

## Chapter 6

Mandiga knew she should go to fetch water from the well, but she didn't have the courage. She was afraid of the rapists, and it was already getting late. She would not be able to go and return safely with the sun already setting.

She thought of Kibwana. She knew that when he came back from the farm the bitterness would continue. *'He knows the situation, I will tell him that there is no water, and I am afraid of being raped,'* she told herself.

After changing her clothes, she decided to take the radio to the sitting room to listen to what was happening in the world. She took the mat from behind the door, unfolded it and laid it out on the floor to sit on.

While seated, she began to twist the dial of the radio on her lap. Finally, she was able to tune into Radio Sikika, a long-standing community radio which broadcasts from Ifakara town. Nearly all the people of Ifakara liked listening to it, as it broadcast news that was relevant to them. The local people did not call it by its official name, Sikika FM. They referred to it as *'Ours'* meaning that it was the radio with their news.

As soon as she tuned in, she found it in the middle of the 6-o clock news. The male announcer was reading the news within a confident and authoritative voice. He was just finishing one news item before starting on the next.

He began to read the news about the visit of the Deputy Minister for Water to Morogoro Region. Mandiga's attention was drawn by the opening lines, and she turned up the volume so as to hear properly.

"In his visit which ended today, the deputy minister said that access to water continued to increase. The number of people getting safe and clean water in the rural areas had increased from 47 percent to 70.1 percent between 2018 and 2022. In urban areas, it had increased from 74 percent to 82 percent from 2018 to 2022. He added that Morogoro was one of the areas of Tanzania which had benefited from the increase in access to water. So, there was no reason for the region to have a problem of water, as there was an abundance of water sources." The announcer finished and moved on to other news.

*'Mmhh these people!'* Mandiga thought she was hearing some news from outer space. She couldn't take it in at once. She wondered whether the deputy minister was crazy.

She was here in Morogoro, and their village faced a serious shortage of water to the point where there were cases of rape. *'How come there are many water sources, but the water here is a problem?'* she asked herself. She sighed and dismissed it as just politics.

*'They must be liars, if there is no water for years and years, then they say water provision has increased,'* she said to herself.

But after a few minutes, she began to believe it. She thought about this phase of the current leadership. She heard that it was a government that did not play around. It would be difficult for the deputy minister to cheat the people.

Deep in thought, she was slow to respond immediately to the knock on the door. Her husband had entered, and it was now very dark.

"I knock and you don't hear?" Kibwana said throwing down the bundle of firewood in the sitting room.

"Forgive me my husband, I didn't hear you. I was completely focused on the news."

"So, you think the news is more important than opening the door for me."

"No, my husband. I was shocked by the news. The Deputy Water Minister claimed that here in Morogoro there are so many water sources, there is no reason for us to have a problem of water. Isn't that a surprise?"

Her husband was putting the hoe and axe in their place. He wasn't even looking at his wife as she talked. When he was finished, he turned to her.

"So, you are married to water or water is now your husband. Why is this happening? Where are my words of comfort after a long day in the farm?"

"Sorry my husband. Welcome home. Let's not start arguing again."

"Prepare some water for me so I can take a shower." Kibwana told his wife.

Mandiga fell silent.

She knew the quarrel was about to start all over again. She thought for a moment before replying. She had already resolved to let come what was to come. She let her breath out slowly, while her thoughts about the news flew around in her head like swallows.

"But Kibwana, where do you think this water will come from?" Mandiga replied sadly.

"What did you say?" he replied furiously.

"There is no water."

“What have you been doing the whole day here at home?”

“My husband, how can I go to fetch water from the well on my own when I was nearly raped? Don’t tell me you still don’t believe me Kibwana.”

Mandiga’s words seemed to rekindle her husband’s anger. He glared at her.

“Listen Mandiga. I didn't pay the bride price for you to make fun of me. Why didn't you go to fetch water, when you had the whole day at home?”

“I am not making fun of you. I am telling you the truth. I couldn’t go because yesterday I was nearly raped. Why don’t you understand? Or you don’t care,” Mandiga burst out.

She stood up tall and strong. And Kibwana sensed that this was not the Mandiga he was accustomed to. She seemed to be ready for anything.

“Is that the way you talk to me?”

Angrily he moved forward and slapped his wife.

Shocked, her hand flew up to the cheek as her pain flared. She began to cry.

“You speak to me rudely like that? Who told you I don’t care? First, why should I care when you tell me lies. I passed by where you said you were nearly raped, I saw nothing. So, tell me, where is the jerrycan?” Kibwana shouted angrily.

That evening, the neighbours and passers-by on the way home from their farms heard everything.

Mandiga didn’t know how to reply. She rubbed her cheek as she continued to sob. She felt the whole world descending on her. She had never been beaten by her husband before. She didn’t understand why he had slapped her when she had just been telling him the truth.

It pained her to be judged for the truth which had protected her husband also. She thought to herself that if she really had been raped and infected with a disease, the first person to be infected by that disease would be Kibwana. ‘*Why can’t he see this*’ she thought as the tears rolled down her cheeks.

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*'Where is the jerrycan?'* She thought this was such a stupid question for her husband to insist on. The rapists would never leave the jerrycan there and even if they had not taken it, any other passer-by could have done so. She remembered being asked the same question at the village office.

Whatever! She would stick with her truth and her God. She wiped away the tears and looked at her husband. She took a deep breath and turned to confront him.

“Why are you beating me? How have I wronged you?” she asked, tightening the cloth around her waist. Kibwana also stood firm, although he knew he had lit a fire. He had aroused the Kikasu devils in his wife.

“You don't know how you have wronged me?” Kibwana said moving closer to his wife.

Mandiga did not retreat but stood there firmly. She had nothing to fear if she was to be beaten, she had already had one slap.

“I am shocked by you Kibwana. My own safety means nothing to you? What kind of husband are you that doesn't care about his wife's safety? Do you think that you will be safe if I go out to fetch the water and get raped and infected?”

Mandiga spoke slowly and firmly. The slap from her husband had given her the courage to speak up.

“I want water nothing else.” The words flew out of Kibwana's mouth without thinking.

“Forgive me my husband. I love you, but I can never be your slave. You hit me and then you expect me to go off and fetch water. I have explained to you that I did not go for my own safety, which is your safety as well as mine, because if I am raped you won’t be safe. And then you raise your hand and beat me? I am not going. Beat me, kill me right here in our house.” Mandiga tightened her kanga and stood firm. She went on.

“I did not get married to be humiliated, turned into a slave and mistreated. I am a woman and I know my worth. If you don’t think there is a problem with water in the village, go somewhere else, or we go together. The way you are treating me is not fair.”

Kibwana realised he was in it up to his neck. He had never seen his wife like this. She was always polite and did whatever she was told. But now things had suddenly changed.

“Why did you spend the whole day here at home and not go to fetch water. If you were afraid of going on that path where you say you were nearly raped, why couldn’t you take the path through Lungongole village?” Kibwana asked her.

His question showed Mandiga that her husband had now begun to understand and was looking for a way out. But she swore to herself that she would not agree to reconcile as easily as he thought she would. His slap still stung her face and her spirit.

“I did not spend the whole day at home.”

“If you didn’t spend the whole day at home, where did you go?”

“I went to the village office to report.”

Her words left Kibwana open-mouthed. He was like someone who had swallowed boiling hot tea.

“Mandiga, Mandiga, Mandiga why? What did I tell you this morning?” his voice rose.

“About not going to the village office to report? If my own husband cannot support me in such a terrible incident, what did you want me to do, Kibwana? What did you want me to do?” Mandiga responded raising her voice to match her husband. She went on.

“Not Mandiga, no! Be thankful that your wife was not raped. There is another woman, like me who was raped and threatened by the rapists. Do you hear me? So, if you are tired of me, divorce me, don’t look for excuses. What kind of man are you? Trifles are important to you and important things are trifles. Divorce me!”

Mandiga’s words hit Kibwana in the face like punches. They stung him. He had been trying her out. He never expected that Mandiga would come to the point of asking for a divorce. He was the one who threatened with divorce as a way of controlling her. And now she was demanding it herself.

His clothes felt too tight, and his breathing was difficult. They glared at one another. According to the elders of the village, when a woman wants things which she never wanted before, then she has reached the end of her tether and there is no going back.

Her husband's shock confused Mandiga. She didn't know whether he was bewildered by the news of the rape of another woman in the village, or because she had asked for a divorce. The silence grew longer and longer. Kibwana looked like a fish out of water.

So many things flashed through his mind, over what had happened from the start when he rejected her story. He began to feel regret.

"Why do you want me to divorce you, my wife?" He broke the silence, and his voice showed a perplexing mixture of regret, fear, jealousy and love.

Mandiga took her time replying. Instead, she looked to one side like someone deep in thought. *'That's the end of him,'* she thought. She tried to gradually cool the anger in herself. When she breathed out, she became a wife once again.

"Kibwana you are not being fair to me at all. I am your wife, remember. How can I lie to you about something like this? Don't you see that I am fighting for my own safety and the safety of my fellow women here in the village? If that woman who was raped was your sister, how would you feel?"

Silence overtook them. Kibwana felt ashamed. His mind began to comprehend the seriousness of what his wife had told him, while he still fought the truth of it. He began to sense his manhood was shaken. He knew he needed wisdom. He realised he should have agreed with his wife from the start and avoid things reaching this stage. It was true he had not been fair, but how could he concur so easily?

"But why didn't you tell me calmly, my love?" he improvised.

The words 'my love' gave him victory. It brought a small smile to Mandiga's heart. Her husband had not used this endearment for a long time. Mandiga's spirit soared. A smile of the heart cannot be concealed by the face. Kibwana didn't lose the moment, he took the chance to restore his manly defences, which he felt had been shaken. Half whispering, he asked her to forgive him.

"I didn't hear what you said," Mandiga pretended. She wanted him to say it out loud.

"Forgive me. Maybe jealousy misled me because of love. So now tell me how you were nearly raped."

Mandiga was reluctant to re-live the experience with the rapists because it brought back the fear every time. But there was no way out, and she told him everything.

“My wife. I am sorry. If I catch the rapists, they will regret the day they were born.” Kibwana promised.

“And where will you catch them? That is why I went to the village office to report so that they start a hunt for the culprits.”

“Enhe, so what did the village government say after you told them.”

“They said they will call a village meeting to discuss this in public. It would be good if we both attend the meeting. They will probably ask me to speak.”

“Fine, my wife. But have you forgiven me?”

“Yes, I have. But never beat me again. It is completely wrong. If you beat me again, I will go straight to Ifakara town to make a report to the gender desk,” Mandiga said.

“Eeh! That is too much, woman. If you go to the gender desk, your husband will be sent to jail.”

“If you are afraid of jail, don’t beat me again.” But this time Mandiga smiled as she spoke.

“I won’t beat you again my wife. I promise.”

“Good. Thank you. But please understand that for now, we are in a war. The reason I even went to report was that I was very upset. I narrowly escaped but, as I told you, my fellow woman was raped and then threatened. We women, are being raped because of the same problems of which nearly caused us to split. Now I need your support my husband. If only our village had water, then I am sure there would not be any of the brutish behaviour of ambushing women in the bushes and raping them. It is inhuman. Water must not be the source of this violence against women. We also have our rights, and we must fight for them. I will stand up in the Village Assembly if given the chance and I will explain this issue openly,” Mandiga said bitterly.

Kibwana was amazed at the brave words of his wife. Her words touched him. He no longer saw her as the Mandiga he knew. This was a new, mature Mandiga with a great vision. He began to feel proud of having a wife like her. In his heart he recognised that he didn’t get a wife but, a wife and a half.

Mandiga continued. “What kind of life is this my husband? I go to the farm in the morning, then when I leave, I walk five kilometres to fetch water, and when I get there, I have no guarantee that I will find any, no. I must wait for a long line of women from the village as the water is already drying up. And still the water we get is not clean and safe for human use. As if that is not enough, men wait in the bush to rape us. This is totally unacceptable,” Mandiga spoke heatedly.

Her husband swelled with pride. He walked over to hug her, and she returned his embrace, not caring about his farmer’s sweat.

“It’s all right my wife, that’s enough. It’s already dark. What are we going to eat if there is no water in the house?” he said as he pulled away from his wife.

Mandiga remembered her neighbour Mama Mboni. She agreed with her husband to go and see her. She told her about what happened to her yesterday and the problem of having no water that evening. She didn’t tell her about the fight she had with her husband. If Mama Mboni did hear the noise from their clash, she would ask her about it one day.

She was able to get one bucket. She set half aside for her and her husband to bathe and used the other half to wash the dishes and cook the evening meal.

On the days that followed, Kibwana escorted his wife to the well to fetch water, every day after working on the farm. Mandiga was not ready to fetch water on her own.

She was still afraid of being raped.