

**2019 K A L E M B A**  
**short story prize**

[kalemba-shortstory-prize.com](http://kalemba-shortstory-prize.com)

[@KalembaPrize](https://twitter.com/KalembaPrize)

# *All to Love*

## Lydia Ngoma

*(unedited script as submitted by the author)*

ENALA

“Five small raindrops and power goes out in this Avondale!” Judy’s exasperated voice rang out through the house.

Enala smiled in the semi darkness; she didn’t mind the frequent outages of electricity. In fact, the quiet which followed reminded her of her own home in Chinsali.

The sun would set lazily over the distant hills and she would light the kerosene lamp, placing the glass-and-metal light in the middle of her kitchen table. Her husband Onesmus would occupy the only chair at the table, wearing either an undershirt, or his favourite bomber jacket- depending on what the weather was like.

She would light their gas cooker, warm up whatever they had left over from lunch, and proceed to prepare a fresh pot of nshima for everyone to eat. Onesmus would have the first serving- of course, and then she and the children would share the rest from their place on the mat which was spread out in the corner of the kitchen floor.

In that moment, she felt needed; she was Mother, she was Wife. Her oldest son Matthews would be bickering with Musonda while Irene, her youngest, would be animatedly recounting the activities of her day.

But that was two weeks ago. Enala now sat in a large, suburban house which belonged to her older sister and her husband. Their children, all teenagers, stared blankly at screens all day and floated past her like she wasn’t even there. Sometimes, she would catch their curious gaze which they returned with an awkward smile, or a mumble of incoherent Bemba before running off to their bedrooms.

“And you?” Judy’s voice roused Enala from her reverie, “What are you doing looking sad in the dark?”

Judy was what one would describe as a formidable woman. She stood tall and stocky, and there was a permanent crease above her brow.

Everything Judy said had a stern delivery; she would be saying "I love you" and it would have the same tone one would use to say, "Oh for crying out loud!"

Armed with a Bible in one hand, and a will of iron, she lorded over her household which she did not hesitate to remind anyone that she built from the ground up.

The 3-year age gap between the sisters stretched and contracted into a myriad of near-paradoxes; Enala somehow looked older and yet again infantile with her thin, pale gait. Her

quiet nature and innate ability to shrink into a room both opposed and complimented Judy's loud, overbearing demeanour.

"Enh! Madam!" Judy thundered once more, she walked towards the display cabinet which adorned the large living room and reached out to turn on two battery lamps which stood on the highest shelf.

"I was just thinking," Enala replied, her voice barely audible against the steady fall of rain outside.

"Lucky you who has time to think," Judy replied, she sank into the chair next to Enala and propped her feet up on the pouf cushion in front of her.

"How was work?" Enala asked in Bemba.

Judy worked as a school teacher at a government school; her daily routine was to leave the house at 11AM for her 12PM shift and return just before 5PM. She ran other businesses on the side; a hair salon in the market, a catering service, and a farm which she and her husband jointly owned.

"Eh! Those children will kill me!" Judy replied, there was a trace of laughter in her voice. "Today, one of them came with a child on her back. Ati her mother had gone to the border to order things for business and she had to take care of the baby."

Enala blinked in the darkness and mumbled something which sounded like a laugh of agreement.

"Can you imagine?" Judy continued, "Children raising children!"

"It is sad," Enala chimed in.

“Only God knows,” Judy said, she sat back in the plush sofa and called out, “Mwansa!”

“Ma!” a girlish voice echoed through the house.

“Silly girl,” Judy muttered, she hollered once more, “Iwe Mwansa!”

The sound of shuffling feet drew closer and Mwansa showed up, standing in the doorway between the living room and the hallway. She was 14, tall for her age and pudgy. In the lamplight, Enala noticed that she wore pink pyjamas with white cows dotted across them and her acne riddled face was harshly lit by the light emanating from the phone she held in her hand.

“Yes Mum,” she said.

“How was school?” Judy asked.

“It was fine,” the girl mumbled.

“Have you been spending time with your Aunty?”

Mwansa’s eyes darted between her mother and her aunt and quickly looked to the floor before she mumbled something inaudible.

Judy sighed in her exasperated manner.

“Okay,” she said, “Bring the juice I put in the fridge, and tell Chola to start on the nshima.”

\*\*\*

### *CHOLA*

Chola sighed; even in the steady rain she could hear her mother mention her name. It was nearly fifteen minutes past 6PM, and if she knew her mother it meant that it was time for her to start preparing supper. Chabu, her twin brother, had opted to spend two more weeks on campus, and it left the bulk of the house chores to her.

“You know how Mum is,” he’d said, “once we go home, we’ll become the maids...let me enjoy two weeks of no school with no housework first.”

Chola had no such luxury; her boarding house required all students to vacate the premises within two days of the semester close. The landlady claimed that it was so that they start on maintenance works, but everyone

knew that she leased the property to other tenants during the two months' break.

Her bedroom door opened and Mwansa poked her head in.

"Mummy said go and start cooking," she said.

"Ok," Chola replied, "where is she?"

"She's with Aunty in the sitting room."

Aunty Enala had been living with them for two weeks now; Chola remembered the day she came. She herself had just gotten home from campus and found that her father was not home.

"He's gone to get your Aunty from the station," her mother had said. She looked even larger in the pink and blue floral apron she had on.

"Okay," Chola replied, "Aunty Rose?" Her father's younger sister, Rose, was always visiting them from the Copperbelt.

"No," Mum replied, "He's picking up my young sister, Aunty Enala...she visited once when you were little, so you'll probably not remember her."

When her father's silver Mercedes Benz was pulling into their paved driveway, Chola cocked her head to peer through the semi-tinted windows. Her position at the black sliding gate was not the best as her father smoothly pulled in before she could get a clear look.

The car parked beneath the lone mango tree in the otherwise paved yard and her father stepped out of the car. He was a short, portly man with freckles on his brown face, and a bald patch smack in the middle of his head. Mr. Simwanza was never without his tie outdoors, and that day, it was brown.

"Ah, you're here already!" he beamed at Chola who stood just a head taller than him.

"Hi Dad," she said as she gave him a hug.

"How was school?" he asked, "Take the suitcase out from the boot."

Chola was slamming the boot of the car shut when she finally saw her aunt. Aunty Enala was tiny, gaunt, and bent in a manner that Chola did not know was possible for a woman younger than 50; she thought Mum had said it was her younger sister that was coming to visit. Her hairline

receded at her temple and grey hairs sprouted stubbornly in her wiry bun. Her father coughed, and Chola realized that she had been standing stock still until that point.

“Aren’t you going to greet your Aunt?” Dad said.

“Hello Aunty,” Chola moved to hug the slim woman, she smelled like tea leaves.

“Chola,” Aunty Enala smiled and it looked like the veins would burst out of her neck, “The last time I saw you, you were still in nappies.”

Chola laughed in the way she did when she did not have an answer and pulled the otherwise light suitcase up the veranda stairs and into the house.

The subsequent two weeks were what Chola would later describe as awkward; Dad did not spend as much time at home, Mum was snappier than usual, and all Aunty Enala did was stare at them and smile. In the first few days of her visit, Chola tried to spend time with her. They would sit on the kitchen veranda which faced a now empty chicken coop and their conversations dwindled to mumbles and stilted laughs. Chola stumbled through her Bemba and for a reason she did not understand, felt embarrassed whenever her aunt had to switch to English.

So, as the days went by, each decided to shrink back into themselves; Chola to her phone, and Aunty Enala to the chair which sat in the corner of the sitting room. The only time she

seemed to interact with anyone was when the maid, Amake Ronnie, was around. Chola remembered hearing her aunt’s unbridled laughter swim in through her bedroom window for the first time when Amake Ronnie was hanging up the laundry. If there was anything that showed that she and her mother were related, it was that both laughed as though they needed a crowded auditorium to hear them.

When evening came and Amake Ronnie had to leave, Aunty Enala took her seat in the corner of the living room, on the slightly beaten up blue armchair which contrasted the newer, beige sofas that surrounded it. She seemed strange yet familiar all at once, like a piece of furniture which no one remembered buying but had been there all along.

Chola rose from her bed and shuffled to the kitchen; an electric lamp

illuminated the vast chrome and tile room, and she noticed that her mother had already set water to boil on the gas stove. She looked at the time; it was now half past 6PM, if she started now, supper would be ready in the next half hour.

\*\*\*

*JUDY*

Judy heard the clashing of pots in the kitchen and knew that Chola was there.

“Don’t break my pots!” she called out to her daughter, “Otherwise I’ll replace them from your kitchen party.”

Enala sat next to her in that old armchair which she now wished she had gotten rid of earlier. She silently took sips of the orange juice Mwansa had laid out for them and had not peeped a word since.

“So, how are you finding it here?” Judy asked.

“It’s fine,” Enala replied politely, like she always did, “thank you for letting me stay.”

“Family doesn’t say thank you,” Judy retorted.

It was something their father had always told them; it was an insult to thank a family member for a courtesy they were obliged to extend. Enala was Judy’s sister, her home was Enala’s home, her meals were also Enala’s meals, and even though she refused to show it, she shared Enala’s pain.

“Chola’s father spoke to Dr Gondwe,” she said to her sister, “you should be able to go and see him on Wednesday.”

Enala nodded and smiled quietly.

When Judy found out that her sister had been diagnosed with HIV, she sat on her bed in shock. When she learned that Enala had known about this for three years and had kept it a secret, she screamed into the phone.

“Why did you not tell me?” she demanded.

Enala’s voice was calm, “I’ve been taking ARVs from the clinic, I’m fine.”

“You’re coming to Lusaka,” Judy’s tone was final, “I’m sending you money and you are coming! Uleisa!”

“I need to get permission from-”

“I’ll talk to him!” Judy cut her sister off, “Prepare a suitcase and find out what buses come from there.”

She hung up the phone and stared at the chest of drawers which was the only thing in her line of sight. For the first time, Judy was lost for words. The first born in a family of five, she had all the responsibility of a first-born son, but none of the benefits. So, when her father passed away, 19-year-old Judy had to fight her uncles for her mother to maintain ownership of their land. She lost that fight, but it gave her a personal mantra which she carried with her everywhere she went.

“Nshaka chule. I will never suffer.”

In that year, Christian missionaries from Sweden came to her village and offered a vocational teaching course. She studied with them, and with their help was able to get a job in Lusaka as an assistant teacher for a Mission school. Two years later, Judy applied for a government teaching job, and was posted to a primary school which had just been opened in the city center.

“Nshaka chule. I will never suffer.”

She had reached out to Enala a year after moving to the city; she wanted Enala to join her and knew a few shop owners that needed an honest girl to mind their shops. They would make it together in this big city and bring their brothers too, but Enala had other plans.

Enala had met Onesmus; he owned the local butchery and also had hectares of land which transported produce to the city. He drove a pickup truck and had recently built the largest house in their neighbourhood. Needless to say, he was wealthy, and Enala would be wasting her life if she did not marry him quickly- that was what their mother had said.

Judy did not travel to Chinsali for her sister’s wedding, but she was on the first bus there a few months later when Onesmus decided to push Enala’s head through a glass window.

The family elders had gathered at her uncle’s homestead where Enala had gone after the incident. They screamed and hurled expletives at

Onesmus and told Enala that they would protect her. Later that evening when Onesmus and his family arrived, the two parties had a hushed discussion and at the end of it all, Enala was leaving in Onesmus' pickup truck.

Judy's protests were met with rebuke from her elders; she was a bad influence on her sister's marriage and was no longer welcome until she humbled herself. She was a woman! How dare she raise her voice?

And so, Judy stayed in the city; maintaining contact with her mother and siblings through phone calls, money transfers, and bus tickets to Lusaka. Judy kept track of her family in vignettes put together through the phone calls, visits, and gossip which would reach the city.

She learned Enala was having a baby, she learned her brother was recruited to the army, she learned Enala's baby died, she learned her mother was growing beans, she learned Onesmus had a secret family in another town, she learned he would occasionally hit Enala, she learned that Onesmus had lost his businesses, and now, she learned that Enala had been keeping the secret that she had HIV for three years now.

Judy's husband nodded silently when she told him what had happened.

"We should have her here for at least two months" he said, "Get her diet right, and have her see some good doctors."

Two weeks on, and Judy sat in the dimly lit room, looking at her younger sister who looked decades older than her. She said she would never suffer, now she wished she had said her family would never suffer.

\*\*\*

### *CHOLA*

When Chola heard a car hoot at the gate, she was mildly surprised; her father normally called her on her phone when he was a few minutes away. She washed her hands stepped outside to see who it was. The rain had stopped, and the mango tree steadily dripped water from its leaves. An engine hummed heavily at the gate, and the full beam lights shone from underneath the railing.

Chola hesitantly opened the small gate and stepped outside to see who it was. It was a white pickup truck streaked in mud with the wipers still

on, and at her sight, the driver got out of the car and walked towards her.

“Is this where the Simwanzas live?” he asked in a gruff accent.

“Yes,” Chola replied, “Who are you?”

“Tell your mother I want to see her.”

Chola did not need to be told twice and she quickly went back inside, latching the gate for good measure. Her mother and Aunty Enala seemed to have been having a hushed conversation when she walked into the living room.

“Mum, there’s a man outside that wants to see you,” she said.

“Who is it?” her mother asked.

“I don’t know,” she replied, immediately realizing that she should have asked.

In that moment, the living room light came on along with all the other lights which had been left on in the house. Mwansa whooped in joy from her bedroom and Chola squinted from the harsh, new light.

Her mother sighed in her exasperated manner and walked past her to see who was outside. Chola was wiping the kitchen surfaces clean when her mother finally walked in, looking like she had seen a ghost. Behind her, the man followed closely, his muddy boots leaving a streak on the pristine kitchen floor.

“Chola,” Mum said, “this is your uncle Onesmus, he’s Enala’s husband.”

“Hello,” Chola said, from her mother’s pale expression, she knew that something was not right.

“You’re a grown lady eh?” Onesmus replied, he turned to Mum and said, “The way she was shouting at me at the gate, Judy you’ve raised confident ones.”

“Come in,” Mum said vacantly, “My husband will be home soon.”

And they walked across the kitchen into the living room, her new uncle Onesmus’ dirty boots leaving dark brown footprints in his wake.

Later that night, her father arrived, and they all sat at the dinner table to eat nshima with roast chicken and beans which Amake Ronnie had

prepared. Mwansa's legs kept swinging under the table, hitting Chola's chair and Chola wondered why she had such long, stupid limbs for her age.

Uncle Onesmus was a large man. His shirt sleeves looked like they would tear at the bulge of his muscles, and when he moved his mouth to speak, a huge vein would burst from his forehead. His skin was a caramel hue, and half of his face was covered by a neatly trimmed beard which tried to hide a large scar that ran across his cheek.

"So, how are the children?" Aunty Enala asked. She was seated next to him and her mood had brightened since his arrival.

"Irene fell from a tree and has a broken arm," he replied nonchalantly, "the boys are also fine."

"Oh," Enala nodded.

"Rueben, you have such a nice house" Onesmus said, addressing Chola's father, "You must be a big man in the government."

"The Lord provides," it was Mum who responded instead.

"I hope he provides for the land I'm supposed to buy in Chisamba," Onesmus chortled, "I've actually come here to talk to the seller."

"How long are you here for?" Mum asked.

"Just the night, tomorrow, I meet my guy and I'm back on the road" came the answer, and with a laugh he added, "I have so much free time now that you have decided to take my wife."

No one said another word after that. The rest of the meal was finished in a silence which was punctuated only by the news broadcast that played on the television set in the living room. Mwansa stopped swinging her legs, and Chola noticed that there was a small stone in her beans.

Immediately after supper, Mum ordered Chola to prepare the guest house for her uncle was spending the night.

"Get the green duvet, and just dust the room a little bit," Mum said.

"Has he come to get Aunty?" Mwansa had asked when they were in the kitchen.

"Little girls who listen to grown up stories end up deaf," Mum replied

curtly and left the room.

The guest house was a lone chalet-style hut which stood at the back of the house; the bright yellow paint was washed out and now looked something like a creamy white. Chola opened the door and screamed when she was greeted by a giant spider which skittered across the room and onto the nearest wall. A large bed was laid out in the middle of the room, and an alcove which served as a shower and toilet was separated by a sliding glass door.

Amake Ronnie had cleaned the room earlier that day, so all Chola had to do was spread out the sheets on the queen-sized bed. A ten-minute job which she finished in five, she closed the door behind her and went to the living room to let her uncle know that his room was ready.

It seemed that he was already on his way to her because Chola heard voices in the semi-darkness. Her aunt and uncle seemed to be having a discussion which grew louder as they drew closer to her.

"But they've found a doctor," Aunty Enala said, "just until Wednesday please."

"Look," Uncle Onesmus replied, "I'm not forcing you to return...just don't be surprised when you're replaced."

Chola stumbled on a rock and the two hushed their talk.

"Are you okay there?" he asked.

"Yes Uncle, I'm fine," Chola answered, out of breath and embarrassed for having been caught eavesdropping, "your room is ready now."

\*\*\*

*ENALA*

The clock in the dining room ticked gently, the second hand diligently spun around the words that sat behind the glass and read "Today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday."

It was 6AM, and the house was quiet but for the chirping of birds outside. Enala sat at the dining table, one hand folded neatly over the other on the embroidered white tablecloth. She was now accustomed to the Saturday morning routine in the Simwanza household; no one woke up until 8AM and the maid only showed up an hour later.

Enala used the quiet hours to let herself think. They were the few precious hours when no one looked at her like a peculiarity, or a bomb which was about to go off.

Judy lived a wonderful life and stayed true to her words “Nshaka chule. I will never suffer.”

Enala was proud of who her sister had become; she had a good job, a wonderful family, and she sent support to their mother in the village each month. She was everything their father had wanted them to be. This made Enala realise that it was what she wanted for herself, and her own family too.

“What are you doing awake at this time?” Judy’s voice never ceased to startle Enala.

“I was just thinking,” Enala replied.

“You’re always just thinking,” Judy replied, she wore a gold, leopard printed gown, “why are you so dressed up it’s only 6 O’clock.”

“Judy,” Enala started, “my suitcase is in the car, and I’m leaving with Bashi Matthews.”

Judy opened her mouth as if to say something and then closed it. She sat on the nearest chair at the table and looked at her sister in disbelief.

“Is it because of Irene’s hand?” she asked.

Enala shook her head; her children were always injuring themselves in one way or the other- they were children.

“I need to work on my family,” she said calmly, “You have a beautiful life, and you have shown me what mine should be as well.”

“That is not what I intended to do Enala,” Judy’s voice quavered.

“I was waiting for you to wake up, so that I could say goodbye properly.” Enala stood up and shifted the pink jacket which Judy had bought her on her third day in the city.

“Enala, the treatment-”

“Thank you for everything Judy,” Enala smiled.

“Family never says ‘thank you’.”

“I know.”

Enala left Judy seated at the dining table and closed the kitchen door behind her. Outside the gate, Onesmus started the truck and she climbed in next to him. The road was a muddy gravel which caused the vehicle to shake a little before they smoothed onto the tarmacked highway. The radio station played a breakfast show and Enala turned it off; she only wanted to hear the engine humming, and watch the city fly past her.

He was her family, he needed her. She needed him. Their children needed them.

Enala was going to give them her all. She was going to give it all to love.