

## Chapter 7

# Me Before You

Edited by Serendipity

Tears are expected at a wedding. The groom sheds a tear as his bride approaches, the guests get overwhelmed by emotion or the bride takes in the moment, her big day has arrived.

I have only ever cried twice in my life, the first time was on my 9th birthday. My father was throwing me a birthday party and in my excitement I forgot to fix my room. Mother was not happy, it was the first time she hit me. It hurt me but she said it hurt her more.

The second time was on my wedding day. Whether it's good or bad news, tears are tears and in my world, they are always a bad omen, so I try to avoid crying at all costs.

Tears require a certain level of emotional strength and not many have that. I was not built to be someone who can cry and still see myself as 'strong'. I think doctors are built the same. They need to be able to abandon emotions to be able to do their jobs well. Either they speak without thinking or their lives are so routine they never pay much attention to what or who they are delivering their diagnosis to.

He probably didn't recognize me. I'm sure he didn't notice that it was I again he was talking to, he was saying the same phrase

but only added a word or two. The last time he addressed the queen, the crown rested on my mother's shoulders.

I'm normally not a violent person by nature but today everything in me wanted to shoot the messenger. He tried to paraphrase but I could see it in his eyes. I could read between the lines and know what he was really trying to say.

If Rafiki wasn't there to hold me back, I probably wouldn't have let go of his lab coat.

No matter how much I try or how much time has passed, I can never forget those words.

*"The patient is still alive but barely breathing"*. He said it so casually, just like he did that night 16 years ago. I looked around the room with blurry vision, I could tell that I wasn't the first he said these exact words to. Tears overflowed in the hospital corridor and everything smelt like death. Expecting special attention was pointless in such situations because I was just another somebody to the onlookers. They had more pressing matters to deal with and the life of a royal didn't supersede their promise to save all lives.

This place and days like these remind me of my father most.

He was the best part of my upbringing. A lot of my childhood was spent without tears, so it's easy for me to remember the times I cried. I am not saying I was happy all the time but sadness never brought me to tears. My father was always around to cheer me up. No matter what wrong I did, faults I had or secrets I hid, he still loved me. Father would tell me I'm beautiful and the most amazing princess the world will ever have, even when I made a mess of things.

I remember the time I took his car without permission, just so I could get some boy to notice me. I came home late, in a frantic state and he could tell I had almost lost my innocence, instead of pushing me away or scolding me for my mistake, he hugged me and said "*I love you Zee, even though you've made poor choices today, it doesn't change the beauty of your soul.*"

I don't know what was worse, the fact that I found out on the news that you had been shot or that I was on my honeymoon. Less than 24 hours after my wedding day and I was already begging to be back in my father's house.

*"Breaking News, King Makasi gets high jacked and shot on his way home, minutes after dropping his newly wedded daughter at the airport and currently in the ICU. According to the weather forecast, the newly wed Queen to be, might not be able to make it back in time. Do the Watoto wa Mungu people have*

*a new Queen or should we expect a miracle? One thing is sure, the royal family needs the support of their people. Surely, the royal family will never forget the New Year's Eve of 2003.*

*This is Nadine Bettata and you're watching CNN."*

I turned on the television to distract myself from the man I was forced to marry but I was welcomed with such painful images. “*Do the Watoto wa Mungu people have a new Queen?*”. I watched on and I could feel my heart fill with rage because that’s all they cared about, I was allowed to become Queen now without any resistance from my mother. My people made it a rule that a queen could only rule on the throne without a spouse if the next in line did not request the seat on the throne. Once again it was all about the throne.

The only man to ever know how to love me was in a hospital bed dying, surrounded by people who knew only how to serve him but I who loved him was sitting in a hut. I tried everything, every flight, cruise, boat and nothing was available for 3 days. The following day felt like it was a lifetime away but three days, three whole days, hoping he'd wait for me was torture. Hoping that he would wait for me to give him a reason to hold on. I paced, I prayed but what I did most on that day, was cry. For hours I cried, and when I accepted crying wasn't going to help, I

looked to the man I knew I didn't love and said "*Make love to me*".

He stood there blankly staring at me. Mute. Unresponsive. Did he want me to beg? Did he want me to order him to touch me?

"Rafiki, I know we just met", I said, "*You don't know me but help me forget. Help me forgive those who hurt him and make me not afraid anymore. I don't want to be afraid, so please, make love to me or use me but just do something, anything*". I looked at him with tears running down my face, black mascara all over my hands and my body shaking like a leaf. I tried to ask him again because he just continued to stare at me and I tried again but the words wouldn't come out.

*"Plea...Please...Help me"...*

Looking back, I don't know if it was out of sympathy or empathy but he came over, picked me and lay me on the bed.

I didn't care if it was pity or love as long as he made me forget. At first it took time, his kisses on my forehead reminded me of when daddy used to tease me, him holding my hand reminded me of how he used to help me cross the road and when he whispered sweet words in my ear, it almost sounded like when

father told me he loved me. This endless torment continued for what felt like forever until he took control and went deep inside me, he became the man he is wired to be and forget the purpose of this transaction. I could see it in his face, he was turned on by playing the hero to the damsel in distress, and his need to cum, took over his will to comfort but I didn't mind, the deeper he went the more I forgot and the harder he went the more my moans drowned out the thoughts of what was happening back home.

Truth is, this time sex won't distract me from what is going on. I am not the little girl I was 16 years ago when my father died. I don't know what to do, I am a woman of faith but I don't think God can explain or justify letting this happen to me.

Hearing the words "*The patient is still alive but barely breathing*", tore me apart and I forced me think about my father and how everything was so good before he was taken away from me. Even then the doctor could not let me exist in my day dream where it was safe. He repeated the words one again to wake me from my trance, "*Your Majesty, your daughter was hit by a car. She is still alive but barely breathing*".

I felt lost. I really wished my father was still alive, he would have known how to calm me down right now. A big part of me hoped that because he was such a good man alive, he would be

somewhere in heaven, talking to God, begging him to spare the life of my daughter. I reached a point where I was even willing to pray to a god I didn't believe in, just as long as I'd get my daughter back healthy and sound.

Unlike Uhuru, after his accident my father waited for me. He woke up. He was awake long enough to tell me he loved me one last time. My daughter didn't want to give me the same chance. She lay on her hospital bed in a coma, so even if I screamed or kicked she wouldn't wake up no matter what I did.

I wondered if this was my punishment. Maybe taking my daughter from me was for God to teach me a lesson on infidelity. I wanted to curse the driver of the car that hurt my daughter, I wanted to curse everyone who was around but didn't pull her out of the way in time and I wanted to curse Rafiki for agreeing to let her go to the movies without consulting me first.

Hours passed, waiting for the doctor to get back to us. I was tired of the cameras and everyone bothering to check on me every 2 minutes. Eventually I convinced Rafiki to go home, Dada and Mfariji needed him too, and I wanted to be alone with my daughter. He tried to fight, so he could be there for me but I am his queen and as my bodyguard, he had to accept he was dismissed. I have never given him an order but he has also never questioned any of my requests.

I cried for hours in the corridor until God heard my prayer but not the way I wanted him to.

The doctor came back, looking around for my family. “*Your Majesty, where is your family?*”.

“*They are not here as you can see. What is going on with my daughter?*”, I replied annoyed. My daughter was on a hospital bed dying and he was worried about where my family was.

“*There is no need to get Amani. Everything is going to be okay.*”, he replied.

“*Amani? Do you mean Father Zawadi? Why would we need the priest?*”. I felt my voice get louder as I grabbed him by the collar. “*Where is my daughter?*”

“*Your Majesty, please calm down. Your daughter is going to be fine.*”, he said calmly.

“*What?*”, I asked.

*“Yes. She will be fine. I only asked about the priest because I know your family is catholic, so I thought maybe they went to get the priest for the sacrament. I apologise”.*

*“You said my daughter will be okay, when can I see her?”*

“The reason your daughter is in a coma is because she lost a lot of blood...”, he said while holding my hand, “... but if we can do a blood transfusion, she will be fine.”

“Okay. That is fine. Take my blood, I am here”.

*“I know you want to help your daughter but we have your blood type on record, and you are not a match. Your daughter has Aplastic Anemia. It requires a bone marrow transplant from someone who is a genetic match. I need you to call your husband back and tell him to come back, so we can test him for a match. However since he is her father, this is only for the sake of procedure, his blood will match hers. Her father, will save her. Everything will be okay”*

In my mind I repeated those words and my soul trembled, "***Her father***".

I knew Rafiki was not her father, so who was I going to call? Was I going to confess my truth now?

Was I ready to have the world know what happened 13 years ago? Was I ready to strip my baby girl of the only life she knew?