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SACRIFICES AND VALUES

Fiction

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On Sapu Street in Viana (on the outskirts in Luanda - Angola - Africa), an area characterised by incessant activity, a frenetic hub of human and economic activity filled every inch of the street. The open-air market was the pulsating heart of this region, where vendors crowded together, exhibiting their visually captivating and tempting products. The intense movement of cars created a chaotic flow. Horns blared, echoing off the narrow walls of the houses. It was a disordered symphony that unfolded daily, a dangerous dance between vehicles and pedestrians. The narrow, cramped street left little room for people to pass. It was common to see a crowd of individuals crossing from one side to the other in a frenetic choreography. The fast pace of life on Sapu Street was undeniable, a persistent murmur that pervaded the environment.

After the rains, the street would often become a real challenge. Mud spread everywhere, turning the uneven ground into slippery and difficult terrain to traverse. The abundance of potholes littering the roads only intensified the challenges, like scars marking the path. The lack of a proper drainage system exacerbated the situation, turning the street into a labyrinth of puddles and mud.

It was within this realm of multifaceted experiences that Nia's life unfolded. She captivates everyone with her natural and stunning beauty. Her tall and slender stature highlights her striking presence, while her ambition overflows in her dream-filled eyes. Since childhood, Nia has nurtured the desire to be a model, but she has always been aware of the importance of continuing her studies. Her face seems to have been meticulously crafted by a talented artist, with delicate and harmonious features. Her radiant ebony skin shines, a result of her special care for hydration, revealing a unique luminosity. She masters the art of taking care of her face and hair, always displaying an impeccable appearance. Despite wearing clothes acquired from the local market, Nia has a keen eye for selecting the best pieces that further enhance her beauty. She enjoys combining colours that perfectly contrast with her skin tone, creating a delightful visual symphony. On some occasions, she chooses to showcase her magnificent afro hair adorned with a colourful turban, which earns her numerous compliments. Wherever she goes, she attracts the attention of everyone. Whether it's her magnetic presence, stunning beauty, or unique style, Nia captures the hearts of all who have the privilege of knowing her.

She never had an easy life. Forced to abandon her studies at sixteen due to an unexpected pregnancy, she found herself thrust into the tumultuous world of motherhood. The birth of her first daughter, Shany, was an agonising experience, marked by constant fear of losing her precious child. However, Nia's unwavering determination and love propelled her forward, navigating the treacherous waters of single motherhood.

Unaware of family planning, Nia was never taught about contraceptives or reproductive health. The societal taboo surrounding these conversations only added to her struggles. The weight of responsibility fell solely on her shoulders as she dealt with the demands of raising a child alone. Nkosi's absence, as he denied paternity and disappeared from their lives, shattered her heart, and left her feeling abandoned and vulnerable.

For a few years, Nia persevered, juggling the demands of motherhood and the search for stable income. She worked tirelessly as a cleaner in a company contracted by the oil & gas Industry,

ensuring that her daughter had a roof over their heads and food on the table. The world seemed to be closing in around her, but she refused to succumb to despair.

The sudden reappearance of Nkosi in her life brought a glimmer of hope, but also a flood of mixed emotions. The guilt he carried for abandoning his family for three years weighed on his conscience. He promised to be a better partner and father, vowing to support Nia and her daughter in every way possible. While working tirelessly in his job as a security guard, Nkosi strove to prove himself, seeking redemption for past mistakes.

Nia, despite the suffering she endured during Nkosi's absence, also recognized that everyone deserves a second chance and that the love she felt for him was still present. She was willing to forgive and rebuild their relationship, primarily for the benefit of Shany, who deserved to have a father in her life. Nkosi took responsibility for officially registering Shany as his daughter, legally recognizing her as part of his family. He understood that this was crucial for Shany's identity and future, as well as tangible proof of his commitment to being a present father.

Nia and Nkosi dedicated their entire reunited time to looking after Shany, ensuring she had love and security, while tirelessly working to support and maintain their household. Unfortunately, Nia's parents, who reside in the Cunene province, never had the chance to meet their precious granddaughter. Since the moment Nia discovered her pregnancy, she faced the harsh reality of being expelled from her aunt's home, as her aunt couldn't accept the circumstances. She had to experience the hardships of being homeless and subsequently share a small room with a faithful companion. Despite all the challenges, time passed, and now Shany is six years of age. Nia started contemplating resuming her education, as life seemed to have achieved some stability. She aspired to expand her possibilities and create a more promising future for everyone.

Three years after reigniting their relationship, something unexpected happens that Nia never anticipated, all because they continued to live without reproductive health planning.

- (With a heavy heart) Nkosi, I can't understand how this happened. I was determined to continue my education and have more job opportunities. And now, this unexpected pregnancy... It leaves me sad, frustrated.
- (Apology) Nia, I sincerely apologise. I didn't plan for this; I know it affects your plans. But I promise to help you. I'll be there, taking care of you and the children.
- (Emotional) Life is already difficult with a six-year-old daughter. How will we handle another child? The food, the clothes, the healthcare... And who will take care of them so we can work and bring money home?
- (Determined) I understand your concerns, Nia. Together we will find a solution.
- (Sceptical) Nkosi, you promised before that you would be there, but after Shany's birth, you abandoned us. How can I trust you again?
- (Regretful) Nia, I know I made a mistake in the past, and I apologize for that, once again. I have changed, learned from my mistakes. I want to be a present father and a better partner. I understand your doubts, it's been 3 years since I returned, and I am proving that I can keep my promises.

- (Grim) I truly hope you fulfil your promises, Nkosi. To avoid becoming consumed by the confines of traditional domestic responsibilities. I want to continue growing, developing, and be a mother who also fulfils her own dreams.
- (Sincere) I understand, Nia. And I will do everything in my power to ensure you have the freedom to pursue your dreams. We will face these challenges together, and I promise to be by your side.
- (Soothing) I hope so too, Nkosi. Because I need to believe that there is still a chance to achieve a better future for us and our children.

Nia and Nkosi's lives were about to take a turn that would lead them to face the toughest challenges they had ever experienced. After the 2020 lockdown, many companies suffered a significant impact, resulting in the loss of half of their contracts and the dismissal of many employees. Unfortunately, Nia and Nkosi found themselves among those who lost their jobs.

On the way to the clinic for a routine check-up and an ultrasound, the usually bustling and lively streets seemed now enveloped in a melancholy and unsettling atmosphere. The wind blew subtly, almost like an inaudible whisper, but its presence was undeniable, bringing a sense of unease. The clouds, dense and heavy, covered the sky, obscuring the sunlight and casting sinister shadows along Nia's path, as if she was walking through an isolated area, surrounded by a disturbing silence. The chaotic hustle and bustle of people were muffled, as if an invisible veil enveloped her mind.

Just when everything seemed to be falling apart around them, Nia received another piece of news that left her even more disturbed: she discovered that she was pregnant with twins. Faced with economic hardships and a clouded outlook on what lies ahead, she contemplated several times the possibility of terminating the pregnancy. However, Nkosi pleaded for her not to make that drastic decision. He believed that, despite the adversities, better days were ahead and that they would find a way to overcome the obstacles together. With a daughter already in their lives, the possibility of having a boy or two would be a blessing and a ray of hope during the depths of despair.

- (Frustrated) Nkosi, we are in a desperate situation. The monetary cushion from our redundancy settlement is quickly being consumed, and we still haven't been able to find a new job. How are we going to handle Shany's school fees? She is at risk of having the academic year interrupted.
- (Worried) I know, Nia. I'm doing everything I can to find work, but it's tough. As the days go by, the escalating pressure becomes increasingly suffocating, fostering a perception of being inexorably pulled into a limitless and enormous void. We need to find a solution quickly.
- (Anxious) We can't let our children pay the price for our financial difficulties. This is a nightmare!
- (Determined) I understand your concern, Nia, I share that anguish. We can't give up; we need to be creative. Maybe we can reach out to the school and explain our situation, seek some form of assistance or an instalment plan for the fees.
- (Sceptical) Will the school care about our situation? I feel like we're alone in this battle, Nkosi.

- (Hopeful) We can't judge before trying. Let's talk to the school, explain our situation, and ask for help. Perhaps they have some assistance program or know of an organisation that can help us.
- (Reluctant) I don't know, Nkosi. I'm afraid of being rejected or humiliated. I think the best option would be to find a job as soon as possible and try to resolve this situation on our own.

As they navigated through a time of adversity, Nia and Nkosi arrived at a crucial turning point that demanded a decision. The uncertainty of the future and the need to support their family led them on a frantic search for solutions. Nkosi dedicated himself to job hunting, but the lack of opportunities and fierce competition in the market made the task even more challenging.

With each passing day, the hope for better days seemed increasingly distant. The couple's relationship began to suffer under the pressure and growing frustration. Nia felt overwhelmed. She wondered why Nkosi wasn't making more efforts to find a new job, even if it meant accepting a less desirable position, like a driver or another role.

As time went by and concerns multiplied, Nia found herself confronted with a difficult choice. She needed to take extreme measures to ensure her family's survival, but she was uncertain which path to take. It was at that moment that an unexpected opportunity emerged, presenting a potential solution. After enduring numerous challenges, she eventually secured a position as a domestic cleaner in “Bairro Azul”, working for Pedro and Raquel, a young Angolan couple who had recently graduated and were working in the banking sector. They did not have any children. However, the job conditions were far from easy.

To keep her job, Nia needed to arrive at her employers' house before 6:00 a.m. before they left for work. She didn't have a key to the house, so if she arrived late and the employers had already left, a day's work would be deducted. This constant pressure made her wake up early every day, facing the challenge of crowded public transportation, and dealing with unexpected incidents along the way.

The salary of 45,000 KZ that Nia received was not enough to cover the household expenses, considering her role as the family's primary financial support. However, she recognized that any amount was better than nothing and was grateful for having this job. Still, she knew she needed to find a better solution to improve her financial situation.

After six months of dedication, Nia received a raise of 15,000 KZ as recognition for her punctuality and quality of service. This increase helped balance the rent payment, but unfortunately, the cost of living also rose significantly. Rent went up, as did the prices of essential goods. Nia's family was at risk of becoming homeless, without a roof to call home.

The due date for her delivery was approaching, but Nia continued to work tirelessly. She knew that every day of work was crucial to ensure her family's survival, especially with the imminent arrival of the twins. Even on the brink of nine months of pregnancy, she would get up every morning and go to her employers' house, fulfilling her domestic duties with dedication and perseverance.

One day before giving birth, while her employers were preparing for a trip to Italy, Nia cleaned the entire house, making sure everything was spotless for the family that would be absent. Pedro and Raquel, Nia's employers, expressed their well wishes, wishing her a peaceful and healthy delivery for the two little girls. They also mentioned Nkosi's desire, Nia's partner, to have a boy, but understood that for now, the twins would be a blessing to the family.

Understanding Nia's need for rest after giving birth, Pedro and Raquel granted her a 45-day paid leave. This generosity from the employers was a relief. The coincidence of her employers being on vacation during this period also made things easier, as she wouldn't have to worry about balancing work demands with the needs of her newborn daughters.

The days following the birth were filled with love, joy, and challenges. Nia was amazed by the arrival of her twins, feeling blessed to have the opportunity to bring two lives into the world. However, she also faced the reality of raising three daughters in a society that often undervalued women and limited their opportunities. While caring for her newborn daughters, Nia reflected on the future and the possibilities she could provide for them. She was determined to fight against obstacles and ensure her daughters had access to education, opportunities, and a safe and loving environment to grow up in. She knew that the battle for gender equality and the empowerment of women would be a constant challenge, but she was willing to face it with great courage.

As the maternity leave days approached their end, Nia understood that she would have to face the reality of returning to work and balancing her responsibilities as a mother and provider. She mentally prepared herself for the challenges that would come, knowing she would have to find a balance between her professional obligations and the care of her daughters.

The twins, Imani and Inami, were born through a normal delivery, bringing new joy to Nia and Nkosi's lives. Fortunately, there were no complications for both the girls and the mother during childbirth. Their health was a top priority, as children are more vulnerable to illnesses.

Nia was determined to ensure that her daughters grew up healthy and protected. She dedicated herself to caring for them with all the necessary diligence, following medical advice and taking all precautions to prevent illnesses. Vaccinations, proper nutrition, and hygiene were fundamental aspects of the twins' routine.

However, Nia didn't stop dreaming of going back to college. She was aware that to offer a better future for her daughters, she needed to acquire knowledge and skills that could boost her career. But before achieving her goals, she would have to overcome some barriers. One of the most challenging barriers was the financial aspect. With only one salary to support the family and take care of their three daughters, they struggled to cover all expenses. The financial pressure was becoming increasingly intense, and Nia was reaching a point of exhaustion.

Nkosi realised it was time to act and be more persistent in the search for an additional job opportunity. He understood his responsibility to support the family and support Nia's desire to go back to studying. With renewed determination, he started sending out resumes, attending interviews, and exploring all possibilities to secure an additional source of income. While Nkosi worked hard to find a financial solution, the situation of late bills began to worsen. After three

months of trying to balance finances, the rent was already two months overdue, leaving them in arrears. This situation worried Nia and increased tension in the family environment.

Desperate, Nia decided to talk to her boss in search of a solution. She proposed the possibility of receiving an advance on her salary for three months, just to ensure the payment of rent and avoid the imminent threat of being left without a place to live. After all, her eldest daughter was already facing the sad reality of not being able to study due to lack of financial resources. However, her boss's response left Nia speechless. He agreed to advance her salary, but with a condition that seemed almost impossible to accept. This dilemma placed her at a crucial turning point that demanded her attention, forcing her to make a decision that could deeply affect her life and that of her family.

It took almost two weeks for her to gather the courage to talk to someone about this dilemma. She felt trapped, not knowing how to approach such a delicate matter, which only had two possible outcomes: accepting her boss's counter proposal or losing her job. As the weeks went by, the pressure on Nia increased. Her relationship with Nkosi, her partner, was no longer the same. She felt that he wasn't making enough effort to find a new job, even though it was difficult. Nia believed there was a minimum amount of effort he could make, such as looking for driver or security positions, areas in which he had always had experience.

The responsibility of supporting the family fell entirely on Nia's shoulders, and it left her exhausted. While facing financial difficulties and the uncertainty of the future, she also had to deal with the emotional pressure weighing on her. Frustration and disillusionment began to corrode the couple's relationship, which was once filled with love and companionship.

Nia was aware that accepting her boss's counter proposal would mean compromising her integrity and dignity. She wondered if it would be worth giving up her principles in exchange for temporary stability. But at the same time, the idea of losing her job and putting her family's livelihood at risk was terrifying and distressing.

During those two weeks, Nia emotionally isolated herself. She didn't have the courage to share her situation with anyone, fearing judgement and lack of understanding. The emotional burden became almost unbearable, and the uncertainty about her daughters' future weighed heavily on her heart.

Finally, the time came for Nia to decide. She sat in silence, reflecting on the implications of each choice. Her boss's proposal was tempting because it would guarantee the rent and her daughters' sustenance. Accepting it would mean giving up her autonomy and submitting to an unfair situation. Deep down, in her heart, Nia found the strength she needed to face the challenge. She decided that she couldn't compromise her principles and dignity for a temporary solution. She needed to believe in her ability to find a way to overcome this difficult situation, even if it meant facing more uncertainties and challenges along the way.

Nia stood up and made a call to her boss, thanking him for the proposal but politely declining it. She explained that she preferred to confront the difficulties head-on, seeking alternatives and solutions that wouldn't compromise her integrity. This decision wasn't easy, but Nia understood

that it was the right choice for herself and her family. She was willing to fight, to seek new opportunities, and to face challenges head-on, confident that destiny still held something better for her.

— Nia, I know my proposal must have shaken your moral principles. Can we talk a bit more tomorrow when you come in?

— That's fine, Mr. Pedro.

Nia was absolutely perplexed by Pedro's insistence on his indecent proposal. She thought that by categorically refusing, he would understand that her moral principles were unshakable. The next day, Nia showed up for work. Pedro and Raquel left for work, but the boss returned to the house later that morning, determined to persuade her to accept his offer.

Sitting in the living room, trying to convince Nia that accepting would mean a more comfortable life for her daughters, Pedro made a new proposal. He promised to pay six months' rent in advance, cover Shany's school fine so she could return to her studies, and even offered to pay a year of childcare for the twins.

Nia listened attentively to Pedro's words, her heart torn between the need to help her family and the importance of maintaining her integrity. By accepting the proposal, she would be compromising her principles and treading a dangerous path. After a moment of deep reflection, Nia made up her mind.

Pedro decided to transfer the funds so that Nia could deal with the relief of financial pressure. Shany returned to school, the twins started attending the nursery, and the rent was paid. However, Nkosi remained unemployed, and the atmosphere between the couple was not the best. Nkosi couldn't understand how so much money suddenly appeared to solve the most critical problems. After three weeks, Pedro and Nia arranged the location and time for Nia to fulfil her part, as Pedro had already made the money transfer.

Nia walked towards the Eden hostel with a heavy heart and sadness impressed on her face. Every step she took seemed to carry the weight of her own suffering. The atmosphere around her reflected her melancholy. As she approached the place, the surroundings seemed wrapped in a gloomy and oppressive aura. The walls of the hostel were silent witnesses to dark secrets. The wind whispered lamentably, as if sharing her pain. Each thought in Nia's mind was a firestorm of conflicting emotions. Her moral principles, which had always guided her, were now shaken. The idea of being present in this unwanted encounter was like a punch in the stomach, a betrayal to herself and the essence of what she believed in. She felt trapped in a web of circumstances that forced her to make decisions that consumed her from within.

She was promptly directed to the reserved room. As she entered and closed the door, her gaze wandered around the room's decor. Then, she headed to the bathroom, and upon seeing her reflection in the mirror, tears started to roll down her cheeks. Pedro hadn't arrived yet. She sat on the bed and, looking at the bedside table, noticed an envelope with her name written on it. With trembling hands, she opened the envelope and read its contents, while tears flowed incessantly.

Dear Nia,

The money you asked for to resolve your desperate situation, you don't need to repay. At the end of the month, you will receive your salary as usual. The money in the envelope is for you to take a taxi back home. I admire you immensely for being a remarkable woman, a warrior willing to sacrifice yourself for your family. I feel terrible for making such an indecent proposal and putting you in such a difficult situation. Your determination and strength have my respect. Furthermore, I have transferred additional funds to ensure that the children have everything they need. Kindly reach out to me once you've made the decision to return to your studies.

With affection,

Pedro.



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