

Chapter - FIVE.

Without a doubt, the man in the photograph was Jaben. The woman standing beside him appeared older than him, perhaps by several years.

Winnie stared at the image, her eyes narrowing as questions began to storm her mind. Was she his aunt? The thought barely formed before she dismissed it. The way they stood together... the intimacy in their posture... and the unmistakable way Jaben held her—it suggested something far deeper. The way he held her bottoms.

Winnie held her breath, her chest tightening.
Her thoughts tangled into confusion.

Did he have another wife?
When did he get her?
Had he been cheating on me?
Has he been lying to me all this time?

The questions tormented her, echoing endlessly inside her mind. She longed for answers, yet none came.

The days passed slowly, each one heavier than the last, until the week finally crawled to an end.
She knew the truth would only come when Jaben returned home.

And so, she waited.

That evening, Jaben arrived later than usual. The house and its surroundings were wrapped in an unusual silence. Even the neighbours seemed unusually quiet, as though the night itself held its breath.

Above, the moon glowed brightly, casting a pale light across the calm compound, as if it too wished to witness whatever would unfold.

The door was left open—just as it often was when Jaben was expected home late. There had been only a few occasions in the past when he had failed to return after making such promises.

Jaben stepped inside quietly.

Everything had been carefully prepared for him. His food rested inside a flask on the table, alongside neatly arranged utensils and items he might need. The familiar sight comforted him. He ate in silence, occasionally glancing around the room. After finishing, he sat back and scrolled through his phone, unaware of the storm brewing nearby.

Hours passed.

Winnie suddenly awoke.

Confusion flooded her senses, quickly followed by pain, hunger, and a rising emotional weight she could barely contain. She turned in bed, staring into the darkness as the photograph replayed in her thoughts like a haunting memory.

Tonight, she could no longer ignore it.

Carefully, she slipped out of bed and walked toward Jabin's belongings. She had never searched through his phone before. It had never crossed her mind.

Until now.

Her heart pounded violently as she picked it up. Her fingers trembled, yet they moved before her conscience could stop them.

She entered his password—the same one he had always used. Their firstborn's birthday.

The screen lit up.

A cold numbness spread through her veins as she scrolled through his messages. They were all there. Lined up like silent confessions waiting to be discovered.

Last week was amazing.

Wish I could wake up next to you all the time.

She doesn't suspect a thing.

Winnie's breathing grew uneven.

She opened the gallery. Picture after picture appeared—secret dinners, hotel rooms, "business meetings," smiling selfies, stolen moments frozen in time.

Proof.

Clear, undeniable proof.

Her vision blurred as tears welled in her eyes. The room felt suffocating, shrinking around her. A sob escaped her lips before she could stop it.

Her cries grew louder.

Across the house, Jaben stirred awake. Winnie froze, the phone still shaking in her hand as footsteps approached. Her heartbeat thundered in her ears. The bedroom door creaked open, and Jaben stepped inside.

He stopped instantly when he saw her face.

"Winnie..."

She slowly lifted the phone.

“Who is this?” she asked quietly.

Jaben frowned. “What are you talking about?”

She raised her voice slightly, though it remained frighteningly calm.

“Who is she? I’m asking you again... who is she?”

She turned the screen toward him, forcing him to see the messages and photographs glowing between them.

“Don’t lie to me.”

For a brief moment, panic flickered across Jaben’s face. Just as quickly, he masked it with forced indifference.

“It’s not what you think,” he said.

Winnie let out a hollow, broken laugh—the kind that carried pain far deeper than anger.

“Not what I think?” she repeated, stepping closer. “Then explain it to me.”

Her emotions snapped.

With a sudden, furious movement, she hurled the phone at him. It struck his chest before crashing onto the floor.

What followed was chaos.

Winnie’s rage exploded. Words failed her, but her actions spoke loudly. She grabbed anything within reach and threw it at him—books, pillows, utensils, anything her hands could find.

Jaben raised his arms defensively, fully aware that his secret had been exposed. He tried to speak, tried to calm her, but his words dissolved in the storm of her fury.

After nearly ten exhausting minutes, Winnie stopped. Her breathing was heavy, her body trembling from the release of pent-up emotion. Without saying another word, she quickly gathered a few clothes, changed, and rushed out of the house.

The door slammed behind her.

Jaben stood motionless in the wrecked room, staring at the empty doorway. He knew his wife well enough to understand that following her tonight would only make things worse.

Slowly, he stepped outside.

The moonlight stretched across the quiet compound as he walked away from the house,

swallowed by the darkness of the night path ahead.

All the children slept that night, unaware of the storm tearing through their home—except Robert. He had been drifting between sleep and wakefulness when the sharp slam of a door shattered the silence. His heart jumped. Slowly, he rose from his bed and walked toward the glass door.

Through it, he saw Jaben's shadow moving away, swallowed gradually by the darkness of the night.

Then, another door slammed violently—his mother's bedroom.

Robert stood frozen.

He did not fully understand what had happened, but he knew enough to feel fear tightening in his chest and suddenly felt strange... unfamiliar.

After standing there for several minutes, he slowly returned to bed.

Morning arrived quietly, like an unwelcome visitor.

The house was silent—too silent. It felt less like a home and more like a grave where laughter had once lived.

Winnie remained locked inside her bedroom. The curtains were drawn tightly, blocking the sunlight as if she feared the world might witness her pain. Inside, she sat on the edge of her bed, her mind burning with questions and memories she could not silence.

Robert moved around the house slowly. Over the past weeks, he had started accompanying Jaben to work. Jaben sometimes paid him small amounts, and Robert had admired him—respected him, even.

Now doubt crawled into his thoughts.

Inside her room, Winnie's mind wandered dangerously.

Did Robert know something?

If he knew... why didn't he tell me?

The thought pierced her heart with quiet betrayal.

Responsibility had quietly fallen onto Teka, the eldest daughter. She prepared breakfast for her siblings, helped them dress, and spoke softly to keep them calm. Yet beneath her strength, confusion and fear lived quietly.

Children often understood more than adults realised.

Hours later, Winnie finally opened her bedroom door. Her face carried exhaustion carved deeply into her skin. Her eyes were swollen, yet her expression had hardened into something unfamiliar—something determined.

All the children gathered in the sitting room as she called them.

“My children,” Winny said softly, her voice fragile but steady. Her eyes lingered mostly on Robert and Teka. “Listen carefully.”

They nodded.

“We buy things from shops, don’t we?” she asked slowly.

“Yes, Mum,” they replied.

“And what happens when those things grow old... or stop being useful?” she continued.

Robert spoke gently, unaware of the weight behind her question. “We throw them away... or give them to people who need them.” -“Sometimes they are burned or buried,” he added.

Teka nodded. “Like last year when you gave my old shoes to the neighbours. The ones that were too worn out... you burned them.”

Winnie inhaled deeply. Her fingers tightened around each other. Her children had unknowingly spoken the truth she feared most.

She stared at them, wondering if she too had become something that could be thrown away.

The children exchanged confused glances. They sensed something serious but could not understand it fully.

Winny’s mind drifted back to the previous night. She remembered Jaben complaining about school fees. Worse still, she remembered his cruel words suggesting that Teka did not belong in the family.

The memory struck her like fire.

I care for this family, she thought bitterly. Even children I did not give birth to... and this is what I receive?

Her thoughts spiralled endlessly.

Was I wrong to confront him?

Was he truly struggling... or simply betraying us?

Several hours later, Jabin returned home.

No child ran to greet him. No laughter welcomed him. The house stood cold and silent, like a stranger refusing his presence.

He stepped inside slowly and dropped onto the sofa. Winny sat opposite him, her back straight, her face calm—too calm.

Silence stretched between them like a rope ready to snap.

Finally, Jaben spoke.

“To make things clear,” he said flatly, avoiding her eyes, “I truly have another wife.”
The words fell heavily into the room.

Winnie remained silent, her fingers resting motionlessly in her lap.

“It’s alright if you don’t respond,” he continued, shrugging slightly. “And yes... I’m sorry for some of the words I said. But I do not regret them.”

Winnie lifted her eyes slowly, disbelief and pain burning quietly within them.

“For everything I have done for your son,” Jaben continued harshly, “you showed me no respect. I helped raise children who are not mine. But after what you did yesterday, I must be honest... I do not like any of your children except my own.”

Winnie’s lips trembled slightly, but she remained silent.

“From now on,” he continued coldly, “I will only provide for my blood. As for your son... I pity him, but he is not my responsibility.”

The room fell into suffocating silence. Then Winnie spoke, her voice barely above a whisper.

“I am pregnant.”

The words hung in the air like thunder before a storm.
Jaben froze.

“What did you say?” he asked sharply, standing up.

“I am pregnant,” she repeated, louder this time.

Jaben slowly sat down again, stunned. He slipped his hands into his pockets, staring at the floor as if calculating numbers instead of emotions.
After a long pause, he spoke coldly.

“I will give you money... so you can abort it.”

Winnie stared at him in disbelief. Pain twisted through her chest.

“Never,” she whispered, tears sliding down her cheeks. “I will never kill my own child.”

“Then find the father,” Jaben snapped angrily. “It is not my problem.”

“It is yours,” she replied firmly. She didn't want to bear blood on her hands, what if the child was someone important....

Jaben laughed bitterly.

Without another word, he stood up and walked out of the house. The door slammed shut behind him, echoing like a final verdict.

Outside, darkness welcomed him again. The weight of his decisions followed him like a shadow he could not escape. Two homes. Two families. Two lives built upon secrets and fragile lies.

And though he refused to admit it, deep within him, something had already begun to collapse. A thing he brought in by himself. Now two families on his sweats.