

Chapter 13

Chasing Fire

Edited by Serendipity

“Girls, are you okay?”, she asked. *“I can have the chef make you pancakes or anything else you want my angels.”*

“Yes, grandmother”, Uhuru responded.

“Grandmother, I am done eating. Can I go and play now?”, Dada asked.

“Okay, go ahead and wait for me in the garden, the adults need to speak now anyway”, she said with a smile. *“Come here, can I get a kiss before you leave?”*.

I used to envy the girls in the beginning. My mother adored them, making sure they were always catered for and happy. She would cancel meetings and get rid of guests if the girls wanted her attention. Everything she was meant to be for me, she was for them; she didn't have to hire someone else to be. It hurt finding out my father's affections were all at the instruction of my mother. Maybe she was lying but I know my mother, her confidence stems from the fact that the truth is her weapon. I pity the girls now, they don't know they adore a monster.

Once Uhuru and Dada were done eating, they ran to give my mother a kiss and rushed off to the play room. With their exit, entered tension.

We sat in silence. Listening to nothing but the sound of spoons stirring in teacups and chewing. Eventually the silence was too much for Rafiki and he decided to say something.

“Queen mother, we will...”

“No.”, she interrupted.

“How about if we ...”, Shujaa chimed in.

“No.”, she repeated.

“But mother...”, Mfariji tried to interdict.

“No”, she repeated once again. *“You will do nothing. I will handle this.”*

Everyone except Rafiki turned to look at me. I think they thought I would be able to convince my mother otherwise. In

truth, only Rafiki knew that my mother and I didn't really get along. Everyone else just assumed that she would listen to me.

"The Queen has spoken", I said sarcastically.

I could see Hatari snickering in the corner of my eye. He was enjoying the sight of my mother putting me in my place.

"Zee"

"Yes mother"

"I want you to focus on the wedding. You and your friends keep the media attention on that, I will handle everything. Now if you'll excuse me, I want to go spend time with my lovely granddaughters".

She took a moment to look at everyone dead in the eyes, waiting to see if we would object before getting up to leave for the garden.

Hatari stood up and said, *"Well. So when do we start practicing the wedding dance?"*

We all sat quiet no one saying a word.

“It’s okay.”, he sighed, *“I’m not much of a dancer anyway”*. He then poured himself a drink, sat down and started staring at me.

“You think I did it, don’t you?”, Hatari asked. *“All of you think I killed someone”*.

“No one thinks that”, Rafiki says.

“No, they do. So do you”, he responded.

“Drinking tequila at 9am, doesn’t exactly scream not guilty”, I said while taking a sip of my tea.

“You haven’t told anyone what really happened?”, Mfariji said while looking down at her plate. *“It seems like you are hiding something from us.”*

“That is because he probably is. Are you still selling drugs?”, Shujaa asked.

“Still? Wait... When did it start?”, Mfariji asked surprised.

“I am not the only person with secrets in this house”, Hatari responded while looking at Rafiki.

“You came for help and this is how you behave”, Rafiki scolded him.

“Raf, it’s not like that man”, Hatari responded.

“How is it then? It always goes this way, you do something wrong and the rest of us have to come in and save you but this time you have involved Mapenzi too”. I could tell Shujaa was really getting upset.

“Once again putting the queen first”, Hatari said sarcastically, *“She can speak for herself and I am sure she has her own secrets too... I swear, if I didn’t know better then I would think that...”*

“Think what?”, Rafiki asked.

“Men. This is why our kingdom is run by women. You’re right Hatari, we all have secrets but you are a suspect in a murder case, under house arrest, in the house where my children live. Do you see why your secrets are what has everyone so interested?”, I asked.

“I didn’t do it, okay? I really didn’t”, he says.

“Okay, tell us what happened. We don’t want to make any mistakes that could make matters worse.”, I say.

Hatari sighs and takes another sip of his drink.

“I didn’t do it. The person who died is a client of mine, was a client of mine. I used to sell her drugs but then I got to know her and we”, he paused.

“And you slept with her?”, Rafiki said disappointed. *“You’ve done a lot of stupid things but how could you fall in love with a drug addict?”*

“Forgive me. Not all of us get to marry into royalty. And I didn’t just sleep with her, I fell in love with her.”

“In love? You don’t believe in love. Hatari just tell us what really happened.”, Rafiki snapped.

“Raf”, Shujaa whispered, “Look at his hands, they are shaking. I think he is telling the truth.”

“Can everyone keep quiet until he is done with his story?”, Mfariji said as she moved closer to him and held his hand.

“I’m okay.”, he said, “Don’t worry about me. I fell in love with a drug addict and a prostitute. My life is a joke right?. I didn’t want to but the more I got to know her, the more I was drawn to her. She wasn’t always an addict though, she used the drugs as an escape. Something happened in her past and drugs made her feel better.

I tried getting her to stop several times but by then she was dependent on them. The problem with drugs is that the first time you catch a high, that ultimate high, it lights a fire in you and you spend the rest of your life chasing it.

Maybe I should have listened better and been there more but she wanted it to stop. She wanted the pain to stop. She was a cocktail of issues, depression, anxiety and PTSD. She just wanted the pain to stop.”

His voiced lowered with every word until the tears started to fall from his eyes. He was in pain. Losing her really hurt him. I suppose my mother was right, my father made me weak. Hatari just confessed to being a drug dealer and taking advantage of someone who needed help, instead of wanting to throw him out, I found myself focused on the fact that even someone so cynical can find love.

“I got there too late”, he continued, “In my effort to try and get her off the drugs, I started giving her a weaker dose or diluting some of it, just so she could get used to not needing it as much but I guess she figured what I was doing and decided to go to another supplier. Her body wasn’t used to it; whatever she got, sent her into an overdose and I got there just as she was convulsing.”

“If she overdosed, then why didn’t you tell the police that?”, Rafiki asked. *“You said even though they suspected you, they can never tie you to any of the drugs you were circulating.”*

“I did. I did everything you told me to do if ever something like this happened. I called an ambulance, I told the police she had injected herself, I even told them about our relationship.”, he responded.

“Then how are you a suspect?”, Shujaa asked.

I saw the look on Mfariji’s face from the corner of my eye, she wasn’t used to this. The rest listened as if this were a normal conversation; secrets and murder were casual conversation.

“Turns out they have been investigating me as a drug dealer for years but they could never pin anything on me”.

“So the police arrested you because they thought you gave her the drugs?”, Mfariji asked.

“Not only did I give her the drugs, I also killed her. They think I found out about her being a prostitute and I caused her overdose out of jealousy.”

“I believe you”, I said.

“What?”, asked Rafiki.

“I believe him. I take him for a lot of things but not a liar. You all heard my mother’s instruction. Mfariji and Rafiki, you

two go to the station again and try find out how deep this investigation went. Hatari go hide yourself in the study and keep the blinds closed, we can't have the media assuming that you are living the time of your life. Shujaa, you are the new best man. You come with me, we will go to the venue and finalize the décor. Mfariji, please ask your hairstylist to leak that I will be at the mall in an hour. It should keep everyone focused on me. I will be right back.”

I stood up and walked out to the garden. The girls were playing hide and seek in the rose bushes while my mother sat on the patio.

“Mother, we are about to go out.”

“Good”

“Mother?”

“Yes, Zee?”

“How are you going to handle this?”

“By leaving it alone.”

“Mother, if you leave it alone, he will go to jail.”

I was surprised by her response and really hoped she was joking. How could she think leaving things to sort themselves out would work.

“Zee, how do you think it looks like harbouring a man who is suspected of killing a woman?”

“What do you mean?”

“You are undoing all my hard work. I made sacrifices, I ensured that women were seen in a positive light and you want to let that go to waste?”

“Mother, do you know what sending him to jail will result in?”

“Yes, Order”

“What order mother?”

“It will mean your husband’s past will be safe, Hatari will be far away from your family and I will have saved the reputation of the royal family. Killing 3 birds with one stone. This will remind the people that you put your values before your heart”

“But mother, he didn’t kill her.”

“And you know that how? You didn’t even know this storm was coming. I came here because one of my contacts at the news station felt compelled to warn me.”

“If you knew this was coming, why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because I wanted to make it clear that you are failing as queen and you have nothing under your control.”

“You’ve always said I would make a terrible queen, what’s new?”

“You’re also a terrible mother.”

“Don’t start with that. I am a better mother than you were, I adore my daughter.”

“Zee. I am not trying to fight with you. I am only here to help.”

“How am I a terrible mother?”

Before she could give her response, Uhuru walked up to us.

“Mom, are you also here to play with us?”

“No baby”, I shook my head, “Mom has to go to do something at the wedding venue.”

“Grandma, I heard you saying mom was a terrible mother. Why did you say that”, she asked”.

“No baby”, my mother responded, “I was talking about someone else. Someone who abandoned her son to keep her secrets. That person would definitely be a terrible mother, don’t you agree Zee?”.

She knew. This confirmed that she knew about Imani and now she was using him as leverage, her way of shutting me up.