?”

“No, why would I”

“You still love me?”

“I do”

“Then tell me what’s going on”

“Nothing..!”

“Leo... you are not alright”

“I feel like I’m in a dream”

Macy hugged Leo, “I spent four years thinking about you all days and nights”

“Thanks for coming back”

“I love you, Leo”

“Love you too, Macy”

First love never dies. You can put out the flame, but not the fire. The long-dormant dragon was awakening. The feelings which were buried four years ago sprouted in their hearts. The two hugged each other firmly, their bodies expressing the thirsty of the moments they missed. Leo’s hands were holding Macy’s cheeks, whose hands were on his shoulders. Their lips were at a zero distance, leaving the rest of the job to their molding tongues.

The store’s door opened unexpectedly.

“Leo... I thought—” Baraka’s palms rushed on his mouth

Baraka’s eyes and mouth were wide open. Macy remained speechless, her hands still on Leo’s shoulders.

“Can you excuse us?” Leo told Macy and she nodded

The two men escorted Macy with their eyes as she was leaving the store. Leo bowed his head.

Baraka rushed to Leo after Macy left, “you crazy?”

Leo panted. His hands were on his pounding heart.

“Hit and run... that’s your style?”

Leo gasped, “Baraka... I am both happy and sad at the same time, and I’m still trying to figure out how that could be”

“You are treating relationships like video games” Baraka clenched his teeth, “play them and when you get bored, you cheat”

“Baraka list–”

Baraka raised his right arm, “A real man ends a relationship before he starts searching for another”

Leo stared at Baraka

“It was yesterday when you settled your issues with Isla and today you are cheating”

Leo bowed, breathing heavily, “She is the one”

“What?”

“The one I told you about”



Baraka moved closer to Leo, “By any chance, the rosary girl?”

Leo nodded

“Oh my God”

“I’m lost”

Baraka patted Leo’s shoulder, “I’m sorry, I panicked”

Leo forced a smile

“Some beautiful paths can’t be discovered without getting lost”

"Between that beautiful path and the path I am now, there is the deep sea" Leo smiled, "and in it, I'm drowning slowly"

“Leo, you are my friend. I promise I’ll help you solve this issue”

Leo hugged Baraka, “Baraka, thanks for being my friend. Let’s go save our school first then we’ll come back for our hearts”



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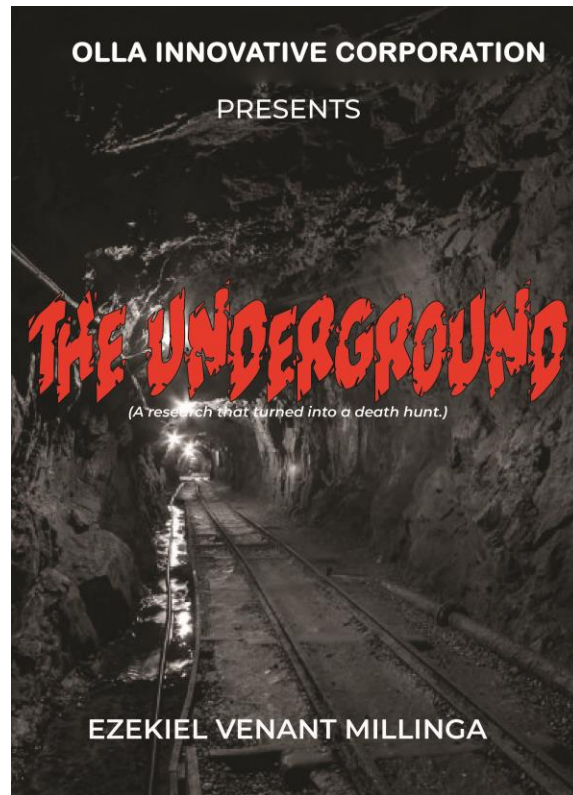
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Watch for book 2 of THE LOVE ECLIPSE SERIES.

Watch for book 1 of THE UNDERGROUND SERIES this year.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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