



# Naledi...His Love

## Chapter One

“This ridiculous, there has to be something you can do,”

What does he mean? He knows I’ve tried everything. He, of all people, knows how hard I’ve tried.

“He says he made me, that without him I’d still be waiting tables at Wimpy,” I say.

A part of me believes that, but I was always ambitious, I was never going to end up waiting tables in Mafikeng, I always knew what I wanted.

“No, that’s not true, it was your brains and hard work that got you here,” he says.

He doesn’t understand. He’s never had to go through what I’ve been going through for the past year.

I have that appointment with the Captain today. To be honest, I don’t think he’s done anything or is doing anything to help me. All he’s done is tell me to call him the next time the fool shows up at my doorstep.

I need him to prevent him from showing up, not make him go away when he's already shown up because anything can happen in the 15 minutes it takes driving from the police station to my house.

"Do you want me to come with you?" he asks.

"No my friend, it won't take long, just signing for a restraining order and that's it," I say.

I feel exhausted and angry as I leave the hospital. I've done this trip over and over again but it never helps.

It's good that we are meeting at a restaurant today because I'm tired of the stares I get every time I enter that police station.

The downside, getting parking at Kim Park during lunchtime, it's a nightmare!

Oh lucky me! That guy is walking to his car. I'll just wait here for him to drive out so I can park, and it's just outside Nando's where I'm meeting the captain.

I have two missed-calls? I forgot to turn my phone volume on when I left work...

What?? No!! You've got to be kidding me! What the heck??

"Excuse me! What are you doing?"

He looks at me briefly and keeps walking.

"I was waiting to park, surely you saw me there," I shout after him.

He turns around briefly.

"The parking space was empty so I parked," he says and continues walking.

What the heck? This guy doesn't know me! He thinks because he's driving a big car he can just bully me? And he has the nerve to just walk away when I'm talking to him? Rude asshole!

Let's see how this is going to work out for him!

I lock my car and walk away.

Why are these people looking at me like that? They saw what he did!

“Dr Montsho,” he says

I knew I’d find him already waiting. I don’t know if punctuality is a cop thing or just his thing.

“Captain, how are you? I’m sorry to keep you waiting...” I say sitting down.

He has a pile of papers in front of him.

“I’ve already ordered, spicy-rice with strips and quarter chicken,” he says.

That by the way means I must stand up and go to the counter to pay. Apparently SAPS doesn’t have a budget for dining complainants, that’s what he always tells me. Sometimes I think he requests meetings with me just so he can get free lunch.

I do what I’m supposed to do.

I order myself a salad. I have this thing of not being comfortable eating in public because I feel like people are watching and judging me, especially when it’s something like Nando’s or KFC. It has everything to do with my weight. My father says I was born big-boned, like his sisters and all my sisters. He always says even if I tried to lose weight I will never really be slim, some people are made big, others are made tiny and besides, “you’re beautiful in and out” he always says.

He lays out the pile of papers on the table and shows me where I have to sign. I’m not sure what I’m signing for but I trust him, he’s the only person I know that’s taking my plight seriously.

“I’m going to take these to court for a stamp and have them delivered to him, actually no, I’ll take them to him myself,” he says.

That’s going to be a bit of a hassle considering that the man’s official address is Rustenburg. But, I am for whatever helps.

My lunch hour is over. I have two patients left to see before I knock-off.

It’s raining outside, strange, the sun was out when I walked in here an hour ago.

And then???

Oh, by the way.

Let me go back inside the mall and buy a few things before going back to work. This guy hasn't suffered enough. I think I must let him stand under that umbrella next to my car a little longer.

"Ngwana I'm going to delay a little, please cover for me," I say

"It's okay ngwana, the schizo has been sleeping all day, I don't think there's anything you can do to him anyway. You might as well go home, I'll see the other one," he says.

My life saver!

This means I can stay here longer and keep that bully idiot waiting even longer.

Here is a beauty salon. Let me do my nails.

"Oh you're back? How long did the old ones last you?" she asks.

It's the same lady that did my nails two months ago. I'm surprised she recognises me.

"About three weeks," I say.

This place is normally full but there's just three of us doing nails and hair today. It makes sense, it's Tuesday afternoon.

"What was he doing here? I mean he's the last person I'd expect to see at Kim Park, I mean, seriously?" the hairdresser lady says.

They all laugh.

I've been ignoring this conversation but it's getting interesting, who on earth are they talking about?

"And all you hoes stood here with your mouths open when he walked past, you have no morals whatsoever," one says.

The all laugh again.

I'm confused.

“What colour?”

“Nude please,” I say.

My hands are too thick, that is why I always do a manicure, just to give them that stylish glow.

From here I'm going to buy myself perfume, expensive perfume.

That's what I do, I spoil myself with all the money I make. I'm not into cars, I have a limited choice when it comes to clothes, and I'm the youngest at home so technically I have no expenses other than maintaining myself.

But, Tsietsi says I wasn't always like this. I wasn't always a shopper. He says it began when my ex started making my life hell.

I used to love him, I really did but years of physical, emotional and psychological abuse killed the love bit by bit.

When I came back from Cuba, after studying medicine there for five years I was ready for commitment. We were going to make the relationship work. We had after-all been together for eight years, including the five I spent in Cuba and saw him only four times during the period.

But he had changed. He accused me of having changed but I think he was the one with a problem.

And then I found out he had almost married some woman when I was away, and had two kids with her.

I tried to break things off but he assured me it was all a mistake, and now that I was back he was sure he wanted me.

So, I stuck around, he was still a police officer, I was a doctor now, he pointed that out every chance he got. At first I thought it was going to pass once he realised that this was not an issue with me, but it got worse. He started telling me he made me, that was it not for his money which I used to go to interviews for the Cuba government programme, I would not be where I am.

A part of me believed that I owed him.

“Done,” she says packing the nail polish away.

My hands look perfect as always.

It’s still raining outside, better than it looked earlier but it’s still dripping.

My car is still where I left it, but he’s not there anymore.....

“All of this for a parking space? You have issues lady.....” he says from behind me.

He’s still rude I see.

I keep quiet and walk past him.

He’s following me with that small umbrella.

I get in my car.

He’s standing next to my window, he looks angry.

I roll the window down.

“Next time you feel like bullying a woman, choose your victim carefully,” I say.

I roll up the window and start my car, but.....it doesn’t move. It’s showing me a tyre sign. Do I have a puncture? Did this fool.....? Oh hell no!

I get out of the car. He’s still standing looking at me with big eyes!

I walk around the car. The left back tyre is clamped!

“Did you do this??” I shout

He frowns.

“Remove this thing, I want to leave!” I shout.

He’s just staring. I’m fuming!

“It happens when you park behind people’s cars on space that’s meant for people to walk on,” he says.

The fool doesn't even raise his voice. His eyes say he's annoyed but his face is calm.

"Please sort this out with security, I have to leave, I've been waiting for two hours," he says.

I'm angry but I'm starting to feel bad. I don't know if it's because I'm now going to have to pay to get my car un-clamped or if it's because I realise now that I should have scratched his car and walked away instead of parking him in, that would have worked better.

There's a security guard approaching.

This is starting to be embarrassing.

"R350 mam," –the security guard.

What? To un-clamp a tyre?

And I don't even have enough money, I have just one bank card with me and I've used almost all the money in it.

"I can't remove the clamp mam unless you pay R350," the security guard.

They're both looking at me. Stupid idiots!

"I don't have money on me, I'll call my friend," I say dialling.

Tsietsi doesn't answer his phone. When I dial for the fourth time they're already looking at me like I'm bullshitting them.

How did I get myself into this?

"I don't have money on me," I say in a low voice.

Oh! How the mighty have fallen!

I'm so embarrassed I want to die and be cremated and have my ashes scattered all over.....

"Here," he says handing the money to the security guard.

Really dude?



“No, I don’t want favours from you. I’ll wait for my friend to....”

“But I want to leave. I’ve already missed my flight back home. How am I supposed to leave when you’re still parked behind me?” he asks.

He has a point, but he started it!

“I don’t know, you can push my car and drive out and.....”

I stop talking when I notice the look on his face. It says “how stupid are you...?”

The security guard takes the money. He removes the clamp. The guy gets in his car. I get in mine and we drive off.

But I notice when I stop on the second robot on Chappel Street that he is driving behind me.

Is he following me?

I drive faster, but he’s still behind me. I’m beginning to feel uneasy. I don’t even know this guy. What if he’s some psychopathic stalker?

And he didn’t seem like a nice person at all.

Okay, I wasn’t exactly nice myself but he is a man, their animal side is dominant.

I turn right on the sign that reads Hillcrest, but he drives straight. He’s on the phone. It doesn’t look like he sees me at all. I think I was imagining things, he wasn’t following me.

Whew! It’s been one heck of a day.....I need a smoke.

I love Tuesdays particularly because my helper comes by. I love coming home to a clean and fresh house. In fact I can’t live in an untidy place, the sight of dishes in the sink, even if it’s one plate makes me cringe.

I clean after myself, my laundry basket never gets full, and, even my car is always spotless.

People in my life say it’s annoying but they like having me in their houses because I end up sweeping and mopping.

Pizza, a double dose of Law&Order: Special Victims Unit and off to bed I'll go.

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“Dr Montsho, they’re looking for you at reception,” the nurse peeps in and says.

I look at Tsietsi, he’s thinking what I’m thinking.

Not my ex again!

He probably knows about the restraining order and now he’s here to harass me, again.

He should be admitted to this hospital, I know people in here who are more sane than he is.

“No, it’s not the usual problem, there’s a delivery for you,” Tsietsi says after calling reception.

It’s probably from the usual problem.

He walks downstairs with me. Lord knows I’m going to need him to deal with whatever it is this time.

“Dr Montsho?” the delivery guy asks.

I nod.

“Great, please sign here,” he says.

I sign, but I don’t see a package anywhere.

“Here,” he says handing me a small white envelope.

He smiles, and leaves.

I look at it.

“Open it,” Tsietsi says.

I’m scared. What if it’s a bomb? In a small white envelope...?

It's a note....

**Dear Dr Montsho**

**I want my R350 back.**

**You can deposit it at Shoprite.**

**Thank you.**

**Q.Z**

Really? How sleazy can this guy be?

“And then?” Tsietsi

“It's the guy from yesterday's drama, he says he wants his money back. I don't even know how he found me,”

He snatches the paper from me and reads it.

“He wants his money back? What a cheapskate! Send it to him so he can leave you alone,” he says

He looks upset.

The guy didn't even write his name, just Q.Z, whatever that means.

“Who am I going to deposit it to? There's no name here,” I say.

We follow each other up the stairs and out to the balcony.

“Can I use your lighter?” I ask Tsietsi

“We're probably the only doctors in the world who smoke,” he says.

We laugh.

I taught him to smoke, and now he's in too deep. It started at our first job in Tembisa Hospital.

We were both straight out of medical school, before he decided to do psychiatry on top of his GP qualification.

Things were so bad in that hospital that you were lucky if you recorded less than five deaths a day,

Everything from gunshots to stabbing to suicide to old age.....

Going out for a smoke was our only escape.

And now, here, we are dealing with mental illness, I don't know what's worse!

And to tell you the truth I don't have that R350, pay-day is two days away. The money I'm left with is for petrol and dinner for the next two nights. He's just going to have to wait, and I did tell him I didn't want his money but he insisted.

And...what kind of a man is this? Driving a big Jeep and demanding R350 from a woman? He's probably one of those fake high fliers who live on overdraft and Capitec loans.

He can go to hell for all I care.

I haven't received a call from the captain and that means he hasn't delivered the restraining order.

I don't even know why I'm thinking about it because I know problems are going to start as soon as that policeman knocks on his door. I don't know what he's going to do this time. He's already smashed my car, broke my house windows, attacked me at work, harassed me on social networks.....

I just hope he will get the message this time.

“How are we doing today Mr Schalwyk?”

He raises his eyes, but he doesn't say anything.

It's a bad day.

I press the red button.

Two security guards and two male nurses come running in.

He's still sitting on the bed, his eyes on me.

“I have to check his BP. I need a few blood samples too but I doubt it’s going to be possible today, not when he’s like this,” I say

I know he can’t hear a word I’m saying. He’s in another world, a different world that none of us have seen. The problem is, that world can be very dangerous.

Tsietsi should be here, he’s the psychiatrist.

His body is burning hot, I think he’s coming down with a fever, but then again, you never know in his case.

He used to be a state pathologist, one of the best in the country. And then one afternoon he arrived home, took an axe and butchered his whole family, including the domestic worker.

On his “okay” days he tells the story. He says he walked in his house and saw snakes all over the place, so he started killing them. The next thing he saw was blood all over and his wife and kids’ hacked bodies all over the house.

Schizophrenia, that’s what he was diagnosed with. So, instead of jail, he came here.

I diagnosed him with diabetes last week.

When he’s fine he’s really fine, but when he’s not, like today, we all fear for our lives.

They sedate him just as I walk out the door. I always ask them to wait until I’m out of the room before they do these things, especially when they have to do the chaining.

I’m done for the day.

We could go and have dinner, me and Tsietsi, but we are broke. People don’t understand how that is possible because you know, we are doctors for crying out loud, but we are also spenders.

And Tsietsi, I’ve been saying that his girlfriend is dodgy. She’s with him for money I just know it. She doesn’t like me, I don’t care.

She, and a whole lot of people find it hard to believe that Tsietsi and I are just friends, but we are, we have been for years and nothing has ever happened between us.

I've already phoned my father.

TV is boring and no I don't read books, I have a high IQ, that's how I got through medical school, I don't need other people's imaginations to stimulate my mind.

I'm going to throw meat in the oven and have an early night tonight.

An SMS?

***“Shoprite is about to close, I still haven't received an SMS with the withdrawal details for my money,”***

What the fucking hell?

I don't know this number but I just know it's that big-eyed fool!

All of this for R350? Really?

I ignore him.

Half-an-hour later, my phone beeps again.

***“I guess then I'm going to have to send a debt collector”***

Oh my God!!

I think about ignoring him again but he won't stop! I just know! What a bloody broke ass man!!

***“I will send it to you first thing tomorrow morning,”*** I respond.

I hope he'll leave me alone now.

***“I doubt that. But I'll let the R350 go if you agree to do lunch with me tomorrow,”***

You have got to be kidding me!!!

The bloody fake BEE is hitting on me now? How sleazy!!

I ignore him.

***“I’ll be outside the hospital at 1pm”***

Rubbish man!!

I cringe just thinking about him close to me.

***“No. Seeing as you’ve been pestering me for R350, I doubt you can afford me. I won’t go to lunch with you. I don’t want to and I never will. I will eWallet you your money tomorrow morning, after that, please leave me alone,”***

Can it get worse than this? Really?

He’s replying?

***“What’s eWallet?”***

Ghrahhhh!!!

I switch my phone off and go to bed!

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Tomorrow is Friday, that means party night!

Party night on Kimberley standards means hanging out with all the people who are not from Kimberley but live in Kimberley and think they are bigger than Kimberley but live and work here because where they come from they would never earn the salaries they earn in Kimberley.

So, in short, it’s folk with a lot of money but nowhere to spend it, in Kimberley.

Sometimes I wonder how I end up being broke. Oh wait, I fly to Joburg once every month to shop and do my hair. Yes, I do that.

“I saw Schalwyk this morning and all I can tell you is, stay away,” Chelsea says.

She’s the gossipier of the hospital. She knows everyone’s business and tells everyone about it. She even knows about my stalker ex because this one time

we were talking about it in the kitchen thinking she couldn't hear anything because we were speaking Tswana. The next thing we hear is "Wuuuu bashimane!!!"

I almost fainted.

She speaks fluent Sotho.

There's also a debate about whether she's coloured or white. You never really know in the Northern Cape.

"Dr Montsho, reception is calling you, there's a delivery for you," it's the same nurse from yesterday.

I hope it's not that fool again.

It's flowers, a large bunch of white roses.

There's a note.

***"While I wait for the eWallet....."***

This is getting creepy.....

I rush upstairs. I don't even sign for the bloody delivery!

My office window is facing the parking lot.

I look at the flowers once and toss them out the window.

Can pay-day come already so I can pay this man and get him off my back?

"Dr Montsho, reception again,"

Urghhh what now?

I drag myself down there. Chelsea is behind me, I don't know who called her.

It's another bunch of roses, a bigger bunch, red this time. I don't even like flowers.

***"Hope you like these better, enough to find space for them in your office,"*** the note reads.



I'm being stalked, again. I have to call the captain. Why does this always happen to me? What did I do wrong?

I hand the flowers to Chelsea and walk back to my office. Now I'm scared.

This guy is doing all of this for R350? Stalking me like this?

Was he serious when he said he wanted us to do lunch?

I don't even know his name.

This is where I have to swallow my pride I guess. This guy will never back off, seeing me flinch seems to make him happy.

***“Hi, I’m sorry if I was rude or mean to you that other day at the mall. But even if I was, what you are doing is unnecessary, I’ve had to deal with this before and trust me, it’s painful. I will send you your money tomorrow. Please stop doing this”.***

My phone rings immediately.

Why is he calling me?

“Naledi,” that’s the first thing he says.

How does he know my name?

“What do you mean you’ve had to deal with this before? Is someone bothering you?” he asks.

This guy though.....

“What do you want from me?” I snap.

“I want to get to know you,” he says, politely.

Really? By stalking me?

“You’re scaring me, I can’t go through this again, please.....” I say

I’m getting emotional.

“Can I come see you? Now,” he asks.

I can't speak, I'm trying to suppress my voice, I'm crying.

“Naledi! Nalediiiiiiii.....”

I hang up!

Damn! I can't believe I just did that! I just cried to a stranger. This guy probably thinks I'm some psychotic woman who can't stand up for herself.

And how does he know my name? How did he know I work here? How did he know my surname?

I ignore the calls, but he calls and calls until I decide to switch my phone off. It's time to knock off. I want to be alone tonight. ---

***“Naledi, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to scare you, I was just trying to get your attention,”***

Why did I switch my phone on?

It's clear this guy is never going to leave me alone.

***“Ngwana, what's wrong with you? I thought you were cooking tonight, now I have no choice but to eat at Chantel's house, pray for me,”***

It's an SMS from Tsiesi. He must have thought I was ignoring him, I'll explain in the morning.

It's 2am, my salary is in.

I'm going to do an eWallet now, I don't care if the SMS wakes him and his wife if he has one. Actually, let me add an extra R50.

***“Here is your money. There's an extra R50, go buy yourself a life with it”*** I SMS just after the money goes through.

My phone rings!

Oh bloody hell!

“What do you want??”I shout.

“Why aren’t you sleeping?”

Really? How is that any of his business?

“Why are you calling me?”

“I’m worried about you,” he says

“Why? I don’t even know your name,”

“I’m Qhawe,” he says

I’m shouting! Why is he so smooth and polite?? At 2am nogal!!

“I’m fine,”

“Okay, do lunch with me tomorrow, I’ll pay,” he says.

Motherfucker!!!

I hang up.

I need a smoke!

I keep thinking he’s going to call but he doesn’t.

Qhawe, I’ve never heard of that name before.

And why is he being so nice to me now?

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There’s no missed call or SMS from him when I wake up in the morning.

Why am I even noticing? I’ve given him his money, that’s all he wanted from me. He’s gone now, it’s over, my life will go back to normal and besides, I’m going to have a great weekend shopping and pampering myself with my sister.

It’s payday weekend, my flight to Joburg leaves at 7pm. I also have a baby shower to attend on Saturday. I’m going to have fun and forget all about the abuse I suffered this week.

“Counting hours?” Tsietsi

That’s what I’ve been doing all day.

I nod.

“I’m going to Kakamaas, to meet the parents,” he says.

What?

He raises one hand just as I open my mouth.

“I know what you’re going to say. I’m a grown man, I know what I’m doing,” he says.

I think this is a mistake, he’s making a mistake. And where the heck is Kakamaas? How’s he gonna come all the way from Limpopo and meet parents of some girl he’s been with for four months in Kakamaas?

“Dr Montsho,” the nurse peeps in.

I look at her. She smiles.

“Reception again?”-Tsietsi

She nods.

It’s probably my stalker ex this time, or maybe the captain.

“Parking,” the receptionist says when I appear.

Parking?

“Yes, parking,” Chelsea says.

I don’t understand, but I go outside anyway.

Why is everybody looking at me like that?

Why are people looking at me through the windows?

Noooooooooo!

What is wrong with this guy?

I stop before I reach him, is this real?

He's just sitting there, and how on earth did he get a table set at a government hospital parking?

How did security guards allow this?

I walk to him, slowly. I feel all eyes on me.

It's embarrassing.

"I decided, since you don't want to go to lunch with me, I'll bring lunch to you," he says, stands up and pulls a chair for me.

Does he really think I'm going to sit?

"What are you doing? Are you trying to get me fired?" I ask.

He looks up and at the building.

"Well, I think you could do without the lunatics looking at us through windows but, if you're happy here, no I won't get you fired," he says.

What the heck did he just say? Arrogant bastard!

"You could sit down with me and have mussels in creamy white wine sauce, your favourite, or you could cause a scene and draw more attention to us than there already is," he says.

This guy is an idiot, naturally.

The food looks great.

He brought wine, I'm at work, and he brought wine and set a small round table with a cream table cloth and two chairs and take-aways at a mental hospital parking lot. That's what he did. Someone please pray for me.

"You have beautiful eyes, big beautiful eyes," he says.

"Bigger than whose?" I snap.

He widens his eyes and smiles.

This is the first time I see him smile. Well, I'm only seeing him for the second time.

He has a beautiful smile, but there seems to be something hidden behind it, I don't know what.

"So, I've given you your R350, what do you want from me now?"

He's staring, and it's making me uncomfortable.

"How about a date? Dinner, just for that it took you four days to pay me back," he says.

I shake my head, but I can't help smiling. I've met many men in my life but this one is a different breed altogether.

"Tonight? Tiffany's?"

I shake my head.

"I'm going to Joburg tonight to visit my sister," He raises his eyebrows.

"Oh really? How are you getting there?" "My flight is at 7pm," He looks at his watch.

"I'm also going to Joburg tonight, we could travel together," he says.

What are we now? Twins?

"My flight is already booked, thanks for the offer," I say.

This food is really great. He's annoying but I'm hungry so I might as well feast.

"It's fine, we're on the same flight," he says.

It gets worse.

“So how do you know all this stuff about me? Including my favourite meal?”

He looks at me and smiles.

“It’s not every day that I meet a woman who blocks my car, makes me stand in the rain for two hours and gives me R50 to buy myself a life. So yes, I did my research, in case she’s planning to murder me for some reason I don’t know,” he says.

He has this smile stuck on his face, and he never takes his eyes off me. There’s something shady about him too, I just can’t figure out what it is.

“My lunch hour is over. I have to go back to work. Thanks for the food and no, I don’t want to do dinner with you, not today, not ever,” I say, stand up and leave.

I turn around, I don’t know why. I tried to fight it but I couldn’t. He’s still sitting there with his hands on his cheeks, smiling.

I feel all eyes on me as I walk in at reception and go up the stairs.

I hope I don’t see him in the flight.

**“You’re beautiful”**-an SMS comes in just as I settle on my office chair.

Why do I always attract psychos?

Why?

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I make it to the airport just in time for check-in. The queue is still long. There seems to be chaos and mayhem. People are talking loud, some are cursing.

“The flight has been cancelled, something about the weather,” I overhear one woman talking on the phone.

Noooooo! This is the last flight! The next one is on Monday! This can’t be happening! I can’t be stuck in Kimberley on pay-day weekend!

“I’m stranded, can I sleep at your house?” he says from behind

me. Crap!

I turn around, look at him and just.....I have no energy, not tonight.

“I have no flight home, no car and no place to sleep,” he says.

“And where exactly is home?” I ask.

“Joburg, Alberton,” he says.

He’s not carrying any luggage.

“So why are you in Kimberley?”

“I came here to have lunch, at a lunatic hospital with a very mean woman,” he says.

I don’t get insulted or offended anymore. I gave up this afternoon.

“Well, I’m not staying in Kimberley all weekend, I’m driving to Joburg,” I say pulling my suitcase.

He follows me.

I stop and turn around. He stops too. I start walking again, he follows me all the way to my car.

I open the boot and throw my suitcase inside. He stands next to the passenger door.

“And then?” I ask.

“You can’t leave me here. You’re the only person I know in Kimberley. And besides, we’re both going to Joburg so it would be nice of you to give me a lift,” he says.

He’s never going to leave me alone is he?

This is a risk. I don’t just take risks. But at least if something happened to me the cameras here will show that he was the last person seen with me.

He makes himself comfortable on the front-seat, but first he looks around the car and appears to be uncomfortable.

He pushes the chair back when his knees touch the dashboard. He’s very tall.



“It’s not a Jeep I know but it gets me where I want to be, like, say Joburg when flights are cancelled,” I say.

He looks at me, and around the car again.

“It’s not bad,” he says.

What’s that supposed to mean? People are always commenting about how nice my car is. It’s a BMW 1-series, that’s a nice car. I can afford a better and bigger car but I like this one.

“You just reverse without looking at the side-mirrors?” he asks.

We haven’t even left the airport parking and he’s already inspiring me to leave him here.

I keep quiet and drive.

His phone rings. He looks at it and hesitates. It’s probably his wife I assume.

He answers it finally.

“Hi.....No.....I’m fine.....no I don’t need it anymore.....I don’t know sleep over and fly back in the morning.....don’t worry about me I’m sorted,” he says and hangs up.

What was that all about?

“The speed limit is 100,” he says.

He looks nervous, like he’s uncomfortable with my driving. He is.

I press the accelerator harder. He looks at me briefly, the speedometer and at me again.

Those big eyes look like they are about to pop out.

“Please don’t kill me, I have nine children,” he says.

What???

I look at him and frown.

I did say he was a fake BEE, look at him, a flight gets cancelled and he doesn't even have a plan. I bet he has nine crazy baby mamas too.

I'm going to dump his ghetto black ass at the last toll-gate, he can walk to Joburg from there.

"Do you want me to drive? You seem tired," he says.

He's got to be kidding me!

I don't trust no black man with nine kids.

He shrugs and sits back.

How I wish he could be this quiet throughout this trip.

"So tell me about the....you said you'd been through that before? Is someone bothering you?"

But then again, I never really get what I want now do I?

"Maybe I can help," he says when I don't answer him.

Maybe he can, nobody has helped me so far.

"Ex-boyfriend, he's been stalking me for the past year, before that he used to beat me, told me I was fat, that I was nothing before him and every other bad thing you can think of," I say.

This sums it all up really.

I glance at him briefly and his face has changed, it's hard and cold.

"He beat you?" he asks.

There's something about the way he asks that question that sends shivers down my spine.

I nod.

"What's his name," he asks.

I tell him, reluctantly.

“Where’s he from?” he asks.

“Mafikeng, but he lives in Rustenburg now,” I say.

He nods.

He looks a bit scary right now.

He pulls out his phone and sends an SMS, and then sits back.

He’s getting comfortable, let me start speeding again.

I need a smoke.

I roll down the window and light a cigarette.

He sits up.

He looks shocked. Has he never seen a woman smoke before?

“What are you doing?” he asks

Really?

“I’m smoking,”

He looks like he’s lost for words.

“Why?” he asks.

Dumb question big-eyed man!

“I don’t know, to relieve stress maybe?” I

say He shakes his head and sits back again.

I close the window when I’m done. This is my car and I will smoke if I want to, if he has a problem he can jump off.

I yawn unexpectedly. I’ve been driving for almost two hours now.

“Okay that’s it, pull over. I’m not going to let you kill me, not tonight,” he says.

He’s right, I’m tired. He seems shocked when I do as he says.

I feel my eyes getting drowsy soon after he starts driving. He definitely drives better than me.

“You can’t sleep, you’re going to make me sleepy,” he says.

This guy has no tender care at all.

I try to fight sleep but it’s too strong. Just as I fall deep in it I feel a cold hand on my forehead.

“Wake up!” he says.

Urghhhhhh

“You tortured me with your smoking, and now you want to sleep while I drive?”

What??

“I’m sorry, do you have a car?”

He shuts up.

I sit back and close my eyes.

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“Wake up, we’re in Northriding,” he says.

Huh?

“We’re here,” he says.

Yes, we’re at my sister’s complex gate. How did he know?

“It’s on your GPS,” he says.

Yes but still, how did he know?

“My ride is here, what time is the baby-shower tomorrow?” he

asks. “1pm,” I say

Oh wait, why am I telling him this?

“Okay, I’ll see you there,” he says opening his door.

“It’s a baby shower, you’re not invited,” I say.

It doesn’t look like he cares.

There’s a black car behind us, a Range Rover I think.

“Naledi, drive in, I won’t leave until you’re inside the gate,” he says.

On my, I have a big-eyed daddy now.

He leaves only when I’m inside like he said.

My sister looks worried. She didn’t believe me when I told her I was driving to Joburg, at night, with a man I hardly know.

It’s way after midnight and all I want to do is sleep.

I kind of miss him though, weird as he is, I kind of miss him a little. ———

I’m woken by my phone ringing. I tried to ignore it but it just kept ringing.

“You’re still sleeping?”-

That’s the first thing he says.

Ghra!!!

“Yes, it’s 6am, of-course I’m still sleeping. Why are you calling me Chawe?” He laughs.

He tries to say something but he can’t stop laughing.

“It’s Qha-we, Qha not Cha,” he says.

Oh, he’s making fun of me now? Because I can’t pronounce Zulu cliques? How low.

“Whatever, what do you want?” I ask.

He’s still laughing.

“It’s fine, since you can’t pronounce my name you can call me ‘love’,” he says.

How is it that at 6am he is so.....?

“I’m going to hang up now,”

“No no no I want us to go out for breakfast, I’m coming to pick you up,” he says.

I’ll pass.

“Sorry but I have plans with my sister, I’m going to do my hair and then I’ll go to the baby shower,”

“What’s wrong with your hair?” he

asks. How do I even answer this

question? “Okay, I’ll see you later

then,” he says. Thank you. Bye.

What does he mean he’ll see me later?

I’m going to sleep for another two hours or so, seeing as I spent all night on the road with an idiot.

I give up, my sister is already singing in the kitchen, I might as well wake up. ———

“And then? You’ve been smiling to yourself all morning, is it about the R350 guy whose surname you don’t even know?” she asks

She’s so observant. She should have been a cop instead of a Public Relations manager.

“No,” I say defensively.

“I think I’m just happy, my ex hasn’t stalked me in a week, I think he got the message,” I say.

I’m lying, I don’t believe he’ll ever get the message.

He’s probably somewhere planning his next move.

“Sometimes I wish he’d just get hit by a car or struck by lightning and die,” she says.

We both laugh. She’s mean I tell you.

I bought two baby blankets, I think that’s reasonable. I mean, she is my sister’s friend not mine. I’ve known her half my life but I’m sure she doesn’t expect me to rock up with a Ferrari baby stroller as a gift.

Besides, I just paid R4500 for a weave and almost R2000 for this dress I’m wearing.

It’s a long flowing floral dress with thin straps. It’s beautiful. It caught my eye the moment I walked in that store.

“Hey gorgeous ladies....” she says when we walk in.

It’s already packed here, women all over, some I know, others I don’t.

I hug her reluctantly because her belly is so big it looks like it’s going to push me to the floor.

“Naledi, you’re so grown and so pretty,” she says squeezing my cheeks.

I hate it when people do that, it makes me feel like I’m still that chubby little kid.

And what does she mean I’m grown? I’m turning 30 in a few months.

“You look good,” I say, forcing a smile.

I’m lying, she looks scary.

Her house is nice though

I am directed to the back yard. I don't see my sister any more but I can hear her laughing somewhere.

I put my gift, which seems to be the smallest, on the table full of pink things. It must be a baby girl, I had no idea.

There's a stretch-tent, Wimbledon chairs and set tables, it looks more like a small wedding than a baby shower.

"Okay. We're ready to begin," says this woman with six-inch heels.

It must be that I live in a small mining town, I thought this was a casual event.

The baby-mama is made to sit on a big chair and all of us around her.

There is champagne, at least. The rest of the stuff I see are little pieces of things I can push up my nostril, there's no meat. I really hope there's cooked food somewhere, I really do.

"So, I'm going to give you a wrapped gift and you are going to guess what's inside okay? If you guess right, you get a Ferrero Rocher, and if you guess wrong, you get an olive, okay?" she says. I conclude she is the MC.

It doesn't help that my best friend is a man and I was raised by a man, I always feel lost during these things.

"It's a breast pump," she says after shaking the box a few times.

There are cheers and giggles, she gets the little chocolate ball.

I'm not looking forward to when she gets to my gift.

Oh no! She picks it!

She squeezes it a few times and says "it's feather baby pillows,"

Oh no! I hear those go for about R1000 a set.

They all look at me. I blink a few times and drink up my champagne.

"It's baby blankets," I say.

I'm soooo embarrassed.



They clap, after an awkward moment of silence followed by a “ncooooohhhhhh”.

I need a smoke.

“There’s someone at the door,” one lady says looking at me.

So?

“He’s looking for you Naledi,” she says.

The look on her face is of shock and.....

Oh hell no!

“Good day makhosazana (ladies),” he says as he walks to stand behind me. He places his hands on my shoulders.

Is he crazy?

Nobody responds. They all stare at him, eyes popped, mouths wide open.

Is this the first time they’re seeing a tall black man? Or is it that they are as confused as I am as to how he got through the gate and all the way in here?

“Hi,” one says finally.

I don’t want to be rude but I mean.....

“How did you find me this time?” I ask.

He looks down at me and smiles.

I hear gulps.

What the heck is wrong with these women?

The MC clears her throat.

“Would you like some food?” she asks.

He nods.

Really dude??

She disappears into the house.

The best thing for me now would be to walk this man out so that this baby-shower can continue.

I stand up.

“Nice to meet you makhosazana,” he says.

“Nice to meet you,” they all say at once, including my sister, I frown at her.

He follows me.

We meet the MC in the kitchen with a plate of proper food, meat and all. There’s food now?

“She hands him the plate.

“You can sit,” she says.

No he’s not sitting!

He follows me outside with a plate and spoon in his hand.

I don’t even know where I’m going.

“How did you know I was here?” I ask.

I want to be angry at him but he’s just....

“Not even a hello Qhawe?” he asks.

I fold my arms.

“You look beautiful. I like your new hair. I liked the old hair too,” he says and walks on to lean on a car parked next to mine.

That’s the neighbour’s parking space.

“You can’t just lean on people’s cars like that,” I say.

He's like a kid!

He moves to lean on mine.

He's busy eating his food like he's done nothing wrong.

I stand and watch him.

"This is nice, did you cook it?" he asks.

I don't respond.

He puts the plate on top of my car. Opens my passenger door and takes out a bottle of water, drinks it and puts the empty bottle next to the plate.

"I've noticed you forget to lock your car sometimes," he says, folds his arms across his chest and looks at me.

What am I going to do with this person?

"I came by to check on you," he says with a smile.

"I'm fine," I say.

I hope he'll understand that he must leave now.

"Okay, so I guess that means we can go out to dinner tonight,"

Sigh.

"No, I have plans, that's why I came to Joburg, to do my things," I say.

He smiles.

"I promise it will be worth it,"

This is it! I'm done.

He grabs me by the waist just as I start walking.

I don't know how he did it so quick but his arms are around my waist and he's holding me tight. He's looking down at me.

I raise my eyes and they meet his. I give up and look down. I try to pull away but he pulls me closer.

He presses his forehead on mine.

“I’m not letting you go until you say yes,” he says in a low voice.

I’m trying. I’m trying really hard to fight it but it’s there and it’s strong, the urge to hug him back.

He smells nice. He’s wearing a light t-shirt I can feel his skin on mine.

“Say yes....please,” he says, softly.

I can’t.

This is the first time I’ve heard him say “please”.

I’m getting weaker.

“Okay,” I say in almost a whisper.

“Huh? I didn’t hear that,” he says.

I look up and there’s a smile on his face.

“I said okay I’ll go to the stupid dinner with you,” He laughs.

I try to pull away but he presses his forehead on mine, harder, and pushes my face up with it.

No no no.....our lips touch.

What am I doing?

“I’ll pick you up at 6pm, I promise I won’t do anything you don’t want me to do to you,” he whispers.

My knees get weak.

He lets me go.

Walks to the neighbour's car, opens it and gets in.

On Lord! It's his car!

It's a Maserati.

He rolls down the window.

“By the way, I threw your cigarettes out the window last night,” he says and immediately drives off.

Stupid fool.

I take the plate and empty water bottle and walk back to the house. I hope that girly party is over.

It is.

It looks like it never continued after I left.

They're all staring at me when I walk in.

I'm confused.

Silence.

And then mayhem.

What are they all jumping around and screaming for?

“Where? How?”-the pregnant one asks.

Where? How? What?

“Oh my God! I can't believe this! You're dating a Zulu brother?”-another one. I know he's Zulu, but whose brother is he? “You have to sit and tell us all about it,”

I'm pushed to the baby mama's special chair.

They all sit around me and stare with looks of fascination on their faces.

“Is this the R350 guy?”-my sister asks, she’s been quiet.

I nod.

“R350?”-the MC.

Eish.....I might as well.

“I met this guy...”

“This guy?” one asks.

Okay.

“Last week in Kimberley. He stole my parking so I parked him in. When I came back my car had been clamped and I had to pay R350 to get it un-clamped. I didn’t have money on me so he paid for me. And then the next day he sends a note saying he wants his money back, saying I must deposit it at Shoprite,” I say rolling my eyes.

They all look at each other and laugh.

“That is so sweet,” one says.

How is that sweet?

“And then he pestered me all week for R350. I think he’s one of those fake BEEs. Plus he has nine kids so really I have no time for him,” I say.

I regret that kiss, and it was forced really.

Most of them look confused.

“Okay, Naledi wait wait...what do you mean a fake BEE?”-one asks.

“I’m serious, I had to give him a lift yesterday because the flight was cancelled and he had no plan and no place to sleep, and now that I think about it, he didn’t even pay for the toll-gates or petrol,” I say.

He’s a loafer actually.

Silence.

I hear throat clearing.

“So you don’t know who this guy is?”-the MC.

Not really.

“He said his name is Chawe,” I say.

They look at each other.

“You don’t know who Qhawe Zulu is?”

Errrrrrrr

“I don’t know his surname,” I say.

What is going on here?

“You’ve never heard of the Zulu brothers? The Zulu family? I mean, you didn’t even recognise him?”-someone.

Not really. I’m lost now.

“Oh my God!” they all scream and laugh.

What the heck is going on?

“So this was Qhawe, I can’t tell him apart from Mqhele....”-one

“Wuuuuuu Mqhele, I get weak on the knees just by looking at his picture,”-another

“My one is Mqoqi, mmmmmmm,”- another one

I look at my sister. She’s quiet, looking at me and quiet. She doesn’t look happy or fascinated.

“Here,” one says handing me an iPad.

It’s a picture of I think eight men, yes eight. They all look exactly like him. There’s one with grey hair and another....he’s a twin??

There’s an article below the picture.

MILLIONAIRE FAMILY.....

What?

“Is he famous?” I ask.

They all look at me like I’m some alien.

“Errrrr yes, famous and very rich,”-the MC.

I’m not...

I read the whole article. There’s another picture of them and wives I think, beautiful women, all four of them, different but all beautiful in different ways.

“Is he married?” I ask.

One of them must be his.

“No he’s not, and no he doesn’t have nine kids,”- the baby mama.

I look at my sister again. She doesn’t look impressed.

The more I read about him and his family the more I feel uneasy.

He’s not what I thought he was.

And I mean, a famous Joburg millionaire?

“When are you seeing him again?”-the MC

“I agreed to go to dinner with him tonight,” I say.

They’re screaming again.

I’m not sure if I should have.

My phone rings.

It’s him.

I reject the call.

An SMS comes in.



***“I can’t wait to see you again, four hours to go. I hope you’ll let me kiss you again,”***

I don’t know how to respond. I don’t respond.

He calls again half-an-hour later but I don’t answer.

I suddenly feel small, like I’d be wasting my time if I continue entertaining him.

I might as well save myself now before I go in too deep and end up regretting everything. He probably has some perfect looking girl at home and I’m just some girl he met in Kimberley.....

And why did he kiss me? Why has he been following me around? I suddenly feel angry!

I’m happy when my sister suggests we leave, she must have noticed that I don’t want to be here anymore.

These girls, they’re still talking about “the Zulu brothers” like they are some heaven sent gifts to women.

I don’t want to end up like them.

The drive to my sister’s house is silent.

I think she’s thinking what I’m thinking, that this guy is playing with my feelings because he can. He can have any woman he wants so why is he all over me?

It’s 4.30pm. He’ll be here in an hour-and-a-half.

I don’t want to see him. I don’t want to continue with whatever it is that we’re doing. I’d rather be safe than sorry. I’ve had too much heartbreak in my life.

I don’t trust men. Period.

I don’t trust him.

“I’m leaving,” I say to my sister.

She's been too quiet.

"Why?" she asks.

"I just want to go back to my house," I say

"So what must I tell your boyfriend when he gets here?" she asks.

I don't know.

"Don't open for him," I say.

I know she won't. She's never really liked any of my boyfriends.

She doesn't like Tsietsi either.

My other sisters always accuse her of being jealous of all of us, but I think she's just overprotective.

And besides, she's the thinner and prettiest one in the family, so people say.

I'm tired but I think I can drive four-hours to Kimberley.

He's started calling again.

I switch my phone off.

I can't do this. He's going to have to forgive me. That's if it's going to bother him at all that I left. I doubt it will. He'll probably just go on with his life which I doubt stopped because of me anyway.

I'm sad. I don't know why, but I'm just sad and I want to cry.

It's going to be one long and lonely drive.

## Naledi...His Love

### Chapter Two

“Naledi!!”  
He’s shaking me.

What? Why????

Urgh!

“What’s going on? Why is your phone off? What is wrong with you?” Oh no, reality.

“Tsietsi, when did you get here?” I ask.

He looks worried.

“Now. I used the spare key you gave me. What’s going on Naledi?”

To be honest, I don’t know. I just know I feel like crap and I’m an emotional wreck.

It’s still dark outside?

I went straight to bed when I arrived last night. I thought about switching my phone on but in the end I decided not to. Tsietsi is still standing over me.

“I had to come back early, long story,” I say getting up to go to the bathroom.

“And you? Kakamaas? The parents?”

I didn’t check on him all weekend.

“I came back last night, long story, plus I was worried about you, I even had to call your evil sister,” he says.

Really Tsietsi?

“Wanna have a smoke?” I ask him.

He does.

I bought another pack during my trip yesterday. I almost smoked it all before I got home.

There’s a bucket in my balcony that unintentionally turned into an ashtray.

“We haven’t spoken since you left for the airport on Friday,” he says.

He’s right. I hadn’t noticed. I was too occupied with.....

My stomach turns a little when I think about how I left Joburg.

I’m sure I’m doing the right thing but there’s that little part of me that feels like I was unfair by not telling him I was leaving, just so he would not waste his time coming to pick me up.

I’m scared to switch my phone on. I just want to pretend like nothing happened, for now.

“I drove to Joburg with him,”

He looks at me.

He’s confused.

“R350, I drove to Joburg with him,” I say.

“What??”

“Long story short, he came to work on Friday just after you left, had this lunch thing set-up. I told him I was flying to Joburg, turned out we were on the same flight but it was cancelled and I ended up giving him a lift. The next day, yesterday, I found out he is a famous millionaire,” It sounds unreal to me too.

“A famous millionaire?” he asks.

“Yes his name is Chawe Zulu, apparently everybody knows him except me,”

He raises his eyebrows.

“Qhawe Zulu?” he asks.

Huh?

“Yes, do you know him?”

“Yes that family owns taxis and buses and trucks and all other things. I just know what I’ve read about them but they all look alike, tall with big eyes,” he says.

He knows them alright.

“So, he’s one of them, I found this out at my sister’s friend’s baby-shower after he just rocked up unannounced and every woman there was gob-smacked,” I don’t think he fully believes me. He must think I’m exaggerating.

“Tell me about Kakamaas,” I say.

He frowns

“There’s not much to tell except that I don’t think it’s going to work,”

What now? I thought he knew what he was doing, that’s what he said to me.

“It wasn’t what I expected, she is not who I thought she was...” Huh?

“Anyway, I need to get some sleep, Ndivhu asked me to stand in for him at his surgery today,” he says and leaves.

He always sleeps in the spare bedroom when he’s here.

Ndivhu is our other friend, his friend. I had a brief fling with him when I arrived in Kimberley. Tsietsi doesn’t know. He’s married now. It’s 5am.

I’m still not switching my phone on.

But I miss him.

He didn’t seem like a rich snob. Well, he’s not exactly normal but he seemed like a down-to-earth kind of person.

To think I thought he was a fake BEE wannabe.

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Where’s Tsietsi?

Can’t he hear that?

“Who is it?”  
No answer.  
But the door is still banging.

What if it’s...

Let me risk it.  
Where’s Tsietsi?  
I open it, slowly. I see his eyes first.

I should have known.  
I open the burglar-gate, slowly.  
He walks in, a few steps and stands still just before he reaches the lounge.  
I’m standing leaning on the wall.  
He’s looking at me, hands behind his back.

“You can sit,” I say  
He stands still, looking at me. I can’t maintain eye-contact so I look down.  
I tie my robe to cover myself.

“Naledi, what happened?” he asks.  
I don’t know. I don’t have an answer.

Why am I feeling guilty?  
“Did I do something wrong?” he asks.

I raise my eyes.  
He looks hurt.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” I ask.

“Why didn’t I tell you what?”

“Who you are. Why didn’t you tell me who you are?” I ask.

Why is he standing there looking at me with a blank face when he should be answering my question.

“Who am I?” he responds, with a question  
nagal. What does he mean? He knows what I’m  
asking! I look away.

“Naledi, I’m Qhawe, that’s who I am, nothing else,” he says.  
Really?

“No, you are Chawe Zulu, a rich millionaire.....”

“Yes I have money, so what? What does that have to do with  
anything?” He must stop playing dumb now.

“You were supposed to tell me who you are Chawe,” I  
say I’m a bit emotional right now, I don’t know why. He  
walks until he’s standing in-front of me.

“Naledi, I’m Qhawe, this is me, I’m here and I want you. That’s all I can tell you.  
Yes I do have money and yes my family is well known for whatever reason

but I don't see why that's an issue. I've never been anyone but myself to you," he says.

I've never seen him this serious.

He's standing too close. I'm looking at my feet.

"Okay, I apologise for being rich. Can you give me a chance now?" he says. This man!

I smile, I try to suppress it and look away but he's following my eyes with his.

"I don't want to complicate my life more than it already is," I say.

He frowns.

"That's your reason for leaving me hanging? That?"

He doesn't understand.

"I had to go," I say

"Why? Why did you have to go?" he asks.

He's still soft-spoken but it's a bit intimidating.

I keep quiet.

"I'm not leaving until we sort this out. Do you feel nothing for me? Because I feel something for you. That's why I'm here," he says. He can't do this to me.

"How did you get here so...."

"I drove," he says dismissively.

He moves closer. I'm still leaning against the wall. He comes closer and closer.....

I can hear him breathing.....

"Whatever those girls at that baby party thing said about me.....they don't know me, whatever they know they read in the media," he says. "It's not about what they said Chawe, it's about...." "It's about what?" he asks.

Oh, Tsietsi. He's walking down the stairs slowly.

Qhawe notices that I'm looking behind, and turns around.

When he turns to look at me again the look on his face is.....

He drops his eyes. He never does that.

He steps back a little.

"Who is this?" he asks.

Tsietsi is now standing in the kitchen, watching us.

"It's about him? You had to come back to him? That's why you left?"

He thinks.....? Noooooo

"Naledi, are you okay?"-Tsietsi

I can't deal with this!!

"She's fine,"-Qhawe

"I'm not talking to you!,"-Tsietsi

He turns to look at him. I don't like the look on his face.

He walks.....

No no no!

“Chawe! Stop, what are you doing?” I shout.

He stops, turns to look at me, and walks out the door.

I’m left still leaning against the wall with short pyjamas and a light robe.

What the heck just happened here??

“I’m sorry Tsietsi, I don’t.....”

I can’t let him leave!

I run to the door, but he’s gone.

“You’re running after him?”-Tsietsi. He looks upset. I don’t blame him.

And what’s wrong with Chawe? What if this was my boyfriend? It’s not like he and I are an item, he had no right to talk to him like that. “Are you okay Tsietsi?”-me.

“I’m fine,” he says and walks up the stairs. He doesn’t seem to care much about what just happened.

I’m just.....devastated I think.

I throw myself on the bed. My phone is still on the charger. I’m still scared to switch it on. I don’t think I want to know what’s in there. I can’t, however, get him out of my mind.

And what did he mean he’s here and he wants me?

Why would he want me? Of all women why would he want me?

I gather some strength and switch my phone on.

The Samsung whistle goes crazy!

I wait for it to stop before opening the messages.

Voicemails, SMSs, missed calls.....

“I’m here...” the first SMS. It’s from him. It was sent at exactly 6pm yesterday. “Don’t tell me you’re the typical bantu time type. But I’ll wait, I’m good at it. I waited four days for my R350”-another one Maybe I should have stayed.

After that it’s a series of missed calls, and voice messages.

He even sent me Whatsapp messages.

“Are we still going?”-the first one says.

I won’t listen to the rest.

“Why are you crying?”-Tsietsi

I didn’t see him come in.

I don’t answer him.

“I’m leaving, I’m already late. I still have to go past my house to change clothes,” he says.

My mind is not here.

“Don’t worry about that guy, it’s these rich types, they think they’re entitled to everything including women,” he says and leaves.

-----

I've been in this house all day. Eating and smoking and watching TV. I wish I never met him. My life was simple before him. I wasn't sitting here crying over something I don't know.

And come to think of it, there isn't anything really going on between us, which is why I don't understand why he reacted like that. Or does he think he owns me?

Maybe Tsietsi was right, maybe he does believe he's entitled to everything, including me.

He hasn't called or messaged me all day.

I don't know what happened to him but I think he went back to Joburg, back to his life and his family.

I know wherever he is he thinks Tsietsi is my boyfriend. That's if he's thinking about me at all.

How can he just assume and not ask?

I Google him, I shouldn't but I do it anyway.

There's not a single picture of him with a woman. His twin however is always with a wife, it says here that his name is Mqhele.

I don't think I would be able to tell them apart if I ever met him.

Oh wait, here is a picture. It's from about five years ago. He's with a woman, her name is not there but it just says girlfriend. She's pretty, really pretty and she's slim and....they look good together, a perfect couple.

I'm definitely not his type, I don't know why he wants to play with my feelings. An SMS comes in.

***“You sent your boyfriend to give me a restraining order? How wide did you open your fat thighs for him to do this for you?”***

He's back!

My problems are about to start again.

I block the phone number like I always do with the others he uses.

-----

I slept on the couch!

This is the first time this has ever happened to me.

It's already 7am, I'm going to be late for work! I have to see my first patient at 8am!

There's no message from him. I don't know why I'm torturing myself like this. I make it to work just after 8am.

I have no energy and no motivation to do anything today.

I parked right next to the spot where I sat and had lunch with him on Friday. To think I found him annoying at that time and now I'm hurt and confused and thinking about him all the time.

But I'll get over it, I know I will. By the end of the week I'll have forgotten



about him. He's probably already forgotten about me.  
Mr Schalwyk is....human again. Good for me because I have to make sure he takes his meds. I might have to put him on insulin soon because chances of him getting better with all his complications are slim. He's in a good mood. I'm not.

I also have Stacey, she cuts herself sometimes. When she can't find anything sharp to cut herself with, she bites herself.

She arrived here about two years ago. Thirty-years-old, a high-school teacher who walked into a hospital and stole a new born baby. She had had eight miscarriages in six years.

She was going straight to jail for that, until they realised she really believed she gave birth to the child. She still does.

She's on the right wing of the hospital. That's where the ones who have potential to be healed are kept. Some eventually go home, but most of them come back again.

She also has HIV but refuses to take treatment. And so I have to monitor her even when she has a light cough.

I haven't seen Tsietsi today. I think he's working at the other wing.

I keep checking my phone hoping that maybe.....

Forget it, I'm just stupid.

By lunch hour I want nothing but to go home.

That nurse peeped in my office again today. I got a little excited until she told me she wanted to borrow a stapler.

I'm going out to smoke again, and then to the canteen. I'm going to have a full meal with pap and everything, I'll even have cake after that!

"I knew that guy looked familiar!!!"-Chelsea says sitting across me.

What guy?

"The guy from the parking lot, I knew I'd seen him before!!" she says. I'm not in the mood!

"Where on earth did you meet him?" she asks excitedly.

I can't. I stand up and leave. She looks offended.

My phone keeps flashing a light.

I have a whatsapp message. It's from my sister. I'm annoyed.

I check his whatsapp. There's no status. He doesn't even have a profile picture. It says he was "last seen" ten minutes ago.

Now it says he's online. It shows that he's typing. But....the "typing" disappears again. Now it says "last seen" one minute ago.

At least I know he's alive.

"We're doing drinks tonight," Tsietsi.

Why is he so happy?

"It's Monday," I say.

"Since when do you care?" he asks.

I never got to hear what happened in Kakamaas.  
“He sent me a message this morning,” I say.  
“What does he want now?” he asks. He looks angry.  
“I can’t believe you’re still moping over that guy, he was harassing you for R350 remember.....?”  
Urgh!  
“No, not him, my ex, he got the restraining order,” I say.  
He looks relieved, weird, I expected worry.  
“You prefer him to Chawe?” I ask.  
He seems to come to his senses immediately.  
“No Naledi, I just don’t want to see you get hurt, that’s all. Guys like that are usually very controlling and possessive,” he says. How would he know? He’s never dated a guy.  
I go back to my phone.  
It says he’s typing again. But I don’t receive a message from him.

-----

It’s going to 10pm but this man, Ndivhu, is still here, with us. As to what he is going to tell his wife, I don’t know.  
He’s full of himself, flashy and arrogant. I don’t know what I ever saw in him. I wasn’t surprised when I heard he was marrying the daughter of some government MEC here, and, call me a bitter ex but I’m definitely sure it was more about status than it was about love. This, I say because he talks more about the MEC than he does about his wife.  
“So Dr Montsho, have you thought about branching out of mainstream? I mean, you can’t be a GP forever,” he says.  
The conversation always takes this direction when he’s around. And this thing of him addressing us as “Dr”? It’s so junior level.  
“I’m still serving society, I’ll decide what I want to do in a couple of years and.....”

“Oh by the way, society paid for your studies. But, I don’t understand why, I mean, it’s not like your father couldn’t afford to do it,” he says.  
He’s also from the North West, from the village my family comes from. He bores the crap out of me.  
“Ndivhu, it’s late, don’t you have to go home? Because we’re leaving now,” Tsietsi. He always knows when to save me.  
I’m up before he can respond. I shouldn’t have come here. It was meant to distract me but it didn’t work, all I’ve been thinking about is yesterday morning and the days before that. My spirit is down.  
No missed calls, no SMS, nothing. He was on Whatsapp five minutes ago. I

keep checking. I've become a serious stalker.  
I didn't come home after work. I thought it would be pointless but now I regret it because I'm about to walk into a dark house. That's my fear, walking inside a dark place and patting walls trying to find the switch. Other people are scared of heights, I'm scared of dark houses.  
Whew! Home sweet ho.....  
"Where were you?"  
On my God!  
"I'm talking to you," he says.  
I freeze. This feeling, I had forgotten it.  
"I asked you a question. You're still stupid I see," he says.  
He hasn't turned around to look at me. All I see is his head and shoulders on my couch.  
"How did you get in?"  
"Why? You thought a piece of paper would stop me?" he asks.  
I know where this is going. I have to get out of here....  
"Take another step and I'll blow your brains up...."  
I stop.  
He has a gun. He always carries a gun.  
"You look good. You're into this fake hair thing now? I see you haven't cut down on the eating," he says spanking my hip.  
I'm still frozen, like I was when he stood up and walked to me.  
He's standing behind me. I can hear him breathing. I'm praying that he doesn't touch me.  
"What do you want from me?" I ask.  
Why won't he leave me alone?  
Awwwwwwww!  
"What do I want from you? Are you asking me that bullshit? Are you crazy?" he shouts.  
I know where this is going. I've been here many times before.  
I'm trying to get his hands off my hair but his grip is too tight, and he's pulling. The pain is so much that I end up kneeling on the floor screaming.  
He has the TV remote in his hand and the louder I scream the higher he raises the TV volume. He used to do that every time he hit me, raise the volume so no-one could hear me screaming.  
"You've forgotten where you came from haven't you? You think you can scare me with a restraining order? Don't you know who I am?" He's still pulling my hair and I'm still on my knees.  
The first slap comes when I least expect it. From here it's going downhill.  
"I've told you many times, I made you, I can break you," - his famous words.  
"Please..." I scream.  
"Please what?"

“Please don’t kill me,” I beg.  
I know he can. I know he will in the end.  
He stops and looks down at me.  
I have my hands raised, I’m begging like I did something to deserve this.  
He puts his foot on my chest and pushes me down until I’m lying on my back,  
on the floor.  
He kneels.....  
No! No! No!  
“Keep doing that and I’ll pump this gun in your head!” he shouts.  
No! I have to fight back! No!  
He’s pulling my pants down.  
I’m screaming and slapping and scratching!!!  
But he’s stronger than I am.  
The more I fight, there more aggressive he will get. I know that, I know him  
too well.  
“It’s been a while. It’s time I reminded you why no other man can have you,”  
he says.  
I’m still fighting. Kicking and pushing and screaming.  
He stops.  
He slowly places the gun on the floor and looks at the door.  
I’m still on the floor with my pants pulled down to my knees.  
I raise my head. I see shoes, black boots.  
“Dr Montsho,”  
I know that voice. It’s the captain. He’s standing over me.  
I’m still scared. I have no idea what’s going on. How and when did they  
get here?  
“Dr Montsho, it’s okay, it’s over now,”-captain.  
I can’t move.  
He’s still kneeling over me with his hands on his head. There’s movement  
all around me. Someone picks the gun up from the floor. He’s being  
handcuffed.  
The captain pulls me to my feet.  
I pull my pants up and look around me. There are four of them, cops. They’re  
walking all over the house, inspecting and searching. “Does he have a key for  
this house?” one asks.  
I shake my head.  
“He came in through here,” another cop says coming in from the balcony.  
Through where??  
My house is in a complex but all units are stand-alone. How did he even enter  
the gate?  
“Dr Montsho you’re going to have to come with us to the police station  
to make a statement,”- captain.

Where is my handbag?

“I think you should go to hospital first, did he do something to you? Do you need to call someone?”- captain

No, luckily, but he was about to rape me.

I take my handbag and follow them out.

I hope this is the last police statement I’m going to make.

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“You have to talk about it ngwana to release the anger,” Really?

“Are you psycho analysing me now? Do I look like one of your patients?”

I snap.

I shouldn’t have called him. I should have just done this alone.

“No, I’m saying.....”

“Tsietesi I was almost raped and killed just three hours ago, so no, I don’t want to talk about it,”

There is no talking until he drops me off at my house. Yes, I will sleep here, alone, like I’ve done for the whole year that I’ve lived in this house.

And no, I’m not going to call my family or anyone else for that matter.

I’m going to sit here, alone, and try to forget what I just went through.

No, in fact I’m going to drug myself to sleep.

I hope this was really the end. If he gets out on bail he’s going after me, that I know for sure. He will never stop, I’ve accepted that. Maybe it’s my fault, I allowed it to go this far.

No actually, it’s not my fault, he’s crazy and he needs help, that’s all.

My father doesn’t know about this, if he did, if I ever told him, this world would turn into a war-zone.

He’s always been like that, too protective of his daughters. Sometimes I think to make up for us growing up without our mother. She left before I turned one. From what I’ve heard, she couldn’t stand the traditions and the requirements of marrying into a family like my father’s.

We were shielded, that’s why we grew up in Mafikeng and not in the village. But things changed seven years ago when my father had no choice but to accept who he is and respect tradition.

I have four hours to sleep before I have to go to work. I doubt I’ll be able to do so. But first I have to clean up the kitchen and lounge and mop the floors because people were walking all over here, I can’t stand a messy place.

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It's almost 6am and I'm still sitting on the couch with the remote in my hand. I've watched two episodes of Rockville already.

Qhawe is awake. I know that because I checked his Whatsapp just now and it says he was online five minutes ago. I think I'm losing my mind. I think I love him.

**“Naledi, don't come to work, I'll send a counsellor to your house,”**— an SMS from the hospital CEO.

Tsietsi told them?

I told him I don't want the whole hospital knowing about my problems. It's enough that I have to deal with crazy people every day, I don't want them knowing about my own crazy life.

“We don't do business with government. Our business is not based on tenders,”

I know that voice.

It's him, he's on TV, on the news.

He's explaining to the anchor about some allegation against his family, him and his brothers. He seems different, serious and a bit aggressive. Her looks annoyed, like he did on that day at the mall parking. The only other time I saw this side of him was when we were in the car driving to Joburg that night, when I told him about my ex.

So, I'm thinking, the guy has a private jet and he could have easily gotten himself a car to drive to Joburg that night instead of getting a lift from me. And, he didn't have any luggage, which means he flew down here that morning to.....to have lunch with me?

That call in the car, was he talking about.....? He said he didn't need it any more, that they must sleep over and fly back the next morning.....

His Whatsapp says he's typing.....and then he stops.....I don't get a message.

**“It's fine. Thanks for the offer but I'm driving home to the North West. I will be back in two days”**— I respond to the CEO's SMS.

I almost died last night and I'm sitting here not doing what I want to do because I'm scared of what the end result might be? No Naledi, this is not who you are.

If I get burnt then it's fine, I've survived many things before including living in a foreign country where I knew no-one. I've watched people die, babies die. I've won, I've lost, I've failed, succeeded and I've.....

If this is me being stupid, then so be it. I don't care anymore.

# Naledi...His Love

## Chapter Three

It rings once.

“Naledi,”

I keep quiet.

“Naledi....” he says again.

I take a deep breath. Suddenly I’m not sure if calling him was a good idea.

“I just called,” I say.

I’m a bit emotional.

Silence.

I think about hanging up but I didn’t come all the way here to call him and hang up and go back.

I can hear him breathing.

“Naledi,” he says again.

“I love you,” he says and immediately takes a deep breath, like he is shocked himself.

What am I supposed to say now? I didn’t expect him to say that. Why is he saying that?

I don’t....

“I’m here,” I say.

I’m not even sure where I am, but I know I came here for him.

“You are where?”

“I don’t know. But I’m here. I took the Alberton off-ramp,” I say.

I shouldn’t have done this.

“You took the what? Where?” he asks, he sounds confused.

“You said you lived in Alberton, so I took the Alberton off-ramp from the N12,”

I had no plan when I left Kimberley, but I knew I was going to him, wherever he is.

He’s breathing fast.

“Where are you? Where are you parked?” “On the side of the road,” I say.

He sounds like he’s running now.

“Tell me what you see,”

“I see a Spar and an Engen garage,” I say  
It sounds like he’s getting inside a car.  
“Okay, go and park at the garage,” him.  
Why didn’t I think of that? But then again, I haven’t really been thinking straight today, the evidence of that is me being here, what am I doing? I park and sit and wait.  
I don’t know what I’m going to say to him when he arrives. I don’t know what I’m going to tell him when he asks me why I’m here.  
He’s here.  
That was too quick.  
It’s that Range Rover.  
He parks a bit further away and comes running to my car.  
“Naledi!!” he says pulling my door open.  
I just sit and look at him.  
“What happened? Hey.....what...?”  
I can’t speak.  
I’m biting my lips very hard.  
I don’t know why I came here but I know it wasn’t to cry. I can’t be crying to a man I barely know. It’s enough that I drove all the way here..... He pulls me out of the car.  
I stagger a little before I find balance by leaning on the car.  
I’m wearing leggings and a t-shirt. I look and feel like hell. I didn’t even shower I just grabbed my handbag and phone, got in the car and drove to Joburg.  
“Talk to me, what happened?”  
He has his hands on my shoulders.  
Where do I start? I don’t know why I’m here, but I know I want to be here, with him.  
“Okay get in the car,” he says when he gets no answers.  
He pulls me by my hand around my car and into the passenger seat.  
He gets on the driver’s seat.  
We leave his car at the garage. I want to ask but I’m too emotional right now.  
He keeps looking at me and the looking ahead at the road.  
“Did you drink all these?” he asks looking around the car.  
There are empty coffee cups and empty bottles of energy drinks.  
I nod.  
He looks worried.  
I’m still crying.  
I want him to stop talking and I don’t want him to see me like this but I want to hear his voice and I want to be here with him, right at this moment.  
We drive to a golf-estate.  
This is where he lives?



There are houses, big houses but they are not close together like you'd normally find in estates.  
I'm still not sure why I came here.  
We stop in-front of a huge house. The walls are mostly glass. I can see the lounge and kitchen from here on the driveway.  
He gets out, rushes to my door and pulls me out by my arm.  
"Where are your bags?" he asks.  
Good question.  
"I didn't bring any bags,"  
He doesn't look surprised.  
"Come," he says.  
He has one arm around my shoulders.  
The door is wood but the walls are glass, there are brick pillars here and there but everything is just bare.  
Why am I here again?  
"Do you need anything? Food?" he asks.  
No!  
I feel a bit funny. I'm angry actually.  
"Why did you leave Chawe? Why did you leave me?" I'm angry! I feel like shouting at him! He keeps quiet.  
"You just left me like that!" I scream.  
He looks confused.  
I want to go to him and hug him tight but I want to scream and shout at him too for leaving me like that and torturing me this whole time and for doing this to me, this, this thing that is happening here!  
How can he drive me crazy like this when I barely even know him! "I didn't.....your boyfriend was there," "He's not my boyfriend!!!!"  
He's looking at me like I'm scaring him.  
"You didn't call! You didn't do anything! You just left! You were lying, you lied that you wanted me! You lied!!....."  
He takes a few steps towards me. I freak out! But he grabs and holds me tight before I can step back. I'm still screaming! The louder I scream the tighter he holds me.  
"I didn't leave you.....I didn't leave you," he keeps saying.  
"Why are you doing this to me? Why? I was fine before you!!"  
I'm screaming but I'm not trying to break free. I'm angry at him but I want to be in his arms.  
It takes a while before my calm returns.  
Now I'm a bit embarrassed. Why did I do that? Why did I scream at him like that?

“He’s not my boyfriend Chawe. He’s a friend and colleague, he came to my house that morning because my phone was off and everybody was worried. He’s just a friend,”

I’m sitting now. I still feel a bit drowsy but at least I’m functioning again. I don’t know what happened there, I don’t have temper issues. I don’t know what got into me.

He sits next to me.

“Why didn’t you tell me that?” he asks.

Really? Like he gave me a chance to do that.

I cough a couple of times. I haven’t eaten. I just drank coffee and energy drinks and smoked throughout the trip.

He stands up, comes back with bottled water and hands it to me.

“I missed you,” he says.

I turn to look into his eyes.

“I wanted to call you but I thought you didn’t want me to,” he says.

How could he think that? He’s the one that walked away. After I walked away.

“I waited for your call, for the past three days,” I say. I’m being honest, I was desperate for his attention.

“Why didn’t you call?” he asks.

Why didn’t I?

“I don’t know, I thought you didn’t want me to call,” I say.

I wanted to, but I didn’t.

He shifts closer and puts his arm around my shoulders.

And then I remember.

“I didn’t shower, I just got in the car and drove here,” I say.

We look into each other’s eyes. And then we both burst out laughing.

He pulls my face close to his, he wants to kiss me....

“I didn’t brush my teeth either,” I whisper.

He kisses me anyway.

And then we sit, like this, with my head on his shoulder and his arm around me, in silence.

“Did I hurt you? On Saturday when I just left, were you hurt?” I ask.

He clears his throat and squeezes my shoulder.

“Yes,” he says.

What kind of man is this? He was supposed to say no so that I don’t feel bad. Doesn’t he know that?

“I didn’t mean to,” I say.

I really didn’t mean to hurt him.

“At first I thought you were just being your usual self, as in being mean to me like you always are. I waited and waited and as time went by it started to hurt, especially when I realised I had to come to terms with the fact that you were not coming, that the dinner was not going to happen,”

Now I feel really bad.

“Was it going to be here?”

“No, I didn’t want to bring you to my house, not on our first real date because I know you’re crazy so you were going to assume that I wanted to shag you,” he says.

Our first date was at a mental hospital parking lot. And yes I was going to assume that.

“Is this your house?” I ask.

I know, it’s obvious.

“No, it’s a friend’s, I’m just renting the bedroom,” he says looking at me.

Oh.

“In case you decide to leave me because I have a big house,” he says with a little smile on his face.

I almost forgot how he is.

“Yes it’s my house. That night I realised I was past that games stage. I wanted us to really talk and be serious,”

I should have stayed.

“Games as in you stalking me for R350 and showing up at my workplace and stalking me at airports?”

He laughs.

“You’re crazy. Those lunatics you hang around all day are rubbing off on you.....”

Really?

“Chawe, they’re people too.....”

“No, they’re not, they’re crazy,” he says.

How did this conversation get here?

“I thought you were a fake BEE,” I say.

Okay that was a bit random of me.

He raises his eyebrows.

“Yes, because you were stalking me for R350,” I say He laughs.

“By the way, I’m not a BEE,” he says.

Whatever.

We’re laughing now but I’m going to have to tell him, but I can’t tell him everything, not until I know him better. “Can I borrow your towel?”-me.

He laughs, stands up and pulls me by my hand across the dining room and some room, the passage and up the stairs.

“I can use the guest bathroom,” I say when we enter the main bedroom.

“You’re not a guest,” he says and walks to the bathroom.

That’s one huge bed!

There’s no headboard, just purple wallpaper from where the bed starts all the

way up the wall.

I walk to the window and pull the curtain open. Oh, it's a sliding door. It takes me out to the balcony. It doesn't look like he comes out here often. There's a pool and another structure. I think it's a pool-house. Not very far is a lake, it looks a bit too big to be in a residential area.

There's something refreshing about this place. I want to stand here and breathe the fresh air. It's so serene it's hard to believe we're in Joburg. I turn around to see him standing at the door, watching me. He smiles when our eyes meet.

There's something sincere about him when you look deep enough, something warm and safe too. It draws me. I feel like I want to hold him. But I stop myself.

Let me go take that bath.

But he's standing blocking the entrance. He has this little smile on his face.

"Can I pass please?"

He stands still.

He's such a kid!

"So are you my girlfriend now?" he asks.

Just like that? I don't answer.

"I'm not letting you pass until you answer me," he says I'm trying hard not to blush. "No," I say

He's still smiling.

"So you drove all the way from Kimberley to scream at me for I don't know what and shower in my house?"

He's still blocking my way.

Sigh.

"I'm not moving until you agree to be my girlfriend,"

What is wrong with this man though?

I wrap my arms around his waist and kiss him.

"Can I pass now?"

"No," he says, that smile still there.

"Can I pass? My boyfriend," I say.

The smile gets wider, and those eyes bigger, he's beautiful.

"Yes you can," he says and steps aside.

"You can use my toothbrush..." he says walking out of the bedroom. Moron...

He's run me a bubble-bath, but it smells a bit masculine. Everything here is masculine including the towels, they're all navy and blue.

I look around and I see no pink things, there's also just one toothbrush.

I hope I won't be having problems in this union.

I don't even have clean underwear, but who cares, I'm swimming in a bathtub

in the house of a man I know very little about.  
This is nice and soothing.....after the day I had, this is all I need.  
I hear footsteps and flinch!  
Please don't come in here please please.....  
They stop. I hear them again, they fade.  
He's gone. Whew!  
I spend another 15 minutes just relaxing in the water.  
And then it crosses my mind.....I might have to give something up tonight.  
It's been so long since I've opened these legs I'm sure there's a spider-  
web down there.  
He doesn't seem like the type that would push hard if I said no, but the  
situation is I'm not sure if I have enough morals to say no to him. The fool is  
damn sexy!  
Oh, this is why he was here! There's a white robe on the bed and a t-shirt. It's  
a bit tight but I have my bra back on so I can work with it.  
I still feel naked with no panties on so I tie the robe very tight around me.  
This house, I can see everything from up here. I can see him down there in  
the kitchen walking back and forth. I think he's cooking.  
Isn't he supposed to have maids and chefs walking around all over this  
house? And why is he single? If he's single.  
If he's not single I feel sorry for that lady because I'm not walking away,  
not again.  
I walk down the stairs.  
I feel fresh and more confident, panties or not.  
He stops what he's doing and watches me all the way to the bottom of the  
stairs.  
That thing that draws me to him, it gets stronger.  
We stand in the kitchen and just look into each other's eyes. I drop mine first.  
"You can cook?" I ask.  
He has this thing of frowning and smiling at once.  
"I try. And you?"  
I try too.  
"I can, nothing fancy but I can make pap and meat and the basics,"  
"Uphuthu?" he asks.  
What's that?  
"You don't know what uphuthu is?"  
I don't.  
"Google it," he says.  
What??  
"And call me love, I'm tired of you butchering my name,"  
As if he can pronounce my surname properly. "Here," he  
says placing a plate in front of me.

It's pasta.  
It has chicken and a creamy sauce.  
"You can cook pasta?" I ask.  
I'm shocked.  
He laughs.  
"I can cook anything,"  
I don't believe this at all.  
"Are you sure you're Zulu?"  
He does that smile-frown thing again.  
"Why? Do you think all I do is go around shooting and beating people?"  
Well...Zulu people haven't exactly had the best Public Relations. It's just like us Tswanas. The general perception is we are not generous fellows. People say a Tswana person would rather be hungry with you all day than take out their food and risk having to share it with you.  
Come to think of it, I have this aunt.....  
"No, but pasta I didn't expect," I say.  
"I can cook, really well.....oh and I do shoot people," he says sitting next to me.  
I laugh. He's crazy.  
"What did you mean when you asked why I was doing "this" to you?  
What were you talking about?"  
He's serious now. I thought we were still laughing and joking.  
I don't know what to say.  
He's staring. He wants an answer.  
"I don't know...." I say.  
He puts his plate down on the coffee table and looks at me.  
"What did I do Naledi?"  
He won't understand, but let me tell him anyway.  
"You made me love you,"  
He's quiet, but he's still looking at me.  
"Is that wrong?" he asks.  
Yes it is.  
I look down at my plate and keep quiet.  
He's still staring, and I know he won't stop until I give him an answer.  
"He came," I say, still looking down.  
He puts his fork down too, but doesn't say anything. He wants me to continue.  
"Last night, I found him in my house, waiting for me," I say.  
I thought I wasn't going to tell him this now, not today.  
I see that look on his face again.  
He hasn't said anything, but I know I should keep talking.  
"He hit me and pulled my hair and tried to....."  
I can't tell him that last part.

“Tried to do what?” he asks.

I keep quiet.

“Tried to do what Naledi?”

I don’t answer.

“He had a gun, he said he was going to shoot me. But the police, the captain, he walked in just as he was trying to.....” I stop.

I want to look at him but I can’t. I feel him, the intensity.

“They got there before he could hurt me more. They arrested him. He’s appearing in court tomorrow and I have to be there, in case he applies for bail. I have to be there so I can tell the court that he’ll kill me if they let him out,” He’s quiet. But I can feel him, the aura around us is getting heavier and darker.

“It’s fine, we’ll leave very early in the morning, we’ll fly there,” he says after what seems like years.

But.....

“I’m going to court with you,” he says.

“I don’t think that’s a....”

“I’m going with you,” he says.

“That will make things worse Cha.....love,” I say.

He frowns, a real frown this time.

“Worse for who?” he asks.

“For us, I don’t want him to hurt you,” I say.

He frowns again.

He’s going to go after Qhawe, I know he is. If he sees him in court with me tomorrow he’ll freak out and if he’s released on bail he’ll go after him .

“Chawe you don’t understand, this guy is dangerous and he’s never going to leave me alone. I don’t want to put your life and your family in danger.....”

“He’s never going to leave you alone?” -him.

There’s something about the way he asks.

“Naledi, I’m going to court with you,” he says.

I think that maybe this is not negotiable, yes, it’s not. So is the instruction that it’s time for bed. Apparently I have to go to sleep now at 8pm because I didn’t sleep at all last night, that’s the instruction. “What time are we leaving in the morning?”

He hesitates a little, He looks like he’s thinking hard.

“We’ll get a flight,” he says like it’s nothing major.

“We’re talking about Kimberley remember?” I say.

“Okay, we’ll drive. We’ll leave your car here and take mine,” Huh?

“How are you going to come back?” I ask.

He looks at me like I’m asking a strange question.

“Come back? You think I’m going to leave you alone Kimberley?”

What? Is he moving in with me now?  
“And I don’t want you working at that crazy people’s hospital....”  
Oh Lord Jesus!! This relationship is over!  
He leaves me in bed and goes somewhere in this house. I don’t know where.  
I feel my eyes getting heavy. I set the alarm clock for 5am. The captain said  
the court appearance will be at 11.30 am.  
The drive to Kimberley is about five hours but I have a feeling it will take us  
less than that.

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That noise.....  
I open my eyes. Where am I?  
“Phone,” he says.  
Oh. I’m here. In his arms. When did he come to bed?  
It’s dark but I can see him and his arms around me.

It must be the alarm clock.  
“It’s ringing,” he says.  
It is.  
“Hello,”  
“Dr Montsho,”  
It’s the captain.  
“Yes,”  
“I just wanted to tell you not to bother coming to court. I’ve been  
informed that Tlabane is dead, they say he fell and hit his head,” Huh?

“That’s all I wanted to tell you. Sorry to wake you. But, don’t bother coming to  
court today, we have to inform his family now,” he says. And with that he’s  
gone. It’s over.  
“What’s the matter?”  
Where do I start?  
“It’s the captain, he says my ex is dead, he fell and hit his head or something  
like that, I don’t need to go to court,”  
There’s no reaction at all on his face.  
“Mmmmmmm...” he says, takes my phone from me and puts it on the pedestal  
behind him.  
He wraps his arms tighter around me, kisses my forehead and says: “I  
love you”.  
I understand his reaction, he didn’t know the guy.  
I hated him but I didn’t want him to die, he has two kids.



He must have gotten into a fight with the other prisoners, maybe they pushed him and he fell, he was naturally rude.

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“And then?”

“And then what?”

“Why are you just standing there.....?”

“Why are you just sleeping there? It’s 6am,” he says.

What the heck!!!

He’s just standing here with his hands in his pockets. He’s cleaned up and all dressed.

“Yes, it’s 6am Chawe, normal people are still sleeping. Why aren’t you?” “Normal people sleep until after 6pm?” he asks. I don’t know if he’s being serious or sarcastic.

“Wake up, we’re going out for breakfast,” he says.

Is he serious??

“I don’t have clothes,” I say.

He looks like he’s just remembered that.

I’ve also just remembered a lot of things, including the fact that my ex is dead and I’m worried about that.

I have to tell my sisters, I have to tell Tsietsi, I have to check with the captain.

He’s on his phone, he walks out of the bedroom.

“Tsietsi,”

“Where are you?” he asks.

Whoah! Really?

“Forget that, Tlabane is dead,”

“What?”

“Yes, I got a call from the police this morning saying he fell and hit his head in the cells, and died,” I say.

That’s all I know.

“And so? How are you? Must I come over?”

Sigh

“No, I’m not at my house, I’ll see you when I come back,”

I’m in no mood to explain.

“Where are you??”

“We’ll talk later Tsietsi,” I say and hang up.

He’s back.

“Was that.....that guy?” he asks.

He must not start, the look on his face says he’s about to start.

“I don’t like him,” he says.

Yeah, and he doesn’t like you.

“He thinks he owns you,”

He said the same thing about you.

I stand up and go to the loo.

Strange, he hasn’t tried anything, like touching me or trying to be intimate. I don’t know if I should be worried or not.

I slept in a robe and he didn’t even try to make me take it off.

When I come out he's still standing where I left him.

"I have to make a few calls," I say.

He just watches me, all the time. He looks at me like I'm.....a rare precious stone.

"Okay, breakfast will be here soon, meet me downstairs," he says.

I think he's going to turn and walk away but instead he comes to me, puts his hand at the back of my neck and pills me close to him. He kisses the top of my head, turns and walks away.

The urge to hold him tight, it's there every time he comes near me.

So, does this mean I have to get cleaned up too? Yes, I do actually. I feel sticky and all that.

I walk out to the balcony. It has a roof, I didn't notice the first time.

I'll have a smoke while I make the calls. I need to sit down for that.

The air is fresh, it must be that lake there.

"Ousie, you won't believe what.....

Ahhhhhhhhh! What the heck!!

I'm running around the balcony! But the water is all over! It's coming from the roof! What the heck is this now!!

It won't stop!

I try to run back inside but he's standing at the door.

"I see you've met my smoke detectors, I had no idea they worked so well," he says.

Damn him!

"Turn it off!" I scream

He doesn't move.

I'm dripping wet now, the bloody thing is still raining on me!

I try to run back inside but he's blocking the way.

"Chawe!!"

"Are you going to stop smoking?" he asks.

Really??

"Okay," he says and pushes the door closed.

"Chawe!! Open the door!!" I scream and bang on the glass sliding door.

He's standing inside, watching me go crazy and get wet here.

"Are you going to stop smoking??" he shouts.

Ghrah!!

"My phone is getting wet!" I scream.

"I'll buy you another one....when you stop smoking," he shouts.

Stupid arse!!

"Okay," I say.

"Huh? I didn't hear that,"

"Okay, I'll stop smoking, now open the bloody door!" I shout.

He opens the door, the water stops.

I push him aside and walk past him, straight to the bathroom. The robe is literally dripping, my hair too!

I lock the bathroom door.

He is so stupid! I hate him!!!

I take off the robe and throw it in the bathtub. I'm cold now!

"Breakfast is here!" he shouts from outside the door.

“I don’t want it!” I shout back.

I’m shivering now.

I know he’s still here and I’m not talking to him, not anymore.

“Should I wait for you here or go downstairs?” he asks.

Nx!

I get in the shower. He can go eat that stupid breakfast alone!

He’s gone when I come out.

How am I supposed to dry my weave now? And what am I going to wear?

I’m standing in the bedroom with my hands on my hips. I have no idea what to do.

I’m less angry now but I won’t let him get away with what he just did. He’s such a tall black big eyed kid sometimes!!

I’ve had to SMS my sisters to tell them about what happened to Tlabane. My older sister keeps telling me about counselling and all that stuff, they forget that I’m the doctor here, I know all about coping, and I know how to stop physical trauma from turning into emotional trauma.

I’m okay, I really am. Actually, I think a part of me is relieved, if I may say that. But there is a part of me that is sad, I knew him before he became who he was now. That him, I wish that him had lived. I always believed, or hoped I don’t know, that he’d get help and go back to being that good caring man.

His eyes are wide as I approach, all the way until I sit across him at the small table.

The sun is starting to get warm. The fresh morning air is beginning to thicken.

There’s fruit and yoghurt and croissants and different cheeses and muffins and also, warm breakfast, eggs and all that.

He’s sitting with his mouth open. He’s still holding that half-eaten slice of toast in his hand.

I raise my eyes to look at him once before I take a small bowl and fill it with fruit.

We're sitting outside on the porch. This is where I found him. This is where we're having breakfast. The lake is in front of us. I like looking at it.

He won't take his eyes off me, can he at least close his mouth?

He clears his throat...

"You...errr....I....there's juice....."

Why is he stuttering?

"I left the juice in the kitchen," he says.

I don't care.

I turn my chair to face the lake, cross my legs and sit with the bowl of fruit in my hands.

There are voices, sounds like a group of.....

He's standing in front of me! So quick?

There's a group of people walking past, a bit far from us but they can see us judging by their greeting. I can't see them because he's standing in front of me but I make out that they're construction workers. The way I see it, he's trying to make sure they don't see me.

"Let's go inside!" he says the moment they disappear.

I did say I wasn't going to let him get away with what he did.

"Why?" I ask.

"Naledi come on, let's go inside,"

Oh, he's begging now? I hope he remembers how I begged him to open that sliding door.

He keeps looking at me, my legs and thighs. I know he wants to intimidate me by being tough and looking me in the eye but his eyes betray him, they keep going to the exposed parts of me.

He runs inside and comes back with a throw. He puts it over me.

Is he serious?

We hear voices again.

“That’s it!” he says and pulls me from the chair by my arm. I’ll let him win this time.

I put the throw on the couch and again I’m left with just the bath towel. He’s standing in the lounge looking like a stupid fool with his mouth open and eyes popped.

“I told you I didn’t have clothes, but you decided to make the only thing I could wear wet,” I say walking past him to the kitchen. I feel his stare behind me.

Now, you have to understand that I’m a big girl. Yes, I have issues with my weight, mostly because I’ve always been that fat kid and all my nicknames are about me being fat. But also, I’ve always been the pretty girl. I may have extra kilos on my thighs and hips and ass and waist but honey, there is not a single drop of cellulite, not even a centimetre of a stretch mark, hell, I’d pay you a lump sum if found a single scar on my body.

I’m fat, but I’m fit, and firm, and fresh and damn sexy!

And yes Chawe, mess with me again and I’ll have you standing there with your tongue out like a little puppy seeing a bone.

“Thank you for breakfast,” I say walking up the stairs. He’s still watching.

He must know that Dr Montsho rules up in here!

But Dr Montsho still doesn’t have any clothes. Now what do I do?

I feel him getting nearer and nearer.

He clears his throat. He’s behind me.

“We can...we must...”

The stuttering again.

“Buy clothes, we can go buy clothes,” he says.

I turn around to face him.

He looks me in the eye but he can't maintain it, it's like he can't control his eyes, they keep going down and coming up again.

“I can't, what am I going to wear?” I ask.

“Okay, I'll go,” he says.

“It's 8am, shops are not open yet,” I say

There seems to be something in my thighs that's bewitching him because he just can't control himself, those double-lens eyes just keep going there.

“Do you have another robe?” I ask.

He's still staring at my thighs.

I raise my eyebrows.

“Yes actually,” he says, like he's just remembered something and walks out of the bedroom.

It's a blue one this time. I wonder why he keeps some clothes in the other bedrooms.

It's long. It covers me up completely.

“So, you never took me on a house tour, I wanna see all of it,” I say.

He smiles and shakes his head. I think he's back from the world of lust.

“Where do you want to start?”

“Wherever you want,” I say.

I try to touch his arm but his reaction is a bit awkward.



Now he doesn't want me to touch him?

His hands are in his pockets. Urgh!

"This is the second bedroom," he says pushing the door open. It's snow-white. Everything from the walls to the bed linen to the en-suite bathroom, everything is white, even the side-lamp covers.

There's just a bed with a headboard, a white single-couch on one corner and a fluffy white throw as an overlay on the bed. I like it. But it doesn't look like anybody ever uses it. It has a balcony too.

I look up, the ceiling is not white, there's a mural. I can't make out what it is but it's black and white.

The next bedroom, it's standard, brown wooden slay-bed, cream white linen and a big mirror on the wall. It has that African design thing about it, probably because of that huge painting of a woman wearing a Zulu hat, I think it's called isicholo.

Another one, it has double-bunk single beds, I think about seven. The bed linen is everything from Spiderman to Superman to.....

I look at him.

"I did tell you I had nine kids," he says defensively.

I know he was lying.

"No you don't, your brothers combined have nine kids," I say.

He frown-smiles.....

"I Googled you,"

"Mmmmmm Dr-spy," he says behind me.

He's starting to lighten up and act normal again, but he's still careful not to touch me.

"What else did you find out on Google?"

“That you’re not a fake BEE. Oh and that you’re single, because I thought you were married at first,” I say.

He seems surprised by that, but he has this little smile on his face.

“So you believe everything you read on the internet?” he asks, still walking beside me.

“What? About you being single? It doesn’t matter, if you do have a girlfriend, tell her I say ‘hello and byeeeeeeeeeee’,”

He bursts out laughing.

Okay, I didn’t expect that, I was just being my crazy self.

He’s still laughing. I’ve had to stop walking and wait for him.

He stops, looks at me and starts laughing again.

Okay, was it really that funny?

“Is that a gym?” I ask.

It is.

“You have a gym in your house?”

He nods. At least he’s stopped laughing but he still has a smile on his face.

“How many TVs do you have?” I ask. I’m seeing yet another one in some random corner.

There’s also a passage around that corner that looks like it’s leading somewhere.

He follows me down the stairs and to that passage.

It’s wide. I can’t see where it leads to exactly because there’s a bend somewhere along it. It’s one of the few walls that are bricks in this house.

It’s lined with pictures, portraits, mug shots, baby pictures, wedding pictures and a whole lot of others.....all in black and white print.

“Is this you or your twin?” I ask. It’s that one that looks exactly like him. He’s wearing a tracksuit jacket and has a lit cigarette in his mouth.

“A twin? I don’t have a twin,” he says frowning.

Of course he does.

“That’s Mqhele, we’re eleven months apart. He’s older,” he says.

Oh. He looks exactly like him though.

So Mqhele is the one whose wife is...

Here she is. Her picture is a close up, just her face and shoulders. She looks very young here, mid 20s I think. She’s smiling but she’s not looking at the camera. There’s something about her in this picture, something deep and consuming. I stare at her picture longer....

“That’s Hlomu,” he says. He’s looking at the picture too. He looks like he cares deeply about her, judging by the look on his face.

“Is this the eldest brother?” I ask.

I recognise him from one of the internet pictures, he has grey hair.

“Yes Nkosana, and that’s his wife Zandile,” he says.

“That’s Xolie and that’s Gugu,” he says pointing at two other women.

He shows me two other brothers but it’s pointless really because they all have strange names, most of them with cliques I can’t pronounce and worst of all, they all look exactly the same.

“These are the kids, this is the eldest, Sbani, he’s a braniac,” he says.

He looks a bit old to be called a ‘kid’.

There’s another one, a teenager and then the rest all look like they are ten and younger.

“This is Niya, she’s almost two now, the first daughter in over 100 years,” he says with a wide smile on his face.

“Oh and that’s Mvelo, my grandson, and that is Shlangu the youngest,” he says.

There’s something beautiful about the way he says the kids’ names.

“And this one?” I ask.

She looks familiar. I think I’ve seen her somewhere. Her picture is the largest. It looks like a random picture, like she had just woken up, but then she’s flawless. There’s a purple wall behind her.....it’s....it’s the main bedroom.

I turn to look at him.

The smile is gone. His face is hard. He looks pained.

It’s her.

I drop my eyes. Why am I heartbroken? I’m just...really hurt. Suddenly I’m not sure about being here. I’m looking down at my feet.

“She died Naledi,” he says in a soft voice.

What??

“She died four years ago,” he says.

I had no idea. So that’s why that picture I saw was an old one.

I don’t know what to say.

I look at the picture again.

“She’s beautiful,” I say.

“She was,”-him

I don’t know what he’s trying to say by that.

It’s time to move on, to get out of this situation right here.

I walk on. He’s walking behind me but he’s quiet now.

There’s a bend...the passage becomes narrow as we walk

Is that a.....?

“A cinema?”

He nods.

Oh Lord! It has white leather cinema chairs, three rows.

“You have a cinema in this house?”

He nods. He’s still a bit stiff.

I wrap my arms around his waist and look up at him.

“Mmmmmmmmm exactly how rich are you?” I ask.

He smiles and shakes his head.

“Rich enough,” he says

“And how soon before I hear the words gold-digger next to my name?” He smiles again.

“The moment you appear,” he says pressing his forehead on mine. He’s not smiling anymore.

It’s like he’s trying to tell me something.

“You know there are things you can’t buy right?” I ask. I’m looking him in the eye. I want him to assure me.

“I know, the most important of them all is standing right in front of me,” he says.

I hope he means this.

“I mean it,” he says.

He must have noticed doubt on my face.

“Should I trust you Chawe?”

I'm still looking in his eyes, his forehead on mine, my arms around his waist, his hands are still in his pockets.

"Allow me to answer that question with my actions," he says.

I'll take that risk.

I believe him, but I don't trust men, it's going to take a lot for me to fully trust him.

But I do love him, that surpasses my trust issues.

I tighten the hug. He hugs me back.

"So when are we having sex?"

Whaaat?

Seriously?

Is he.....?

I push him off me.

Did he really just ask me that? Just like that? When we are having sex?

"What did I do now?" he asks with his hands raised.

I'm looking at him, he really sees nothing wrong with what he just asked me.

"Did you really just ask me that? I didn't come here to have sex with you," I say.

He's confused. He doesn't understand why I'm angry. How many fights have we had again since I got here yesterday afternoon?

Now he has that smile-frown on his face.....

I know he's about to be stupid.

"I have to shag you soon so you'll stop fighting with me, and being crazy," he says.

I'm offended, but why am I being turned on by what he just said?

"You will shag me when I want you to shag me, and that's not anytime soon," I say trying to walk out but he blocks and pulls me back with one arm.

"Are you sure?" he says pressing me against the wall.

He raises my arms and holds my wrists together with one hand. He's untied the robe I'm wearing. I can't push him off. The robe opens and I'm left naked, my whole front exposed. That look on his face, it's back again.....

"Let me go....." I say, softly.

"You don't want me?" he asks and kisses my neck.

I do.

The grip on my wrists loosens. I drop my arms but they end up around his waist, holding him tight.

"I do," I whisper.

I feel his hands on my thighs and his lips.....

## **Naledi...His Love**

### **Chapter Four**

I'm going to cry. I'll try my best not to but I think it's going to happen eventually. I feel like crying right now.

I've had my head on his shoulder since we sat here, before the flight even took off.

It felt so sad when we left the house. I'd only been there since yesterday afternoon but it felt like home already.

I wanted to drive, but he said he wasn't going to let me drive five hours two days in a row, one of the reasons being that I'm a bad driver who almost killed him last week.

So we took a flight, a private jet.

I didn't know that private jets were like taxis, that you can just get on one and fly your girlfriend home.

He said my car would be brought to Kimberley by a driver. So I left it still parked at his house.

He's a bit quiet but his arms are around me. There are random kisses as we sit. I don't want to go home. He doesn't want me to go home, that's why he came with me.

He was right, now that we've had sex I feel weaker around him. I'm not that girl that wanted to fight with him all the time this morning. Now I want to curl up next to him and be cuddly and vulnerable.....

It started with me against the wall, to the cinema chair and ended on the floor.

There were two more times after that, when we showered and just before we left the house. But the first one, I still get butterflies in my stomach when I think about it. You know that sound?...that sound that a man makes when he is really enjoying you? He made that sound. He called my name and he looked into my eyes when he came. He made me look at him too when I came. And then he asked me to trust him and told me he loved me.

"Are you really going to the looney house tomorrow?" he speaks.

I was enjoying the silence, particularly because no-one was being insulted.

"They're not looneys baby, you can't call people that," I say

I know I'm wasting my time.

"Aren't they dangerous?" he asks.

Why does he want to know?

"Some of them are, like, there's Justice, he's a serial killer and.....



He pushes me off and looks at my face

“A what??” he asks

“He’s better now, he was mentally ill when he killed those.....”

“He’s better? Are you listening to yourself Naledi? And what’s a serial killer doing in hospital? Why isn’t he in jail.....?”

Why is he being so dramatic?

Thank God we’ve just landed!

It’s that same Jeep he was driving at the mall. I thought we were going to get a hired car or that I’d ask someone to come pick us up but.....here is the Jeep!

We sit at the back, someone is driving. It’s after 9pm and I want to go straight to bed but chances are slim. He’s still giving me a lecture about my job, the one I’m trained for.

“I told you I don’t want you working there,” he says.

“You can’t tell me where I can or cannot work Chawe,”

“Why not?” he asks.

This is where I shut up and do a silent ‘whoooooosaaaa’

My house is dark, my worst fear. The last time I walked in it dark I was almost killed.

He goes in first and switches the light on. He didn’t even look worried.

He told the driver to pick us up in the morning so I conclude he’s sleeping over. However, none of that was discussed with me. I thought he was flying back to Joburg tonight.

“How did he come in?” he asks walking around the lounge.

“Through there,” I say pointing at the sliding door to the balcony.

He opens it, goes outside and comes back in.

“So a person can walk in this complex and enter a house without being seen?” he asks. He looks worried.

“This was the first time it happened,” I say

Why am I explaining?

“Yes and it was the last time,” he says.

We go to sleep only after he makes himself food and treats himself to Tsietsi’s beer in the fridge, although he’s made it clear that he doesn’t want him coming here.

After he leaves I’m going to sit down and give myself time to phantom him and his overwhelming behaviour. I need a planning sheet for all the medical and psychological theories I’m going to have to explore to be able to handle him.

—————

“You let them wander around unmonitored just like that???” he asks.

Yes, they’re patients, not aliens from Jupiter!

I’m embarrassed just walking with him because he has that look on his face. I understand, maybe, if not certainly, he has a fear of mentally ill people. I think that’s the case here.

But this is my job and there are people I work with here, although most of them are staring at him and couldn’t care less what he just said.

I walk faster as we climb the stairs to my office.

“Naledi are you okay? Oh my God! I heard what happened....” Chelsea comes rushing to me, until she sees the tall man behind me.

“Hi,” she says with a wide smile.

I guess she’s not worried about me anymore.

“This is where you threw my flowers out,” he says standing by the window.

That was last week but now it seems like a long time ago.

I must call the captain to get an update.

My sister says I must go to the funeral, to get closure, but I'm not sure, his family never liked me, they loved the baby-mama.

He looks at his watch. I think he has to be somewhere.

"I have to go. I know you don't want me to leave but I have to work," he says with that frown-smile.

I never said I didn't want him to leave.

He stops and looks at me.

"I'm glad you came," he says.

I blush.

"I don't know where you've been all along Naledi, I've been looking for you," he says.

At first I don't get him, and then I look into his eyes, I get him. I've been looking for him too.

My eyes are getting wet.

He pulls me close and hugs me tight.

I think he's into perfume, he smells of a different one today. I think he loves crispy white shirts too.

"Your car is on its way, they'll deliver it here," he says.

That's better because I'm going to need it to get home.

It's already Thursday and I have to decide whether I'm going to Mafikeng this weekend. The problem is that he said he was going to see me at the weekend, which means he already has plans that I don't know about.

I walk him out before the whole building hears that he's here and comes out to watch.

"I'm going to miss you," I say, my head on his chest. I don't want him to go.

“You could quit this place and move in with me,” he says.

Go away fool!

I already feel like crying when the car drives out of the gate. The past two days have been amazing. Now I love him even more than I did when I lost my mind and drove to Alberton in leggings and unbrushed teeth.

But I can't get the picture of that woman out of my mind. He still loves her, I know he does. What scares me the most is not knowing whether he'll ever be able to love me more than he loved her. It worries me. Imagine being second best to a ghost.

I comfort myself with the fact that we look totally different, so I wasn't her replacement I think.

I don't know where Tsietsi is today. He's not even answering my calls. He still doesn't know I went to Joburg, nobody knows, not even my sisters.

I have been away for two days and need to catch up on the work. I'll try by all means to avoid crossing paths with the CEO and have him feel sorry for me.

Qhawe sent an SMS two hours after he left saying he had arrived in Joburg. He said he had meetings all day but he's been SMSng me all day.

I told the car people to leave the car keys at reception. I've been too busy I didn't even go out for lunch. Now almost everyone is gone home and I'm still in the office because I really need to finish this paperwork.

**“Why are you still in that place?”**-an SMS from him.

How does he know I'm still here?

**“I have to finish work,”**- I respond.

**“Finish it tomorrow. Please. It's going to get dark outside,”** he says.

Sometimes I stay here until 9pm, but let me listen to him because he might just drive here to drag me out of the “looney house”.

He calls.

“Go home,” he says.

Sigh.

“Are you home?”

He takes a deep breath.

“Yes, it doesn’t feel like home without you here,” he says.

Now I miss him even more.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m sitting in your car,” he says.

Huh?

“Because I miss you, so I came to the garage to sit in your car.....” he says.

But.....

“But my car is here.....”

I stand up and look out the window. There are only two cars left in the doctors’ parking lot. It’s the CEO’s and another one.

“Chawe!!!”

“You have to stop shouting my name if you can’t even pronounce it,” he says calmly like he didn’t just push me to my highest limit!

“Arrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr” I say with my teeth clenched

“I wasn’t going to let you drive around in some little car with no airbags,” he says.

Oh My God! Whyyyyyyy???

“Go home,” he says and hangs up.

Where do I put the key? I don’t know, I’ve never driven a Maserati before.

It’s a nice car but I don’t have the energy to appreciate it, not after what he just did.

It's going to get dark really soon. You know my problem. If it means I'm going to rush home to switch the lights on and then drive out again to get take-aways, so be it.

I'm never walking into a dark house again.

It's just going to be me and the TV tonight. Oh and Qhawe's stalking through phone calls and messages and everything he has access to.

It's always quiet in this complex, that's partly why I chose it. The units are few and the general population is stuck-up, which means less drama and borrowing of sugar.

Oh, my neighbour is moving out? I know he's renting but I had no idea.....

No, they're coming out of my house. What the heck?

"Excuse me, can I help you? What's going on here? This is my house....."

Am I being robbed? I'm being robbed! Where's my phone?

"Mam, we struggled getting the bed out of the second bedroom, that's why we took this long. But everything is in order, half the furniture has already been unpacked at the house....."

I'm being robbed in broad daylight!

"I'm calling the police!!" I scream.

They all look confused. He looks at the paper-board in his hand.

"Did we break something? I don't think so, Mr Zulu said....."

"Did you just say Mr Zulu??"

He nods.

I'm losing my mind.....I can't breathe.....I can't stand.....I need to sit....

These people are still packing my things into a truck like I'm not even here.

"My love," he answers.

I'm trying to catch my breath so I can be able to speak!

"Naledi..." he says.

"Chawe, what is going on? I'm at my house, what did you do?" I ask. My voice is low because I'm trying to keep myself together.

Lord help me!

"Your house?" he asks.

I take a deep breath.

"Oh! You don't live there anymore....." he says.

Count to five Naledi.....count to five and breathe.....

"Chawe, what do you mean I don't live here anymore?" I ask in almost a whisper.

"Are you okay? You don't sound....."

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!" I scream, I can't deal with this!

"Mam!"

"What? Leave my things! Get out of here!" I scream. Why are they still packing?

"Naledi.....Naledi?"

He's still speaking.

"What Chawe?"

He keeps quiet.

"What??"

Why does he live to make me angry??

"Are you okay....?"

WTF?

I hang up.

The truck people are standing outside my house looking stunned.

And where did they get the keys? How do you just walk into someone's house and pack their stuff up, on instruction from someone in Joburg?

My house is empty, as in there is nothing except the kitchen cupboards, everything from the spoons to the dishcloth is gone.

The lounge looks like an empty hall. It's like nobody ever lived here.

I'm dragging myself up the stairs with little hope that maybe there is a bed upstairs where I can throw myself and fall asleep now and wake up after two years.

My bedroom is empty. The wardrobes are empty. Everything is gone.

He's calling, I'm ignoring him. I don't know what's going on and I know whatever explanation he's going to give me will make me want to slit my wrists.

I've fallen in love with a mental case, that's what's happening here, I'm madly in love with a crazy person!

"Mam,"

What does this man want now?

"Mr Zulu wants to talk to you," he says handing me his phone.

I told these people to leave! Why are they still here?

"I don't want to speak to him,"

He stands still.

Didn't he hear me?

Why is he not telling him that I said no?



The look on his face says he's begging.

I take the phone.

"Baby?" he says.

Please Lord help me here!

"Chawe.....what's going on?"

He doesn't speak.

"I'm sitting on the floor in an empty house. There are men I don't know all over my house going through my things without my permission. What's going on?"

He sighs.

"I don't want you living in a house where anyone can just walk in and hurt you," he says.

He doesn't get it does he?

"So you decide I'm moving? And you send people to my house without me knowing Chawe? Where did you get my house keys?"

He doesn't respond.

"So this is what you do? Dictate my life? I'm not your property Chawe. This is my house, I bought it, it's my home and I'm not moving out because you say so,"

"I have reasons," he says.

I don't care.

"Where are my things? Where did they take them?"

"To Modder River, to a house there," he says.

Whaaaat?

"You have a house there?"

“Yes, we have a house there now,” he says.

That’s where most government ministers and Kimberley’s elite live.

It’s not happening.

I’m surprised I haven’t lost it and raised my voice, that’s probably because he’s calm too, a little nervous too sensing from his tone.

“Chawe, I’m not leaving my house. I’m not moving to Modder River. Tell those people to bring back my stuff,” I say.

“But baby you don’t understand....”

“I’m not going Chawe, I’m not moving out of my house. I don’t care what your reasons are. Tell these people to bring back my stuff....” How could he even think I’d say yes to this?

Even if he had asked me first I would have said no.

“Naledi you don’t understand.....”

No man!

“Tell them to bring my stuff back. I’ll sleep at Tsietsi’s tonight, I want.....”

“You’ll sleep where?”

Why is he raising his voice now?

“I said I’ll sleep at Tsietsi’s”

“No I’ll book you a hotel” he says.

Qhawe though!

“Don’t you have other friends? Female friends?” he asks.

I see he’s back to being himself. Just now he sounded apologetic but it’s all gone now...

“I don’t want you to book me a hotel Chawe, I want my house back!!!!”

He’s making me angry again!

“You’re not going to sleep at that fool’s house Naledi....”

That fool has been my best friend for six years!!!

“Why?”

“Because I don’t want you to!” he shouts.

“You know what Chawe! Don’t call me! Don’t ever call me again!” I scream and hang up.

This is it! I love him but I’m not going to let him treat me like this! I am not his property!

I might as well get out now while I still can! Tsietsi was right about his controlling arse!

I hand the truck guy his phone back, take my handbag and leave the house.

No in fact I'm going to leave his car here too. They must bring back my furniture and take his car.

Qhawe is so emotionally testing. Just now I was happy and in love and now I'm angry and crying.

He's still calling and I'm ignoring him. I can't talk to him. If I hear his voice I'll scream at him!

"Tsietzi please open,"

"Open what?"

"The gate Tsietzi, I'm outside,"

I see him peeping through the window.

I get out of the cab and walk inside the gate.

"Why are you using a cab? Where's your car?" he asks the moment I walk in.

Where do I start explaining?

"Your phone is ringing," he says.

"I know, I don't want to talk to him," I say.

He looks confused.

"Chawe," I say.

"What? Is he still calling you?" he asks.

I'm in no mood to talk about this. Not now.

"Can you just explain to me what's going on. Where were you all week? I know you didn't go to the North West," he says.

I just want to lock myself in the bedroom and sleep. That's all I want.

But he won't let it go.

"On Tuesday I drove to Joburg,"

He raises his eyebrows.

"I know, but I love him Tsietzi. I really love him and he makes me happy....."

"Happy? You're here looking like hell, I can see you've been crying so please explain the happy part to me," he says.

He's about to judge and give me a lecture and tell me what I don't want to hear. That's the last thing I need right now.

"I stayed there for two days. He didn't know I was coming, I called him when I was in Joburg and he came to pick me up and I stayed at his house. We flew back last night....."

"Flew back?" he asks.

"Yes, he has a private jet," I say.

I don't want to dwell on that because I know what he's going to say.

"And your car? What happened to it?"

Sigh.

"It's at his house. He sent a car here for me to use, but I left it at my house now,"

He's confused.

"But why?"

"His explanation was, he doesn't want me driving around in a small car with no air-bags, so he sent his Maserati for me to use,"

Now that I'm telling this to someone, it sounds really strange.

And my car does have air-bags.

He folds his arms across his chest. I know this, he's about to give me a lecture about men and how bad they are.

"Naledi I told you about this guy," he says.

I knew it.

"I think he loves me Tsietsi, I think he does. We have this amazing connection....."

"Sit down..." he says.

Here we go.

“Naledi, guys like him are bad news. They control everything around them. They can buy anything they want anytime so they think they own the world and everything in it. They go for girls like you.....”

Girls like me?

“What do you mean girls like me?” I ask.

“No don’t get offended. You know he can have any girl he wants, any girl and yet he’s chasing after you, or you’re chasing after him I don’t know anymore.....”

Whaaaat?

“He knows you don’t believe in yourself, you have self-esteem issues...”

No I don’t!

“So he’ll give you attention, too much attention you’ll think you are everything and more to him. You will do anything he wants you to do because at the back of your mind you’ll always believe that he’s doing you a favour by being with you. And so he will control you, play you and destroy you along the way.....”

This guy is supposed to be trying to make me feel better, not this, he’s supposed to be my best friend.

“Tsietesi I’m not stupid, you know that....”

He raises his hand.

“Yes I know, which is why I don’t understand why you’re behaving like this. I’m a man, I know how we operate. We find our power in the women we are with. Your ex found his power in abusing you and knowing that you were scared of him, it made him feel like a man, like he owned you,” he says.

Did he have to bring him into this?

“No, stop crying. You’ve just got out of a similar situation and you’re going back there now. I mean, Naledi, you ex died three days ago, hours after he tried to rape you and right now it looks like you’ve forgotten all about that.

Shouldn't you be trying to deal with that and at least trying to find out from the police what happened and preparing to go to the funeral?" he asks.

I wasn't even thinking about that.

"So why did you leave your house? Is he there?"

Sigh.

"No Tsietsi, he's not there. Nothing is there. When I came back from work I found people, movers, packing my stuff in a truck. They said it was an instruction from him,"

He looks confused.

"When I spoke to him he said he was moving me to a house in Modder River because my house is not safe..."

"Whaaat?"

"Yes, everything is gone. It's totally empty,"

I'm not even angry anymore. I just want my life and sanity back.

"I just want to go sleep Tsietsi, I've had a tough few days," I say.

He's still judging me. I hate it when he does this. It's only 7pm and I just want to disappear.

My phone is still ringing non-stop.

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"You're not coming in here! Who the fuck do you think you are?"

It's Tsietsi shouting!

He's here. I knew it. I knew he was going to drive here. I was just hanging on to false hope that maybe he'd wait until the morning.

"I said go"-Tsietsi

"What's going on?" I ask.

“Go back to bed Naledi!”-Tsietsi

“Naledi!!”-it’s Qhawe.

He’s standing outside. The door is open but the burglar guard is locked.

“Naledi we have to talk,” he shouts from outside.

I walk to stand at the door.

“Why are you here Chawe?”

“You said I shouldn’t call you, you didn’t say I mustn’t come to you,” he says. Oh Lord! What am I going to do with this guy?

I’m wearing Tsietsi’s pyjama pants and t-shirt. He looks at me and notices that. It seems to make him angry.

“She doesn’t want to talk to you,” -Tsietsi.

My life is tough.

“Tsietsi open the door,” I say.

He looks at me like I’ve lost my mind.

“Open the door, trust me he’s not going to leave,” I say.

He’s angry, Tsietsi is angry.

“Didn’t you hear anything I said to you Naledi? You’re letting this guy play you, again?”-Tsietsi

“You don’t know shit about me man, you don’t know shit about me,”-Qhawe.

This could take the whole night if I don’t stop it now.

He unlocks the burglar-gate after I beg until he gives up.

He wraps his arms around me the moment I reach him. I don’t return the hug.

“Let’s go talk in the car,” I say.

He follows me to the driveway, there's no car there.

"It's outside the gate," he says.

But.....

"I jumped over the fence," he says.

What??

Now I have to go back and ask Tsietsi to open the gate because I'm not jumping over the fence.

He looks at me once and presses the remote before slamming the door in my face.

I'm an adult, he must understand that.

"Aren't you cold?" he asks opening the passenger door.

I'm cold but I don't care.

He keeps rubbing his hands together.

"Are you okay?" he asks.

Ghraaaaa!

"Why are you here Chawe? What do you want?"

He doesn't answer but looks at me. Something

hits the car bonnet.

It's my handbag. I had left my handbag and phone inside the house. I see Tsietsi walking back to the house.

That's just rude of him, throwing my stuff over the fence now?

"What's this guy's problem?" he asks.

What's your problem?



“Can we go to the house and talk please?” he says

“Which house, because my house is empty!” I snap.

He takes a deep breath and starts the car.

“Where are we going Chawe?”

“We’re going to talk,” he says.

I don’t think there’s anything he’s going to say that’s going to take away the doubts I have about him now. The doubt I have about this relationship that officially started two days ago.

Isn’t it a bit too early for us to start having problems like this?

We’re driving to Modder River, after everything I said to him, he’s still taking me to that house.

“Are we seriously going there Chawe?”

“There’s furniture there, your house is empty there’s nothing to sit on,” he says.

He seems to be as depressed as I am. We haven’t laughed or joked like we normally do when we’re together.

This house. How does he expect me to live in this house alone?

The lights are on.

He leads me to a giant double-door.

Whoah!

My furniture is all over this house, but it looks out of place. The couches are too small for the giant lounge. The walls are too high and the stairs are too wide.

I stand still and look around me.

Even my fridge and kitchen appliances are placed and plugged in the kitchen.

How could he do this? Just like that? Didn't he see anything wrong with it?

"Let's go upstairs," he says, already pulling me by my hand. I do as he says.

The main bedroom. My bed looks too small. It's neatly made and even my side-lamps are on. My towels, my toothbrushes and toothpaste and shower-gels, it's all there in the en-suite bathroom.

"Chave what are you doing? What is all this? I told you I'm not about your money. I thought you understood that,"

He looks at me.

"I know that," he says.

"Yet you still go and buy me a house?" I ask.

He looks down at his feet.

"I know I did this the wrong way. Sometimes I get like that, I'm like that. I don't know what I was thinking, I'm sorry baby," he says.

Yes I get that but he still hasn't explained anything about this.

"Why?" I ask.

He sits. I sit next to him.

"Can you take that off and put on your own clothes," he says.

Really?

I roll my eyes and walk to the wardrobe. My clothes are neatly hanged and folded. I want to ask who did all this but that's not the point.

I changed to my own pyjamas with him watching me.

I hear him clear his throat a couple of times.

I go back to sit on the bed. He walks out and comes back with a chair, puts it in front of me and sits, facing me.

He has his elbows on his thighs and his hands on his cheeks.

“First of all Naledi, I’m not trying to control you.....okay maybe a little but it’s not meant to hurt you or make you angry like you are now,”

“What are you trying to do Chawe? Prove a point?” I snap.

He looks at me. There’s something really serious about him tonight.

“Do you do this with all the women you meet? Give them luxury cars and move them to mansions?” I ask.

He looks offended.

“No Naledi. I don’t buy all the women I meet flowers. I don’t randomly fly to another province just to have lunch with them so I can get their attention. I don’t leave my family’s private jet at a Kimberley airport just so I can get a lift with them and get to spend time with them. I don’t drive through the night across provinces to their houses after they leave me hanging, I don’t let them inside my house and into my bedroom. I don’t hold them in my arms and watch them sleep all night while asking myself how the fuck they took full ownership of my heart so quickly. And no, when I make love to them it doesn’t feel like our souls are one. I don’t fly them home on a jet that’s used only by my family and no, I don’t give them my Maserati. I definitely don’t jump fences and bang some idiot’s door at 1am because I’ve lost my mind because they’re not talking to me.....”

I didn’t realise we’d come that far. He sounds so sincere.

I put my hands on his.

“What is this all about then? Talk to me,” I say.

“Do you love me?” he asks.

I do and it’s driving me crazy.

“I love you,” I say.

“Okay, because my life is complicated, and yours is about to be complicated too,” he says.

I don’t like this.

“Are you prepared to be in it, complicated as it is?” he asks.

I nod. I’m not sure why I’m committing myself when I don’t even know what he’s talking about, but I know I want to be with him. I’m looking in his eyes and I know there’s nothing I want more than I want him.

“Good, because I’m never letting you go,” he says.

What does that mean?

“I know you didn’t know who I was when we met, so you’re probably not aware of my history and where I come from. We have money, too much of it, but it didn’t come easy, enemies were made along the way. They’ve never forgiven and they never will,” he says.

That sounds a bit scary.....

“So, now and again we have to deal with things. Oleta, she died because.....”

Oleta?

“Yes, her name was Oleta. She was shot in the head, at home in Greytown, while taking a shower. My 12-year-old son too, my eldest brother’s son, they both died on the spot...”

Oh my God!!

“I was there, we were all there but I couldn’t get to her soon enough. I couldn’t protect her and she died and her family still blames me. I still blame myself,” he says.

I hold his hands tighter.

“So when you told me some man walked in your house and hit you, and tried to....I was freaked out and angry. I had said I was going to help you, but I spent time writing and deleting messages to you and wanting to call you but stopping myself....if I had called you earlier none of that would have happened, I would have been there with you....” he says.

This is too sad.

“Now I might come on a bit too strong sometimes but, it’s because I never thought I’d find a woman who drives me crazy again. And now that I’ve found her I’ve literally gone crazy and I’m doing crazy things,” he says.

I smile.

“Is that a smile?” he asks with that frown-smile of his.

He’s starting.

“Since you want to be with me all the time, and you are a self-confessed mental case, how about I admit you at my hospital, just so we can be together all the time?”

He laughs. That’s what I wanted. I’ve missed his laugh.

“You still miss her don’t you?” I ask.

We’re back to being serious.

He takes a deep breath.

“I do, I wish I had had time to say goodbye, or get a moment with her, just one moment so I can apologise for everything,” he says

I know now that he will never stop loving

her. “What happened Chawe? Who shot

her?” He looks me in the eye.

“An old enemy. A man whose family my father wiped out a long time ago,” he says.

What? Really? People can hold a grudge for that long?

“You still have more enemies?” I ask.

“Recent one was when my brother almost got killed, by a woman who thinks we did something to her sister,” he says.

By a woman?

“Is that why you want me to live in this house? So no-one can hurt me to get to you?” I ask.

It doesn't even make sense.

“ I just want you to be in a safe place, even if it's not about me and my business I just don't want you to be at a house where someone can just walk in, or drive a car with squeaky breaks or be surrounded by crazy dangerous people all day,” he says.

I knew he was going to go there.

“But baby I don't want to leave my house. How am I going to live in a mansion with six bedrooms and four garages? Alone,”

“I'll be here almost all the time, at least four times a week? And you'll be in Joburg every weekend,” he says.

Does it matter that we've been officially dating for only three days?

“I can't Chawe, all of this is happening too soon. But I like the house, how long have you had it?”

“I bought it yesterday,” he says.

What??

“It was for sale and empty so I called my banker. I came past here yesterday morning before I left,” he says.

How is that even possible?

Another question.

“Do you do this with all the women in the family? The high security thing?” I ask.

He nods.

“We know where they are and what they're doing all the time. Windows of our homes are bullet-proof, doors, cars and everything. Security is important in our family, we can't afford to lose anyone, everybody is important and protected,” he says.

I don't want that much complication in my life though.

"Am I there already? Am I part of that now?" I ask.

He nods.

"You're part of me now and I won't let anything happen to you," he says. "But Chawe, I want to live in my house, not here,"

"Okay, I could pay the house off now and you can move here when you're ready"

"Chawe!"

He laughs.

"Okay okay.....you're a hard-head anyway so I won't even waste my time. I'll tell them to take your stuff back today," he says.

Thank you!!

Today??

Oh crap it's 4am already. I have to be at work in four hours!

"Are we going to sleep at all?" I ask.

He smiles and stands up.

"Not before I shag you," he says.

I laugh.

What ever happened to asking nicely?

He has a thing for my thighs, he just always goes for them first.

"You smell nice," he says pulling my pyjama top off.

I didn't even shower last night.

He smells nice too. He always does.

He pulls my legs once and I'm lying on the bed on my back. He gets on top of me, still dressed. His one arm is under my neck and the other is slowly going under my pyjama pants.

"What are you looking for down there?" I whisper.

"What's mine," he says.

I giggle.

"Freshly shaved? When?"

"This morning," I whisper.

"You should have let me do it," he says.

I giggle. I can't stop.

"I want to taste it," he says.

What? No!!

"Noooo," I say pressing my thighs together.

He's standing now.

"Why not?" he says kissing my stomach and all the way down.....oh crap! He opens my legs and pulls down my pyjama.

I should have switched the lights off!

I don't want him to see.....

Damn!!!

"Mmmmmmmmm,"

"Does it feel good?" he asks.

I can't see his face, just the top of his head moving between my thighs.

He's back in my face.



“It tastes good,” he says.

My eyes are wide, I’ve never.....

He’s kissing my breasts and....

I pull his t-shirt

off. He stops.

I figure he wants me to undress him so I push him off and stand in-front of him.

The belt is a little hard to unbuckle but he’s not helping me. The sound of the zip opening and the jeans dropping to his ankles.

His skin is so soft. We’ve done this about five times since Wednesday by I never took time to appreciate his fineness.

I feel like experimenting.

He wraps his arms around my waist but I pull away and get in my knees.

I’ve never done this to anyone before.

I feel his hand on my head. He wants me to do this.

I don’t know what I’m doing but I think I’m doing it right because he’s moaning and groaning. His hand is pressing harder on my heard. My hands are on his thighs. I keep doing what I’m doing, he seems to be enjoying it....he’s calling my name.

I stop when the grip on my weave gets too tight and look up at him. His eyes are smaller. He looks at me once and pulls me up by my hair.

Crap! I’m on the bed again, he’s on top of me, my thighs tremble as he pushes himself in....

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“So are we staying here or are we going to Joburg,” he asks.

“You’re asking for my opinion? That’s a first,”

He laughs.

This is something we should have discussed in the morning but he seems to be the type that lives on the edge this one.

“I don’t really have a house right now,” I say.

Those people are still taking my stuff back in and there are women there packing my clothes and kitchen contents.

I’ve been at work all day and he’s been somewhere in Kimberley doing whatever he was doing all day while finding time to call me every five minutes.

“Who said anything about your house?” he asks.

Oh Lord! What now?

“We’re going to your house to pack and we’re moving into our home for this weekend,” he says.

Joburg was never an option was it?

“And where is that?” I ask.

“The road. We’re sleeping in Kathu tonight and in the morning we’ll go see the Kalahari Meerkat Project, I hear it’s fascinating. You know, one of the twins wanted to name Shlangu “Timon”, I heard later that Timon is a meerkat from some cartoon show,” he says laughing.

His light moments are always weird.

And what’s a meerkat?

“What’s a meerkat?”

He frowns.

“You don’t know what a meerkat is? It’s that little animal that looks like cat crossed with rabbit...”

I have no idea what that looks like.

“So you love animals?” I ask.

“Yes I love nature. And you?” he asks.

I’m not exactly an outdoor person.

“Not much, I’ve never really paid attention,”

“I’m gonna make you love it,” he says.

“Not more than you love me though,” he says.

Sigh.

“And when did you plan all this?”

“Dr Montsho, I have millions to my name, I don’t plan things, I make one phone call,” he says.

I smile and shake my head.

This is the first time I’ve heard him talk like this. Sometimes I think he doesn’t even care that he has money.

I think I’m going to enjoy this, just because I have to put up with his madness and controlling self all weekend.

“We’ll do Namaqualand Flower Route too and Orange River Wine Route and Boesmansgat Sinkhole and.....

“All that in one weekend?”

He laughs.

“Yes, I’ll drive, I don’t want you to murder me with your tuck-shop driver’s license,” he says.

He’s stupid.

“I want to spend the whole weekend with you because I’ll be home in Mbuba next weekend,” he says.

I forgot, all black people have two homes, home as in your house and home as in home.

“Greytown?”

He nods.

“Nkosana is going to pay lobola for Zandile,” he says.

But....

“I thought they were already married,”

He bites his upper lip.

“They are, but it’s complicated, culture can screw you over sometimes.” he says.

I know hey.

“Yeah, I know, I come from a royal family. I’m getting myself prepared to put up a fight for that day when I’m told I’ve been picked for marriage by some royal man.....” I say.

“What???”

The look in his eyes!!

## Naledi...His Love

### Chapter Five

Screeeechhhh.....

The car stops!

Eish...

“You are from what??” he asks.

Oh crap! Really Qhawe?

“I’m from a royal family, my father is a chief,” I say.

Okay maybe I should have told him this earlier but I don’t understand why he’s reacting like this.

“And you didn’t tell me? Why?”

Whoah!

“Just drive please?”

“No!,” he snaps.

I’m surprised he didn’t do background checks on me and my family because he would have easily found this out.

“I didn’t think it was important, and besides, my father never wanted to be chief, that’s why we left the village and went to live in Mafikeng. He only took it up seven years ago when he had no choice but to do it,” I explain.

He’s not convinced.

“So what’s going to happen? Some village chief guy is going to come and want to marry you?” he asks.

Well, that happened with my sister but....

I keep quiet.

“Is that a yes? Does your silence mean yes? Naledi please don’t make me lose my mind.....”

“No Chawe, it’s not a yes, I’ll never allow that, you know me better,” I say.

But....it could get complicated if he ever popped the question.

“Good, because I’d shoot him,” he says.

I laugh. He’s crazy.

“So, royalty? Explain to me,” he says starting the car again.

I don't like talking about this.

“It's a little complicated, Montsho Montsho, that's my father. He was the first son, which made him the successor to his father. But his father died when he was very young and his cousin took up the position. There were rifts in the family. My father went away to study, came back with my mother, married her, family didn't approve, they had four daughters, it got tough, my mother left before I turned one, we lived with my grandmother, she died, my father packed his four daughters and moved to Mafikeng. Fast forward, community started asking questions, they wanted the rightful chief, my father refused, things happened and eventually he had no choice but to respect who he is....”

That's the story, all of it.

“Mmmmm,” he says.

“And your mother?” he asks.

“Don't know her, don't remember her, but there's a picture. I look like her,” I say.

I gave up the longing a long time ago. I always say that if she wanted to be in our lives she would have come back. She knows exactly where she left us.

“Have you ever tried to find her?” he asks.

“No, my father is too good a father, I never missed her or her presence,”

He nods.

“You know, if she's still alive you should try to find her, maybe she has a good explanation,” he says.

I don't think so. You can't explain running and leaving your children behind, it's an unforgivable sin.

“No, she should try finding me, not the other way round. I did think about her when I was young. My two older sisters would talk about her sometimes. They remembered her, I didn't at all. You know, when you don't know your mother, you look twice at every woman you see or meet, even if it's a homeless person you look at them and wonder if maybe they are not her,” I say.

He looks at me briefly.

“I think I’d forgive her if I found that maybe she went crazy or maybe she died or something, but if she’s somewhere living her life right now, I don’t want her,”

He bites his upper lip.

We have an eye-lock moment.

“Chawe,” I say.

I know what he’s thinking.

“Don’t go find her. Don’t do it,” I say.

He looks at the road ahead.

“My parents died when I was ten,” he says.

Oh. I never asked.

“How?”

“You didn’t find that on Google?”

I smile. This man though!

“Chawe!!”

We’re having a serious conversation here and he’s being himself.

“They were attacked, hacked and burnt to death. We ran. The only thing we came out with was a brown envelope,” he says, he’s serious again.

Oh Lord!

“A brown envelope?”

“Yes, amid all the chaos, we could hear the angry crowd approaching. My mother gave it to me and said “don’t lose it, run!” and pushed me out,”

I have the picture on my mind and it’s scary.

“What was in the envelope?”

“Our birth certificates,” he says.

Whoah! She must have known she was never going to see them again.

“So, we raised ourselves. Nkosana and Nqoba actually, they raised all of us. Hlomu raised our children, and us in a way,” he says.

I’ve never really asked questions about the wives.

“How? I’m sure they were kids too,”

“Yes they were but where we come from you become a man when you are forced to. Our father raised us that way, to be men and to know and understand our responsibilities. We learned a lot from the way he treated our mother. He loved her, he showed it and he lived it. He always said the greatest thing that can ever happen to a man in life is finding the woman he loves,”

That’s deep.

“You do anything, anything to keep her and you love her with everything you have, he used to say that,”

Sounds like he was a great husband and father.

“The problem was, he didn’t love other people that much, he was a warlord and a killer,” he says.

I was curious about that part.

I keep nodding because I don’t know what to say.

We have another eye-lock moment.

“You know, I’ve never talked to anyone about this, about my mother,” I say.

He holds my hand.

“When I have kids, I’ll make sure I never let anything bad happen to them. And I’ll never leave them,” I say.

That’s what I always tell myself, I’ll never let my kids go through what I went through.



“Don’t worry, we are going to be the best parents ever,” he says.

Huh? What did he just say?

He doesn’t notice anything strange about what he just said.

“You can talk to me about anything Naledi,” he says.

I think I can. He listens.

“I’ll do that, you know you can talk to me about anything too right?”

He nods.

I hope he’s a talker. I can’t stand a man who can’t communicate, they end up being beaters.

“What’s your ultimate thing? What do you want besides love?” I ask.

He squeezes my hand.

“Loyalty,” he says.

I know he means this. The way he says it, I know he means it.

“I need to know that you’ll stand by me, my flaws, my mistakes, all of it, I need to know that you’ll still be here through it all,” he says.

He’s looking ahead at the road as he speaks. I expect him to look me in the eye so he can tell if I’m being sincere, but he’s not.

“Why is loyalty so important?” I ask.

He still doesn’t turn to look at me.

“You’ll understand soon,”

What does he mean?

“I can do that Chawe, I love you enough to give you my word, but I need you some things from you too,” I say.

He turns to look at me.

“Don’t hurt me, don’t break my heart,” I say.

There’s a delay.

I turn away and look out the window.

“What’s the tie-breaker?” he asks.

“Cheating. And I want to know you, don’t shut me out,” I say.

He smiles.

“Trust me, you already know me,” he says.

Wow. He knows?

“Come here,” he says putting an arm around my shoulder.

I rest my head on his shoulder.

“I know that if I cheat, you’ll bring out your ghetto Mafikeng persona,” he whispers.

I laugh. I’m ghetto now?

“I like that you stand up to me, but I need respect Naledi, I want my place as a man,” he says.

The Zulu man in him is always here. I hope he doesn’t expect me to be submissive because I can’t do that.

It’s time to change the subject.

“How did you survive? How did you get to where you are now?” I ask.

It must have been tough growing up like that.

“We worked,” he says.

Okay.

“We started with one taxi and worked all the way up,” he says.

That must have taken a lot of work.

“So you raised enough money to buy one taxi and then used the money you made from that taxi to buy more?”-me

“No, we stole enough money,” he says.

What?

“Baby sorry, I have to answer this call,” he says.

He’s on the phone.

Why does that last part not feel like it was a joke?

“It’s Nqoba, they keep hounding me about work stuff, I have better things to do right now, including finding that place where we’re going to sleep tonight,” he says.

Seems like we’re past that “stealing” subject.

I hope he was joking.

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I know what he’s about to ask, that look on his face, he always has it when he’s about to treat me like a child.

“I’m counting, you said five years, it’s been seven,” he says.

I knew it.

“Let’s add another three, I promise after that I’ll come back,” I say.

He looks at me suspiciously.

“You’re the only one I’m left with you know. I just want you to be closer, and I worry about you, a lot,,” he says.

I know that, sometimes I think he’s paranoid.

“Ntate, I’m not a baby, I can take care of myself, I lived in Cuba for five years remember? And trust me that country has some dodgy rules,”

He'll never see me as a grown woman, never.

He cried when my two eldest sisters got married. His relationship with Omphi was never good. She was a problem child, rebellious and unruly. He is a strict father. So now he is left with me, his last-born daughter and he is determined to hold on to me.

“I didn't know you had a new car, when did you buy it?” he asks.

Yerrrrrr.....

I arrived at night. He's only seeing the car now and I didn't really think about how I was going to explain a Maserati to my father. Yes I'm a doctor but I do work for a government hospital. No Maserati can come out of that.

“No it's a friend's car, mine has a problem.” I say trying to sound convincing.

He nods.

Whew!

He spends his days here, in the village solving community problems and chairing lekgotlas and mediating in all kinds of strange disputes.

This is not what he wanted, it's just not who he is, but then, he's always had strong belief in culture and respect for custom.

“You're always on your phone,” he says.

I arrived here last night, what does he mean I'm always on my phone?

Okay maybe I am...

Qhawe has been stalking me as always. This time he's whining because we haven't seen each other in four days. We live in different provinces for crying out loud!

Last weekend he was in Mbuba for the lobola thing. He came to Kimberley on Monday and left on Wednesday. I don't know when he works because he's behaving like someone who doesn't have a job lately.

He wanted me to be in Alberton this weekend, but I couldn't, I really had to come home, my father was complaining. He became even more whiny when I

told him I was going to use the Vryburg route so there was no chance of us seeing each other at all.

I've known him for a month but it feels like ten years. I've never been happier, even though he is overwhelming sometimes.

He wants to control everything. He wants to control me and my life but I won't let him, I can't. It frustrates him but I'll be even more frustrated if I allow him to be a control freak that he is.

Last week he said to me: "I have a plan, how about we find you another lunatic hospital in Gauteng so you can move this side. I understand what your problem is, you have this obsession with crazy people, you can't live without them...."

The irony!

I just looked at him. He doesn't shock me anymore but sometimes I try to find a diagnosis for him, it's difficult. I think it's a cocktail of things, among them rudeness and arrogance and a large amount of not giving a shit.

There's also a side to him that I've recently discovered, the side that gets hurt very easily. He was in a state last Saturday. I could just hear in his voice that something bad had happened that day, during the lobola negotiations. He talked less and laughed less. I think it had something to do with one of his brothers. He'll tell me when he's ready. He does that when his family is involved, he doesn't talk about things right after they happen, he waits until he's past them before he talks. It's weird because that's in conflict with his impulsive personality.

I also think he has a good heart. I think he does because we fight all that time but it never lasts long, he moves on very quickly from things. And when he's done something to upset me, he apologises sincerely. He acknowledges his wrongs and he apologises. But, I don't think he's like that with other people, I don't think he'd ever apologise to anyone for anything. Maybe the way he is with me has a lot to do with the way our relationship started, he's been making me angry from day-one.

His birthday is coming soon, in two weeks actually and I have no idea what I'm going to do for him.

He's a Leo, that explains a lot.

“Where is that boy from Limpopo? Your friend, what’s his name again?”-my dad.

“Tsietsi, he’s around”

My father likes him. He thought we were an item, like most people do, but I keep telling him that we are just friends and nothing will ever happen between us. I don’t even have feelings for him.

We haven’t spoken since that night he threw my stuff over the fence. I tried to reach out a few times but I think he blocked my number. He also avoids bumping into me at work at all cost. People have noticed, especially Chelsea and she’s been telling everyone who cares to know about it.

It hurts because I don’t want to lose the friendship, I don’t want to have to choose between him and Qhawe.

“He’s a nice Tswana boy,”-my dad.

Not that again please!

I think it would be better if I brought a Pedi or Sotho man home, but a Zulu? That would be a real problem.

I ignore him. He must get over this little crush he has on Tsietsi on my behalf.

Today there’s a wedding at a nearby village, a chief’s son is marrying a certain Botswana chief’s daughter. It’s going to be one of those where everybody is invited. I’m accompanying my dad as his “date” I think. I’m not looking forward to the whispers and people pointing at me and village BEEs trying to charm me because I could be their ticket to getting tenders. But there’s nothing worse than other chiefs’ daughters who think they are real-life Snow-Whites.

He’s wearing his royal regalia and I’m wearing isishweshwe which is actually Sotho traditional clothing because I couldn’t really wear makgabe(Tswana female traditional clothing) as it covers just your bums and boobs, and ya’ll know these thighs have been around.

“Ready?”

“I’m ready ntate,”

“Don’t you want to leave that phone behind?” he asks.

Errrrrrr no! Unless I want Qhawe to drive here and ruin the bloody wedding!

My dad has a driver. It reminds me of the life I live now.

***“Send me a picture, I want to see you in traditional clothing” -SMS***

He must have about 100 pictures of me on his phone. He takes my photos every chance he gets. When we were on that road trip that other weekend that’s all he did, take pictures of me randomly.

I’ll send him one when I find someone to take it.

It’s already full, like I expected. We are VIPs so we are escorted to the white tent the moment we arrive. It’s beautiful.

There are people sitting on an open veld not too far, I assume they are here with the bride.

Me and other “mafetwa” as they insultingly call us unmarried women, we are going to spend all day being judged by elderly career-wives because apparently we have difficulty meeting the requirements of getting a ring.

There he is, I remember him from high school. He was a boarder and one of those wannabe intellectuals. The fact that he was a chief-in-waiting was important to him, so it was well known.

He sits on the front row with my father and all the other VIP men. I’m at the back with the other snobs. I know some of them, but I didn’t grow up here so I don’t really consider them friends.

“I hear you live in Joburg,”

And so starts the small talk.

“No in Kimberley actually, I lived in Joburg for a couple of years,” I say.

She’s tiny and light skinned, typical Tswana features.

“Oh, I heard you were a doctor?”

Heard from whom?

“I am,”

“I’m a qualified accountant but I’m in business now. It was never really my thing but my father wanted a degree,” she says laughing.

The wedding is starting judging by the singing and the large number of people walking to the open veld.

Women are ululating and the traditional dancing has started again. I stand up and follow the rest of the snobs out of the tent. There are people here, a lot of people. There are young girls wearing makgabe, singing and dancing.

A group of people, also singing is approaching with the bride, she has a blanket over her head.

It’s July, but it’s hot here, that blanket must be torturous.

I notice a few people looking at me. It’s those types that I was telling you about.

You see, in rural areas, traditional leaders are very powerful. They have influence and are respected by people they rule over.

Everything that happens goes through them. If the government wants to do a construction on tribal land, they have to consult with the chief. The rules are always clear, if you are going to do something on our land, even if it’s for our own benefit, you use the services of our people, from the sweeper to the manager.

And so we, the daughters of the influential are seen as tender contracts.

The wedding is nice, but the dust and the heat are not.

I’m happy that it’s time to eat. If my father wants to stay longer I’m just gonna leave him here. All I want now is to lock myself in my room and talk to Qhawe. I miss him so much.

Our table gets full very quickly. The accountant turned business-lady is my partner for the day seeing as my dad has technically deserted me.

There’s one empty chair on my right, I hope it stays empty. No, it doesn’t.

“Hi, can I sit here?” he asks already pulling the chair.



I hope he's not a talker.

"I'm Letsoalo Letsoalo," he says.

He's a talker.

He's a chief's son, they're named like that mostly.

"With an 'o' or a 'w'?"-my new partner asks.

He laughs.

"With a w," he says.

Oh. Sotho.

"Originally from Lesotho but I'm based in Gauteng," he says.

He smells nice.

Lately I pay attention to how people smell because I'm used to Qhawe smelling nice. He has a thing for perfume. I must buy him some.

"So, Naledi, how are you doing?" he asks.

He knows my name now?

I frown.

"Of course I know your name, I went to school with your cousins,"

He's well spoken. He sounds like the over-educated type. I'm not sure which cousins he's talking about.

"I was at your sister's wedding remember? I greeted you but you just walked past me," he says

I'm not sure which sister he's referring to.

"I'm sorry but I don't remember you at all," I say.

He's not bad looking, but he's definitely not my type so I hope he's not about to ask me out because.....

"I could drive you home after this because I can see your father is still partying," he says.

Where is that old man by the way?

"No don't worry I'll be fine,"

He doesn't seem like the type that would say "okay" and leave.

"Okay, how about I come and see you tomorrow then? When you're not tired and dusty,"

Oh I'm dusty now?

"Look, I'm.....no thank you," I say.

I want to leave now, this guy is starting to bore me.

My partner is gone, in fact everyone has left the table. It's just the two of us now.

"By the way, my mother likes you, she thinks you'll make a great daughter-in-law. There she is there" he says pointing at some woman wearing isishweshwe.

Whaaaat? Hell no!

She's watching us and smiling.

This must not get to the elders....

I'm not giving up my life like my sister to....

"I don't think so.." I say trying to stand up.

I feel a grip on arm. He pulls me back to the chair. He's smiling but that hurt.

"We're still talking. Where are you rushing off to?" he asks.

Oh I see, he's one of those that are used to getting any woman they want because of who they are.

“Look, I don’t want to be your mother’s daughter-in-law,”

He’s not smiling now.

“That doesn’t mean we shouldn’t talk,” he says.

I feel his hand tightening around my wrist.

He’s starting to piss me off.

“Listen, Le-tswa-lo. I have a man, he is a crazy thug turned taxi owner from KwaZulu-Natal, touch me and he’ll.....”

That scent coming from behind me.....

The heavy feeling on my shoulders.

He’s here.

I turn around....

“Chawe...”

He’s not looking at me. He’s looking at him.

I quickly try pulling my hand away from his but he’s holding my wrist tight.

The tension here.....

“Let me go!” I snap.

He does.

I stand up.

“Chawe,”

Silence. He’s still looking at him. I know this face, I saw it that morning he found Tsietsi in my house.

“Chawe, let’s go,” I say.

He looks at me for the first time.

“I don’t know him,” I say

Why am I so scared right now?

The guy stands up.

Oh no!

They look at each other for seconds, and then he walks away.

Whew!

He takes my hand. I follow him, I’m not about to negotiate.

“Get in the car,” he says.

I hope my father didn’t see me being pulled by hand all the way out the gate by a man he doesn’t know.

“When did you get here?” I ask.

Silence.

He starts the car.

Why do I feel like I’m about to be punished for a sin I didn’t commit?

“Chawe, I swear I don’t know that guy. He just came and sat next to me, he wouldn’t let go of my hand,” I say.

I’m explaining because he’s scaring me right now.

I give up when he doesn’t respond. I don’t know, maybe my talking makes him more angry. He looks like he’s about to lose it.

And how could he just come here without telling me? He’s driving straight to my father’s house. How does he know my father’s house?

“Go get your stuff we’re leaving,” he says.

“I can’t just leave, my dad will.....”

The look he gives me!

“Chawe I can’t just leave. What am I going to do with your car? Leave it here?”

I don’t think he cares about that. But also, he can’t just order me to go with him.

“Can we at least talk about this? You’re scaring me Chawe?”

He’s still not talking. I’m going to sit here until he does.

“What’s his name?” he asks.

Nope.

“I don’t know, he’s just some guy that knows my family, but I don’t know him,”

He looks at me, he thinks I’m lying I can just tell. He looks at me until I give in and look away.

“What’s his name Naledi?”

Really??

“Chawe, what you saw there was nothing, the guy came and sat next to me and started talking.....”

“I don’t want you talking to men,” he says.

Here we go again!

I fold my hands and look out the window.

Qhawe is crazy! He’s crazy and he can’t help it! I’ve lost my best friend because of him! And now I can’t talk to people?

He starts the car.

“Where are we going? My dad will be back anytime now,” “I’ll bring you back,” he snaps.

I’ve seen many sides of him but I’ve never seen him this angry before.

He's going to beat me! I know he will! What have I gotten myself into?  
Please not this! Not this again!

My ex sometimes did this when he was about to hit me. He drove to a secluded place where no one would see us....

It's all coming back. All those times he bashed me, it's all coming back like a wave....

“Why are you crying?”

“I want to go home Chawe, please take me home..” I beg.

He looks confused.

“I said I'll bring you back,”

“You're going to hit me...”

“Hit you??? What? Naledi!!”

He stops the car.

“Hit you? You think I'd hit you?? Naledi!”

So where is he taking me then?

“Where are we going?”

“We're going to the guesthouse where I'm staying. I wanted to surprise you, that's why I came here,” he says.

He looks serious, and worried. I want to change the subject now. I'm a bit embarrassed.

“When did you arrive?” I ask.

We're still parked on the roadside. He looks worried, hurt a little.

“Naledi you think I'd hit you? Is that how little you think of me?”

Eish.....

“No, it’s just that you scared me,”

Now I’m really embarrassed.

“I will never hit you. I know I have my moments but hit you? I’ll never do that,” he says.

He’s serious.

“Okay,”

I can’t look at him, not after I accused him of being a potential abuser.

“Hey, look at me,” he says touching my chin.

“Nobody is going to ever hit you, not as long as I’m alive,” he says.

I wish I could believe him. Just like that.

“But I’m going to hurt that guy, he doesn’t know me!” Urgh.....

He needs to get over that.

My phone. It’s my dad.

“Where are you?”

“I’m around nate, I left the wedding, I’ll be home just now,” I say.

He says okay and hangs up.

I know he didn’t see that little incident otherwise it would have been the first thing he asked. He doesn’t hold back, naturally.

“My dad is home,”

I hope he will understand that this means he has to take me home.

“Do you want to go back home?” he asks.

He’s softened a little.

He has this puppy look on his face. He doesn't want me to go and honestly I don't want to go either, but my dad.....

“I have to go baby, my dad is.....he's very strict and he's going to go crazy if he doesn't know where I am,”

He definitely doesn't want me to go, and I feel bad.

“Okay, tell you what, let me go home now, you come back when it's dark, I'll SMS you when my dad is sleeping. I'll sneak out through the window,”

He smiles.

“Okay,” he says. He looks excited. I was joking about the window part.

“What's that smile on your face? What do you want to do to me Chawe?”

He laughs.

The hand goes to my thigh.

“The problem is, you think I've done something to you already, I haven't done anything to you so far?”

Huh?

“I'm going to fuck you until your knees break tonight,” her whispers.

The way he says it!

That's it! I'm getting out of this car...

I'll have to find a way to sneak out.

I feel really bad. He came all the way here to surprise me and the next thing there's drama.

He watches me until I get inside the house.

We were fighting not so long ago and now it's like nothing happened.

It's crazy because the reality is I have no friends now, which means I have nobody to talk to about my weird relationship. Do other women go through



this? Do they have men who just show up everywhere? Do they have hectic fights that last for 15 minutes? An intense 15 minutes?

I think we are more similar than we know. We both let things go easily after we lose our cool over them.

“Where were you?”

“I got a lift with some girls nstate, they were at the wedding,”

He never knows when I’m lying to him. He trusts me too much.

“Oh, you have to cook because we have guests tonight. I’ve told Dikeledi not to bother, I think you should cook tonight,” he says.

Why? He never asks me to cook. Besides, there are enough domestic workers in this household to cook for a village wedding.

“We have guests coming over tonight,” he says.

I am in no mood to entertain village people! No mood!

“Who are they?”

“Old family friends, they asked to sleep over here because they don’t want to drive at night,” he says and leaves, just like that.

My dad is known for being generous, everybody knows that about him and they take advantage of his kindness. That’s why there are always people all over his house.

And those people are from the wedding, why do they need food now?

“How many are they?” I shout. He’s in the other room.

“Four I think,” he shouts back.

At least it’s not the whole village.

Pap and grilled meat and gravy, that’s as far as I can go. I cooked the same thing for Qhawe the other day. I was worried, but he ate it and was seemingly impressed.

I can't wait for tonight, I just want to be with him.

"Look who is home..."

What?? Oh My!

"I didn't know you were coming,"

"We weren't but we heard you were home and that you brought a new car. How are you?"

I'm not interested in her. I'm interested in the hugs and kisses from my nieces.

"They're so grown!" I say.

I haven't seen her or them in three months. They live in the Free State.

"That's one posh car you have there," she says.

Should I lie to her too?

"What's going on?" she asks.

She's too good.

"Actually the car is not mine, I'm just using it for now....?"

She's still asking, her eyes say so.

"Whose car is it?" she asks.

Where do I start?

"It's Chawe's,"

"Who is that?"

I keep quiet.

"New boyfriend?" she asks.

Eish...

"Let's go to the bedroom," I say.

I don't want my dad to hear.

She closes the door and stands behind it. I know what that means.

“Okay, I met him a month ago and things just escalated.....”

“Escalated to a point where he gives you a car like that?” she asks.

Not her too.....

“Yes but.....a lot of things have happened in one month,” I say.

She wants an explanation.

“But I'm happy. He's different, but I'm happy. And he loves me Tshedi, he really does. He treats me like a queen and he cares, he really cares about me,” “Sit down and tell me all about it,” she says.

I don't even know where to start.

She's the eldest, married to some stick-up guy who thinks the world revolves around him. She told me that sometimes she and the kids go for weeks without seeing him because he travels a lot.

I don't think she loves him, or that she ever did. I think she married him because the family approved. My father liked him from the start although he's not type that chooses men for us. I know there will be some terms and conditions when I bring a man home but he won't go out and find one for me. In fact, I don't think he wants me to get married, I'll always be his baby.

With my sister, her husband's family found her for him. She was not aware. She only found out after they managed to worm their way into our family and earned my father's trust. There was no turning back after that.

I've never trusted him. There was just something that was odd about him from the beginning. He has a close relationship with my father, I think that's why my sister lies about being happy in her marriage, just so she doesn't frustrate dad.

“So just like that, he wanted to put you in another house without telling you?” she asks.

I nod.

“But he apologised and I moved back to my house,”

She laughs.

“He sounds like an interesting character, I don’t think you’ll ever get bored with him,” she says.

I didn’t expect this reaction. I expected her to say things are moving too fast and that I have to be careful.

“Omphi didn’t seem to like him,”

“Omphi doesn’t like anyone. Besides, you know how she gets when things go well for one of us, she’s never happy for us,” she says.

I don’t believe that. They always say that about her.

“So, he’s here, he said he wanted to surprise me because.....”

“Here where?”

“Here in the village, he’s going to come and see me later. I’m going to have to sneak out because ntante will never allow me to go out,”

She looks excited.

“Shame you’re in love. I think I’m going to like him, he’s stupid, stupid men are fun,” she says laughing.

And she knows that how?

Anyway.....

“I have to finish cooking, ntate invited some people over...”

“Urgh, not again,” she says following me back to the kitchen.

She’s a better cook than I am, so she takes over and I sit and watch. Well actually I’m on the phone updating Qhawe about what I’m doing.

“They’re here,”-my dad.

I hope they’ll want to go to sleep early so I can get out of here.

He goes outside.

“Do you know who they are?”-Tshedi

“Not really, let’s just put everything in serving bowls and leave it on the table, they will dish up for themselves,” I say.

It makes things easier. Besides, we have no plans of sitting with them, they’re probably old people who’ll bore us with their stories.

“He said four but let’s put six plates just in case,” -me.

The door opens and they walk in. It’s two women and two men. We direct them to the table. The sooner they all settle down the better.

I hear my dad laughing outside. He walks in with.....

Really?? This?? I can’t believe this!

They walk in and join the others at the table.

The idiot smiles at me. I bet you this was his idea.

“And then? You look upset all of a sudden,”-Tshedi.

I don’t even want to start.....

We greet and leave everything on the table.

“Where are you going? Aren’t you joining us?”-my dad.

“No we’re going to.....”-

“No, sit down. Naledi!”-dad

Oh no!

We sit on the two empty chairs next to the idiot.

I make sure Tshedi sits next to him and not me.

“Naled, go put your phone in the kitchen, it’s rude to always be on your phone when you’re sitting with people,”-dad.

I don't want to, Qhawe will be here soon. But I don't want to disrespect my dad in front of people, so I do as he says. But I will ask to be excused from this table as soon as I can.

I've just realised that one of the two women is the idiot's mother.

"Naledi, I haven't seen you since you were a little girl," she says.

I've never seen you in my life.

"She's grown hasn't she? She looks exactly like her mother," the other one.

I hear that a lot. My mother has been gone for almost 30 years and they still remember her?

"This is my son Letswalo, I understand you two have already met," the mother. She has this creepy smile on her face.

"Yes, we met at the wedding," he says looking at me and smiling.

Tshedi looks at me, and then the mother. She knows exactly what's going on here, this is exactly how it happened with her.

"This is a lovely house nstate, and thank you very much for accommodating us. I see there has been so much development in the community since you took over," the idiot says to my father.

Oh he's good. He knows exactly what to do to win him over. And my dad has no idea what's going on here.

His mother keeps looking at me and smiling. I'm getting really irritated by her. Tshedi is angry.

We're done eating but my dad still won't let is leave the table.

I'm anxious now, really anxious. I know Qhawe has been sending messages. He said he'd SMS before he leaves the guesthouse and it's not even far.

"There's a car outside," Tshedi whispers to me.

Yes but what am I going to do?

“Naledi, how is it being a doctor, have you thought about coming back here to open a surgery or help out at the local clinic?”- the mother.

Nx!

“I’ve been asking her to do that for years,” my dad.

“I think it’s a perfect idea. I mean there’s not much money to be made but helping people in need gives you more satisfaction. I do a lot of cases for free, especially for rural communities. I also believe in the importance of family and culture,” the idiot.

I figure he’s a lawyer.

My dad keeps nodding.

They are talking but I’m not listening. I keep checking the clock on the wall, it’s been 30 minutes since he arrived. I know he’ll wait but I know he’ll keep getting more and more anxious and paranoid when I don’t respond to his messages.

Dikeledi has cleared the table. She’s washing the dishes now. These people are still talking but my sister and I are sitting here looking bored. The creepy mother keeps asking me questions and I want to slap her fucking face.

It’s been an hour, I need to come up with a plan.

“May I be excused, I just need to make a call outside,” the idiot says, stands up and goes outside.

This could be my chance.

“No, where are you going? Let’s wait for him to come back, say a prayer, and then we can all go to sleep,”-dad.

They’d better pray very fast or I’m going to leave this house while their eyes are still closed. Jesus will just have to forgive me, he’s the one who sent me a crazy man.

He’s back.

“I was talking to.....”

Oh crap! Can we just pray and leave this table!!!

My phone rings. He's calling now, this is not good. "Naledi that can wait. Let us pray,"- my dad.

Thank you!

One of the men talks about a verse in the bible. I have no idea which one. I'm not listening.

"Let us close our eyes,"-dad.

Whew! We're almost there!

The women are praying, I'm not sure if my dad is but everybody has their eyes closed including the idiot, I just want to stab him with this fork.

I close my eyes, maybe this will go quicker if I do.

I feel the heaviness on my shoulders, the tension, the presence....

"Amen,"-dad.

All eyes open.....

No!!!

Silence.

The look on everyone's faces. Shock and confusion....

How and when did he come in?

"Can we help you?" my dad asks in SeTswana.

He looks at all of us. He's standing at the end of the table with his hands in his pockets.

He stares at Letswalo longer.

I cannot believe this!



“Good evening,” he says at last. In Zulu.

I push my chair.

“Naledi!!”-dad.

“Can I help you young man?”-dad.

“Yes, I’m here to see Naledi,”- he says in some very deep Zulu.

Now all attention turns to me. He’s still standing. It’s disrespectful to stand like this in a man’s house. Let alone a chief’s house.

“What?”-dad.

“I’m here to see Naledi,” he repeats.

How am I going to explain this?

“And you are?”-dad

“I’m Qhawe,” that’s all he says.

“Please leave my house. You’re not going to come in here and demand my daughter. Not in my house!” dad. He’s raising his voice now.

Qhawe stands still.

“ I said leave!” -

dad He stands still.

Oh no!

“Naledi what is this about? Do you know this man?”-dad

I keep quiet.

I look at him. Can he just leave please...

He stands still.

How can he do this to me?

“She’s not going anywhere with you,”- dad.

Tshedi nudges me with her elbow.

I’m still sitting.

“Do you love him?” she whispers.

I nod.

“Go,” she says.

I look at her.

She raises her eyebrows.

I stand up.

“Naledi!!” my dad.

I keep walking, pick up my phone from the kitchen table and go to stand next to Qhawe.

“Naledi sit down!”-dad

I can’t.

“Thank you,”-Qhawe says, puts one hand on my back and we walk out the door.

I feel a bit funny as we walk to the gate. My body feels heavy, my head

light. What did I just do?

“What have I done???” I ask when he starts the car.

I’m coming back to my senses.

What did I just do to my father??

He makes a call.

“Bafo, I just fucked up big time. I just did something really stupid. Call me,” he says and hangs up.

What have I done?

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# Naledi...His Love

## Chapter Six

Baby I'll fix this, I'm going to fix it I promise,"

He's been saying this all night.

"How Chawe? How are you going to fix it? Did you see the look on his face? He was hurt Chawe, I disrespected him. After everything he's done for me, I humiliated him in front of people who respect him,"

I've been crying and stopping and crying.....

I should call my dad and apologise...no, it's after midnight and he's surely still very angry.

"Don't touch me!!!"

He steps back and raises his hands.

All he's done is bring me problems! From the first time I saw him, all he did was create problems for me!

First it was my best friend, and now my father. Why do I have to lose so much to be with him? Why does he make me do all these things? It's like I'm not myself anymore, I've turned into some person I don't recognise.

He's sitting on the bed, quietly.

I snatch the car keys from the TV stand and rush to the door.

He follows, where's he going?

"I'm going to get some air Chawe, I just need some air," I scream.

"I'm not letting you go out alone, I'll take you to wherever that air you're looking for is," he says.

He doesn't understand how bad he fucked up, does he?

"No, I need to get away from you! I need you to leave me alone Chawe! Let me breathe! You're suffocating me!" I scream

"Naledi," he says, softly.

"This is all your fault. If you used your brain instead of behaving like a little spoiled child all the time we wouldn't be here! None of this would have happened! I don't even know why I'm still with you!" I scream before I slam the door to his face.

I wish I never met him!

How do I start this bloody car?

And where am I going? I'm driving the opposite direction to home.

I stop at the first petrol garage I see. I haven't done this in a week. I started by cutting down to a few a days when he wasn't around and now I've managed to finish a week without doing it at all.

"I need a packet of Kent Menthol please, and a gas lighter," "And some Stimorol," I say.

I know this cashier from somewhere. I know by the way he's looking at me that he knows me too. He's probably from my village.

Outside I find petrol attendants all around this car I'm driving, admiring it. I want to burn it down.

I start the car with my cigarette already lit. I hope it won't rain on me like his house did.

I still don't know where I'm going but I'm just gonna drive.

My heart sinks when I think about what my dad could be going through right now. I literally chose a man I met a month ago over him. A man who walked in his house and disrespected him in the worst possible way. I should have just sat down and told Qhawe to leave, that would have been the right and respectful thing to do, not that stupid nonsense I did. I don't know what happened to me, seeing him standing there, something just took over me. Even if my sister had not told me to go I know I would have still gone with him. I made the decision the moment I saw him standing there that I was going to leave that house with him.

I wonder what those people are thinking. I may not care about them but my father's reputation is very important. He can't be viewed as someone who can't control and command respect from his own children. If he can't do that how is he going to lead his people?

I screwed up, I really did. I wish I could call Tsietsi, he'd know how to make me feel better. I know he'd start by telling me the brutal truth but after that he'd help me find a solution.

I'm thinking that maybe I should make this up to my dad by moving back here and starting a practice this side. That's what he's always wanted me to do. It would make him happy. He'll forgive me if I do that. I could live with him, he's growing old alone.

We've never really asked him why he never found himself a woman. It was understandable when we were still young but after we all left home it didn't make sense at all. Maybe if he did have someone he would find it easier to let go. But with me, being the youngest, I don't think he'll ever let go.

I'm in Zeerust. Why?

I've been driving for almost an hour and a half. Qhawe hasn't called at all.

I don't want to think about him. He was right that night when he said my life was about to get complicated. I'm beginning to think he's complicating it on purpose. Why can't he just be a normal man? Behave like normal men who ignore and lie to you instead of suffocating you by loving you too much?

That's what he does, he loves too much and screws up while at it.

His explanation was that when he saw Letswalo outside talking on the phone he panicked!

When I asked him why he just looked at me, he didn't even have a bloody reason!

Does he think I'm that easy that I'd run off with the first man who shows interest in me? What did he think? That I was now going to take Letswalo to my bedroom and sleep with him?

And how can he be so insecure? He has everything a woman can ever want from a man, money, good looks, good sex, charm.....everything except a normal working brain.

I'm so mad at him right now! I'm so mad!

It's my sister. At this time?

"Tshedi?"

"Ledi, are you okay?"

"I'm fine, why are you still up?" I ask

"You didn't call to say what happened after you left, I'm worried," she says

I should have at least sent her an SMS but I was in such a daze I forgot.

"How's Ntate, how mad is he?" I ask.

She sighs.

"As mad as you expect him to be. Those people just stood up and left. I thought they needed a place to sleep. That old witch was the first to walk out the door, after we fed her and her brat son," she says

She didn't like those people the moment they walked through our door.

"Should I come home? Maybe it will make things better with dad, maybe we can talk and he'll forgive me,"

I hope so.

"Yes maybe. Where's the boyfriend?" she asks.

“I left him at the guest-house. I can’t stand him right now, he put me in this situation,”

I’m not as angry as I was when I left him there but he put me in this situation.

“You’re 29-years-old, you’ll know what to do, SMS me if you end up here so I can open for you,” she says and hangs up.

I’m going home to my dad. I have to apologise and make things right with him.

It will take me another hour or two to drive back home.

Whatever chance there was of our relationship going further is gone. My father will never like or accept Qhawe, I know that for sure. There is nothing he can do to fix this, but me, I can still fix things with my dad, he’ll forgive me, he loves me.

Now I have to choose between my dad’s love and his love, it looks like I can have only one. My dad has always and will always love me, no matter how bad I turn out. Also, I’ve never been loved by a man as much as Qhawe has loved me in one month.

But the fact is, he is bad news, a distraction and loose cannon. I see a lot of things with him but I don’t see calmness, I don’t see peace. We’re always fighting about something, there’s always drama around us and we both can’t hold back, that’s the problem, we speak our minds to each other. He’s probably the only person in this world that I can tell how and what I feel at that exact moment.

I’ve smoked five cigarettes already. I don’t know why because it’s not calming me down or helping me think.

I drive past a group of drunk men on the dark road. It’s after 3am. They stop and watch the car. I assume they’re coming from some party in the neighbourhood.

The lights are still on at home. I can see that all the way from here because the house is on a steep hill. Tshedi must have gone to sleep by now but left the lights on so I won’t have to walk into a dark house.

Qhawe always laughs about that. He always says I should carry a torch in my handbag so that I walk in with it already lit. When we go somewhere and come



back after dark, he makes me stand outside while he goes inside and switches the lights on.

He jokes about everything and he almost always has a comment ready. Last week when he was at my house we went out to Tiffany's for dinner. I ordered salad because you know, sometimes I have a problem with that eating soul-food in public thing.

He looked a bit confused because I had complained about being hungry.

I joked that I didn't want meat going straight to my hips and thighs.

***“Those hips and thighs are mine, all of them, and I love them just the way they are,”*** he said before changing my order to steak and vegetables.

He's something else.

There is his Maserati there on the yard. I've forgotten what my 1-Series felt like.

The gate is not locked. I remember how it felt when I walked out of here just hours ago with Qhawe's arm around my waist, I felt weak, like I was going to fall, but I kept walking because I knew he'd never let me fall, his arm around me was all the strength and protection I needed.

I trust him. I trust that he loves me and that he'll protect me. I feel like I'm a top priority to him, like he cares about every single bit of me. The way he holds my hand in public, it's like he's always trying to show-off that I'm his. He says I'm beautiful, he says it all the time and he's quick to notice when I've changed something, like hair or nails. He listens to my stories about work and he eats my not-so-nice food.

I feel like we have a soul connection, like we can't live without each other, like we are friends more than we are lovers.

It's rare that you find a man who makes you laugh and makes you come.

Wait...where am I going? No!

These drunkards are still on the road. I wonder where they're walking to, home or to drink more somewhere.

We took 20 minutes coming here earlier but I think it took me ten this time.

The door is not locked. Only one side lamp is on.

I sit on the edge of the bed. He's fully dressed. He's lying on his stomach. I think he's fast asleep, I can't see his face because he's facing the wall.

I'm just going to sneak under the blanket and....

"You came back?" he asks.

Whoah! He's awake!

I stutter.....

"Why?" he asks.

He still hasn't turned to face

me. "I came back....."

"Why?" he asks again.

"I want to be here, with you," I

say Silence.

I remember what I said just before I left, it was anger talking. I didn't mean any of those things.

He turns his head, finally. He didn't sleep at all, his eyes are clear, they're always red for a few minutes after he wakes up.

He looks me in the eye until I can't handle it anymore and look away.

"I want to be here Chawe, I want to be with you," I say looking at my fingers.

Now I don't know why I left in the first place.

"Why?" he asks. He's angry, but he's trying to control himself.

I raise my eyes.

“Because I love you,”

He’s still looking at me. He doesn’t say anything but gets up and walks to the bathroom.

He finds me still sitting where he left me when he comes back. He pulls a chair and comes to sit in front of me.

I feel a bit uneasy. The look on his face makes me feel uncomfortable. He has his hands on his cheeks. He does that when he gets serious, puts his hands on his cheeks and his elbows on his thighs. He’s looking down at his feet.

“Were you smoking in my car?” he asks.

Oh that! I should have gone straight to the shower when I arrived.

“I just.....”

“You said you’d stopped,” he says

“It was just this once, I was....”

“So you lied?” he asks.

Really? Is he really going to make smoking a big deal? We have bigger problems.

“When you asked me what I wanted from this relationship, do you remember what I said?” he asks.

I wish he would raise his eyes and look at me.

“You said you needed me to stand by you through it all, that you wanted loyalty,” I say.

“And I promised you that,” I say.

Oh, I promised him that.....

“Yes you did, and now, the first time we’re in shit together you walk out the door and tell me I’m a brainless child who is suffocating you. You walk out Naledi? Do you call that standing by me.....?”

That's not what I said....

“Chawe please look at me....”

“Trust me, you don't want me to look at you now...” he snaps

What does he mean by that?

“I was just angry. I didn't mean all that.....”

He raises his eyes and I feel everything inside me shrinking.

“I'm sorry Chawe....” I say, very quickly.

I don't know this face, it's different, I've never met this him.

“Naledi listen to me, and listen carefully because we are never going to have this conversation again.....”

I want to run out of here.

“You do not speak to me like you did tonight. I don't care how angry you are, you do not raise your voice and you do not fucking talk to me like that! Do you hear me?”

I nod.

“We're past the petty fights and little tantrums stage, and I need you to tell me now, right here if you're going to be able to respect me as your man,” he says.

He's really scary now.

I nod. I don't know which point I'm nodding to but I nod.

“I'm sorry,” I say.

My apologies don't seem to be making any difference.

“I said to you I'm going to fix this, why don't you believe me when I tell you that?” he asks.

I'm still playing with my fingers. I can't stand up to him when he's like this.

“I know my father, he won’t....”

“Don’t you know me? You think I’d mess up your relationship with your father and leave it just like that?”

I keep quiet.

“Look, I know I screwed up tonight, I know I did. But I expected you to understand that it wasn’t on purpose. I want your support, your full support Naledi not this bullshit you just pulled driving off alone at night. Is that what you’re going to do? Leave when things get tough? Is that your plan?”

“No Chawe, I came back, I’m here aren’t I?”

“Why are you here?”

That question again.

“I made a choice, at my father’s gate, I made a choice that I want to be here,” I say.

I still can’t maintain eye-contact.

“I don’t want you to choose between me and your father Naledi. I’m not making you choose. I’m saying allow me to make things right,”

Yerrrrr...

“Yes, I’m going to be here, no matter how tough it gets I’m going to be here,” I say

I’m committing myself again. I don’t know how tough it might get from here but I’m committing myself.

“Are you sure?” he asks.

I nod.

“Naledi, I’m not the type that would walk into a man’s house and disrespect him like that, let alone the father of a woman I love. That’s simply because I also would never let anyone disrespect me in my house. I made a mistake, I’ve spoken to my brother, he’s going to help me fix this, no matter what it takes, I will make things right with your father,” he says.

It won't be easy.

"I need you to trust me," he says

"I do trust you Chawe,"

"Great," he says, stands up, takes off his pants and gets under the blankets.

He switches off the side-lamp while I'm still sitting there.

I take my dress off and get under the duvet. The tension, I feel it all over. But it's drawing me, I have this strong urge to hold him tight. I want him to touch me, I want him to have me but he is distant right now.

I shift closer to him, he doesn't move. I touch his back, he doesn't move. He doesn't move even when my lips are on his shoulder.

"What do you want?" he snaps.

I shift away from him quickly.

"You smell like an ashtray," he says.

Oh I forgot.

I get out of bed and go to the bathroom. There's mouthwash, it's his.

The bathroom light is off, it's dark but I can see with a bit of light coming in through the window.

I didn't expect him to be so cold. I know I shouldn't have said those things to him but I expected him to be happy that I came back, that I chose him, again, twice on one night.

I hope this mouthwash will help.....

I feel his arm under my breasts. Shit! He's pushing me down! My forehead is pressed to the mirror over the hand-sink....

He pulls my panties aside with one hand! He's breathing behind my ear... "Ahhhhh...."

“Is this what you want?” he asks.

I hold on to the sink for balance. He’s pushing himself in from behind.

“Is this what you want?” he asks again.

His body is warm and firm and heavy on my back...

“Yes.....” I say

His arm tightens around me! I can’t breathe! He keeps opening my legs wide with one knee.

He pushes deeper and stops. His hand moves up to my breasts. I scream when he squeezes too tight.

“Is this how you want it?” he whispers

“I want to see you,” -I whisper back.

He pulls out and turns me around to face him.

Our eyes meet. I pull him to my chest and kiss him.

His hand goes up my thigh and into my panties. He pulls them once and they rip and drop down to my ankles. I must stop wearing lace G-strings. His one arm is tight around me. The edge of the hand-sink is cold and so hard my back is starting to hurt, but I can’t push him away.

He notices and grabs me by my hair and pulls me to the bedroom. I’m thinking bed but he pushes me against the wall instead.

I feel his finger going inside, I’m wet, he murmurs and sticks another finger in.

“Mmmmmmmmm” I murmur and take a deep breath.

He pulls the fingers out and lifts my leg up. I’m exposed, he pushes himself in and I find myself holding him tighter, I can’t help it. He pulls up my other leg and I’m floating in the air with my back pressed on the wall. I’m moaning, he’s moaning. My forehead is on his shoulder and my arms wrapped around his back.

He pushes my face up with his shoulder. He presses his forehead on mine, our eyes are glued. He moves faster, rougher, I wrap my legs tighter around his waist and he puts both his hands on my bums, squeezing them.

I'm screaming.

"Shhhhhh," he keeps saying.

I stop when he kisses me again.

I feel a hot flush all over my body. It's coming! I tighten myself around him.

"Wait for me," he whispers.

I can't. I let go and let my body lose when I finish. I'm done, he can work alone now if he wants to get his happy ending.

But he gives up.

"You owe me," he says putting me down.

I slide down to the floor. I can't feel my legs.

He goes to the bathroom for a few seconds and comes out again. I'm still sitting on the floor.

He crouches down until he's looking me in the eye.

I'm still trying to calm my breathing. He's still staring at me.

For a moment I think he's going to get up and leave but he rolls me on the floor on my stomach and gets on top of me, he comes in from the back, I can't even move. He's done in two minutes. He gets up, goes to the bathroom again, comes out, bends down and kisses me behind my neck.

"I love you," he says and climbs into bed.

He did say he was going to break my knees earlier.

I lie with my head on his shoulder, he's lying on his back. He puts one arm around me, thank you Lord! We're back to normal.

"It's 5am already," I say.



“I don’t think I’ll fall asleep at all. I’m usually awake by this time,” he says.

He’s right, 6am is like 10am to him.

“Why? Don’t you like sleeping in?”

“I’m not that much of a sleeper,” he says.

I’ve noticed, but I’m a sleeper and I want to sleep now.

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Ahhhhhh not again.

“It’s 8am,” he says.

Not even a “good morning Naledi”.

“And you’ve already showered and gotten dressed? You’re like a vampire,” I say.

Oops!

“What’s wrong?” he asks when he notices the look on my face.

I immediately regretted saying that. After the conversation we had last night, or was it this morning? I think I’m going to have to watch what I say to him. Respect is important to him, now I understand that. “Nothing, I didn’t mean to say that, sorry,” I say.

“To say what?”

“To call you a vampire,”

He looks confused. I guess he didn’t find it disrespectful.

“Breakfast closes at 9am so you’d better make it fast,” he says.

I could sleep more actually, but it’s day time and one has to go out and face reality. I have no missed calls, not even from my sister.

“Where did you get a newspaper?”

Where on earth did he get a newspaper?

“I drove to the garage, I had to get my car washed because some Tswana hood-rat turned it into an ashtray,” he says.

Really? I’m a hood-rat now?

“Oh, do I have a hood-rat vagina too?”

He laughs.

“Go get ready, we have to check out of here,” he says What am I going to do with this man?

“Naledi,” he shouts just as I’m about to close the bathroom door.

I look at him.

“I love you,” he says and goes back to his newspaper.

I’m left stunned. I close the bathroom door and take a shower.

Story of my life, I have no clean clothes. I put my isishweshwe back on. The people here are going to wonder what is wrong with me. I hope they don't assume he picked me up on the road somewhere and brought me here because he needed a shag. You know how people can just judge you, especially because this one is a celebrity.

He's holding my hand as we enter the dining area. People are looking at us. I'll never get used to this. I prefer Kimberley because well, things are like, ten years behind over there.

We are fussed over and put on what I think is the best table.

"I'm going to have fruit and yoghurt," I say.

"No you're going to have eggs and bacon and toast and whatever else you feel like having," he says.

No I have to mind my weight.

"You want to turn me into a whale," I say He frowns.

"I don't like that Naledi,"

He doesn't like what?

"I don't like it when you do that. You're perfect. Those thighs had better stay the way they are," he says with that frown-smile of his. I laugh out loud.

"What is it exactly about my thighs that drives you crazy?" He smiles, a naughty smile.

"The whole of you drives me crazy, literally," he says, stands up, bends over and kisses me.

People are watching. I'm blushing.

The food arrives. Greasy breakfast was a great idea, I'm really hungry.

"Are you okay?" I ask. He looks a bit distracted. He keeps looking at the table across us.

"I'm fine, eat your food, we have to go soon,"

Yeah, that thing about going, I'm not looking forward to it. My dad is already in church now so I know he won't be home when I arrive. I have a good mind to just go in there, pack my bags and leave. I don't have the strength to face him, I've wronged him in the worst possible way and I don't know what I can do to fix things between us.

Whoah!

He stands up swiftly and walks to the table across us! What's going on? The guys at that table look nervous.

"Stop what you're doing now. I'm trying to have breakfast with my girlfriend and I don't appreciate what you're doing," he says. Everyone is watching now.

I see one of the guys raising his hand, like he's apologising.

He comes back.

“What’s going on?”  
“Don’t worry about it. Are you done?” he asks.  
I am...but  
Someone is talking to those guys, they stand up and leave.  
“I’m sorry about that Mr Zulu,” he comes to our table and says. I think he’s the owner or manager of this place.  
Qhawe nods and picks up his phone and wallet. We walk out.  
His bags are already in the car.  
“Baby, what was that about?” I ask.  
“Nothing, they were taking pictures of us, I don’t like that,” he says starting the car.  
Huh? Why?  
Okay I understand why but.....really? That’s just wrong.  
It’s even more wrong because I don’t look my best. I’m just saying.  
I’m getting more and more nervous as we drive closer to home. He notices and holds my hand.  
“I’m thinking about packing and leaving before he comes back from church,”  
He shakes his head.  
“You can’t do that?”  
Oh really? This is all your fault.  
“You’re going to have to drop me off and leave immediately, I don’t want him to see you, it will make him more angry,” I say. He frowns. Ghosh! This man!  
“I thought we were going to Joburg from here,” he says.  
Whaaaaat?  
“I have to be at work tomorrow  
Chawe,” “I’ll fly you home,”  
Geez! I have enough problems to deal with.  
We’ll be home in ten minutes.....I think I’m going to pee on my...  
“Is that.....?” he asks pointing out the window.  
Huh? Is that.....?  
It’s the Maserati! It’s coming this way. Tshedi! Oh-my-God!!!  
The top is open!  
She stops.  
I’m so embarrassed right now!  
“Heeeeeeeeyyyyyyyyyyy” she shouts smiling and waving at us.  
Her two daughters are sitting at the back.  
“Hi,” Qhawe says.  
I want to dig a hole and jump in it.  
“Tshedi!” I say.  
She looks at me like I’m annoying her.  
“Say hello to uncle Chawe,” she says to the kids.

“Hello uncle Qhawe,” they both say at the same time. Where did they learn to pronounce the “Q” clique? He smiles and waves at them. I think he loves kids. “Tshedi what are you doing?” I ask. Qhawe looks at me, and then at her.

“Helooooo....I’m driving a Maserati. Chawe I’m sorry I just had to. I figured...I’ll probably never drive a R2 million car in my life, and then I saw the keys in her bedroom and realised that God was showing me a sign. He was saying to me, Tshedi....you only live once, drive the bloody Maserati.....” What the heck is she on about? She stole my boyfriend’s car!

“Do you like it?”-Qhawe

“I love it!!” she shouts

“You can have it,” he says laughing.

“Really?” she asks.

“Tshedi!! What is wrong with you? He’s joking!” I shout. Why is she so crazy.

Qhawe is laughing his lungs out next to me.

She rolls her eyes.

“We’re going to the shops, we’ll be back just now,” she says turning up the radio volume and driving off.

He’s still laughing.

“It’s not funny, she’s crazy I don’t know what’s wrong with her,” I say.

Family! You can’t choose them, you just can’t!

“I think I’m going to get along very well with this one, when is her birthday?” he asks.

I’m going lose my mind as in now!!!

“Stop it please. She’s the eldest, she’s supposed to be the serious one but no....”

He keeps shaking his head and smiling.

We’ve reached the gate, my stomach knots.

And there, right in the middle of the yard is my dad, sitting on a chair, waiting.....

We look at each other.

“You have to go, now,” I say

He frowns

“Chawe,”

“He’s not going to hit you right?” he asks

Urgh

“No, he’s never hit us. I’m going to talk to him, but alone, you have to go, you being here will make things worse,”

He’s not going.

“I want to go to him and apologise,” he says

Qhawe though, he has no clue who my father is.

He’s still just sitting there watching us. I think he did this on ~~purpose~~, he’s probably been sitting there all morning waiting to see what time I come home.

“Okay, I’ll park here and see what he does when you walk in. But it’s still rude of me to just drive off and not try to explain.....”

Explain what?

My dad stands up and walks towards us.

Oh Shit!

“Chawe! Leave, just go,” I say. I’m in panic!

He doesn’t.

“Naledi!”-my dad shouts.

Shit!

I open the car door. Qhawe opens his too. I give him an angry look and he closes it immediately.

“Naledi get in the here!”-dad

I jump out of the car and rush to the gate. He comes out as I go in.

Oh no!

He stands next to the window. I can see Qhawe inside the car with his eyes all out. My dad is just standing there looking at him.

I walk back to the gate. I can't leave him alone there.

"Naledi! I said go inside!"-dad

I walk backwards, slowly.

He knocks on the window.

It opens slowly, but only halfway.

"Come out of the car and talk to me like a man,"-

dad Don't do it Qhawe! Don't do it! He does it.

I can see fear. I'm far but I can see him, he's scared.

He stands leaning on the car.

"Dumela ntante," he says.

He can speak Tswana now?

My dad doesn't respond.

I can't! I walk back to them, but I stand at a distance.

"So you take my daughter and keep her all night? After that you have the nerve to come here and park at my gate?"-dad

This is bad.

"I'm sorry ntate, but she's my girlfrie....."

Dad! No! I run!

"I said go inside Naledi! Go inside!"

How can he do this?

Qhawe has his arms over his face!

I can't believe my dad just slapped him! Who does that?

“Didn’t your father teach you respect?” - my  
dad “He did, I’m sorry,” -Qhawe “Ntate please  
stop, please,” I beg

“He taught you to walk in other men’s houses and do what you did? She’s your  
girlfriend? Your girlfriend? Does that give you the right to disrespect me?”

“No, I apologise, I was wrong,” -Qhawe

Another slap!

I have to stop this! I have to stop it now!

Qhawe has his arms over his face again. He’s not fighting back. I’m  
standing between them.

“I said go inside,” -dad

Never!

“Chawe get in the car,” I say

He’s not moving.

My dad raises his hand! Qhawe pushes me behind him swiftly. He’s the  
one standing between me and dad now, I don’t like the look on his face.

There’s silence.

What just happened?

“I wasn’t trying to hit her, I was trying to hit you,” -dad

Qhawe’s face softens a bit.

“Chawe get in the car,” I say again.

He won’t.

This staring contest between him and my dad is starting to scare me.

I have no idea what to do now.

My dad turns and walks to the gate.

He turns around before walking in.

“Naledi, come,”-dad

Qhawe is still blocking me with his arm.

My dad looks at him.

“I won’t hit her,” –dad.

That stare again.

He slowly removes his arm and I walk to my dad.

He stands still until we enter the house and close the door.

I peep through the window and see him driving off.

We’re never going to get married and have children and live happily ever after.  
It’s never gonna happen.

I’ve never seen my dad hit anyone before.

I walk straight to my bedroom and close the  
door. My phone rings just as I throw myself on  
the bed. “Baby,”

“Are you okay?”

“Yes I’m fine, I just need ice for my cheek, that old man has one hell of a slap,”  
he says.

Really?

“I’m sorry, I’m really sorry Chawe my dad is not like that at all, I don’t  
know.....”



“Don’t worry about it, I knew he was going to hit me,” he says.

So why did he come out of the car?

“Are you okay, is he still mad?” he asks.

Obviously.

“Yes but he hasn’t said anything, I’m in my room.....”

“Naledi!!”-dad

“I have to go, he’s calling me, I’m sorry my love.....”

“Yes please call me that! Call me “my love” and stop butchering my name, now go,” he says.

Ohhhhhh! My life is hell I tell you.

“Sit down,”-dad

This is going to be the worst day of my life.

He sits across me with his hands on the table and just looks at me. I can’t even look him in the eye.

“I’m sorry ntate...”

“Who is this boy? What’s his surname?” he asks.

“Zulu, he’s Chawe Zulu,”

He’s quiet again, just staring at me.

“How long have you known him?”

“For a month,” I say

That’s not going to make things any better.

“Just one month?” he asks.

Eish.....maybe I should have lied.

“Yes ntate,”

“And he comes here and does this?”

I wish he understood that I was as angry about this as he is.

“It was a mistake ntate, he said he just panicked when he saw.....” I stop. This is going to make him sound even more crazy.

“Continue...”

Let me just be honest.

“He’s worried about me being your daughter, the fact that you’re a chief. He’s worried that maybe I’m going to be forced to be with a man of the same status and so when he saw Lwetswalo here he just panicked and thought that you’re going to like him and.....”

He looks confused.

“Letswalo? Who is that?”

Really?

“Letswalo, he was here last night ntate,”

“Oh that boy,” he says.

That’s weird.

“But what does Letswalo have to do with him disrespecting me like that?”

Everything.

“He thought that you were going to like Letswalo and that you’d want me to be with him,”

I sound stupid don’t I?

“ Since when do I choose men for my daughters? You’re 29-years-old Naledi if I was planning to choose a man for you I would have done it a long time ago,” he says.

He's making sense. Now I have to explain why I chose a crazy man over him.

"At the wedding, they had a moment with Letswalo..."

"He was at the wedding?"

That too.

"Yes, he stopped by to say hello, and he found me sitting with Letswalo,"

My dad is really lost.

"I don't like him ntate, he seems a bit aggressive, he held my hand and wouldn't let go and the Chawe came and there was a moment there. He said to me that his mother liked me and thought I would make a great daughter-in-law and his mother is trying to.....that's why they came here, his mother is trying to get us together....."

"What?"-dad

Did he really not figure this out?

"I don't like him either, he's self-absorbed, most of his statements start with "I","

I laugh, I can't help it. I've never had a conversation like this with my father. He doesn't even know about my ex.

"So this boy ran in here like a fool because he thought I was going to marry you off?" he asks.

I nod.

He shakes his head.

"How is he? How is he with you?"

It would take the whole day if I had to tell the whole truth.

"He's good ntante, he's really good and I want to be with him," I say

He looks at me like he's trying to read my mind.

“Protective?” he asks.

“Yes, very,” I say.

“Yes, I saw that,” he says.

He saw that when?

“Where is he now? Have you spoken to him?”

“Yes, he called. He said he was going to get ice for his cheek,” I can’t help laughing as I say this.

He shakes his head and scratches his cheek. He does that when he’s unsure about something.

“Mmmmmm, I’m going to hit him again when I see him,” he says.

What? I thought this conversation was going well.

“Your mother’s father set dogs on me when I first met him, they bit me. I had to be admitted to hospital after that. When I came out I went straight back to his house to see your mother, he chased me down the street with a sjambok. I went back again the next day.....”he says.

I didn’t know that. It’s funny though.

“He’s already taken a few slaps like a man, let’s see how far he can go,”

What?

“Ntate, are you going to abuse my boyfriend now?”

I’m shocked!

“He started it,” he says, stands up and leaves me sitting there.

I’m glad we didn’t get to the “he is not Tswana” part. But, I still don’t know what this conversation means, is he approving the relationship or not? Now my dad is also playing mind games with me?

I see him walking out the gate. And why didn’t he go to church? He never misses church.

I have to pack and get ready to leave, but first I'll cook lunch, I have to get myself out of the dog-house and maybe cooking my dad lunch will help.

I'm thinking about what my father said about my mother. Their relationship must have been doomed from the start because even his family didn't like my mother. That's why she left from what I heard, she couldn't take the abuse anymore.

Maybe if I saw her, even if it's just once, maybe I'll understand why she never came back for us. It's a subject my father doesn't want to entertain at all. He tried, he tried really hard to be both a mother and a father.

I remember when I started my period, Tshedi was already at varsity and my two other sisters were in boarding school. It was just us. I had no idea how to tell him, I felt a bit embarrassed really but when I finally did, we got in the car and went to the shops.

"Always or Stay-free?" he asked. Just like that.

I picked the less pinkish ones.

There's blasting sound coming from outside. Tshedi is back.

"Is he gone?"

That's the first thing she asks when she walks in.

"Who?"

"Chawe man, who else would I be talking about?" she asks.

I did say today was going to be the worst day of my life.

"He-is-dreamy!! He looks even better in person!" she says.

Looks like I'm the only one who didn't know who this guy is.

"Is the car fine, or did you crash it?" I ask.

She's still as excited as she was when she said that "heeeeyyyyyy".

"Urgh stop it, and Chawe wanted to give me the car but you stopped him,"

Does she really believe someone would just give her a Maserati?

“And why didn’t you put petrol in the car, the petrol attendants were giving me judging looks putting R100 in a Maserati.....”

She’s funny.

“You should have used the petrol card in the cabiole,”

“He gives you his petrol card too?”

I’m so over this.

I nod.

“So, what happened? Did dad see him?” she asks.

“Yes he did, and he beat him up,”

“What?”

“He ordered him to come out of the car and slapped him after that,” I say.

She looks shocked, but also, she’s trying very hard to hold a laugh.

We look at each other. And we both laugh.

How crazy is all this though? My dad beating up my boyfriend?

“Maaaaan can Sello do the same thing just so dad can beat him up? Please at least once, just one,” she says.

We laugh.

I’d love to beat Sello up myself.

“I have to leave soon, I hate driving at night,”

Qhawe must have passed Rustenburg by now. He should be in Joburg in the next hour or so.

I miss him, I keep thinking about that sex and how steamy it was. I’m embarrassed to say that I enjoyed the aggression in the bathroom. And even

though I got scared, I found myself turned on when he was angry and shouting at me. Am I a freak? I think I am, even me being obsessed with a man like him makes me a freak.

Tshedi has taken over the cooking, I'm glad. I love them but I want to go back to my house now. I miss my couch and my TV and my Qhawe. I know he'll come by this week, even if it means arriving at night and leaving in the morning.

***“What time are you leaving the house? I’ve run out of things to do here,”-SMS***

***“Things to do where?”***

***“Rustenburg, I’m waiting for you here”***

Why am I happy? I'm supposed to find this psychotic of him.

***“Okay, I’m almost ready to leave. I miss you,”***

***“You’ll find me here, just don’t bring daddy Mike Tyson with you,”-he replies.***

He doesn't offend me anymore.

Sometimes we are a perfect couple.

My dad arrives just as I put the last bag in the boot. He's a bit hurt that I was going to leave without saying goodbye to him. I think....I think he's worried that he's about to lose me, his attitude says so. I mean. I've dated this man for only one month and I've never said anything about leaving home for hm. He needs to relax.

“You're going straight to Kimberley right?” he asks.

Sigh.

“Yes ntante, I'm working tomorrow,” I lie.

Tshedi promises to visit me soon. She says she won't be staying at my house when she does, she's gonna go straight to the Modder River house because she's not a stupid ungrateful bitch like me.

I say my goodbyes and drive off to be with my man, only God knows how I'll make it to Kimberley by 8am tomorrow.



# Naledi...His Love

## Chapter Seven

I find him waiting at a petrol garage across McDonalds.

“Are you okay? How’s you cheek?” that’s the first thing I ask.

He looks like he got over that a long time ago.

“I’m fine, I’m a man, a few slaps from a man who raised my lovely woman are nothing,”

The charmer that he is!

I don’t want to let go, I want to hug him like this forever, but we have to go, in different cars.

“I want to go with you,” I say.

I’m serious. I don’t think I can spend another hour without touching or smelling him.

“What about the other car?” he asks.

I don’t care about that.

“Make a plan, I want to drive with you,” -me

I see a slight smile on his face, like he’s impressed. He likes me needy and clingy, I see that.

It could be that episode we had last night, him being tough and putting me in my place, it has made me vulnerable and has me feeling like he is above me. It's a dangerous place for me to be emotionally.

“Okay, if you insist,” he says and dials on his phone.

I go inside the store to get energy drinks. I slept for only three hours.

“Let's go,” he says opening the car door.

I look at my car. Actually his car.

“We'll leave it here, someone is already on the way to fetch it,” he says.

Does he like leaving his cars at garages? What if it gets stolen? And even though I didn't want it at first, I've fallen in love with it. I've become known as that doctor who drives a Maserati in Kimberley. Oh, life can be unpredictable.

He's driving with one hand because I'm holding on to the other. I did say I had become clingy.

“I love this dress,” he says

It's that one I wore at the baby shower. We had our first kiss on that day, it wasn't consensual but you know.....

“I do too, it reminds me of that time when you were still stalking me,” I say.

He laughs.

“It's not stalking it's pursuing,” he says.

That was not pursuing, that was persisting.

“How is it at the bottom? Can I see it?”

What? My dress?

“Lift it up. I want to see how it looks at the bottom,” he says.

Okay. I do as he says.

He quickly slips his hand under my dress! He's such a crook.

“Okay you can drop it now,” he says smiling, hand still on my thigh.

Dad should have added some punches and kicks too.

But I’m not complaining.

“You have to stop drinking those things, they’re not good for you,” he says.

I know, I’m the doctor here, but if I don’t drink energy drinks I’m going to fall asleep as in now.

Urghhhhh I hate this car loudspeaker thing! Tsietsi has it in his car too!

“What do you want?” he asks.

That’s how he answers the phone?

“Where are you?” the person on the other side asks.

There’s noise all over this car. I can hear everything.

“Why do you want to know?” he asks.

It sounds like there are two people.

“We haven’t seen you in days man, and you’re not at your house, what’s going on with you? And whose car is this? You have a 1-Series now?”

“What? Are you inside my house? What is wrong with you fools?”

“We’re hungry. Where are you and when are you coming back?”-another one asks.

“How did you get inside my house?”-him

They totally ignore him.

“This is nice, how old is it?”-another one.

“Mqoqi! Leave my whiskey alone! Get out of my house!” he shouts.

Ignore.

“How long has this meat been in this fridge? Did you cook it or did you buy it?”-another one.

“You monkeys.....”

They sound like they’re settling down somewhere. I assume on the couch with his food and his whiskey.

“Where are you? Are you okay?”-one asks, he sounds serious now.

“On my way to my house and if I find somebody there I’m going to shoot them,”-him.

Urgh.....

“Are you okay man?” one asks, he sounds concerned.

“Yes, I was beaten up by my girlfriend’s father earlier but I’m fine now,” he says squeezing my thigh.

Silence....

And then loud laughter!

“What?”-one

“Where? Why? Okay let’s start here.....you have a girlfriend?”-another.

He hangs up.

“Nx! These fools,” he says, he’s smiling.

“Your brothers?”-I ask.

“Yes, younger ones,” he says shaking his head.

They sound like a chaotic lot.

“How did they get in?”

I’m curious.

“Errrrrr those two could probably break into the moon if they had a chance,” he says.

I laugh. He’s funny.

I have a picture of them in my head sitting there making themselves comfortable. I wonder if I’ll ever meet them, and if so, when. It’s still early in the relationship to be meeting family, although he has forcefully introduced himself to mine already.

And those wives, I’m nothing like them, they look...perfect, like that type that crosses its legs until the toes touch the heel.

And what will I talk to them about? They look like they shop and do their hair for a living.

“My dad asked a lot of questions about you,” I say.

He frowns. Why? He didn’t expect him to ask?

“He did? What did he ask?”

“When I met you and if you’re good to me, your surname and all that,”

He widens his eyes. I think he wants me to tell him what my answers were.

“Oh and he says he’ll hit you again if he sees you,”

He laughs.

He really didn’t take this thing to heart did he?

“I know. We’re men, we’re communicating, you won’t understand,” he says.

He’s right, I don’t understand.

“He told me my mother’s father set dogs on him and chased him down the street with a sjambok, but he kept going back,”

He looks surprised but there’s a smile stuck on his face. And then it fades, slowly. He takes my hand and kisses it.

Something is going on.

“Talk to me,” I say.

I know him too well.

“I think I know where she is,” he says.

Who?

He looks into my eyes.

No! No! No!

I pull my hand away from his.

“Don’t get mad, I asked around and.....”

“I told you Chawe! I told you not to do it...” – I can’t even shout at him. I don’t even know if I’m angry or sad right now.

“Can we not fight? Please not today Naledi. Don’t get mad, just let me explain,”

What’s he going to explain?

“It’s not that I’ve found her, yet. But I did get a lead. I have someone who might be able to find her, when you’re ready. If you never get to a point where you are ready then it’s fine, we’ll never talk about it again,” he says.

I wish he had respected my wishes. I wish he had done what I asked him to.

I can’t even look at him.

“Baby please come on, I didn’t mean to upset you,”

I’m looking out the window. I’m emotional. I’ve never been emotional about my mother before. I don’t even know her.

“Is she alive?”

Silence.

Okay.

“I don’t know. I just have her last address and workplace, I haven’t gone further than that,” he says.

Why did he even start?

It’s the afternoon and almost dark when we get to Alberton. I fell asleep on the way, it doesn’t seem like those energy drinks worked at all.

I can just tell that someone was here, the couch cushions are all over. There are food crumbs on the kitchen counter and one whiskey glass.

They really drank his whiskey?

I’m still clingy. I was mad and sad earlier but I’ve forgiven now. I’m still feeling a bit down but I don’t want to fight with him, I want to be needy and vulnerable and I want extra attention.

“I’m going to make food,” he says.

That’s if there’s still food in the fridge, his brothers sounded like they were having a feast.

“Okay, I’m going to shower and get comfortable,” I say

He pulls me to him just as I take the first step.

“I’m sorry,” he says.

I’m past that.

I walk up the stairs with my bag and his. I know someone comes here four times a week to clean and do laundry. When he told me about it he sounded like he believed it won’t be long until he doesn’t need that person anymore. I got the feeling he thought that will soon be my responsibility. I’ve heard a lot about Zulu men, in fact, I’ve heard they don’t even have to be rich to want to turn you into a submissive. I’ll have none of that.

I walk down that passage. My heart sinks. I had forgotten. It’s still there and it’s still the largest. There’s no picture of me, or should I say not yet.

He’s standing behind me scratching his forehead.

He touches the picture.

“No,” I say.

He looks at me.

“Don’t take it down,” I say.

His face is blank.

“Leave it there, I’m fine with it, you have to heal Chawe. I’m not here to replace her, keep her in your heart as long as you want, there’s enough space in it for the both of us,”

He’s looking at me as I say this. His eyes deep, his face intense.

I’m trying very hard to suppress what I’m really feeling. I think he believes me.

“Now, I’m going to shower, go be a great chef that you are,” I say smiling.

He kisses my forehead.

I turn around walk on.

*Blink Naledi.....blink.....don’t let them flow.*

She’s still the one.

And maybe she always will be.

I had to do that. I had to lie.

I want to be the one and only one in his heart.

But sometimes you have to sacrifice yourself, that is how these things work. I’m going to hide this truth for as long as I can.

*Oleta, it’s a beautiful name. Who are you and what did you have that I don’t? Let him go. Please. I promise I’ll take good care of him”.*

The doorbell rings...

There’s someone outside.

“It’s take-aways,” he shouts.



I thought he was cooking...

Oh well, let me go take my shower. I still don't know if I'll make it to work tomorrow morning but who cares, I'd rather be here with this man I love so much that I'm willing to lie to him about how hurt I am.

I want him to get over her, in fact I need him to get over her. He's held on to her for four years, that's too long. And I refuse to believe I'm just another girl passing by, it can't be, I know he loves me, I can feel it. I see it in the way he looks at me. No man has ever looked at me like that, like I'm all that matters.

I have to call my dad and lie about where I am. No actually I'll SMS him. No actually he might only see that SMS tomorrow because he is bad with technology like all people his age.

I wonder if he's kept my mother in his heart for all these years like Qhawe has done with Oleta, maybe that's why he never married again.

My mother, I'd rather not think about her. I don't miss her because I don't know how it is to have a mother anyway, but I'm curious.

I must remove this weave soon.

I put on that robe, the one I wore when I came here the first time. I haven't been out to the balcony since that morning. I laugh to myself thinking about the abuse I suffered on that balcony, first he forced me to agree to be his girlfriend and then he forced me to stop smoking, right on that balcony.

Let me go there.

That fresh air again, I love it. The water in the lake is still.

Oh there he is out on the yard.

What???

He's smoking? No ways!!! This can't.....

Oh! Who is.....?

This is a bit freaky. I can't see their faces but they look like one person, even the way they walk. They're the same height too. They both have their hands in their pockets too.

They're walking towards the pool. They go inside the pool-house. It must be one of his brothers. I think then I shouldn't go downstairs because he told me it was take-aways, obviously he doesn't want me to meet his brother.

Why am I bothered by that?

"Tshedi,"

She sounds like she's on the road.

"Talk fast, there are cops all over," she says.

I'm sure she has tickets and warrants of arrests, that's why she doesn't want traffic cops even looking her way.

"Just wanted to tell you we travelled well, we're in Joburg. You're still on the road?" I ask.

"Yes, I had to stay at home a little longer, I needed to talk to dad about something,"

Huh?

"Is everything okay?"

"Yes everything is fine Ledi, where is Chawe? How is he doing?" she asks.

I think she's hiding something from me.

"You didn't ask me how I'm doing,"

"I don't care about your broke ass. So how are his brothers? Are they nice like him?"-her

I have no idea.

"I haven't met any of them. I haven't met anyone from his family at all,"

It hurts just saying it.

"And he's met almost all of us," she says. And she says it like it's a joke.

She laughs, I don't.

“Hey, don’t take it seriously, it’s still too early to be meeting family, it doesn’t mean anything that you haven’t met his,” she says.

I don’t need comforting or assurance.

“He has an ex Tshedi, her pictures are still on the wall,”

She’s quiet for a few seconds.

“Is that the ex that died?” she asks

She knows about that?

“I read about it in a newspaper Ledi, it was years ago. She died, there’s no reason to be threatened by her,” she says.

The truth is, I am threatened by her, and I’m about to cry.

“I think he still loves her,” I say.

I hear her sigh.

“Ledi, listen to me. You are not in that man’s life to replace anyone. You are not there to erase his past and if he didn’t want to move on he would not be with you. You say her pictures are on the walls? It’s fine, let them stay there. It won’t be easy but let them stay there. He will remove them when he is ready. Don’t push, allow him to get over her because you know, you can’t force him to do that,” she says.

She doesn’t understand.

“But how Tshedi? How am I going to be in this house when there’s a constant reminder that I’m not the only one in his heart? What if he thinks about her when he’s with me? I just want to be the only one, like he’s the only one to me,”

I hate crying over these things.

“Mmmmm I think you’re asking for too much. Patience, that’s all you need to have. It’s not like you have some crazy ex drama to deal with. You have a man who is trying to move on from a traumatic loss. He’s proven that he wants to be with you hasn’t he? So forget her, be you, those pictures will come down, you’ll see,”

I'm not sure if I can do that. He hasn't been patient with me at all. He started changing things and taking over my life the moment he came into it.

"What if he never gets over her? I don't want to be second best to anyone,"

She takes a deep breath, again.

"Don't act like a spoilt brat, everyone has a past and it stays with them sometimes. That man lost that woman without a warning, when was he going to get over her? He didn't have a reason to try, now he does, allow him to do it on his own pace,"

Tshedi though?

I don't respond.

"Ledi please, don't end up like me, married with a man you don't love....."

"Hands over your ears!" she shouts.

I know she's talking to her daughters. She makes them do that every time she's about to insult their father.

"See Naledi, you don't want to end up with a man you don't love just because you allowed fear to defeat you. You're worried about the dead ex? Okay, that's a challenge, what did I teach you about challenges?"

"You taught me to take them head-on, you said it doesn't matter if I win or lose, running is not an option," I say.

I'll always remember that advice from her, it has helped me through so many situations.

"Good, this is another one of those, now go get your man. If I had done the same when I was young I'd be with the love of my life right now.....  
Who said you could uncover your ears?" she shouts to the kids.

"Love of your life?"-me

"Yes, Maradona," she says.

Maradona??? Who the heck is Maradona?

Wait a minute!

“Maradona? The bus driver?”

“Yes...oops! Cops, bye!” she says and hangs up.

Maradona???

The weight on my shoulders.

The scent.

Oh shit!! He heard all that!

I feel his body covering mine from behind.

His chin is on the top of my head. I don't feel his hands, they're in his pockets I think.

He's quiet behind me. I stopped crying, but I'm still emotional.

We're standing here looking at the lake. I'm not going to be the first to speak. I know he heard that whole conversation. I don't know how to explain it to him. So I stand here quietly with his chin on top of my head and my hands holding on to the balcony rails.

“It's not love anymore. It's guilt,” he says.

I'd rather not have this conversation, because then I'm going to have to explain why I lied earlier.

“I want closure Naledi, desperately, I need closure. I've tried, I've tried really hard for all these years but it's not happening,” he says.

I wish I knew what to say to him. Am I supposed to stand by him on this too? How?

I keep quiet.

“I don't think about her when I'm with you. I used to think about her all the time but not lately, not since I met you. Not since that day you came in here screaming like a mad woman asking why I left you,” he says.

I feel like that was the day it all started.

“It wasn’t your fault Chawe, her death wasn’t your fault,” I say.

Silence.

“You know, death happens. It is not decided entirely by the person who kills, it’s fate, pure fate, it’s determined by where you are at that particular time and what you are doing and.....

“I don’t get you,” he says.

I’m also not sure if I’m making sense at all.

“Chawe, what I mean is everything that happened in her life on that day led to that moment, her last moment. Your whole life, from when you are born, is a build up to that last moment where you take your last breath. You can’t avoid it...”

I hope I don’t sound insensitive.

“I disagree,” he says.

“Why?”

“I’ve taken lives, it was my decision, it was at a time decided by me and it was in a way I chose to do it,” he says.

I feel a cold rush in my stomach. I try to turn and face him but he presses his chin hard on my head and stiffens his body behind me.

I want to speak but I have to catch my breath first.

“What do you mean you’ve taken lives?” I ask.

Can he say he was joking! Please please please.....

“I’m saying that I’m not a saint. I know more about death than you do. And I know that one should never have happened, everything that my father did, everything that we did to survive led to that moment,”

He doesn’t get it does he?

“I put last the signature Chawe, I confirm people’s deaths. I’ve seen people die from choking on a peach seed, falling from a chair, a headache.....it’s unstoppable,”

I think we have different opinions about this issue, maybe I should just leave it.

We stand there in silence.

But...

“Chawe, what do you mean you’ve taken lives?” I ask.

“I mean that we’ve had to defend ourselves from many things. On that day that Oleta died, six other people died with her,” he says.

He doesn’t have to explain further, I think I get what he’s saying. But that’s different, they were defending themselves.

Let me move on from this.

“You really loved her didn’t you?”

I’m opening myself up to heartbreak again.

“I did. She understood me, and she was a good person in general, a strong character. She laughed and talked a lot and she was, I don’t know, different, it was like she saw no evil in this world.....” he says.

That’s a total opposite of me.

“She was different from you. I mean, you do talk and laugh a lot and have a strong character, hectic character actually, but you two are different. I feel different with you from how I felt with her. You Naledi, you drive me crazy, literally! You wake every kind of feeling and emotion I have in me when you are around. You can make me angry, happy, insecure, emotional, fearful all in just one hour. And you don’t even try, it just happens naturally. I feel like I’m naked, like you turn me inside out and find every little hidden corner of me. You make me alive,” he says.

That’s what he does to me too.

“When did you figure that out?”-me

“When I couldn’t stop thinking about you after you made me stand in the rain for two hours and made me miss my flight and on top of that, you turned out to be a broke doctor, and I don’t remember you paying me back my R350,” he says.

I laugh. This is the first time I’ve laughed since I felt him behind me.

He wraps his arms around my waist.

“You know, on that day, I was meeting a police captain for lunch at Nando’s, I was going to sign a restraining order against my ex,”

That seems like a long time ago now.

“Mmmmmmm,” he says.

He said that when I told him my ex was dead.

“I do love you Naledi, you are the only one in my heart. It’s just that I have baggage, too much baggage,” he says.

I have baggage too.

“No crazy exes who are going to walk in here and try to kill you?” I ask.

I hope he’ll get me.

“No. I did see a few women after Oleta but you know, nothing serious. I’m a man, I have a penis, I need.....”

“Chawe!!”

“What?” he asks. Does he really see nothing wrong with what he just said?

“I don’t want to know,” I say.

He’s still behind me but I know he just shrugged.

“Who was that?”-me

“Who was who?”



“The person that was here, he stood there smoking, the one you went to the pool-house with,”-me.

Silence.

I’m waiting.

“It was Mqhele, my supposed twin, I called him last night when we left your father’s house,” he says.

Oh. There’s also that problem.

He kisses my shoulder.

“Naledi, you are not anybody’s replacement. You have nothing to do with her,” he says.

I did say he heard that whole conversation.

“I have a suggestion,” I say.

Tsietsi once told me this works.

He’s quiet.

“Write her a letter,”-me

“A letter?”

“Yes, everything you feel, write it all down. Tell her you’re sorry and you wish you had protected her and tell her about your life now and where you want it to go, what your future plans are.....”

He feels a bit stiff behind me.

“Write it all down. You can read it to her when you’re done,” I say.

I expected him to call this mumbo-jumbo but I think he’s listening.

It’s getting a bit chilli here.

We have to go back inside.

-----  
He's not in bed?

Strange.

He never leaves me in bed alone in the middle of the night.

It's dark.

He must be here in the house because his phone is there flashing a light on the charger.

It's 2am and I need to pee.

I'm naked. He never wants me to put my sleepwear back on after we have sex. He always says my skin is soft and he wants to feel it.

Where could he be?

He's not that type that takes work home, like me.

I'm going to find him. What if he took that conversation we had really hard. Maybe he's somewhere crying. Okay crying is a bit extreme but what if he's not okay?

There's light downstairs. I can see the whole of downstairs from here.

There he is in the dining room table. He has a pen and paper. He's writing.

I tiptoe back to the bedroom.

So he listened to me?

I wonder what's on that letter, but me reading it would just be wrong.

I hope it's going to help.

# Naledi...His Love

## Chapter Eight

You've been scarce, I haven't seen you shaking your thang around here in a while,"

Shaking my thang?

I laugh.

This girl.

"I've been around, just busy," I say.

She keeps glancing at me as she files my nails. "You're glowing, new man?"

How can she tell?

"Why does it have to be a man?"

"Oh please, I know you, you look different," she says, inspecting me I think

Is it that obvious that my life has changed for the.....well better, depending on how you look at it.

"Talk talk talk I'm listening," she

says. I don't even know her surname.

"Not exactly new, it's been almost two months now," I think I'm blushing as I say this.

"Two months of...?"

"Total bliss, some drama here and there but I'm not complaining," I say. She has this curious smile on her face.

"Is he hot?"

"He is beyond

hot!" We laugh.

It's nice to talk to someone about him although this conversation is just shallow beauty salon talk.

I need someone to share my happiness with. Forget Tshedi, she thinks this is her happiness more than it is mine. I've tried talking to Omphi a few times but she doesn't seem very happy about my new relationship.

When I was in Alberton last weekend I asked to do lunch with her but she said she was busy. I was disappointed, Qhawe too, he thinks she doesn't like him. He said he doesn't care whether people like him or not but it's different when it's my family. He's already screwed up his relationship with my father, so he says he doesn't want another enemy in the family.

Tshedi is his biggest fan.

"I have the perfect colour for you," she says.

Her nails are blue, I hope she's not about to make me look like clown.  
"That? But it's too purple," I say.  
Hell no! I'm not putting that on my nails.  
"Okay, how about this one?" she asks.  
Nope! I want nude, I always do nude.  
She shrugs and picks a nude nail polish.  
I'm smiling thinking about the other time I was here. Qhawe was outside in the rain waiting for me to come out and move my car. Never in my widest dreams did I think that incident would lead to now.  
I miss him. I last saw him on Sunday night, today is Wednesday, it's been three days and I feel like I'm going to go crazy if I don't see him soon. "So where does the hot mystery man live?" she asks.  
I was somewhere far just now, it happens a lot, I'm just always thinking about him.  
"In Joburg, but I'm seeing him this weekend. His birthday is on Friday and I want to make it special,"  
Do I sound like a teenage girl right now?  
"Really? What have you planned?" she asks.  
To be honest I'm not sure if my plans qualify as "special".  
"Dinner, just for the two of us. There's a little birthday cake too and a custom-made present,"  
She doesn't look impressed.  
"That's all?"  
What does she mean 'that's all?'  
I nod.  
"He has everything, I didn't know what else to buy him," I say.  
She's getting me worried now. Tshedi also said the same thing.  
But what do you do for a man who can afford to buy a whole ship if he wants it?  
"What are you going to wear? You said the dinner is romantic right?" I have no idea.  
"I still have to go shopping," I say.  
She doesn't have much faith in me, I can just tell.  
"Tell you what, remove the weave, you're more beautiful when you're natural. And wear black, a dress and dark eyes and popping lipstick," she says.  
Remove the weave???  
"Trust me," she says.  
Errrrrrr okay.  
"Done!" she says.  
Oh! That was quick! Or was it because I wasn't paying attention to what she was doing. I live in my own little world these days I tell you. The nails are perfect, she's always on point.

“And.....” -she says with a smile.  
I’m a bit lost.  
“I have another thing.....I’ll call you, I have your numbers on my client list,” she says.  
That look on her face is suspicious.  
Heavy.....  
Burberry Brit Rhythm.....my favourite.  
“Good afternoon ladies.....”  
Silence.  
I turn around to find him already on my face. The kiss.  
It’s still silent.  
“Are you done baby?” he asks.  
Butterflies in my stomach.....  
“Yes,” I say standing up and walking to the counter.  
He’s still standing where I left him.  
“It was nice meeting you ladies,” he says before we walk out the door.  
Where did he come from?  
I didn’t even know he was coming to Kimberley.  
“Nice nails,” he says.  
I’m still caught up in the moment. After all this time, he still makes me weak all over.  
“Stalking me as usual?” I ask after I force myself to come back to the real world.  
“I told you, it’s not stalking, it’s keeping checks on what’s mine,” he says. I’m property now?  
I wanted to buy a few things, but I think I’m ready to go now. We have to get out of this little mall before people swallow us. “How did you know I was here?” I ask.  
Why am I even asking though?  
“It’s your favourite place, you abuse strangers in parking lots here,” he says.  
I roll my eyes.  
I only come here to do my nails actually.  
“Did you miss me?” he asks as we walk out of the mall.  
Ofcourse I missed him, I told him that just 15 minutes ago, and he didn’t even think of telling me he was already here.  
“I missed your double lenses, and your tall self,” He smiles.  
We’re both going to my car. Okay his car but I call it my car now.  
He goes to the driver’s seat.  
Really?  
“They dropped me off here,” he says.  
I won’t ask who “they” is.

I let him be the control freak that he naturally is. Me asking how and when he decided to come here will just be a waste of time. Maybe I must just accept that he's different from other people. The problem is I don't know if he is different-different or if it is the money and power that makes him do what he wants when he wants.

My dad asked me about him yesterday but indirectly. Well, actually he wanted to know if he was still in the picture, probably to check if he still had an opportunity to beat him up again.

But...this is not the way home.

"We're sleeping at the Modder River house tonight," he says.

Lord help me! And I wasn't even consulted?

"Why?"

"Just," he says.

"Okay, can we go past my house so I can get some clothes atleast?"

He takes the Hillcrest turn. I'm glad he still listens to me sometimes.

I went straight to the mall from work. I left at exactly my knock-off time. It's not fun being there anymore, with Tsietsi not talking to me and Chelsea always fishing for details about my personal life, I just don't want to be there at all.

"How are the crazies?" he asks.

Here we go again.....

"Okay okay.....how are the pa-ti-ents?"

I give him a warning look.

"They're fine, but Schalwyk is not improving, his diabetes is worse than I thought,"-me

"Is he that guy that murdered his whole family?"-

him "You're not supposed to know that Chawe,"-me

"What difference does it make? The guy is crazy," he says.

Save me!

"Where is that other one who stole a baby?" he asks.

Oh Stacey.

"We discharged her yesterday,"

He frowns. He looks shocked too.

"You discharge them?? What for?? I thought they stayed there forever!"

Whoooooooooosaaaaaaaa Naledi.

"Yes Chawe, they get better and we discharge them," I say, calmly.

"You discharge serial killers too?" he asks.

"Yes, but we discharge them back to jail once they finish treatment," -me.

Stay calm Naledi...stay calm.....

He has a look of disgust on his face, and he's looking at me like I'm an evil monster whose mission is to destroy the world and all mankind.

“The Public Protector must investigate this. We’re not safe in this country,” he says.

Breathe in.....out.....in....Naledi. God will never give you more than you can handle.....this is a challenge.....you will conquer it.

“What are we going to eat?” he asks as we park outside the gigantic house.

I look at him.

“Why are we here then?”-me

“I don’t know, I just wanted us to be here tonight,” he says.

Sigh.

“Is there a bed in this house?” he asks.

Lawd! I’m the one who should be asking these questions, not him. Where did he think we were going to sleep?

“Chawe, let’s go back! We’re going back to my house,”

I think I need therapy.

This guy is one of the smartest people I know. He’s also one of the biggest idiots I know.

“Okay,”he says.

And just like that we drive back to my house.

I guess then now I have to cook.

He gets comfortable on my couch. I think he thinks this is his second home, that he has rights to whatever is in here.

I’ve lived alone for the three years that I’ve been in Kimberley but I enjoy his “entitled” attitude. It makes me feel like he’s in this for a long run, like he’s preparing for a “forever”.

“You’re cooking?” he asks

“Yep,”

“What are you cooking?”

“It’s a surprise,”-me

He raises his eyebrows.

“I hope it’s not those worm things that Limpopo people eat,” he says.

He must be talking about Mopane worms. I’ve eaten them a few times, they’re nice actually. Tsietsi used cook them.

“No I wouldn’t do that to my poor Zulu man, I hear you all grow up eating avocado and rice,”-me

The frown-smile.

“Oh, wa tella ne?”

Whaaat? LOL

“It’s going to be a problem if I can’t gossip about you with my people Zulu, stay away from my language, don’t try to learn it,”-me.

“Incase you didn’t know, I grew up in a taxi rank, I know the streets of Joburg like the back of my hand, you’ll be shocked at how many languages I speak,” he says.

Really? I don't believe him though....  
He's standing behind me.  
"But that's just water boiling," he says.  
Well, it's a surprise, I did tell him that.  
"I'm going out to get beer,"  
Can't we have a free-alcohol night? Just once?  
"Do you need anything?"-him  
I shake my head.  
"Okay, I hope my food will be ready when I come back," he says running  
his hand up my skirt.  
"You should wear skirts more often," he says.  
I'm left wondering if that was a compliment or a sign that he's going to want to  
control what I wear too.  
The Spar centre with a Tops is a few minutes away. I should have asked him  
to bring me wine for the oxtail I want to cook tomorrow. Let me call him.

But...I can hear his phone ringing.  
It's here, in the house.  
He must have forgotten it.  
Oh well, I'll buy it in the morning then.  
He hasn't said when he's leaving but I hope tomorrow because I want to  
plan for his birthday romantic dinner on Friday.  
He hasn't said anything about it, infact I think he's forgotten that his birthday  
is coming soon. He only mentioned it once and only because I asked him  
what his star-sign was, he had no idea what I was talking about.  
I then asked him for his birthdate. He told me. I explained that he is a Leo and  
told him characteristics of people born under that star-sign. He responded  
with something that had to do with the fact that I work with mentally ill  
people. I left it there.  
His phone is ringing.  
I hope he'll be back soon, maybe it's something important.  
The water is boiling, I put one-and-a-half cup, I hope it will come out right.  
The millie-meal is also a cup-and-a-half, that's how they cooked it on Youtube.  
The phone again. Urgghhhhhh it's disrupting me.  
Okay, close the pot for two minutes, drop the heat to low and wait.....with  
wooden spoon in hand.  
His phone again. It's starting to irritate me. I'm trying to score points here.  
Okay, now I have to stir.....  
Damnit!!! I'm switching the bloody thing off!  
It says "Nkosana" on the caller ID  
Alright, I'm not switching it off, I don't want his brother worrying.  
Back to my pot. I'm counting five minutes before I stir again. Apparently I



have to do this four times and then leave it on the stove to cook  
itself. Urghhhhhh  
It says “Sambulo” this time.  
Now I’m starting to worry, what if something happened back home and  
they’re trying to reach him.  
And he’s been gone for too long.  
This doesn’t look too bad, except that it’s turning my kitchen into a mess.

Why can’t everyone eat pap like normal people?  
That bloody phone again!!  
It’s either I switch it off or answer it this time!  
The number is not saved on contacts, but it looks familiar.  
Yes, I know this number, I know it by head.  
It’s…….  
No, but that’s impossible.  
It stops ringing.  
I’m a bit confused.  
An SMS comes in, it’s the same number.  
I press read before I can stop myself.  
“Zulu, there’s a constable who’s threatening to talk, he was on night shift, I  
need something to shut him up”  
Huh?  
“Is that uphuthu I smell?” he shouts with an excited look on his face.  
He’s standing at the door.

I slowly put the phone down where I found it.  
“Are you removing my phone from the charger and putting yours again?”  
Huh?  
I have my phone in my hand, I didn’t realise.  
That’s what he thinks I was doing?  
We always fight for the charger, that’s because his battery is always low.  
“Actually I was trying to switch it off because it’s been ringing since you left,”-  
I lie.  
He’s not interested in my explanation. He’s in the kitchen.  
“I love the smell but I think it’s burning,”-him.  
Oh shit!  
I rush to the kitchen.  
I’m not sure if it’s coming out right but he said he likes the smell, that’s a good  
sign.  
“I brought you a present,” he says.  
He looks excited.  
He pulls it out of a plastic bag, amongst 12 beers.

Okay.  
I smile. He's sweet.  
It's a mint Aero chocolate slab.  
It's my favourite, but I never told him that. He's observant, I love that about him. "Thank you, that's sweet of you," -me  
"I know, I'm sweet aren't I?"  
Urgh. His sarcasm.  
He goes to sit on the couch. He doesn't even look at his phone.  
He's flipping through channels, you'd swear this is his house.  
I think this phuthu thing is ready now. I have to put it in a bowl so that it cools off.  
"When are you buying furniture for the Modder River house?" he asks.  
I thought I made it clear that I'm not interested in that house.  
And who is buying furniture again?  
"I'll leave you with my card, you can just go to the furniture shops and choose what you want, pay for it and I'll have it delivered to the house," he says. He's serious.  
Are we building a home now?  
"Chawe, why?" -me  
He puts his beer down and looks at me.  
"How are we going to have a house with no furniture in it?" -him Sigh.  
It's "our" house now?  
I'm not going to mix this, he's going to do it himself.  
The struggle of the serving tray. I have to use it every time I serve him his food.  
"Do you eat it with sugar?"  
He frowns?  
"People eat amasi with sugar?"  
I guess that's a no then.  
"Come sit next to me," he says.  
I was going to clean up first, but I do as he says. Maybe he saw what I was doing, or maybe not. But I know I'm really confused right now. "This is nice, thank you, even uphuthu is nice," he says.  
He could be lying about uphuthu being nice, that's a possibility.  
But I guess I succeeded in scoring points afterall.  
Now I have to watch him eat because he can't finish his sentences, he keeps popping spoonfulls in-between.  
I think he's enjoying it.  
Finally, he puts the bowl down and lies back on the couch.  
Because I'm me I take the tray back to the kitchen and come back with a glass

of water. He drinks it up all at once, puts the empty glass on the coffee-table and picks up his beer.

He's such an interesting character.

"You were right," he says randomly.

I'm lost.

"You were right about the letter. I wrote it, everything, I wrote it all down and then I went to the spare bedroom. You know, she's the one who decorated it white. I sat there on the bed and I spoke to her," That must have been hectic.

But he doesn't seem as intense as he always is when the subject comes up.

"I told her about you," he says.

What? I didn't expect that. I wonder what he said about me.

"I told her I was happy," he says.

Wow.

He stretches his arm. I know what it means. I shift closer and lay my head on his shoulder.

"You have no idea how happy you make me," he says and takes a sip of his beer.

He has no idea how much he's helped me. The things he does, well some of them, the things he says and the way he treats me, I know myself better than I did two months ago.

"I love myself better than I did before I met you," -me.

"I love you more than you love yourself," -him

I hug him tighter.

I think I'm stuck with him for the rest of my life.

But I'm struggling right now, something is eating me up.

"Chawe, what were you doing in Kimberley on that day? The first time I met you," I ask.

I never really thought about asking, I just assumed he was here on business. And now that.....I think it's important to know more.

"It's a long complicated story, but we have a route for our trucks that goes though this province, three of them were hijacked in March so I was here to meet with the police officers working on the case. We think the drivers were involved," he says.

Oh well then that explains why the captain was calling him.

He probably doesn't even know it's the same captain that handled my case.

"And now.....thanks to those hijackers, I met you" he says.

He's such a charmer.

A beautiful dark big-eyed charmer.....

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I'm not sure anymore if taking the advice to remove my weave was smart. I look five years younger and I don't know if that's a good or bad thing. I relaxed my hair, tied it up and put a bun extension on top. I also took the advice to wear black. While at it, I took advice from the sales lady to buy a body shaper. I went for a black dress, a tight black dress and stilettos and stud earrings. I look good if I may say so myself. The lipstick, yes, pale pink.

He said we should meet at the restaurant because he left work late today. He was supposed to be here at least by 5pm to pick me up but he said something came up.

I had to tell him about my dinner plans because he wanted me to come to Alberton right after work. So we ended up agreeing that he'd come here tonight and then we'll go to Joburg tomorrow morning. I'll fly back down here on Monday morning and hopefully make it to work on time.

I have to go now. I told him to ask for a table booked under the two of us when he arrives.

Gift...check. Cake....they'll bring it out after we've had the main course. It's small, perfect for just the two of us.

"I'm here," -SMS

Oops! I'd better rush. I check myself in the mirror one last time. I hope he's going to love the gift.

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The Jeep is here.

And by the way, why have I never asked questions about this car?

I decided to let that SMS from the captain thing go because I don't even know how I'm going to start asking about it. I don't want to be known as that girlfriend who goes through her man's phone. He trusts me with his stuff, I want it to remain that way.

He's already standing at the door, waiting.

Suit? That's my man!

He's calling? Why? I'm right here in the car. He's standing there watching me park.

"I did say you had a tuck-shop driver's license, look at how you're parked," Sigh.

I don't get offended anymore.

I open the door and walk to him.

"Happy Birthday,"

No answer.

And now? Why is he looking at me like I'm a.....

"You look..."

His mouth is open.  
I know this reaction.  
I see, it means I look hot. Mission  
accomplished. "Are we going to go inside  
birthday boy?" "You look beautiful,"-he says. A  
hug and a kiss. Finally.  
I hope our night can begin now.  
He takes my hand, he's composed himself.  
I follow with my too-high shoes and little clutch-bag.  
We're walking past all the small tables. They must have put us in some  
cosy corner.  
Why are people here looking at us?  
Oh I forgot, he's famous.  
"Are we sitting outside?" I ask because we're walking past all the tables.  
"No, we're going there," he says pointing at one long table full of people.  
But how.....?  
No!  
I stop.  
"Chawe!"  
"Don't worry, let's go," he says.  
Oh My God!  
I turn around! I'm walking back!  
He grabs me around my waist and pulls me  
back. "Where are you going?" he asks.  
"Chawe! You should have...."  
One turns around. The big eyes. Oh my God! I  
have no choice now but to keep walking.  
My chest is pounding. I'm so nervous my hands are  
shaking. Just like that? No warning whatsoever?  
They're all looking at us. I want to run out of here, very  
fast! He pulls a chair for me to sit.  
I sit down very quick because I could faint  
anytime. "Hello," I say.  
They're looking at me like I'm an alien.  
"Hi," some of them say. It's a flat 'hi'.  
Their eyes keep going from me to Qhawe and back to me and him  
and..... "Happy Birthday to me," he says.  
I want to slap that smile off his face.  
My hands are under the table. I'm trying to stop them from shaking.  
I keep looking down because there's about 20 people on this table all  
looking at me, most of them with eyes bigger than tennis balls.  
But there's one sitting across me, I try but I just can't, I keep looking at him,

and then Qhawe.

No ways, he was lying, they are twins!

Just looking at him freaks me out. It's like looking at Qhawe.

"I'm older,"-he says, smiling.

Lord! He even sounds like him!

"Don't worry baby, it's easy to tell us apart, he's the stupid one. Just listen to what he says and you'll know it's not me," -Qhawe. They all laugh.

Whew!

I hope they're laughing away the awkwardness.....

I raise my eyes and they meet Qhawe's.

He looks serious now.

A waiter appears and places the starter in front of me. It's what I had organised for the two of us, and now they have had to make more I assume because he came with the whole of Mgungundlovu...whatever that means. The guys start eating immediately. They don't even pray for the food. And there's alcohol all over the table.

Qhawe looks at me, and then at everyone.

"This is Naledi..." he says and stops.

They're all looking at him.

"She is....." he stops, looks at me and smiles.

I'm still nervous.

"I love her....." he says, picks up a fork and starts eating.

Awkward silence.....

"Nice to meet you Naledi,"- the grey-haired one says. It's the big brother and next to him is a creature. I'm not going to call it a person because nobody looks like that in real life. I want to see her in day light. Our eyes meet and I look away quickly.

I move my eyes to the left and they meet.....she looks exactly like she did in that picture on the wall.

She smiles. I return the smile. Our eyes are locked for a second.

She looks at Qhawe.

"So Qhawe, is Naledi the reason you've been smiling to yourself lately?"- she asks.

There's something about her, just something. I saw it in that picture and I'm seeing it now. The way her husband looks as her.....it's like he doesn't see anything else.

She has braids and not much make-up, that's if she's wearing any at all.

"I could say that," -Qhawe.

He's happy with himself isn't he? He's not getting sex from me anytime soon. I've been poking my starter, I can't eat, I'm too overwhelmed. I also feel very plain compared to these flawless women here. Where do they find them?

There's one far across who looks like a perfect mermaid. She has oval eyes, long lashes and she blinks, a lot. I assume that's her husband sitting next to her. I've seen them all in pictures before but the nerves and shock have erased everything I thought I had memorised, but this one, I think her name is Xolie. I remember this because I read that she has an NGO that deals with female health. Maybe I should ask her for a job.

"So Naledi, where are you from?"-someone asks.

He's sitting on the same side of the table as me so he has to pop his head to be able to see me.

He looks like all of them, I'm not sure which one is he.

"Mafikeng," I'm still nervous as hell.

I feel Qhawe's hand on my knee. He's trying to make me relax, it helps a little because my knee stops shaking.

"So what on earth are you doing in Kimberly?" another, again, he looks exactly like the one sitting next to him and the one sitting next to me. The only good thing is you can tell who is younger than whom, except for the one next to me and the one across me.

"I work here, but I'm not planning on staying long, it's too far from everywhere,"

Qhawe looks at me and raises his eyebrows. Okay, I said that because I didn't want to give yet another one-word response. I have never thought about leaving, not yet, and Kimberley is not even far from home, it's only a four-hour drive.

"How long have you been here?"-the twin, okay, Mqhele.

I look at his wife, I don't know why.

"Easy with the interrogation,"-Qhawe.

Thank you baby!

They all laugh, at him I assume.

I see this is a family of drunks. The men have beer, the women have wine, I'm having juice but getting sloshed right now would actually help me a lot.

His hand is on my arm now, I'm trying real hard, he's trying to help too. None of this would be happening if he'd just told me I was going to meet his family tonight.

"I don't know why she likes this place because it's just her and her gay friend,"-Qhawe.

I frown.

"Tsietsi is not gay," I say.

"Mmmm...okay, he's not gay," he says, like it's nothing important.

I have to calm my nerves right now if I want to survive this night.

“Relax,” he whispers.

Mnx!

“So Naledi, this is your man? This guy?” that other one says pointing at Qhawe with a beer bottle.

I want to laugh but.....

“How did he convince you to go out with him? And you said yes? To him?”- another one, he’s sitting next to Xolie.

They just want to embarrass him.

Boys! “I did, yes,” I say trying not to laugh. He brushes my arm again.

The main course is here, it took a little longer than I had hoped.

I’m scared to eat. Atleast I’m used to eating in Qhawe’s presence but these wives, especially that one over there who looks like she lives on carrots, are going to judge me I know. And this is strange because I swear I saw her pregnant in one of their recent pictures.

“Are you going to tell them that I had to come to Kimberley five times before you agreed to go to lunch with me?”-Qhawe.

Nooooooooo.....

“And that you made me wait for two hours in the rain?”-Qhawe.

He’s making me sound mean.

“Oh, and she threw the flowers I bought her out the window,” he says.

I laugh, I can’t help it. The story is funny when he tells it.

“I think I like her,”-Nkosana, that will be the big brother.

I’m starting to relax a bit. It doesn’t seem like they’re bad at all, I think it’s because they laugh a lot and that there’s this thing.....I don’t know what it is.....but it’s like you can feel the love all around this table.

We’ve just finished the main when the waiter appears with the cake.

Yerrrr, it’s enough for about six people, there’s about 12 or 13 here. What am I going to do now?

“One candle?” one asks.

He looks younger than all of them. It must be the one who lives overseas.

That loud laughter again.

Qhawe didn’t know about the cake, hence the surprised look on his face.

“Qhawe didn’t tell me you were all going to be here. I thought it was going to be a dinner for two so I organised a small cake,” I have no choice but to explain.

I hope they won’t start singing “happy birthday” just to put him on the spot. No? Good.

“I have a gift for you,” I say.

I should have waited until we got home, but the party is here, tonight.

I’m crossing fingers he’ll like it.



It's nothing major or expensive. I thought making it personal would be a good idea.

I'm nervous as I hand him the small wrapped box.

"Open it, we're waiting,"-the twin.

He gives him an annoyed look.

Our eyes keep meeting with Hlomu. She is just.....too cute. I think she's sweet, she seems sweet.

Qhawe leans over to hug me.

I think he likes the present.

Now he's looking at it and smiling while everybody waits for him to tell them what it is.

"It's cuff-links," I say, just to end the suspense.

"Ohhhhhh...." -most of them say.

"They have my name on them," Qhawe.

He's like a little boy.

I had them engraved with Q.Z

It reminds me of that note he had delivered at work demanding his R350. Oh!

How far we've come!

He's happy, I can just see it. Everybody sees it judging by the silence and smiles.

I meet with Hlomu again. She's blinking rapidly. Is she trying to stop herself from crying? Why?

She nods at me, smiles and looks away.

"How long have you been here again?" another question, from the creature this time.

"Three years. I've had to move around a lot, different hospitals," "You work at a hospital?"-the carrot eater.

I'm being interrogated again. Qhawe is not helping this time.

It was better when the guys were asking the questions but with the ladies, I'm a bit uneasy because I know they're trying to figure me out and I will be judged by my responses.

"Yes, I studied through a government programme so I'm working in a state hospital, for me it's more about giving back," she says.

'Giving back', that line always impresses people. "Where did you study?"-Hlomu, she's back to being cute. "In

Cuba,"-me

Now I'm going to have to explain that because they look confused.

"I went to study medicine in Cuba, I spent five years there and when I came back I was deployed in the Free State and then I think Limpopo and....."

I've worked in so many hospitals hey.....my first was in Tembisa.

"You're a doctor?"-Hlomu.

I nod.

They seem excited about that.

“So how did you two meet?” the carrot eater, I heard someone call her Gugu, I remember reading about her somewhere. I look at Qhawe, we both want to laugh.

“He stole my parking space,”-me

“No, I didn’t steal her parking space, the space was empty so I drove in,”-Qhawe.

“No, I was waiting for the other car to come out, and then, just as I was reversing he appears from nowhere and parks in my space,”-me “I didn’t see you,”-he says and kisses my hand.

“Are you going to tell them what you did after that?”-Qhawe.

I can’t help laughing.

“I parked him in, parked behind his car and left,”

“I had to wait for two hours for her to come back, and it was raining. And when she came back she just walked past me, tried to get in her car and drive off but...,”-Qhawe.

“And then he started stalking me,”

They laugh.

He tells them the whole story. It seems like along time ago.

They’re all laughing at him.

The creature stands up, some call her Zah and others call her Sis’Zah.

She says something to the big brother and leaves.

I think she’s going to the loo.

Most of them say no to dessert, except two, Mqhele and another who also looks a bit young. I noticed he’s the only one drinking juice.

“So, you forgot one important piece of information,”-

Mqhele What’s he talking about?

And, he’s eating ice cream? Really? At this time of the night?

Qhawe looks at him with that frown-smile.

“What piece? We want to know...”-Hlomu “I did say he was stupid,”-Qhawe says to me.

Now they all want to know that missed information. I’m also lost right now. “The part where her father beat the shit out of you,”-Mqhele Oh no! Did he really have to raise that?

Qhawe is laughing.

“What? What did you do?”-Nkosana

I’m embarrassed.

Hlomu looks shocked.

“Man, I thought you were joking,”-the younger one.

Can he not tell the story please...not tonight.

But then again, I never really get what I want in this life.

He tells it....

The others are laughing but Nkosana seems to be taking this seriously. He must be the voice of reason.

The creature is back.

“I think I like the chief. Tell him he’s welcome to beat his brothers too, especially the one that looks and behaves exactly like him,”-Hlomu

They laugh.

Mqhele is laughing too.

“Like you’d ever stand and watch someone beat me up, you’d cry your eyeballs out on the first slap,” he says and kisses her forehead. He is exactly like Qhawe, it’s weird.

I’ve also noticed that they are very touchy-touchy. If his arm is not around her shoulders, he’s brushing her arm, or she has her head on his shoulder. It’s getting late and the restaurant is almost empty.

But this lot is still laughing and chatting away, and drinking beer straight from bottles. They’re such a beautiful family, so much warmth it’s hard to believe there are no parents around. Qhawe was right, everyone is important, I can just tell.

It’s been a great night. They’re not as bad as I thought they would be. They seem down to earth, I’m almost certain that family comes before everything else. They all seem very close and very loving.

Come to think of it, I’ve never heard Qhawe mention any friends, it’s always my brother this my brother that.

“Are you still fine?”-he asks me.

I am actually, I’m enjoying these people’s madness. But it looks like everyone is over their fascination with me now, they’re talking to whoever is next to them.

And...I have other plans for tonight.

“I’m fine, you?”

“I want you all to myself now,” he says.

I blush. I want the same thing.

“Guys, this is our cue, we still have to drive to Joburg in the morning,” he says. There’s that too. We could just stay here for the whole weekend, but, I also have plans with Tshedi and Omphi in Joburg tomorrow. Lunch and some drinks, we haven’t hung out in a while.

“You’re not coming with us?”-Hlomu

“I thought you were flying back with us,”-Xolie

I look at Qhawe.

“No, we’ll see you later tomorrow,”-Qhawe says standing up.

I stand up too.

“Welcome to the family Naledi,”-Nkosana says with a serious face.

Silence.

“Thank you,” I say.

“Qhawe, see me when you get to Joburg tomorrow, there’s something we need to discuss,”-Nkosana, still serious.

I hope whatever they need to discuss is not about me.

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“What’s that smile on your face? I thought you were mad at me,” he says as we drive out.

I want to be mad at him but I can’t. I lean over and place my head on his shoulder. He’s going to have to drive with one hand. He puts his arm around my shoulders.

“Do you like them?” he asks.

I think I do.

“They’re nice, and weird like you,”-me

He laughs.

“Do you think they like me?” I ask.

He kisses the top of my head.

“They love you,” he says.

How does he know that?

“We’re very careful about who we let inside our family Naledi, especially now,”

I raise my face to look at him.

“Do you remember that story I told you about a woman who tried to kill my brother...”

I nod.

“She was in our lives for a year. We left her with our children and...”

I feel his chest moving when he says the part about children.

“She was Mqoqi’s girlfriend, so she tried to kill my one brother and broke my other brother’s heart...”

Wow, she must have been a really bad person.

“But I know you’re not going to try to kill me or my family....” he says

Oh, he’s back to being Qhawe.

Mnx!

“I wouldn’t try.....They’re pretty, your brothers’ wives, they’re very pretty,”-me

“Mmmmm”-he says.

Okay.

“Where do they find them?”-me

Oops! I didn’t mean to say that out loud.

“They’re not just pretty faces Naledi, they are the mothers of our children, the backbone of our family. And no, they do not shop and pamper themselves all day, they have things, businesses and responsibilities. You’ll realise that once you get to know them,” he says.

Okay, I figure they are a sensitive subject. I'll be careful never to make any nasty comments about them in future.

"I love the cuff-links. Thank you," he says.

I'm glad.

"I'm going to have a problem remembering everyone's name, especially the guys, and you all look alike,"-me

"We're different though, we like different things," he says.

Still, they're like one person.

"I know you love the outdoors, nature and all things fresh, that's why you have a lake on your doorstep."

He nods.

"All things fresh, that's why I'm with you, you're fresh..." he says with that look that says "I'm being sarcastic".

Oh okay.

"I know hey, I'm as fresh as they come,"

He laughs out loud.

And in a split second he's back to being serious.

"Nkosana likes cars, and jazz,"

I'm not surprised. He looked like the type.

"Nqoba likes....people, he's a people's person and he's very outgoing,"

I noticed he was the loudest.

"Sambulo is the quiet one, and he likes clothes and all things expensive, he's always been that type..."

Sambulo is Xolie's husband, I remember that.

"Mqoqi is the live-on-the-edge type, he's into motorbikes and car racing and all those things...he's an adrenalin junkie actually. But also, he reads and he writes and he is focused,"

"Mqoqi is the second youngest?"

"No, that's Mpande, his life is girls and cars and parties, I don't even know what he likes,"

Okay that one must be really troublesome.

"Ntsika is the youngest, he used to be black but now he's white,"

LOL, that must be the one based in London. "And your twin?"-

me

"We-are-not-twins," he says tickling my arm.

Awwwwww.....

"Mqhele is into.....Hlomu," he says.

Huh? That's it?

"His wife?"-me

"Yep, oh and he plays the guitar and loves ice cream," he says.

I noticed the ice cream factor.

And he's right when he says he's into Hlomu, I noticed that too.

I feel like I know all of them already after just one night.

They're very interesting, and overwhelming just like this one here.

We walk in together because I left the lights already on. Everyone has something weird about them, I think this is my one.

"Can we leave really early tomorrow please, I know Tshedi will want us to go to every shop there is,"-me

"Okay, although I know you'll sleep all the way...."

I roll my eyes and walk upstairs. He's doing whatever in the fridge. I must buy more groceries because he eats for five people. Now, how do I put this thing on?

"Baby?"- he's knocking on the bathroom door.

"I'm here,"

"Yes I know but why did you lock the door?"-him

Ummmmm

"I'll be out just now, just sit there," I shout.

I know he's still standing by the door.

I'm done. But I'm not putting these heels on, she can forget it.

"Switch the lights off," I shout

"Huh? Why?"-him

He's still standing by the door, I know it!

"Chawe, just do it,"-me

I hear his footsteps. He must be wondering what the heck is going on, just like I'm wondering what the heck I'm doing. It might backfire, you never know with these things.

He's switched the lights off. I switch the bathroom light off too.

This was a bad idea.

I open the door and stand there. I practiced the pose.

"Switch the side-lamp on Zulu, I have one last birthday gift for you,"

Boom!!!

Silence.

Mouth open.

Smile.

"Can I take a picture....?" he says with his phone in his hand.

What the fuck???

I turn around and walk back to the bathroom...

He runs after me. He grabs me by the waist from behind.

"What did I do? I just wanted a picture because you....."

“Chawe! I’m standing here in lingerie trying to be sexy and all you want to do is take a picture? Do you have any idea how hard it was to put this thing on.....?”

He’s confused.

“But that’s why I wanted to take a picture, because you’re sexy and I was.....”

Mnx!

“Whatever! Forget it, I’m taking it off,”-  
me I feel him poking me.

“No, okay, I’m going to go back to sit and you can continue with everything,”  
Nx! I’m so mad I’ve forgotten the routine. “I don’t want to,”-me

“Pleaseeeeeeeee.....look, this means you’re sexy,” he says pointing at his flippin erection.

I look at him. Why does he have to spoil everything by being himself?

He was supposed to freeze when he saw me, so much that he can’t even speak, and then, watch me walk slowly until I’m standing in front of him, and then start gulping because I’m so sexy he can’t even breathe..... But no, he wants to take a freakin picture!

My problems are real.

But I can’t let all the practice go to waste.

I push him out of the bathroom.

“Go sit on that chair,”

“Okay,” he says rushing there.

I walk to him with my hands behind my back. He laughs when he sees what I have in my hands.

“Are you arresting me Dr Montsho?”

“No, I’m restraining you,” I say cuffing his wrists to the chair.

His eyes are smaller now. He’s going to like this.

“I wanted to take that off with my teeth,” he says referring to this little black lace thing and thigh high stockings I’m wearing.

“I’ll take it off for you, while you watch,”-I say moving away from him.

She wanted me to put up a pole here but I said no, I plan to be a hoe tonight but not up to that level.

“So, what do you want gone first?”-me

He bites his lip.

“The top,” he says.

I take it off.

Now I’m left in just the panties, which are see-through anyway, and the stalkings.

“The socks...” he says

Really? Socks? He calls them socks?

This night is not turning out like I imagined it.

I take them off.  
I walk to him, unbuckle his belt and pull his pants down. I unbutton his shirt and....  
Sigh. I should have asked him to take his shirt and vest off before cuffing him.  
Oh well.....  
On my knees...  
“Shit!” he says.  
I’m getting better at this. I never did it to any of my exes. I was never comfortable enough.....  
The chair keeps moving, he can’t stay still....  
He smells nice and he’s warm....  
Normally his hand would be on top of my head. But he technically has no hands, that’s why he’s fighting with the chair..... Every “mmmmmmmm” comes with a rattle.  
I let go when I realise we might just end up on the floor...with the chair on top of us.  
He opens his eyes, halfway.  
“Where are you going? Naledi....”  
I’m here, standing in front of him....  
He’s trying to break free.....  
“Please come back.....”-he begs.  
Now it’s happening exactly the way she said it would  
I shake my head  
“Naledi,”  
I swear his voice is hoarse now. His eyes are red.  
I’m supposed to push him to the highest limit, tease him until he can’t take it anymore.....  
He tries to free his wrists again.....  
It’s not happening.  
I’m focused but I’m enjoying watching this... I did say I had become a freak.....  
“Please....” he begs.  
He looks so helpless, so powerless.....  
The next step is to give him everything he can’t touch.  
I sit on top of him, facing him. I’ve wanted to do this for along time but I’ve been worried about being too heavy.  
It doesn’t look like he finds me heavy at all judging by his lips on my breasts.  
I’m not about foreplay today, I’m about torturing his lust.  
I tighten one arm around his neck while my other hand goes down to find what I want.  
I find it and push it in.



He clenches his teeth.

I move.....

He's not moaning now, he's groaning.

I'm breathing in his ear.

“Is this how you want it?” I whisper.

He attempts to speak but ends up clenching his teeth instead.

I move faster and harder. He starts screaming...

“Touch me, please...” I whisper.

The chair rattles...he's going to break it!

I know it's getting really bad when he starts biting.....

I'm derailing from the plan, I can't bear watching him suffer....

I un-cuff the first wrists, one hand is behind my neck before I can blink. I free the other one.....

He's going to break every single bone in my body.....

-----

I hold him tight as he groans louder and louder on top of me....

I can't remember how we ended up on the floor....

His forehead is pressing on mine, too hard...

I can't feel my lower body....

He lets his body loose and I feel him starting to get heavier and heavier.

I still have my arms around him. I wait for him to come back to earth...

He raises his head and looks into my eyes...

Sweat dripping.

He reaches over and pulls the duvet down from the bed, puts it over us and rolls to lie next to me

“I'm going to wife your crazy ass.....” he says pulling me to his chest.

Huh?

Did he just say.....?

# Naledi...His Love

## Chapter Nine

Aarrrrrrrrghhhhhh!!”

I want to throw the bloody thing out the window.

Thirty minutes! That’s all I need just thirty minutes of sleep!

But Tshedi, she’s been calling and calling.....

And that vampire of a man! We left Kimberley at 3am (yes that’s how rough it is).

I tried to sleep on the way but he kept waking me up.

We arrived here just after 8am and what does he do? He showers, gets dressed and leaves! He’s like a flipping ghost!

He said something about going to shisanyama with the brothers. I don’t know, I wasn’t listening, I just wanted him to leave so I could sleep.

Now I’m annoyed by Tshedi and I’m hungry. It’s just after 11am. I don’t know why she’s rushing me.

I’ll eat whatever I find in the fridge and go get ready. I want to drive my car today, it’s been parked here for two months. But then, Tshedi will kill me if I show up in a 1-Series when God has shown her so many times that she deserves far better.

The car is parked outside? That means he’s back. But the house is quiet, too quiet.

He could be outside, but I don’t see him through the glass walls.

I’m going to look for him, he must think I’m still sleeping.

I smile walking past the porch and thinking about that first morning we had breakfast out here. When I showed him who rules the roost. But, where is he though?

“Don’t step on those.....” he says behind me.

Where did he come from?

“Whew! I’ve been looking for you.....” I say rushing to hug...

Oh shit!!! I stop before my arms reach him.

“He freaks out when we step on his trees and flowers and all this green shit he has all over here,” he says puffing out smoke. I’m frozen. I can’t even utter a single word.

“So, how are you MaMontsho?” he asks.

I want to speak, but I can’t, so I nod.

“Qhawe tells me you hang around lunatics all day,” - he says.

I clear my throat.

“They’re my patients,” I manage to say.  
I’m freaked out by a lot of things. First is the fact that I almost hugged him, second is the fact that there’s something very dark.....I can’t explain it....about him, and four is I cannot get used to how much he looks like Qhawe.  
“I see,” he says, puffing the smoke.  
So he is as arrogant as his brother I see.  
I don’t know whether I should continue standing here, or ask to be excused and run to lock myself in the bedroom or if I should..... Where is Qhawe anyway?  
“I’m hungry,” he says  
Huh?  
He’s standing there looking at me.  
I can’t even look him in the eye.  
“What should I make you, is there anything specific....?”-me  
What kind of stupid question is this.....?  
I’m really trying to act normal.  
He shrugs.  
So he’s hungry but he doesn’t know what he wants to eat?  
He’s not Qhawe Naledi, he just called his herbs ‘stupid green shit’.....  
I have to get out of here before I lose my mind.....  
I walk inside the house and literally run up the stairs to the bedroom. I’m on a robe! I just spoke to my boyfriend’s brother on a robe! And worse at first I thought he was Qhawe! What if I can’t tell them apart one day and I end up.....! No!  
And where the heck is Qhawe???

I jump in the shower quickly, put on a dress and comb my hair. Some lipstick, at least.  
I’m going to make something quick so he can eat and go.  
Oh! Qhawe is here now? They’re both sitting watching TV. I wonder where he was.  
“That was quick,” he says when he sees me coming down the stairs.  
He has a nerve to say that after he abandoned me here and left me with his scary brother.  
“I’ll make you something quick if that’s okay,” I say  
They both nod.  
I wish I could make them Noodles but that would be a sin before the lord.  
I’ll make them some seriously thick sandwiches.  
“By the way baby, I called Tshedi and told them to come pick you up from here,”-Qhawe  
Called Tshedi? Where did he get Tshedi’s numbers?  
Oh so that’s why Tshedi has stopped calling.

He doesn't even look at me and that's because he knows I will give him the look.

Sigh. He has my family's phone numbers now?

How does he do these things?

I almost forgot the tray. That would have been a disaster.

I put the food in front of them, and then wonder what I should do next.

Omphi's car is parking outside. I was hoping he was joking.

Tshedi is the first to walk in.....

Please please please don't embarrass me, not in front of his brother.

"Hiiiiii" she says, loud, wide smile, face that says "I'm about to embarrass the shit out of my little sister".

She stops and leans on the kitchen counter, looks at them, me, and them again.

Good! She doesn't know which one is Qhawe.

Omphi is standing next to her. She's just...cold.

They both stand up and walk towards us.

"Ladies, we have to go, but enjoy hanging out. Baby, you'll call me if you need me, don't forget to lock the front door," -Qhawe says kissing me on the lips.

"Nice to see you again, ladies," he says looking at both my sisters. He's met both of them before, by the way.

"MaMontsho, we hope to see you soon, don't stay in Kimberley for too long,"-Mqhele.

"Don't worry, I don't have a life, you'll probably see me sooner," I say looking at Qhawe.

He doesn't say anything but I know in his mind he's saying: "Mnx!"

They're gone.

Tshedi looks at me from head to toe.

"What is wrong with you? Are you trying to embarrass me? Did you even shower?"-

Really Tshedi?

"I had to make them food and I didn't even know the brother was here. And how is this embarrassing you?"

She rolls her eyes and leaves me standing there.....

Oh no!

"Is that a....?" she's walking out the sliding door.

"They call you MaMontsho? What are you an illiterate woman from some village?"-Omphi

What's her problem?

Tshedi is back in the house and she's running all over. "Is this you Ledi?" she shouts from wherever she is. Me? Where?

She's at that family photos passage.

She's looking at a picture, the largest one.

Wow.

It's me. It's a picture of me, in the main bedroom, I look fast asleep.

Wow!

She's gone. Finally.

I didn't see this when we arrived.

I think I'm going to cry.

He really is mine.

I have to call him now.

An SMS comes in just as I dial.

It's from the bank.

Huh?

Another SMS.

"Here is R50 000, go buy yourself a life,"

Qhawe!!!!

Urghhhhhhh!!!

I'm going to murder him!!!

"What's wrong Ledi? What's that look on your face?"-Tshedi

She must think it has something to do with the picture.

"Chawe! He's so....."- I don't even know how to explain it.

They're both looking at me waiting for an explanation.

But if I tell them, especially Omphi, they might get the wrong impression about him.

"Never mind, we have to go it's getting late,"-

me Tshedi wants to see the whole house.

I have to go to the bedroom and get ready.

Qhawe though, just when I think he can't shock me anymore, he does. This must be about that R50 I gave him to buy a life, yes, he's been waiting for this moment for a long time.

But why am I smiling?

He seriously drives me crazy.

I won't call him. I want him to worry and think I'm not talking to him.

I have to put a weave on this head, this plain and natural thing is hard work and besides, my face looks too big with thin hair. I can't be walking around with plumpy cheeks and plumpy hips.

Another plumpy face is Hlomu. She's not even big, although she's not thin either, she's just really really cute. I have to do some more internet research so I can know more about them, well, at least all that has been said about them. "Is this the main bedroom?" Tshedi walks in and asks.

She's opening bathroom doors and....

"A walk-in closet? You must put your clothes and shoes all over here," she

says.

This gold-digger though!

“I don’t live here Tshedi,” -me

But it feels like I do, some of my clothes are here too.

Omphi is in the balcony.

“So the ex is history?” -Tshedi says in a low voice.

“Looks like it, we haven’t talked about it though, I don’t even know when he put that picture up,” -me

I’m not complaining though.

“He must have a lot of money,” -Omphi walks back in and says.

Tshedi and I look at each other.

She’s just so cold, I don’t know what her problem is.

“I’m ready, let’s go,” -me

We’re going wherever Omphi thinks is proper. I only lived in Gauteng briefly and I was still a struggling intern working in Tembisa, I shopped at Boulders in Midrand.

“Is that your car Ledi?” -Omphi

I almost forgot, I have to close the garage door too.

I nod.

“You drove here?”

Sigh.

I hadn’t really briefed her about my new transport mode because she’s been acting all funny since the day of the baby shower.

“No it’s been parked here for two months, she uses the Maserati now,” -

Tshedi The way she says it!

“Oh,” she says with a frown.

We’re going to Melrose Arch. I’ve only been there once.

I haven’t spoken to Qhawe since that SMS and I know that wherever he is he thinks I’m angry and won’t even touch the money. Well, I’m going to shock him today.

“Let’s choose a restaurant where we can sit outside, we’re only here for lunch anyway so we might as well sit outside and gossip about people passing by,” -Tshedi

We do that sometimes, especially the two of us.

“No, we’re here for shopping too,” -me

They look surprised. I never offer shopping sprees and it’s still a week before payday.

“Nope, I’m broke,” -Tshedi

Omphi is never broke. She’s just that kind of person and no, she will never offer you money even if it’s rolling in her bank account.

“My treat, I have R50 000 to spend, today,” -

me They raise their eyebrows.

They must think I'm joking.

"So where do we start?"-me "There!"- Tshedi says pointing at a shoe shop. "No wait, R50 000 for shopping?"-Omphi Urgh.

"Yes Omphi, I have R50 000 for shopping, I've been saving. I did some private jobs and saved money, and today, I feel like spoiling myself, and my sisters,"- me

Now I'm forced to lie because I don't know what the heck her problem is.

Tshedi is already rushing us to go to the shop.

"Ledi, your boyfriend is rich, not you, you can't be spending money carelessly just because you are taken care of now. What if the relationship doesn't work out....?"

"The relationship is going to work out Omphi whether the guy is rich or not, they love each other and that's it. And Ledi makes her own money, she doesn't need a man to do that for her,"-Tshedi.

She's getting annoyed by all the negativity. I am too.

I see the first pair I like the moment we walk in. Tshedi, she likes all of them. I don't care what Omphi wants.

"Are you sure about this?"-Tshedi asks when we are alone.

"Yep,"

She looks at me suspiciously.

"Okay, okay....Chawe gave me the money. I didn't ask him for it, he just put it in my account and said I must go buy a life. I think he gave it to me because you guys are here and he wants us to spend it..."

"R50 000? Just like that? That's Sello's monthly earnings," she says.

Okay, I didn't need to know that. The guy is a successful business consultant, I thought he made more.

I don't like him but I do respect his business skills, he pays himself a salary every month, he doesn't go out and spend money he should be using to sustain his business, I guess that's why he's doing so well.

And also, he takes care of his family financially. His children go to the best schools and my sister gets everything she wants, although she has a good job too.

"Yeah, it's like five-cents to him. The guy has so much money it's scary sometimes. Normally I'd say no but he gets offended every time I do,"- me I don't want to appear as a gold-digger. But last night he said he was going to "wife my crazy ass" so maybe I should start getting used to it.

"And you say no because? The guy is chowing your vagina and every time he does it loses some value. I want those shoes and that bag...."she says. She's back! I love her so much!

"Do you even need that stuff?"-Omphi says when Tshedi buys a travel bag.

She's really spoiling this trip.  
 Anywho, we decide to move along to Sandton City because there aren't enough shops here.  
 "Looks like I've been dumped"-SMS from Qhawe.  
 Ignore.  
 "I miss you"- another one  
 Ignore.  
 Phone.  
 Ignore.  
 "Ledi, it's Chawe,"-Tshedi  
 This is just wrong, totally wrong, it's stalking actually.  
 "Hi,"-me  
 "Hi, I was about to hang myself,"-him  
 "Wow, who stopped you?"-me  
 "The thought of never shagging you again,"-him  
 Oh crap! I'm laughing..... "What are you up to?"-him  
 "I'm buying myself a life,"-me  
 "Really? You are using the money?"  
 "Yes, are you happy now?"-me  
 "I'm happy, and you deserve all this after last night, did you bring those handcuffs.....?  
 Oh my God!  
 "Bye Chawe, I'll call you later,"  
 What is wrong with him? I know he's still with Mqhele wherever he is. Does he want his family to think I'm a retired stripper or something? "Ledi, where did he get my numbers?"-Tshedi.  
 I wish I knew.  
 "I wish I knew. I don't know where he got MY numbers or my name and where I work and stay. I mean, he showed up at that wedding in the village and from there drove me straight home.....I don't ask anymore," -me  
 "Sounds a little creepy don't you think?"-  
 Omphi I cannot for the life of me!  
 I have more stuff that I want to buy, for the house, or "our house" as he always calls it.  
 I noticed he keeps the pasta in packets so I'm going to buy those silver containers. I need about three glass-jars too, those fancy towel holders for the bathrooms and some ice buckets. Oh and door-mats too.  
 Omphi is...still Omphi but she couldn't resist buying expensive make-up with the money she said I was using carelessly.  
 "Pots? You're buying pots with my boyfriend's money?"-Tshedi though!



“They’re nice, and besides, he owes me for training you to become the woman that you are,”

Yeah right!

Omphi is on the phone.

“By the way, I told Sello about your new boyfriend, guess what happened?” Urgh I don’t think they’re going to click at all. “He’s pestering me to introduce them,” she says.

I can’t say I’m surprised. It must be about business more than anything.

“Where is he by the way?”-me

“Where he always is when he’s not home with me,”

Oh shit! Nothing breaks my heart more than this. That woman has been around for years now.

“But Tshedi, it looks like you have just accepted it, that’s not good,”-me She doesn’t look bothered at all.

“Ledi, you will learn when you are older that some battles are not worth fighting. He made his choice that he wants to have an official mistress, but he gets suicidal when I suggest we divorce so he can go and be with her. He claims he loves me and wants to stay with me, but also, he can’t stay away from her. I tried everything, everything I could Ledi. So, eventually I decided that I’m going to live my life the way I want to, I’m just going to let him be and I’m going to sacrifice my happiness just to make sure that my children see their father before they go to sleep and when they wake up in the morning. You may not understand it but I know what I’m doing. I’m not saying it’s going to be like this forever, one day I will be strong enough to go where my heart wants to be,”

I guess that’s Maradona’s arms.

“And Maradona the bus driver? What the heck Tshedi?”

“The bus driver who loves me. He always has, from when we were teenagers,” she says.

I don’t get it.

“And besides, he’ll get his degree soon,” she says.

What???

“Studying where? When? How?”

She rolls her eyes.

“Studying at Unisa, with Sello’s money,” she says and picks a magazine rack. What the fuck??

“I like this, I think it will look nice in my lounge. Come one, let’s go pay,” she says and leaves me standing there.

Does she understand what she’s just told me? This woman! Her husband is a chief in waiting and she’s busy investing in another man? Does she even realise how dangerous this is?

I had to go inside the bank to increase my swiping limit. Tshedi bought more

stuff than all of us. I bought Qhawe two perfumes too, I hope he likes them. “I met the family last night, all of them,” I say as we finally drive back to Alberton.

I can’t believe I hadn’t told them that.

I wish Omphi would drop us off and leave. She’s made this trip very awkward. “Things are getting serious aren’t they?”-Omphi I nod.

“What do you think dad is going to say?”- her again.

Again, she has no clue what’s been happening.

And I won’t tell her, I’ve had enough judgment for one day.

“They’re nice people, very humble,”-me

“I can tell by the way Chawe is,”-Tshedi

I’m not sure about Qhawe being humble, he has his “rich guy” moments. The house is dark, which means he’s still wherever he is with his twin. He didn’t stalk me much today. I assume he didn’t want my sisters to think he is a possessive psycho, which he is.

I brought food too, in case he comes home hungry.

Tshedi is still going on about how big and nice the house is.

“Guys, before you go I have something to tell you,”-me

I’ve been battling the thoughts of whether I should tell them or not all day.

I’m not sure how I feel about the subject myself.

And why do they look like they’re expecting the worst?

I tell them to sit in the lounge. This might just spoil the mood.

“Chawe....I told Chawe about mom and what happened,”-me

Silence.

“His parents died when he was ten so he kind of relates to our story,”

Tshedi nods. Omphi is blank.

“Long story short, he did what I asked him not to do. He made calls,”

They look confused.

Sigh.

“He tried to find her, and he made some progress.....”

“What???”-Omphi

“Omphi sit down!”-Tshedi.

“No Tshedi! Who gave him the right to do that? Who does he think he is? If we wanted her back in our lives we would have looked for her.....!”- Omphi

What is she shouting for?

“He didn’t find her, well, he can find her if I give him the go ahead but he said it was up to me,” -me

“Up to you? Up to you Ledi? If he brings that woman back in your life he’s bringing her back into our lives too! Back into ntate’s life after she left him with four children!!! And you see nothing wrong with that....?”

“He was just trying to help.....”-me

“Help who? Just because he has money he thinks he can come here and fix our family? What does he know about us? You sleep with him for two months and he thinks this is Khumbulekhaya.....”

“Omphi!”-Tshedi

She’s still standing and shouting!

“No Tshedi! I will not allow this. Naledi I don’t want that woman back in my life!”

“She’s still our mother,”-Tshedi

“Our mother? She got to be your mother, she got to be Lesedi’s mother, and when the time came for her to be my mother, she had Naledi, and then she left. So there I was, two years old and somewhere in-between my two older sisters and baby Naledi who needed to be taken care of. Who was taking care of me?”

She must not blame us for our mother’s sins!

“Omphi....”

“No Tshedi! Nobody has ever cared about me! It was always about her! Always about Naledi and what she needed and how everybody needed to pay attention to her and baby her like the world revolved around her! No wonder she ended up with a man who beat her.....”

What??

“Omphi! I’ve had with you. I’m not going to sit here and listen to you blame me for your problems. You’ve always been mean and cold and trouble so you can’t go around blaming people for not being there for you.....” She’s standing in-front of me.

“What? You’re judging me? So now that you’re sleeping with some rich idiot you think you’re better than me? He’s going to fuck you and leave you like every other man.....”

“No! Ledi!”-Tshedi shouts and stands up.

Omphi is still standing in front of me with her hand on her cheek. I didn’t mean to slap her but she had it coming!

“You think you’re going to bring home that uneducated taxi owner who probably stole and killed his way to the top to make his money? Dad will never allow that.....”

The bitch doesn’t know me!

“Ledi! Ledi!”-Tshedi is screaming and trying to pull me away. Omphi has messed with me for the last time! The last time! The bitch is pulling my hair and ripping my dress! The arms pulling me are bigger and stronger now!!

“Naledi!!”

He pulls me once and I can’t move!

He’s holding me tight from the back!

Oh my God!!

Tshedi is holding Omphi from behind! She's still screaming and cursing!

"What is going on?"-Qhawe

Silence...

Oh my God!!

"Naledi!" he says.

I can't stop myself from crying. It's anger more than anything.

Nobody speaks. Qhawe's eyes are on me and I have no idea what to say to him. I have to get out of here!

What did I just make him witness? How did that happen? How did I not see him?

I hear a car start. It must be them leaving.

How am I even going to explain this to Qhawe? In his house?

"Naledi?"

He walks in. I should have run to the spare bedroom, I don't deserve to be here.

"Are you okay?" he asks.

I don't answer.

I don't know what to say. I don't know if I'm okay.

"What's going on Naledi? What was that?" he asks.

That was family.

"Are they gone?"-me

"Yes, but Tshedi is downstairs, she left her here,"

I was hoping they both left. I want to sleep and forget all about that. I just want a minute, a minute of escape.

"I'm going to tell her to take my car and go," me

He doesn't think that's a good idea, but he follows me out of the bedroom anyway.

I don't know whether I should be embarrassed or angry or sad about all this.

Imagine Qhawe having to witness that, all the noise and chaos in his house!

Tshedi is sitting on the couch. The same one that was a boxing ring just minutes ago.

"Are you okay?" that's the first thing she asks.

I'm okay. I really am. I'm calm now.

"You can use my car....."

"No you can stay here Tshedi, it's fine,"-

Qhawe I'm not sure.

"It's fine Chawe, you're here with Ledi so she'll be fine, someone has to be with Omphi," she says.

Yes she's right.

"Okay, use the GPS so you don't get lost," he says handing her car keys.

She leaves.

Now I'm left alone with him.

This is going to be the worst night of my life.

“Are you hungry?”-me

He’s shocked by my question.

He doesn’t answer.

“I bought you perfume,” I say looking at the shopping bags still sitting on the dining room table.

“Naledi, talk to me,” he says

I’m going to start crying again.

I don’t want to talk to him about this. I don’t want him to know the hidden imperfections of my family. It’s too personal.

“I brought you take-aways.....your favourite,”

He pulls me by my arm before I reach the kitchen.

“I don’t want food, I want to know what’s going on,” he says.

He’s that “him” again. That firm and commanding him.

“Come on, let’s sit,” he says pulling me to the lounge.

I don’t want to talk about it.

“Chawe will you be okay with it if I said I didn’t want to talk about this?” -me

I really don’t want to.

“No,” he says.

He can’t do this.

“Why? It’s how I feel,”-me

“Because we are in a relationship, and it’s a permanent one. So if something happens we talk about it. If you are not okay, I’m not okay, and I’m not going to lie next to you in bed and listen to you cry all night,” he says.

He clearly doesn’t understand how bad things are. I’ve never gotten physical with any of my sisters before. Yes, we have our fights as a family, that’s why Lesedi is estranged but it has never gotten this far. Omphi has always been mean to everyone but nobody has ever hit her. And, she’s older than me, I shouldn’t have done that. What will ntate say?

“I’m going to sit here and wait until you’re ready to talk,” he says.

I know him, he won’t let it go.

I stand up.

“I’m going to get something to drink,” I say when he stands with me.

There are always bottles of water in the fridge. I don’t think he drinks tap water at all.

I come back and sit next to him. But he stands up and sits on the coffee-table, facing me.

Where did it start? Let me see.....

I’m just going to start where there was calm before the storm.....

“I told them about the possibility of finding our mother.....”

He doesn’t get me.

“I told them about you asking around and that there is a possibility that you

might find her.....”

He drops his eyes.

I hope he doesn't start thinking all this was his fault, because it's far deeper than that.

“And then Omphi started going crazy, saying she doesn't want her in her life and that you had no right to interfere and that nobody has ever cared about her or taken care of her it was always about me.....” I stop.

The look on his face is.....I think he's feeling a bit awkward. I think he doesn't want to know the details of my family drama now.

“So she doesn't want to see her mother again?” he asks.

“I also don't want to see her again. Our lives are fine, her coming back will just take us back....”

“Naledi, what I saw when I walked in here did not say your lives are fine. I could hear noise from the driveway...” Eish...

“That was not us at all Chawe, that's not who we are. I don't know what happened but I just lost it. Omphi had been picking on me all day and I just....I got pushed to the limit,”

He's looking at me like he's trying to read my thoughts.

“What pushed you to the limit?”-him

“The things she said,”-me

“What did she say?”-him

“She said something about my ex-boyfriend. She said no wonder I ended up with a man who beat me,”

He closes his eyes as I say this, like he's in pain.

“Is that what the fight was about? Is that when things started getting physical....?” he asks.

I open my mouth but.....

I close it.

I'm not going to tell him what she said about him, I can't.

“To be honest, I'm not sure when it started. Voices got high and it just turned chaotic...”- I stop.

Whew! I don't know how the fuck I'm going to fix this.

“I'm not like that Chawe. I swear that wasn't me. And I'm sorry you had to see that. I didn't mean to disrespect your house like that.....” He's quiet. Why is he so quiet?

“I didn't like what I saw Naledi,” he says.

Eish....

“You don't solve problems with violence. Trust me, I know what I'm talking about, especially not with your siblings,” he says “I know baby I'm sorry,”

I am so ashamed of myself right now.

“Are you going to make things right with your sister?”-him  
I frown.

It’s a bit too early to suggest that, I need to sleep on it.

“You have to,” he says.

Qhawe doesn’t know how hectic Omphi is, she’ll probably spit on my face when I try to apologise. And she’s the one who should apologise to me for saying all those hurtful things.

“I need to cool off, I’m sure we will talk eventually,”-me  
I’m done with this. I want to stop talking now. “So she said nobody cares about her?”-him

I nod.

“Why?”

“She said everyone cared about me because I was the baby of the family and that nobody paid attention to her and a whole lot of other things. And the thing is I don’t remember her ever caring about me, she doesn’t care about anyone but herself.....”

He clears his throat.

“So you’ve never been close?”-  
him I don’t think so.

“Not as close as I am to Tshedi. I can actually count the times where Omphi and I did stuff together when we were younger,”-me

He nods.

“Okay, count them,” he says.

Let me see.....

“She used to pleat my hair when I was in primary school, every weekend we would sit on the veranda and she would pleat it because naturally it’s very coarse so the teachers used to shout at me all the time when it locked and looked untidy,”

He nods.

“When I started high school, she was two classes ahead of me, I used to spend breaks and lunches with her and her friends. She never allowed me to make my own friends, I was always forced to be with her and to follow her around, all the time,”

He raises his eyebrows.

“Why do you think she did that?”-him

“I don’t know, because she wanted to control me, like she still does now,”-me  
He narrows his eyes.

“You know, me and my brothers were like that too. Nkosana always made sure we were where he could see us,”

Okay.

“He did that so everyone would know that we were his brothers and they couldn’t bully us,” he says.

I was bullied at primary school after Omphi left but I was never bullied in high school.

“Tell me more,” -him

“She left to go to university later and then she started being really wild. She gave my dad a hard time. She came back home only in June and December. We heard stories about her from people studying with her in Pretoria,”

That was a difficult time for my dad. I think that’s when he really realised the difficulty of being a man trying to raise four women.

“But, she came back for my matric dance. She brought me a nice dress, the one my dad had bought me looked like a nun’s costume. Dad dropped me off at the venue, minutes later Omphi appeared and pulled me to the ladies room, made me take off that hideous dress and put on the one she had brought. She tied my braids neatly and made me wear earrings. I looked really good, I felt really good,”

That story. I still laugh when I think about what a nerd I was in high school.

“You must show me pictures of that matric dance,” he says with a slight smile on his face.

I’m not smiling, I’m not there yet.

“Was that where it ended?” -him

“I...I passed matric, with flying colours too, but I had not applied for a bursary because I knew my dad could afford to take me to university. I went to Rhodes and enrolled for a Science Degree. The modules included Entomology, Microbiology, Zoology.....”

“What is that?” he asks like I just swore at him.

“I have no idea, all I know is I failed and had to come back to Mafikeng to work at Wimpy because my dad said he wasn’t going to pay my fees any more, that was my punishment for failing dismally for the first time in my life,” He looks at me, and then laughs.

“You’re laughing at me Chawe? I mean, I had no idea what I was doing there, I was totally lost. The only reason I was accepted to that course was because I had gotten six As and that included in Maths and Physics,” He’s still laughing. Okay let me just wait for him to finish.

“Continue,” he says when he’s done being an idiot.

“At Wimpy I met.....” I stop.

I should skip this part, he won’t like it.

“You met who? Your ex?” he asks.

Yah no that look on his face says I should have skipped this part.

“Yes, he was still a good person then.....” This is rather awkward.

“Omphi never liked him, from the beginning she was just hostile towards him. She could drive then so she would come to fetch me every night after I finished my shift so I wouldn’t end up lying to dad about not having transport and end



up sleeping at the ex's place,"

She's always been hell-bent on controlling my life.

"Oh and she went shopping with me before I left for Cuba. She researched the country on the internet and gave me a piece of paper with a list of things I shouldn't do when I got there if I didn't want to end up in jail," "Did the list help?"-he asks.

"Yes it did actually, trust me, that country is weird,"

He smiles slightly, and then gets serious again.

"Naledi, I'm listening to you.....and I'm trying to find that place where Omphi only cares about herself. But I can't," he says.

What does he mean?

"All I'm seeing is a sister who has always had your back. She pleated your hair because she didn't want you looking like a raccoon and other kids laughing at you. She hoarded you in high school because she didn't want you to be bullied. She made you look good for your matric dance so you'd have great memories about your teenage years and she took her time picking you up from work so some scum-bag wouldn't take advantage of you and make you pregnant before you even turned 20," he says.

Huh? No, he doesn't know Omphi.

"Listen to me, hate anyone but not your siblings. You have your father now, he is the glue that is sticking all of you together now but once he dies, all you're going to have are your siblings, and those are the people who will always have your back, no matter what," he says.

I get what he's saying. I may have hit Omphi tonight but I'll never let anyone touch her, never. But also, Qhawe doesn't know that it's not that easy, the person responsible for this is somewhere in this world and we don't want to meet or know her.

"I'm going to try,"-me

I'm tired of talking about this.

"Just so we're clear.....I'm not going to be a victim of domestic violence am I? Because you have some serious punches Dr Montsho I almost....."

"Chawe!!"

I can't believe I'm laughing at his crazy.....

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"I'll put them here, next to the bread bin," "Do you like them there?" he asks.

"Yes I think they look nice here,"

"Okay," he says.

Now for these glass jars. I've filled one with sweets, the other with dried fruit and the last one with biscuits.

“They bring colour,” he says.

They do.

“I’ll put them.....here,” I say placing all three of them against the wall where the kitchen counter starts.

He likes them, I can tell.

I’ve already placed the bathroom stuff and given him his perfume, which he loved and appreciated.

We went to bed last night without unpacking the shopping. We’re only doing it now in the morning, in pyjamas while we wait for breakfast to be delivered.

I must start doing the breakfast in bed thing. I know he’ll appreciate it. He

likes it when I treat him like a man. You should have seen his face when I

showed him the things I bought for “our house”. Forget that I used his money.

“The clothes are nice,” he says.

It’s dresses mostly.

“So you didn’t buy any lace things with sexy socks.....?”

He’s starting isn’t he?

“That Mageba, is reserved for special occasions,” I say rubbing his back.

He smiles. He must be surprised by the “Mageba” situation. I Googled it.

“How about we make this moment a special occasion?” he says pushing me against the wall.

The doorbell.

It must be breakfast.

It’s not.

“Hi,”-Tshedi is the first to speak.

Omphi walks in with her hands folded across her chest.

Why is she here?

Awkward.

Really really awkward.

Qhawe looks at me. I have no idea what to do next. And how did they come inside the gate without calling? Oh, Tshedi had Qhawe’s car, the gate remote must have been in it.

“I’m going to give you ladies some privacy,” he says raising his eyebrows at me.

I know it’s not negotiable.

Just as he is halfway through the stairs, Omphi speaks.

“Can you really find her Qhawe?”

Whoah!

And where did she learn to pronounce “Qha”?

He turns around.

“Can you?” she asks again.

She doesn't seem like herself at all. She seems, I don't know, emotionally drained.

“I can make a phone call. But it has to be Naledi's call, I won't do it unless she wants me to,” he says and continues walking.

Now it's just the three of us. Where do we even begin?

I wish Lesedi was here, she'd definitely know how to deal with this.

Breakfast is here.

“Please set it up outside,” I say to the two guys wearing chef uniform.

It's different guys every time but they all come from the same place. I don't even know where that place is, I just know their food is divine.

I don't want to go near Omphi and she doesn't want to come near me. We are avoiding eye-contact at all cost. I don't know how she feels right now.

Tshedi is also not her usual crazy self. I'm surprised she hasn't sat us down and shouted at us like we're kids.

“Let's go outside,” I say when the chef guys leave.

It's a buffet breakfast, I'm used to it now. In the many times that we've had breakfast like this, when we're done eating, Qhawe instructs me to go inside the house, and then calls the construction workers to come and eat. He continues eating with them too so it doesn't feel like we're giving them leftovers.

There are always construction workers here in this estate. They've just started building another house there across the lake. “Ledi,” -Tshedi says.

Why is she looking at me like that? What have I done now?

“You're just going to sit here and eat?”

What??

I shrug. I'm lost.

“Dish up on a plate and take food to him upstairs. Use a tray and cover the plate,” she says.

Oh! I was just gonna sit here and.....

I do as she says.

It looks like he was expecting me when I walk in with a tray.

He also seems to be expecting me to tell him something, I don't know what.

“I won't do it unless you want me to,” he says.

Oh! That.

“We haven't started talking,” -me

He nods.

“Naledi...” he says just as I'm about to walk out the door.

I turn around.

“I love you,” he says and picks up a fork.

“I love you too Chawe,” I say and walk out.

These two are already eating. The elephant in the room is still standing tall. I dish up and go to sit next to Tshedi.

It's Sunday, I have to go back to Kimberley later today. Tshedi has to go back to Bloemfontein. Life has to continue after this. "Omphi, I'm sorry," I say. I'm thinking out loud again.

She looks at me briefly and continues eating.

"I shouldn't have gotten violent, it's just that the things you said...."

"It's fine Naledi," she says.

I have a feeling that is all she's going to say. She won't apologise for the hurtful things she said to me and for insulting my boyfriend.

"Ledi when you say Chawe made some progress....how far is that progress," Tshedi.

"He found her last address and her last place of work,"-me

"Where?"

"I don't know, I didn't ask. I didn't want to know,"-me

I think more than anything, it is fear that makes us not want to take the risk. She could bring us more problems than we already have.

"I think that if we decide that we want to find her, we must tell ntate first.

I don't want him to think we went behind his back,"- Omphi. Wow. It speaks.

She seems to have had a change of heart.

"But it's your decision Ledi,"-Omphi.

There seems to be more to that statement than meets the eye.

"We have to speak to Lesedi as well," -Tshedi.

It's funny how Qhawe being in our lives, for just two months, has forced us to confront the part of our lives we've always pretended doesn't exist. We've never sat like this and talked about our mother. Everyone suffered in silence, alone. I think much of it was to protect ntate's feelings. We don't want him to think there is a void, not after he tried so hard to fill it.

"I don't think ntate will be happy that Chawe is involved in this, they've already had an interesting introduction,"-me Omphi laughs.

"Tshedi told me about that last night,"

I guess then that they talked, like we did with Qhawe.

Oh, he's here.

He smiles briefly. He's probably glad he doesn't have to break off another fist fight.

"Baby, I'm going to eat skop with the guys, I'll be back in two hours or so. You ladies feel at home," he says.

Skop? Didn't he just have breakfast?

"By the way, Hlomu and Mqhele are coming over tonight, I think Nqoba too, I'm not sure yet," he says and leaves.

“Skop??”-Tshedi.

“Yes, once a taxi driver, always a taxi driver,” -  
me We all laugh.

“Tonight? Don’t you have to work  
tomorrow?” Yes, That.

“I do. I know I’ll make it to work. He always makes a plan. Chances are I’ll  
be flown to Kimberley early in the morning,”-me

About the coming visitors, what the heck am I supposed to do now?

“Ledi, go get ready, we’re going,”-Tshedi. Going where?

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Why do I have to push the trolley?

“No, not lettuce, salad leaves,”-Tshedi.

I hope she’s going to cook all this stuff because some of these things  
she’s throwing in the trolley I have never seen before in my life.

I also don’t understand why we had to come all the way to Centurion,  
surely there’s a Foodlovers Market somewhere near Alberton. “Do they eat  
pork?”-she asks.

“Yes,”

“Okay, was just checking, they could be members of the Shembe church  
you know,”

“Tshedi not all Zulu people go to the Shembe church, just like not all people  
from Limpopo go to ZCC,”- Omphi.

Thank you sister for that lesson in generalization.

The number of salads she plans to make is frustrating. She claims I have to  
cook a feast so that I can impress. I don’t know, maybe she’s right, she’s been  
dealing with in-laws for years.

“Is this all?” -me

“Yes,”-she says.

We couldn’t finish the “buy a life” allowance yesterday, so it’s coming in handy  
now.

“Can we close the top? It’s actually cold...”

“Ledi don’t mess with me please, not today. You should have worn a trench  
coat if you were cold. I’m not driving a Maserati with the top closed. What if I  
bump into someone I went to school with? They have to see this,”-Tshedi.

The struggle was not for this. This is not what we voted for in 1994. It seems  
I’m not needed here because, apparently, I can’t cook.

So I sit and watch.

There’s even dessert!

It’s been four hours and Qhawe is still not back. He sent an SMS saying he was  
at Hlomu’s house, something about having not seen the kids in a while.

Omphi is cooking.....uphuthu???

Huh?

“I once dated a Zulu man, I had to cook for him every night and the fool wasn’t even planning on making me his wife. The next thing I heard he had paid lobola for some woman back in his Durban township,” she says. Silence.

“I should have poisoned his ass,” she says laughing.

We can also laugh now.

There really is a feast on the kitchen counter when they’re done. Tshedi is really good at this. She’s like a career wife. “How is Hlomu?”-Omphi

That’s a bit random.

“She’s cool I think, I’ve only met her once, on Friday,”-

me “She’s my favourite Zulu wife,” she says.

They have favourites? Am I the only one in this world that didn’t know these people at all?

“We should go to her restaurant one of these days, they have very nice food,” She has a restaurant?

Qhawe did say they made their own money.

Tshedi mentions that it’s getting late and she still has to drive to Bloemfontein. I’m going to miss her, a lot.

I can’t say the same about Omphi but that trip to Foodlovers and this coking session we’ve just had was something to write home about. The issue of finding my mother is not raised until they leave.

Now I have to freshen up and look good for my second encounter with the Zulus. It’s the bun again, I really have to put a weave on this head. I feel the heavy presence and turn around.

Really?

I turn the water off.

“Stick to your day job,” he says.

Ghra! I don’t know how long he’s been standing here.

“I’m sure I sing far better than you. How long have you been here?”

I step out of the shower.

“Long enough to damage my eardrums,” He just never stops.

“They’re downstairs, I see you cooked,” he says.

Well...

“Yes, Tshedi and Omphi helped me cook,” He smiles.

“See, that is sisterhood,”

I’m not sure if that’s a compliment or a sarcastic comment.

He leaves me alone finally.  
I'm going to wear one of the dresses I bought yesterday. I could wear pants but Tshedi told me wearing pants when your boyfriend's family is around is disrespectful.  
So here I am.  
"Hello pretty girl," she shouts as I walk down the stairs.  
She is soooooo pretty with that smile of hers.  
I smile back.  
She's wearing a dress too. It's a bit short but it's a dress. Maybe Tshedi was right after all.  
"Hi Hlomu,"-me  
I'm nervous all over again.  
Mqhele is outside, smoking. Qhawe is with him.  
"Did you have a great day? You look good. I like your dress," she says.  
Okay. I like her dress too. And her, I think she's my favourite Zulu wife too.  
They walk in.  
"MaMontsho," -Mqhele  
Is he really going to call me that all the time?  
I smile and say hello.  
And now I'm just standing here because I don't know what to do next.  
"Did you tell the security guard we broke into your house? He refused to let us in at first,"  
Oh, it's the double trouble!  
They don't knock. They don't greet. They walk in already talking.  
"Who invited you?"-Mqhele.  
"Is this your house?"-one of them.  
"Hello mami," they both say at once.  
And then they look at me.  
"Hi," I say.  
"Hello. How's your father?"-one of them asks.  
I'm trying to hold back a smile.  
"He's fine, he hasn't beaten anyone up lately,"-  
me They all laugh.  
They'll never let this go.  
This is where I should tell them to sit down and serve them food.  
"I'll help you with that,"-Hlomu  
She knows where everything is.  
Hmmmmmmm.  
"Wow this is lovely," she says.  
I smile and nod, simply because I don't know what it is and how it's made, but it looks like a pot-pie, and it smells nice.  
"You should come with me to the spa tomorrow, it's really nice," she says.

Tomorrow is Monday. People go to spas on Monday?

“I’m going to work,”-me

She smiles and rolls her eyes.

“I forgot. But you should definitely come, it’s like a “little Zulu sanctuary”, they bought it for us as a present,” she says, picks a serving bowl and walks to the table.

A spa as a present? Where the fuck am I?

I sit next to Qhawe. I can feel all their eyes on me and I’m trying very hard to relax.

The two monkeys who broke in here and drank my man’s whiskey are eating like they’re street kids sharing bread. Why don’t they have wives anyway?

Qhawe holds my hand under the table. I think it’s a sign that he is impressed. The problem is, I think this impressing business is hard work, I’m not gonna be cooking dinners and wearing dresses all the time.

But Tshedi says I have to do my part, go the extra mile to show him that I care and want to make him happy.

To be honest, Qhawe deserves all that, he goes the extra mile to make me happy too.

I love him.

The conversation gets idiotic now and again, no surprises there, boys will always be boys.

Hlomu and I keep stealing looks.

“Naledi, come on, let’s take a walk outside,” -Hlomu

Silence.

Qhawe looks at me and nods.

I’m suddenly nervous. But she’s so warm and accommodating, I want to take the walk with her.

They watch us in silence as we walk out the sliding door.

She puts her arm around my elbow.

She smells really nice.

“That was some really good food,” she says.

I must learn to cook fancy food. Fast.

“I try,” I smile and say.

I’ve just lied.

Silence.

“So, how is he?” she asks.

There’s some intensity in her voice now.

I keep quiet.

She looks at me.

“You’re doing well with him. I mean, the past four years have been hell. We lost him, totally lost him. It was like he wasn’t alive anymore,” Oh.



“And then boom! He starts smiling to himself and laughing more and....I don’t know....he just came alive. I knew it had to be something great,” she says. I’m blushing, did I really do that for him?

“He’s.....great. At first he was a bit intense, very controlling and too protective. He even tried to move me to another house, a mansion because he believed I wasn’t safe in my house. I didn’t understand until he told me about what happened to Oleta,”-me

She raises her eyebrows.

“He told you about Oleta?”

“Yes, he did,”-me

“I see the picture has been replaced,” she says smiling.

I’m happy about that too. But we still haven’t talked about it.

“You have to be patient with him Naledi. They can be overwhelming sometimes but we’ve all learned to live with them and their extravagant gifts and stalking and all the madness you’re going to see along the way...”

Trust me I’ve seen enough.

“I know exactly what you’re talking about. But I love him, I love him so much Hlomu,”

“And he loves you. I’ve seen the way he looks at you. He smiles and blushes every time your name is mentioned. You should see him, he’s like a little boy...” she says and laughs.

I did say she was warm.

“Oh and by the way, spend his money. It makes them happy,” she says.

I laugh thinking about that R50 000 I’m still blowing.

But she’s not smiling now.

“You’re going to stick around right? When the going gets tough, you’re going to be here right?” she asks.

That question, it keeps coming up.

“I will,” I say.

“Good, because sometimes it gets really tough and we have to step up, they’d crumble and fall without us, they know that. That’s why they’ll do anything to keep us happy,” she says.

I’m a bit scared now, it sounds like life here is not so rosy after all.

“He said he wanted loyalty, how do I know if I’m loyal Hlomu? I try but.....”

“Don’t worry about that, you proved your loyalty a long time ago,” she says But how? When?

I give her an inquiring look.

“The day you walked out of your father’s house with him. That was loyalty....” What?

That is what that was about?

“No no no it wasn’t planned. That was just him being impulsive. You know, he’s not usually like that, he’s the proper type, it’s just that you...you drive him crazy and I think it’s working well for him,” she says.

I’m still stuck on that loyalty thing. It wasn’t planned on my side too. Does this mean I love him that much? So much that I’d choose him over anything?

“He is funny and crazy, I like him like that,”-me

This conversation is fun. I’m talking about Qhawe with someone who really knows him.

“Hlomu, why were you crying when I gave him the present? On Friday night,”-me

There’s a slight smile on her face.

“Because he was happy. I’ve been with them for almost 14 years, we’ve had ups and downs, some we thought we’d never get through but we did,” she says.

Statements like this scare me, a lot.

“You know, I knew Oleta. She came when nobody expected her, just like you. She was lovely and she was a good person, and when she died.....” she stops.

“I think that wherever she is, she’s happy that he found you,” she says.

I don’t believe in ghosts but I think Oleta is a good one.

“So...” she says holding my arm tighter.

“We must go on a girls’ night out, all five of us. And you must meet the kids, they’re all bugs like their fathers,”

LOL is that what she calls the eyes?

“They have double-lenses,” -me

She laughs out loud.

“How long do you plan on staying in Kimberley?”

“A few more years I think, I like my job,” I say.

That look she’s giving me is suspicious.

“Mmmmmmmmm,” she says. Is this a family thing?

“You know you’re in a relationship with all of them right?”

Huh?

“With the whole family actually. We’re going to call you and show up at your house and.....basically we’re going to smoulder you,” Errrrrrr

“But the important thing is, he loves you, which means you’re top priority now, which means you just have to make one phone-call for everybody to jump. It also means there are going to be some sacrifices on your side if you want this to work...”

Here we go again.

“What kind of sacrifices Hlomu?”

“Sacrifices that one makes when they love a person and want to build a life with them. Don’t worry, I trust you. Qhawe trusts you. They know how to spot

the ones who have good intentions.....”

Didn't his brother almost get killed by the other brother's girlfriend recently? I smile and say nothing.

“My sister says you're her favourite Zulu wife,”

Did I just say that out loud? She smiles and shakes her head.

“That's all we are to people, the Zulu wives. They think we shop and do our hair and nails for a living. Some think we are with these men for their money. But they don't know us. Our family is very closed Naledi, it's to protect our kids. Things are said about us sometimes, hurtful things but we've learned to live with it,” she says and turns to look at me.

“You're about to find out. As soon as you appear out there, floodgates will open and you will be the talk of the town. To think that we got famous because I was hijacked...”

“Hijacked?”

“Yes, a long time ago. It's a long story,” she says.

It doesn't look like Google has helped me much.

“But, were you hurt? Who hijacked you? Were they arrested?”

“No, I wasn't hurt. I was highly pregnant but luckily the twins survived. The people who hijacked me.....I never heard anything about them after their first court appearance. They probably killed them all.....”

Whoah!!! Is she serious?

“Come on we have to go back inside before they start thinking we've left them,” she says.

LOL, are they all that paranoid?

She stops just before we enter.

“Okay, follow my lead. Let's pretend we're angry and we're not talking to each other, like something happened between us out here,” Why?

“Trust me,” she says.

Okay.

She walks in.

Qhawe's eyes are the first to rise.

He looks at me, and then her, and then me.....

The look on his face! It's like he's facing death.

I walk to sit next to him. Hlomu sits next to Mqhele.

The atmosphere here!

Hlomu and I are not looking at each other at all but I know we both look very angry.

No-one has spoken since we came in but they all look very worried.

I swear I can hear Qhawe breathing fast next to me.

“We need your credit cards, we're going for lunch in Cape Town on Saturday,”

Hlomu

They all have “huh?” looks on their faces.

“And we’re going to go shopping while at it, for a holiday beach house,” -  
me Confusion...confusion...

Hlomu raises her hand, I raise mine. We do a “hi-5”. And then we laugh.

“Fuck!” - Qhawe says next to me. He has his face in his hands.

We’re still laughing.

The others laugh too. Mqhele is tickling Hlomu. They’re like kids.

“I need a beer. No, actually I’m going to have whiskey, skoen,” - Qhawe says as  
he stands up and walks somewhere.

That was fun.

I’ve never seen him squirm like that before.

But wait, does this mean Hlomu’s approval is THAT important?

# Naledi...His Love

## Chapter Ten

I was born on the same month as Mqhele. He's a Leo too, not that he knows what that is.

But I'm a Virgo, I was born on the last week of August. Hlomu is a Virgo too, at least she knows what that is.

We went to Mbuba for the past two weekends. It wasn't negotiable, I was just told to pack more dresses because we are "going home".

These women, all of them, they become totally different people when they're there. No glam, no diva-ness, nothing. They become wives, rural wives.

It was Zandile and Nkosana's membeso. Although I didn't understand it much, it was a beautiful ceremony, except for the creepy old man who kept looking at me like I was meat.

There was a time where he touched my bum when I walked past him. I was so grossed I almost cried. I also had to serve him food and he ran his hand up my arm when I gave him the plate. I felt.....violated. I wanted to get out of there right at that moment.

Qhawe noticed I was upset and asked what was going on. I told him the whole story. He was angry! He wanted us to leave there and then but I told him not to cause a scene, for Zandile and Nkosana's sake.

He was still angry at night. He left me in our room and went to calm himself down somewhere I think.

I only saw him later when we were preparing for dinner and a little surprise we had planned for Zandile. He seemed to have calmed down.

The old man was Zandile's father. He died in his sleep that night and we had to go back again last weekend to bury him. That was probably my maternal ancestors bewitching his pervert ass, my mother was from Limpopo you know. And so, I turn 30 tomorrow. Qhawe arrived on Friday and I know he's up to something. He's been on the phone non-stop for the past two days. He's upstairs and I'm making him breakfast because you know, that's how I roll now.

I did what he asked me to do. I went and bought furniture for that house. But it was only three beds, couches and a fridge. I need more time. Tshedi said she was going to make time to come here and help me shop. She said I must tell him that we need half-a-million. Who needs that much for just furniture? And besides, nobody lives there so we don't have to go all out. We're staying indoors today. It's a great Saturday morning.

There's a knock on the door.

Who could that be?

Qhawe is going to freak out because he told those security guards at the gate never to let anyone in here without calling.

But whoever that is, is here now, I might as well open. "Naledi," he says pushing me aside and walking in. Someone kill me now! Please murder me! Where's my phone? Oh shit! I left it upstairs!

"You're cooking, good, because I'm hungry. You've done well with this house. The last time I was here there was no TV stand," he says making himself comfortable.

"Yes, bring me some water, I'm tired. I left home very early. It took me seven hours to get here, I'm getting really old," he says.

Everything inside me is shaking. What am I going to do about that man upstairs?

"I didn't know you were coming," I say putting a glass of water in front of him. "Why? Can't I surprise my youngest daughter on her birthday?" Lawd! I'm in shit!

"My bags are in the car, you can go get them," he says.

I'm not leaving this house!

"I'll get them later, let me make you some food," -me

"Good because I need to drink my medication after I eat, it's in the car," he

says.

What the heck am I going to do now?

I keep looking up the stairs praying that Qhawe doesn't appear, or that he's heard what's happening and jumped out the window, I'll still love him even if he has one leg.

"There you go," I say putting a plate in front of him.

Now I can run upstairs and tell Qhawe to hide while he eats.

"Baby...!"

Throw me in a crocodile-infested river now!!

He's running down the stairs!

And then he stops.....eyes all out!

Boom!!!

He turns and runs back up the stairs!

"Boy!" -my dad shouts.

He calls him a boy. Sigh.

I don't know if he should keep running or come back. But then again, where is he running to?

He comes back.

He's walking down the stairs, slowly.

He frowns at me. I shrug.

He walks down slowly until he is standing at the bottom of the stairs. He doesn't move further. He doesn't want another slap on his face. My father is sitting there eating his food.

"So you live here now?" - dad

Silence.

He raises his eyes.

"I'm talking to you,"

"No, I was just passing by so I stopped to say hello to Naledi,"-Qhawe.

He's such a bad liar.

"Are those your passing-by pyjamas?"-dad

Oh Lord save us.

He doesn't answer.

"Zulu, I see that you're still disrespecting me. You've turned my daughter into your wife just like that. She's cooking you breakfast now while you sit upstairs in pyjamas, like a boss?"

Oh dad please stop!

Qhawe shame. He looks like he's about to wet his pants.

"Are you the head of this house now? You wake up like you're in a hotel I see,"-dad.

Qhawe scratches his head.

Dad stands up.

I swear not even lightning is that quick. He's out the sliding door before I can

blink! Yeses!!!

Dad sits down and continues eating like he didn't just almost give my boyfriend a heart attack.

Qhawe wasn't even wearing shoes.

"Where are you going? Sit down!" dad orders when I walk to the sliding door.

"But ntate...."

"Sit down Naledi. You are cohabiting now? Did I raise you like that?"

Cohabiting?

"No ntate he doesn't live here,"

"Oh really? He looked really comfortable walking around here like he's the man of the house,"

Whaaat??

Why is he doing this? Now Qhawe is stuck in the balcony with just pyjamas on. He can't go anywhere, it's too high to jump to the ground. My house has a garage at the bottom, the kitchen and lounge and dining room on the first floor and bedrooms and bathrooms on the top floor. We are on the first floor, so basically, he is stuck.

"Aren't you going to have breakfast with me?"

You're so evil!!!!

"No I'm going to change into proper clothes," I say and walk up the stairs. Is he trying to ruin my life?

I look out the bedroom window, but he's not in the balcony.

What the heck?

"Psssssss,"

Huh?

Oh! There he is. How did he get there? How did he jump?

"Are you okay?" I mime. I can't risk Hendrik Verwoed downstairs hearing me.

He nods.

"Keys," he says. He had to say it three times before I understood what he was saying.

Oh, luckily they are here in the bedroom. I throw them out the window.

He blows me a kiss and runs off.

Really? He's still blowing kisses under these circumstances?

And where is he going?

Oh crap! His phone is on the charger, now I don't even know how I'm going to reach him. He's driving out the gate, but where's he going in pyjamas?

Even his wallet is here. Now I'm worried.

I hope that at least he has the spare keys for the Modder River house.

But then, what's he going to eat there? He didn't even have breakfast!

He's stranded somewhere in a car and I'm sitting here! "Hey gal,"

She always answers the phone like this.



“Hlomu,”

“Hey, what’s up?”

“It’s Chawe,”-me

I’m waiting for her to laugh at my pronunciation before I continue.

She’s not laughing.

“What happened to Qhawe?”

She sounds intense all of a sudden.

“My dad is here, he just showed up, just like that! Chawe had to run out of the house, in pyjamas and he left his phone and now I’m worried because he left his wallet too, he has no money and he has nowhere to go and.....”

“Whoah! Stop.....”

She sounds like she’s laughing.

This is serious.

“Naledi, don’t worry, he’ll be fine. I’ll speak to his brother, he’ll know what to do and where to find him. And besides, he knows some people there in Kimberley, some cops I think, so don’t worry too much.....” I feel a bit relieved, at least they’re going to do something.

“Oh and Naledi, stay with your father this time,” she says and hangs up.

What if they don’t find him? What if he’s cold somewhere with no shoes on? Okay, it’s hot today, but the thought of him wandering around Kimberley in pyjamas makes me want to cry.

Why does my dad have to be like this though?

“Naledi!”

Sigh.

“Where are my bags? You said you were going to get them, I need my medication. After that put Channel 183 on. And bring me another cushion, I want to relax. I was on the road for seven hours, seven whole hours.....” he says shaking his head and putting his feet up on my couch.

Ntate though!

I might as well give up now.

“I’ll make you tea, which one would you like?”

He raises his head, looks at me and smiles.

“Summer tea,” he says.

I smile back. I missed him. He’s determined to ruin my life and murder my boyfriend but he’s still my daddy. And he drove all the way here just to be with me on my birthday tomorrow.

Now, do I have summer tea ingredients?

Summer tea, by the way, is Rooibos with lemon and honey. Winter tea is a normal teabag with milk and sugar.

I must call Tshedi and tell her about this dilemma I’m in. And then I have to make a plan to get Qhawe’s phone and wallet to him so he can drive to Joburg because my dad, he can stay all week if he wants, he doesn’t care if I still want

him here or not.

“Sit here,” he says after I put his tea on the coffee-table.

“Tell me about those people from your hospital,”

Not again.

“Ntate I can’t talk about my patients, you know that,” -me

“Yes, you can’t talk about your patients, but they are your patients only when they are sick physically right? You have nothing to do with their craziness, which means you can talk about it. Now, tell me about that one who thought he could fly.....”

I forgot the old man is naturally sly.

Sigh.

Let me settle here as well with my cup of tea.

“He’s still trying to prove and convince everyone that he really can fly. Sometimes they have to tie him down because he’s always trying to fly out the window,”

He’s laughing. He always laughs at my patients, just like Qhawe. “It’s not funny ntate, those people are ill,” He sips his tea.

“When was the last time you spoke to Lesedi?” he asks.

It’s been a while. We don’t communicate much.

“It’s been a while but we are planning to see her soon, there’s something we need to talk about, all four of us,”

He frowns.

Shit!

“We’re planning something, a get together of some sort just so we can reconnect,” I lie.

We haven’t told him about the possibility of bringing my mother back into our lives. But also, we haven’t decided among the four of us.

“That would be a good thing. I won’t be around forever and I don’t want to leave this family in tatters,” he says.

The thought of him not being around anymore makes me cringe. I don’t know if I’d be able to survive without him.

“Where is your friend?”

What friend?

“Your friend from Limpopo, the other doctor, where is he?” Oh Tsietsi. I haven’t seen him in a while.

“He’s around, we’ve both been busy so we don’t see each other that much lately,”-me

“You’ve been busy with that big-eyed boy?” he asks Can he stop calling him a boy? Please?

Qhawe is a respected man in his 30s and my dad is.....well, he doesn’t care who he is.

“Is he treating you well?” he asks.  
I’m never comfortable with this conversation.  
“Yes ntate, he treats me very well. Please stop being mean to him,”-  
me There’s a little smile on his face.  
“Why must I stop? He disrespected me,”  
What is he? A little bully boy?  
Now I’m forced to sit here with him and watch animals running around while  
my man is a street-kid in Kimberley. I don’t know why he loves this channel so  
much.  
Knock.  
Huh?  
Do not tell me Qhawe is back! Do not! “Are  
you going to get that or should I?”-dad No!

I stand up and rush to the door. I’m sure it’s Qhawe.  
Huh?  
It’s Nkosana.  
And Nqoba, and Mqhele.  
And Hlomu?  
What are they doing in Kimberley?  
“May we come in?”-Nkosana.  
Errrrrrr....  
They walk in. I’m left standing at the door.  
Hlomu is the first to walk to my father to greet him and shake his hand.  
Oh wow! That’s a huge smile on his face.  
“Did you travel well ntate?”-she asks.  
He still has that stupid grin.  
“Yes, it took me a long time. I didn’t think I could still drive myself for such a  
long distance.....”  
Now the rest of us are just standing here while he has a conversation with  
his new found precious daughter.....  
“Nice to meet you ntate Montsho. You remind me of my father,” she says.  
“Is he an old man like me?” he asks laughing.  
Sigh.  
“No, he died a long time ago...”  
He looks sad.  
What the heck is going on here?  
His face changes when Hlomu leaves his side.  
Now shit is about to get real.  
“And you are....?” he asks looking at Nkosana.  
“I’m Mqhele, I’m not Qhawe, we just look alike,”-Mqhele jumps in and says  
Who asked him?

Nqoba gives him a look.  
“What? I don’t want him to kill me,”- he whispers.  
Dad is looking at them one-by-one....  
They shouldn’t have come here! They shouldn’t have!

Nkosana greets my father in SeTswana. He must think this is going to work, he doesn’t know this old man.

He sits next to him. Nqoba sits on the single couch and Mqhele sits on the ottoman very far from everyone.

He’s one heck of a character.

Nkosana looks at us.

“Come on, let’s go upstairs,” -Hlomu

Oh, so that look was “dismissing” us.

She closes the bedroom door.

Good, because I want her to tell me how the heck she got here so quick.

“Your dad is hectic! Did he really just show up here unannounced?” she asks.

She obviously finds all of this funny.

“Trust me it could have been worse. What are they going to say to him?”-me

“I have no idea. Try to apologise for Qhawe I think. You should have seen him running in barefoot, in pyjamas like your father was chasing him. I’m sorry but it was too funny,” she says.

Okay.....but.

“Running in where Hlomu?”

She has that “oh shit!” look on her face.

“Nowhere, I just.....ahhhhhh” she says and puts her hand over her eyes.

“What’s going on? Why are you guys here?”-me

“Arrrrrrr Qhawe is going to kill me!”- hand on her forehead.

She needs to start talking.

“Okay, tonight was supposed to be your surprise birthday party.....”

Huh?

“Not a big thing, just us family and your sisters, a birthday dinner actually. We arrived last night,”

What?

“But where..?”

“That house in River something,”-her

But...

“You slept there? But it’s empty,”

“Urgh we made a call on Thursday and more furniture was delivered and sorted yesterday afternoon,” she says and waves her hand like I should have known that.

“Do me a favour pleaseeeee....act surprised or else everybody is going to hate me for ruining everything, especially Qhawe and

Tshedi,” Tshedi is here too?

Hlomu did say they believed in extravagant gifts. I hope he didn’t buy me a mall as a gift, or the whole of Kimberley and its diamonds.

“Did he really do that? Organise a party for me?”

I’m biting my lip because I’m trying to stop this bloody love-struck teenage girl smile that’s trying to ambush me.

“Yes, it’s your 30<sup>th</sup> remember?”

Still, I didn’t expect this.

But what am I going to do about my dad? I can't leave him alone here to go party.

I wonder what's being said downstairs. How are they even going to start apologising for Qhawe? And besides, he's already been slapped and chased out of the house in pyjamas, that's enough punishment.

"I think we should give them something to drink or eat," -me

She agrees, says at least he won't beat them in front of us.

They watch us coming down the stairs. No, we're not being "dismissed" again.

"We'll make you something to drink," -me

My dad is not even looking at me.

They're all still sitting where we left them. Mqhele, yes, he still looks scared. He keeps looking at his wife who's trying to hold a laugh.

"Where we come from culture dictates that we come to your house with an animal, as a peace offering and to cleanse your house for what my brother did. But also, we can't just go to your house, who are we going to introduce ourselves as? We were waiting for the right time, the official time," -Nkosana

"But you're here now, and I still don't know who you are,"

Ntate though!!!

Mqhele clears his throat.

"He didn't want us to come here, for obvious reasons," -Hlomu whispers to me.

He's such a child.

"Your brother must come to me and apologise. I might hear him out but that won't give him rights to my daughter,"

Sigh.

Am I 12-years old again?

“That will be the right thing to do. My father would be disappointed at him. But kgosi you were young once, you know what the love for a woman can do to a man, it can turn you into a fool,”-Nqoba

Really?

My dad looks at him, he looks down.

Shame, they're trying but my dad is not exactly a man you can soften easily.

“I like what you did with the Namane Project kgosi, at first it sounded like an impossible venture, but you've made it a great success. I won't be surprised if your area soon becomes the biggest supplier in the country,”-Mqhele.

Huh? How does he know about that?

My father looks at him with a surprised face. I'm surprised too. I had forgotten he was there.

“You think? It's done very well but we have to compete with the more experienced white farmers from Vryburg,”- my dad. He looks excited.

Nkosana and Nqoba look really confused.

“I know but yours is more like an investment, it's a business that will feed generations to come but more than anything, everyone contributes and has a share,”-Mqhele.

Is that a smile I see on my father's face?

“Now we have kids from the village studying agriculture after they finish school, it's really working. You know we started with only ten calves. Some families didn't want to get involved at all, they thought I wanted steal take their livestock from them, I had to call a lekgotla and ask for help from the government,”-dad

Now, everyone here is confused, except dad, Mqhele and me.

Mqhele looks at Nkosana and Qhawe.

“You know how North West is rich in platinum....” -Mqhele

They nod.

“Kgosi Montsho’s area is one of the few in the North West that don’t have mining. Because it’s dry, stock farming is popular, so what kgosi did is he asked every family in the community to give him a calf to start the Namane Project. Long story short, the project has become commercial and everyone who brought a calf is a shareholder,”-Mqhele

Sigh.

The look Nqoba is giving him!

My dad is impressed, the look on his face says so.

As to where Mqhele got all that information, is a mystery. Hlomu is as stunned as I am.

“We’ve started with smaller animals, goats and sheep...”-dad

The problem is he can go on about this all day.....

“Dry lands are good for game farming I hear,”-Nkosana.

“Very good,”-dad

“Well if you have open space somewhere kgosi, I think it would be a good investment, and a job creation tool,”-Nkosana

What’s he trying to do?

The look of excitement on my dad’s face!!

I did not expect this at all!

“I think so too. I’ve always wanted something like that, to improve tourism,” ntate.

Sigh.

I think they want to leave now. Yes they do.

“We will see you soon,”-Nkosana.

The old man looks impressed.



Wow! I've just been bought with a game farm!

"Naledi, where are you going?" ntate asks when I follow them out.

I guess then that the game farm was not enough!

"I'm seeing them out ntate,"-me

"Game farm? What the heck are we going to do with a game farm bafo?"- Nqoba asks the moment we close the door behind us.

"I have no idea,"-Nkosana

These guys! They're crazy!

"You've just made us buy a game farm! A game farm bafo! What the heck is that?"-Mqhele

"It's called negotiating....."-Nkosana

No it's called bribing.

"And you? Charming with some cow project? How did you know about that?"-Nqoba to Mqhele.

"I didn't see you helping,"-Mqhele

Okay. Me and Hlomu, we're just standing here watching the circus. It makes me wonder exactly what their plan was when they left the house to come here.

"Do you think he's going to like Qhawe now?"-Hlomu to me.

I'm not sure.

"I think it will make some difference,"-me

I'm just saying this.

"Well, if the game farm is going to get us our fifth wife, then game farm it is,"- Nkosana.

Huh?

They get in the car.

“Act surprised,”-Hlomu whispers before she gets in the car.

It's going to be difficult.

But at least Qhawe will have his phone and wallet now, I also gave them his bag.

—————

Qhawe is waiting for me outside. He said we're going out for dinner.

When I asked him if I could bring my father along he said he knows I have many reasons to want to kill him but I must at least wait until I turn 30 tomorrow.

Now I have to find a way to get out of here.

He's already in the bedroom. He said he was tired and wanted to go to sleep early. But then, it would be unfair of me to wait until he's fast asleep and sneak out, what if he wakes up and finds that I'm not here.

“Ntate, I'm going out, I won't be long,” I say.

“Going out where?”

Here we go.

“To a restaurant, Hlomu wants us to....”

“You're going with Hlomu?” he asks.

Errrrrr but what's that smile on his face.

I nod.

“Okay then you can go,” he says.

What the fuck?

He's in bed.

I made sure he took his diabetes treatment this afternoon.

“I’ll be back soon nstate, but call me if you need anything I’ll have my phone on the whole time,”-me

This means I’m going to have to leave the party and come back here, alone.

My father though!

I’m surprised he bought that Hlomu story. He must really be getting old.

I’m wearing black, again, with gold accessories. I put the weave back on, natural was cute but I was an average girl growing up, I refuse to be one in my glory days.

Now I have to work on my “surprised” look.

And I hate surprises, they make me awkward because I never know what to say after “surprise”.

“Is he sleeping?”

“No he’s right behind me,”

Really Qhawe?

His eyes are all out.

“I’m joking Chawe, he’s sleeping, I told him I’d be back soon,”

I see relief on his face.

I must have a talk with my father, he can’t be traumatizing my man like this.

“You can kiss me, trust me he’s not watching us through the window,”-me

“You never know. You look beautiful,” he says leaning over to kiss me.

I hug him.

“I missed you baby. I’m sorry about all that. Are you okay? How did you jump to the ground? You didn’t hurt yourself did you?”

He shakes his head.

“I’d rather jump off a building than face your father’s slap again,” he says.

LOL, poor thing.

“How is he?”

“He’s fine, just tired from that long drive. So, he has this little crush on Hlomu, so I told him I was going out with her and he was okay with it,”

He’s laughing.

“I’m serious, you should have seen him when he saw her, he had this huge smile on his face. He was mean to everyone except her,” I say.

He’s still laughing.

“Hlomu has that effect on people. But don’t worry, she’s not about to be your stepmother. I think the old man was just charmed by her natural beauty and humble spirit,” he says.

He’s right. She does have that thing about her that nobody can explain.

Oh, it’s time to act clueless.

“Where are we going? I thought we were going to town,”-me

“No, no restaurants tonight, I cooked for you,” he says.

I see.

“Where?”

“At that house you don’t want to live in. The one where your father would never have found me and I would not have had to jump off buildings,” he says.

He’s starting.

“Okay, there’s not even a fridge in that house. But, I appreciate your cutlery skills so dinner in an empty house it is,” me.

He looks very impressed with himself.

“Baby, I’ve been thinking, I want to start a private practice, I think I’m ready now....”

“Thank you Lord!” he says raising his arms.

“Chawe I’m serious,”

“I’m also serious, do anything, as long as it doesn’t involve those crazy people I’m fine with it,” he says.

Sigh.

Here we go.

“So I was thinking of doing it in a rural area, or an informal settlement. But I won’t be based there full time because I still need to work. Maybe hire a couple of nurses and do visits three times a week,”

“And where exactly is this informal settlement you’re thinking about? I hope it’s in Gauteng,” he says.

I hadn’t thought about that. It could be anywhere actually, Gauteng is fine too.

“I still have to think about that,”-me

“It’s a great idea, how much do you need?”-he asks.

I take a deep breath.

“What? I’m trying to help, it really is a great idea,” he says.

“I don’t need money Chawe, I need your advice since you’re in business. Besides, it would be very easy to get a sponsor, especially if I’m going to focus on issues like HIV and TB, government would give me money very easily,”

I just know he’s not going to support that.

“You know we don’t do business with government right? We don’t want anything linking us with government tenders or sponsorship or whatever else is linked to “taxpayers’ money”.

He says the “taxpayers’ money” part like it’s annoying him.

But...I'm not trying to start a family business. And besides, since when am I family? The last time I checked I was still his girlfriend.

We're here.....

"I still can't get over how big this house is. I'll only move in here if you relocate to Kimberley," I say

He frowns. I thought he liked Kimberley.

He holds my hand as we walk to the door.

I'm ready to act surprised.....

He pushes it open.....

"Happy Birthday....." they all shout.

I stand still.

I'm surprised because I was expecting "surpriseeeeeee"

"Oh My God!! Chawe!!"

He shrugs.

"Happy 30<sup>th</sup>, I love you," he says and pulls me by hand to everyone.

It's noisy, it's crazy, it's a party.

"How did you hide this from me?" I keep asking him.

He is so proud of himself it's written all over his face!

It's the hugs and greetings and some people I don't know and.....

"I spoke to Chawe and he said I could come here anytime I want! And you are going to give me my own keys!"

"Hello to you too Tshedi, I see you are also colluding against me with the Zulus," -me

As if she's interested in what I have to say...

“You look gorgeous. You’re starting to look like the rest of them,” she says. I assume “them” is the wives. Where are they anyway? “Lesedi??”

Wow!

“I wasn’t going to miss your 30<sup>th</sup>. How are you? You’ve grown,” she says.

She always says that when we meet. She just can’t get over that I’m not a little girl anymore.

“When did you get here? I can’t believe this,” I say hugging her again.

“Your boyfriend called, and called, and called.....” she says rolling her eyes.

Qhawe though!

This is the real surprise.

“Come on, it’s your party.....” - Xolie says pulling me to I don’t know where.

Even Chelsea is here?

But....there aren’t many people here. It’s mostly family, the ones I don’t know I assume are the “plus-one” of the ones I know.

Omphie is also here.

Wow! This was really planned.

The house looks great too, it looks like a home now.

What happened to.....?

“Happy Birthday MaMontsho,”

What is it with him and sneaking up from

nowhere... “Thank you,” - that’s all I’m able to say.

“Please tell the chief that I have this little scar on my forehead so that he looks for it first. Because you know, I don’t want any accidents,” he says.

I laugh.

My dad is making everyone’s life hell.

“Where is Hlomu?”-I ask. I haven’t seen her.

“Somewhere in the house. When you find her tell her I love her,” he says and walks on.

He’s one hell of a character.

And where is my man?

Oh, he’s there, with a beer in his hand.

“Come on Miss Party,” it’s Gugu this time.

She always looks like those girls from fashion magazines.

I remember of all of us, she was the one who had a problem being in Mbuba. She kept complaining about it being in the middle of nowhere. But from what I’ve heard, she comes from a small town and it takes over an hour to drive from there to the nearest town.

There’s a cake written “ Happy 30<sup>th</sup> Naledi”, It’s a shaped like a shoe, a red bottom shoe. I think they were trying to make a Laboutini cake. It’s nice though.

He wraps one arm around my waist from the back and kisses me on the cheek. I didn’t see him coming.

“Are you enjoying your party?” he asks.

I turn around to face him, my arms around his neck.

“Yes I am....and when did you plan all this? And how did I not catch you?”

“I’m smart, you know that,” he says. The self-satisfaction!!

Now I want to kiss him....and undress him.....and touch him....



“Get a room you two,” –one says

Which one is this?

Oh, it’s the blue-eyed black boy.

“Happy Birthday Dr Montsho,” he says.

I guess then that everyone in this family has their own name that they call me. I’m Dr Montsho to this one I guess.

“Hi Ntsika, I thought you had left already,” –me

“No, I decided to add another two weeks, just to make sure they stay out of trouble,” he says.

He’s the only one that speaks to me in English. The others, well it’s pure Zulu, they don’t care if I understand them or not. And that’s one hell of an accent he has.

I’ve been thinking, I need to learn Zulu if I want to blend in here.

“Why are you standing here with these people, come with me,”-Hlomu.

Where has she been?

“And you? When are you bringing me a daughter-in-law?” she asks Ntsika.

“I think Nkosana is calling me,” he says and rushes off.

We laugh.

I look at Qhawe and shrug as Hlomu pulls me away by arm.

Oh, so this is where they all are? It’s just the ladies though, the guys are taking care of the meat.

Chelsea.

Sigh.

Who invited her by the way?

Oh, I forgot, Tshedi has met her before, but it was just once, not enough for her to be attending family gatherings.

I wish Tsietsi was here.

“Hi, I asked Tsietsi to come but he said no. What’s going on between the two of you anyway?”-Chelsea

I really don’t want to talk about it.

The Tsietsi issue is one of the reasons I’ve been thinking about starting my own practice and leaving Kimberley. It stresses me, a lot. It’s hard to believe he was once the closest friend I had.

“I invited some of your other colleagues too but I don’t see them, maybe they’re not coming,”-Tshedi.

She shouldn’t have. I like to keep my work and personal life separate.

I’m glad they didn’t show up.

So, I join the pretty faces in what looks like a temporary bar area, or is permanent? I don’t know.

“You look like one of my students,”-Lesedi.

Who is she talking to?

“I’m serious, I’ve been looking at you all day, you look exactly like one of my kids in Grade-9,” she says.

She’s talking to Hlomu.

“Errr, could just be that we look alike because there’s no way we are related. I look like my father, he died over ten years ago and there’s no way that he had a small child when he did. I have only one brother and he’s gay, so that’s out,” she says.

I’ve heard about the gay twin. Qhawe once told me that he made them model at a fashion show a few months ago. I think he’s still pissed off by that experience.

“Yah but, it’s really strange, she even talks like you,”-Lesedi.

I think Hlomu doesn't know what to say now because she's sure whoever that kid is, is not her relative.

Let me pour myself a glass of wine.

Tshedi is gelling well with Zandile. Strange, they are totally different.

Zandile is great and all but there's something intense about her. I don't know if it is age or the things she's been through in life, but she's not exactly a warm person by nature.

"Where are the kids?" I ask.

Everybody is here.

"With their nannies," Xolie says dismissively.

Okay.

I'm going to call my sisters aside soon so we can talk about ntate's ambush visit. He's totally inconvenienced me. I'm definitely not getting any sex tonight, that's how much he's ruined my life.

"So our plans for tomorrow are dead?"-Gugu

There were plans?

Silence.

"What plans?"-me

"Yes, we were going to fly to Knysna for lunch by the sea," –Tshedi says. She sounds irritated.

But we can still go, I think.

"We can still go," I say

No we can't actually.

"We can always do Knysna some other time, next weekend maybe," Hlomu

"No we're going to the south coast next weekend remember?" –Xolie

Oh yah. Nqoba is treating us to a weekend away.

There goes Knysna. I've never been there before.

I hear a laugh that sounds familiar.

It can't be.

"Happy Birthday," he says. It's Stanley, he worked at my hospital briefly.

He tries to hug me but I move away, I'm more interested in why Ndivhu is here. I know they are friends but who invited them?

"Tsietisi told us about the party but he didn't want to come, we did, so we came," he says.

Okay. But Ndivhu, why would he come here knowing very well that my boyfriend threw me this party?

I'm looking at him.

"What? You don't want me here? I thought you were over me," -Ndivhu

I hear gulps from the ladies.

I don't know what to say.

"So, where is everyone, are they here?" he asks.

Who?

"The guys are outside, preparing the meat," -Omphi

"Oh, hi," he says to Omphi

He knows her, actually all of us from back home. But it's not like we were close or our families are close.

He looks at all the ladies, walks to Gugu first and kisses her hand, and then to Zandile, Hlomu and all of them.

They look.....a bit, annoyed if I'm reading their faces correctly.

I know why he's here. He's such an opportunist. He's going to be taking pictures and posting them on social networks just so everyone can see that he hangs out with the Zulu brothers. He's always talking about his father-in-law too. That's just who he is. That's why he and I didn't work out, he was always telling people that I'm a chief's daughter.

"The meat is ready,"-Sambulo.

He walks in and says just as Ndivhu kisses Xolie's hand. He has a frown on his face.

"My brother," he says looking at Ndivhu.

"Let that hand go," he says.

Oh shit!

Xolie pulls her hand away quickly.

"The meat is ready," he says again.

We sit still.

He stands still.

"And who are these?" he asks pointing at the two men.

"They're Naledi's colleagues, they've just arrived and were greeting us before coming to join you,"-Gugu

Silence.

"The guys are all outside,"-Sambulo. He still has that look on his face.

He stands and watches them until they walk out the door.

He follows them.

Whew!

"Your ex?"-Gugu

I nod.

“He has to go, now. Unless you want to see flames,” she says.

I’m worried too. I know Qhawe, his jealousy is on steroids.

Suddenly I feel like they’re all judging me for something.

But I didn’t invite him and I refuse to believe Tsietsi is behind this. The problem is Ndivhu talks too much and he might just mention in passing that we were once an item.

But how do I make him go?

We all stand up and follow each other to the kitchen.

There are salads and stuff, there’s even pap, it must be Tshedi.

I’m here but my mind is wandering all over. What if that fool says something stupid? I don’t want anything spoiling tonight, not with all his brothers here.

And I definitely don’t want to have a fight with him

tonight. I can hear him talking and laughing loud outside.

“We have to get that guy out of here,” –Hlomu She looks and sounds very serious.

“But he’s just an old ex, and he’s married now right? I don’t see how him being here is.....”-Lesedi

She stops when she sees all the wives are now looking at her.

I think there’s a lot I still don’t know about how to behave around here.

“Trust me, that makes him an enemy,” –Gugu says walking to the lounge with a salad bowl.

I’m officially depressed now.

I don’t want any drama here. I already know how Qhawe can be through that episode he had with Letswalo.

There's no sitting around the table tonight, they take their plates and go back outside. The conversation is around soccer, as always when boys are together.

I haven't seen Qhawe much tonight. I miss him, even though I can see him from here laughing and talking outside, I still miss him.

“Naledi....we're here, stop looking at Qhawe. You'll end up like these two,” Zandile says pointing at Hlomu.

“Huh?”-Hlomu

“They'll end up being conjoined twins like you and Mqhele,”

Everybody laughs.

Hlomu rolls her eyes.

“I hear the chief is trying to steal my wife,”-Mqhele says before bending over to kiss her on the cheek.

“Yes apparently he has a crush on her. Don't underestimate him, he was a charmer in his days,”-Tshedi

He laughs.

“That old man will be the death of us. He just made us buy a game farm,” he says, brushes Hlomu's shoulders and walks off.

“See, this is what I was talking about,”-Zandile.

Laughter.

“Whatever,”-Hlomu says laughing.

They really are inseparable.

“Can you guys explain the game-farm situation again. They told the story like it was a joke when they came back,” – Omphi

“Long story short, nate was having fun terrorizing them, and when they ran out of ideas Mqhele started talking about the Namane Project.....”

“The Namane project? He knows about that?”- Lesedi

“I was shocked too, we were all shocked, even ntate, but that was a good way in. He started loosening up after that, and as the conversation continued.....boom!! Nkosana mentions a game farm and asks ntate if there was any open space in the village for it. When they were done, ntate was smiling, they were smiling, until we stepped outside the house and they started asking themselves what the heck just happened,”-me

I’m laughing with all of them as I tell this story.

“The conversation went like: “A game farm bafo? What heck are we going to do with a game farm? That was Nqoba”- Hlomu says.

“And then Nkosana says: I have no idea, but if the game farm is going to get us our fifth Zulu wife, then game farm it is,”-Hlomu says.

They’re laughing, but my sisters are not laughing. They look rather shocked.

Tshedi raises her eyebrows at me, she looks serious.

I guess they are alarmed by the “wife” part of it.

“Cheers ladies, we are official game farmers, on top of everything we are,”-Gugu

I think the alcohol is also playing a role now.

“Naledi, I hate to tell you this but soon you’ll be drinking as much as we do.....”-Xolie

“Yep!”-Hlomu says nodding and taking another sip of her wine.

“Life just never gives us a break. If I were to tell you the things we’ve been through just this year alone, you would not believe me. But, we are the Zulus, we are unbeatable,”-Xolie

She’s definitely drunk.

“But nothing is worse than the media. Do you know what they wrote when it came out that I was pregnant?”-Gugu

I shake my head.



“Those Zulu wives are always pregnant, it’s like they are incubators. You’d swear they’re trying to have a baby for each million the family has,”-Gugu

Normally I’d find this funny if I read it in a newspaper. But I guess when it’s said about you, there’s nothing funny about it.

“Bye ladies,”

It’s Ndivhu and his friend. Thank God. Sambulo is behind them making sure that they don’t come this way to kiss hands again.

They’re done eating, judging by how they all walk in and sit wherever they can find space. Mqhele finds his next to Hlomu. Qhawe is next to me. Okay, I see what Zandile was talking about.

“Thank you guys for this,”-me

The guys don’t say anything.

“Thank you Mageba,” I say looking at Qhawe.

Everybody laughs out loud.

He’s blushing.

“Happy Birthday baby, it’s 1am so it really is your birthday now,” he says.

The fools are still laughing.

“I think you should call him that, Mageba, permanently,”-Mqoqi says.

They laughed the first time they heard me call his name.

I decided long ago that I’m going to avoid calling Mqhele, Mqoqi and Nqoba by name. Mqoqi is worse.

We must also leave now, ntate is all alone in that house.

Nkosana and Zandile are the first to go upstairs followed by Gugu and Nqoba.

There seems to be minor tension between Xolie and Sambulo.

“He’s sulking because some guy kissed my hand,” she whispers to me before she stands up.

Me and my sisters, we’re going to sleep at my house. We have to talk about that thing of my mom tonight and if we agree that we want to see her, we must tell nate tomorrow before he leaves.

It’s going to be difficult, but we can’t do this without his blessing. Also, I have a feeling we weren’t told the full story about why she left.

“You know, we could still go to Knysna, I’m sure nate will understand,”-me  
He shakes his head.

“No baby, you must spend the day with your father. He drove all the way here just to spend time with you. The guys will understand, we’ll cancel everything in the morning,”

“Are you going to leave with them?” I ask. I’m about to be a cry baby.

“I’ll see you before I leave, we flying with your sisters remember?”

Oh by the way.

But I don’t want to go, I want to be with him.

“I miss you,” I say hugging him.

“Really? What do you miss? We should have had sex this morning. When I came downstairs the plan was to shag you on the couch, only to find.....”  
he stops and laughs.

My sisters are already waiting in the car. We’re driving home in that Jeep, I’ve concluded that it’s his “Kimberley car”.

“I could drive you, I don’t want you girls driving alone at night,” he says.

I already said no to that

“I wish I could stay here with you,” I say kissing him, again.

Okay I’m whining now.

I finally let go and walk to the car. He stands and watches me until I get in the car and drive off. I feel like crying.

Now that it's just the four of us, the tension begins. We know what we need to be talking about, and we know we are not going to agree on the first try.

“Did I hear the word “wife” being mentioned?”-Lesedi.

Lesedi is the serious one. The responsible one. The one who could have become anything she wanted to be but chose to be a teacher, because it had always been her passion. She likes helping people, she likes seeing the results of what she does. She's also always been the odd one, the one that didn't really fit in with the rest of us.

We always thought she'd get married young and have children and build a home and live happily and boringly, but she went and did the opposite. She has three degrees, a house in Nkomazi where she works and a 7-year-old daughter she adopted as a new born.

“I think I heard that too. Is there something you're not telling us Ledi?”-Omphi

I have nothing to tell.

“Guys, me and Chawe are just dating, we're in a relationship. He hasn't said anything about marriage. Besides, we've only been together for four months, it's a bit too soon for that,”-me

I won't mention that he's been hinting from day one that this is a permanent union.

“I like him Ledi, I think he has good intentions,”-Lesedi.

“I like him too,”-Tshedi

“Tshedi, you just like his money,”-Omphi

“His money makes it easier,”-Tshedi

We laugh.

This woman though!

The tension again. I know something is coming.

I hear a deep breath being taken at the back seat.

“Ledi,”

There we go.

“Have you decided?”-Omphi.

I’ve been dreading this question for a while.

“I’m fine with whatever you guys decide. It won’t make much difference to me because I don’t know her, I don’t remember anything about her,”-me

Silence.

“I think we must go for it. If we don’t, we will always wonder what could have been. Let’s just do it, if it complicates our lives, fine, we are tough girls, we’ll deal with it,”- Lesedi.

I’m still worried though.

“What about ntate?”-me

“We’ll tell him tomorrow,”-Tshedi.

Silence.

It’s going to be a tough one.

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My phone.

“Chawe?”

“Shhhhhhhh....don’t talk too loud you’ll wake your father,”

What the heck? It’s after 3am. I fell asleep just an hour ago.

“Come out,” he whispers.

Why is he whispering? He's in his car on his phone and no, my dad won't hear him.

"Come where?"

"Downstairs, I'm in the visitors parking," he says. He's still whispering.

Lawd! "Okay, I'll come out through the garage," -me This is crazy.

I even forgot to put on a robe, or shoes.

When I open the garage door he's already standing in front of it.

He comes in when it's half open and tells me to close it.

"Did you lock that door?" he asks pointing at the door that connects the garage to the house.

"No....."

He snatches the key from me and rushes to lock it.

What is going on with him?

He picks me up and sits me on the bonnet of the Maserati.

"What.....?"

He spreads my legs.

I'm not ever wearing panties, just the nighty which is very short.

He's kissing me and touching me and.....crap! his pants are on his ankles.

I'm about to be fucked like a cheap Hillbrow street hooker!

I'm not complaining.

I open my legs wider.

"Mmmmmmmmm," he says

He's in.

I'm holding on to him for dear life while balancing on the bonnet with one hand.

He presses my face on his shoulder when I start moaning

louder. "Shhhhhh" he keeps saying

How does he expect me to shhhhhhhh when he's pounding me.....

"Ahhhhh!" I scream.

He puts his hand over my mouth.

I hold him tighter.

He's getting louder.....his grip is tighter.....

No! He can't do this.....

"Mmmmmmm,"

He's done. He pulls out, pulls his pants up, opens the garage, kisses me on the lips and runs out. I'm left sitting on the bonnet like a chicken in the oven.

I can't believe he just did that to me!

And he's leaving, he's really leaving me like this!

My phone beeps.

**"Thank you"**- an SMS from him. Oh I never!!!

I jump off, pull my nighty down and walk back where I came from. I don't even have the energy to finish what he started.

**"Your gift is under the pillow"**

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"No, poached eggs. And please don't make the bacon too salty, cut off the fat," -Omphi says to the waiter.

“I can’t even have proper bacon now?”

“No nstate you have to eat healthy,” she says.

She’s always worried about him and his health. But I think he’s managing it very well. I’m just worried about him having to drive back to the North West all alone now.

“We haven’t sat together like this in a long time,”-he says.

He’s right. It’s been a long time.

He was surprised but very happy to see all of us this morning.

When we woke up he was already on the couch watching Animal Planet.

He almost got a heart attack when he saw Lesedi. I was surprised too.

So we decided to go out for breakfast at the mall. We are planning to take him on a little shopping trip too so he can buy his little things that he doesn’t even need.

I know he’s going to want to buy those plastic boots for when he goes to visit the Namane Project sites.

“So you had a party?” he asks.

I thought we talked about that already.

“Yes nstate but I didn’t know about it, it was a surprise planned by.....” I stop.

He raises his eyes to look at me. I’m not sure what that look is but it doesn’t seem like a bad one.

“That boy, I’m watching him,” he says.

But why does he have to be like this?

“He’s a good man nstate,”-Tshedi says.

He doesn’t respond.

About Qhawe, I'm not talking to him. He's been calling and I've been ignoring him. His mind must still be functioning properly for now because he hasn't started calling my sisters.

"So what are today's plans?"-dad.

We look at each other.

"Hanging out with our old man,"-Lesedi

He smiles.

"No, you didn't know I'd be here this weekend. I'm sure you had plans already," he says.

Can't he allow us to lie? Just once!

"We were going to go to Knysna, but this is more fun,"-Omphi

"And you cancelled? You should have told me you had plans, I would have left early in the morning," he says.

"No ntate, Chawe said we could do Knysna some other time, he said we should spend time with you," -me. I'm trying to score points for my man here.

He nods.

"So ntate, are you really interested in a game farm?"-Lesedi. He laughs. We're confused.

"Not exactly, there isn't enough space. But I was impressed that they were willing to go that far just to apologise," he says.

He's still laughing.

My dad though! He's something else I tell you!

"Ntate, they were really going to do it,"-Tshedi.

He laughs louder.

"I know, they sounded serious," he says. Sigh.



“They must know that my girls don’t come easy, you have to earn them. I’m not going to allow my child to be with a man who won’t jump in-front of a moving train to save her. I know now that Chawe is serious. He’s a bit of a.....I don’t know how to describe him, probably because I see a lot of me in him when I was younger,”

Huh?

“And I know these boys. I recognised him the first time I saw him standing there with big eyes like a fool, demanding my daughter, in my house,” he says shaking his head.

That moment is better not revisited.

“Are you going to be nice to him now?”-me

He frowns.

“No, he still has a lot of work to do,” he says.

I give up!

We agreed that Tshedi was going to be the one to talk, because she’s the eldest, but after we finish eating.

“Ntate, there’s something we need to tell you,” she says.

He is not paying attention.

“Can I have more milk with this,” he shouts to the waiters.

Now the whole restaurant is looking at us.

I don’t think he heard Tshedi at all.

We sit quietly and wait for him to finish eating.

“Girls, there’s something I need to tell you,” he says wiping his mouth with a napkin.

Huh?

“I was going to tell all of you to come home next weekend. But since we’re all here we might as well talk about it now,” he says

It sounds serious.

He sits with his arms on the table and looks at each one of us before speaking.

“I’ve met someone,” he says.

Whaaaaaaaat???

“Why are you all so shocked. I said I’ve met someone. Well, I didn’t meet her now, she’s been around for a while, for years actually. So now that you girls are all grown and Naledi doesn’t need me anymore I think I should make it official. I don’t want to die alone,” he says.

No no no, what just happened here? My dad has had a woman all these years?

“Ntate, you have a girlfriend??”-Tshedi.

He looks at us like we’re crazy.

“Where? When? Who is she?”-me

“She’s back home. Of course I have a woman in my life, I’m a man,” he says.

This is beyond weird.

“I’m going to marry her. You’re all coming home at the end of the month to meet her. Oh and I don’t care if you like her or not, she’s not yours, she’s mine,” he says.

That’s rich coming from him.

I need therapy!

“Tshedi, there was something you needed to tell me?” he asks

We all look at each other.

“No, it was nothing important, I’ve just remembered Sello said he was going to sort it out,”-Tshedi.

“Ohhhh,” he says and continues drinking his “winter tea”.

What the fuck just happened here?

# Naledi...His Love

## Chapter Eleven

One of the twins is here.

I can't tell them apart, I don't know which one this is so I just call him "boy".

It's weird that he's the only one here because the kids of this family are always together.

I'm ready to go.

Qhawe is dropping me off at the airport where I'll meet everyone. From there we're flying straight to Durban and then drive to the south coast.

I'm surprised nobody is being sent with us to babysit and drive us around. "Mama where are you going?"

He's been following me around the house all morning. He walks with his hands behind his back and asks one question after another....

"I'm going to the beach boy,"

"What's the beach?"

"It's a big place with a lot of water."

"Are you going to drink the water?"

"No, the water has salt,"

“Who put the salt there?”

Sigh.

“Jesus put the salt there, come on, it’s time to go,”-Qhawe says brushing his head.

I’ve been saved.

I think I’m a bit too early but it’s okay, I still have a few things I need to buy at the airport, including a bikini. I’ve never owned one, even Cuban beaches were not enough to make me buy one, or walk around in one.

“Which one is this? Msebe or Langa?” I ask as we drive.

“One of them. Don’t worry about it, you’ll never be able to tell them apart anyway,” he says and changes the topic.

He’s right. My stomach still turns when I think about that time I almost threw myself at Mqhele.

He’s been sitting quietly at the back looking out the window with those bulging eyes.

He’ll fall asleep anytime now...

“Baba...”

Or not.

“Yes boy,”

“Why did Jesus put the salt in the water? What are we going to drink when the water in the tap is finished if all the water has salt in it?”-he asks.

I take it he’s been trying to figure this out in his mind, that’s why he’s been quiet.

I’m waiting to hear the answer to this.

“We’ll drink beer,”-Qhawe

I look at him and roll my eyes.

“I don’t drink beer, I don’t want to have a big stomach,” he says. Good my boy, tell him!

“Here, eat this,”-Qhawe says passing him a whole packet of chewing gum. “You can’t give him gum Chawe,”-me

“Unless you want to start answering questions about where babies come from, let him eat that gum,” he says.

Eat the gum child!

“Don’t swallow it,”-me

“Why?”

Oh Lord!

“How old is he?”

“Six,” he says.

Oh! Hlomu said they were seven.

“I’m going to drop you off and leave baby, I know it’s early but there’s something I need to take care of, urgently,” he says.

Great! He’s going to leave me alone at the airport to take care of something more important than me.

“Get on the trolley,” he says to the little bugger.

He’s excited. It’s nice to be a kid.

They’ll leave me outside Woolworths.

I’ll wait for the others before I check in.

“I’m going to miss you,” he says.

I’ll miss him too. Three days is a long time.

“Ewwwww,” the little bugger says when we kiss.

We laugh.

“Close your eyes,”-Qhawe says to him.

He quickly puts his hands over his eyes.

We kiss again.

I watch them walking away. He picks him up and puts him over his shoulders.

I must do some biological research on how these people of this family can look exactly the same, there’s not even a drop of gene dilution.

Our flight leaves at 1pm

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“We should never have let Gugu drive. This is crazy, we were supposed to be there an hour ago,”-Xolie

Yes, we’ve been getting lost all afternoon.

She claimed to know the south coast, and now we are confused because she keeps taking the wrong turns.

“It’s not me, it’s this GPS thing,”-Gugu

“I told you to not listen to this GPS thing,”-Hlomu

“Let’s go to a garage and ask for directions,”- me

“We don’t stop at garages Naledi, what if we get there and there are taxi association people and they start shooting at us? Why do you think we are traveling in a car with tinted windows?”-Gugu

I see Hlomu rolling her eyes.

“There it is,”-Thando says.

Oh yah, there’s the name of the street in which the house is located.

Thando is Mpande's girlfriend. She's new too, but there's one called Gwen, an ex apparently. The problem is she doesn't know she's an ex. I hear she's a mental case.

It's a nice house. I can hear the sea from my room. I open the window and there it is, just metres away.

What if there's a tsunami? We'll all die here.

**"The house is lovely,"**– I SMS him

**"Not as lovely as you, do you like it?"**– he replies.

**"Yes I do,"**

**"Okay,"**

I don't trust that "okay".

**"Qhawe, don't buy it,"**–me

**"You like spoiling the fun don't you? Enjoy,"**–he says

I know him too well.

**"I love you,"**– send.

**"I love you more. Look inside the wardrobe,"**

It's an Aero mint slab.

How did he do that?

**"You're such a charmer..."**

**"I live to impress,"**–he says.

Now I'm going to be smiling to myself all day.

As to how and when he managed to slip a chocolate in here, I don't know.

I have to go downstairs and join the rest.



“Someone is happy,”-Hlomu says as I walk in.

I did say Qhawe had turned me into a nutcase.

They’re all looking at me and my phone in my hand.

Let me explain.

“I was telling Chawe that we arrived here safe, he says we must enjoy ourselves,”

They’re still looking at me and I’m blushing because I know what they’re thinking.

Gosh I’m like a love-struck teenager.

Thando is still raving about how nice the house is. She’s just, excited about everything around her, and the fact that she’s dating Mpande.

Hlomu said she was a typical Mpande type, dark and tall and pretty. There’s just no chemistry between us though.

I’m trying to send Qhawe and SMS.

“Is this correct?”-I show Gugu my phone screen.

“Ngigugumbule.....” she reads out loud.

“What is that?”-Gugu.

“I want to say I miss him,”

They all burst out laughing.

“Ngikukhumbule, that’s what you should have written,”-Gugu.

I’m embarrassing myself here, but I’m going to keep trying, especially if I’m going to end up with a name like Naledi Zulu at some point in my life.

“I’m trying to learn Zulu,”-I say.

They should be offering help instead of laughing at me.

Xolie is on a mission to get Zandile drunk. I'd love to see her letting loose instead of always being perfect.

It's dinner time, a bit too early for me but the chef, yes we have a chef here, says it's time.

“So, Thando, where are you from?”-Hlomu asks.

I'd also like to know.

“My parents are from KZN but I grew up here in Joburg,” she says.

“How long have you known Mpande?”-Xolie.

This sounds familiar. I guess the interrogation is part of dinner table rules.

“Can you tell him apart from Mqoqi?”-Gugu

She laughs and says yes.

“Don't worry Thando, I was also interrogated,” - I say

I remember it like it was yesterday. Luckily for Thando, she was not ambushed.

Zandile hasn't touched her dessert at all, she's been constantly typing on her phone, smiling and frowning and blushing.....

But nobody has said anything to her about that while I'm sitting here fighting the urge to take my phone and chat to Qhawe.

The decision is that from here we are going to sit on the porch and get drunk while we watch the ocean.

Zandile says no to that. She walks straight to the bedroom while we all follow Xolie out.

“I could make cocktails if you ladies want them,” the chef. He's speaking my language now. “I'll have a martini,”-me

“I’ll have a strawberry daiquiri,”-Thando.

“Mojito please,”-Xolie.

“The way you bitches know alcohol!” Hlomu says.

LOL

“I’ll also have a mojito,” she says.

This was a perfect idea. The air is so fresh it reminds me of the glass house and that balcony I like standing on and breathing the air from the lake.

Did I tell you we once had sex there? At night, on the floor, the tiles were cold on my back but the man on top of me was giving me so much pleasure I was happy to bear the pain.

“What are we doing tomorrow?”-Thando

Hlomu and Xolie look at each other.

“We’re not sure, swimming and drinking,”-Xolie

I could just sit in this house and eat and drink forever.

“Good to see you without your phone,”-Gugu says to me

They’re starting again.

“I’m ignoring him a little but he’ll start going crazy soon. I wouldn’t be surprised if we saw him walking in here just now,”-me

They’re laughing.

“Qhawe and Mqhele are so similar, it’s like they’re one person,”-Xolie

“I still can’t tell them apart, after all this time,”-Gugu

“It also took me some time. I used to notice Mqhele by that scar he has on his arm,”-Xolie

I’m drunk now.

“This one time, before I met all of you, I almost hugged Mqhele thinking he was Qhawe, I was saved by the cigarette in his hand,” I say.

“Whaaaat??” they all scream.

Why am I telling this story again?

“I’m serious. I was at Qhawe’s house. He wasn’t in bed when I woke up so I went outside to look for him. I heard someone talking behind me, I turned around, I was sure it was him. I stopped just before my hands reached him,”-me

They all look shocked.

“What did he say?”-Thando

“He just stood there and looked at me. And then he said he was hungry,” I say

Great! They’re laughing at me again.

“I can just imagine him. It’s funny because I’ve always been able to tell them apart. I met all of them at night, at a hospital....it was madness,”-Hlomu says shaking her head.

Hospital?

“Hospital?”-Thando.

“Yes, about two months after I met Mqhele. It’s a long story, I was still working, I was a journalist...”

Wow.

“So I was on night shift and I went to cover a service delivery protest.....”

“You were physically at a service delivery protest?”-Gugu

It’s hard to believe.

“Yes, it was my job. And then, I got shot, by police, with rubber bullets. I called Mqhele and told him it was a minor thing but.....you know him. I was taken to hospital, just for a check-up. The next thing I knew there was commotion at reception, I just knew it was him. I thought he’d brought the whole taxi rank

but when I got there, I found big eyes all over the place, I had never been that freaked out in my life before,” she says.

I know they’ve been together for almost 14 years, so this must have been a long time ago.

“How old were you when you met?”

She smiles.

“I was 22, he was 27. I had just moved to Joburg, six months to be precise. One day, while queuing for a taxi at Bree...”

I can’t imagine her queuing for a taxi, or anything else for that matter.

“..this guy comes to me and tells me to move with the queue. I thought he was a queue marshal and I didn’t pay attention to him at all. He turned out to be the driver of the taxi I ended up in. He kept looking at me on the rear-view mirror. I was so annoyed,”

This is funny.

“And then the next morning I found him parked at the taxi stop, offering to drive me to work. I said no. In the afternoon he was parked at my office gate offering to take me home, I said no again. The next morning he was back, I said no,”

Wow! They really are the same.

“Again that afternoon, he was driving the taxi I was in, he played me this maskandi song. I was so disgusted. Imagine being stalked by a taxi driver in Joburg. Again, he was back the next morning, I said no gain. That afternoon, he was driving the taxi again, he played that maskandi song, I smiled. I had been trying not to think about him all day but I couldn’t help it,”

“ I knew he’d be back the next morning so I spent the night thinking about how I was going to make him leave me alone, even though I knew I had started to feel something for him, I was not planning on dating a taxi driver,”

“So when I saw him that morning, I asked him when he was going to stop following me around. He said: “When your surname is Zulu”

“Ohhhhhh” we all say at the same time.

“I couldn’t help but smile. I got in his car, a green Sprinter, and the rest is history,”

“A Sprinter?”-me

She smiles.

“Yes, a Sprinter. He loved that car. I thought it was dodgy. They were serious taxi-rank material, even the way they dressed and talked,” she says

We laugh.

Suddenly she looks serious.

“The thing is, they are all suits and tie now, but when I met them they were nothing like this. They already had taxis and they did have money. Mqhele had a house in Naturena, Nkosana also had a house, Nqoba had a house in the township from which he ran a pub of some sort. Sambulo I think was living in a flat in town with Qhawe and Mqoqi and Mpande were renting somewhere. They were scattered all around but they literally lived at Bree taxi rank. They were there all the time,” she says.

It sounds unreal if you look at them now.

“They didn’t really have a place they called home. Ntsika was living with Nqoba and he had stopped going to school. He was 17 at the time. One day, the first time I met Nkosana, he arrived in Naturena with three kids, the eldest being nine. I had never been told about kids existing in the family. They just said: “boys, you’ll stay here with your mother,” before they disappeared for four days. That’s how I met Sbani, Lwandle and Mvelo. That’s also when I became “mami”.

That must be the Mvelo that died with Oleta.

“The kids were just.....the younger two didn’t even go to school. Nkosana was trying but you know, he was a man also trying to raise his seven siblings. I had to take them shopping for clothes on that same day. I got them in school the following week and I got Ntsika back at school....”

“And you were only 22?”-me

“Yes, just 22. The worst was when Sambulo got shot and ended up in a coma, later in a wheelchair and after that on crutches. It was the most difficult thing to deal with,” she stops.

“Mqhele asked me to marry him a year after we met. He proposed at Bree taxi rank...” she says shaking her head.

We laugh.

“It was all great and fun until the question of where the traditional wedding was going to take place came up. We all knew my family wasn’t going to give me away unless things were done right. And so came the time to go back to Mbuba, for the first time since they ran for their lives while their parents were being hacked to death....”

That story still makes me cringe.

“It was tough, really tough, but they did it. And they made a decision that day to stop running. They rebuilt their home, that’s why we have Mbuba today. They were also reunited with Mzimela...”

Oh that old man with a mole over his eye.

“They owe him their lives. He’s the one that helped them escape when they were kids,” she says.

She’s quiet for a while.

“They’ve worked really hard for everything they have, really really hard. And we must appreciate that by spending the money as much as we can,” she says.

It’s funny how she can drop a joke in the middle of an intense statement.

Now I understand why she is valued so much. I know that I can never say something bad about Hlomu, not to Qhawe, I figured that out a long time ago.

“And then, fast-forward to when Sambulo brought a bubbly girl with beautiful eyes that blinked like a mermaid,” she says looking at Xolie.

We laugh.

“You didn’t like me at first Hlomu. Be honest,”-Xolie

She laughs.

“It’s not that I didn’t like you, it’s just that I was used to being the only female in the family and I had become overprotective of everyone. To let you in I had to trust you first. There were girls, Nkosana never had a stable one, Nqoba had Mandisa but she was a complicated story. I knew exactly where each woman in the family stood,” she says.

“Like that one who was with Qhawe...”

Oh-oh.....she’s going make my psycho now.

“I knew she was never going to last,” she says

How did she know?

“So Xolie, I had to figure you out first. I had to be protective...”

“But you’re still like that...”-Gugu says

Hlomu frowns.

“Yes you are. Do you remember how much Chawe freaked out when we pretended you didn’t like me?”-me

We laugh.

“Okay okay, I guess I still am like that. And yes, I will never let anyone destroy this family, or come between these brothers,” she says looking at Thando, her face suddenly serious.

What was that all about?

My phone.

It’s Qhawe.

I leave them still sitting and go to take the call in the bedroom.

— — —

I hate lying to him, but if I tell him he will tell the others that we’re on our way home.



This is supposed to be a surprise, which doesn't make sense because we were going to be home tonight anyway, the difference is we are going to be there at least three hours earlier than expected.

I don't remember whose bright idea it was to do this but I didn't protest because, you know, I'm still new in town.

Thando must stop drinking, she looks like hell today.

We should have hired a driver, Hlomu is a speed maniac. She did say when she took over the wheel that nobody was going to sleep while she drives. I'm glad we're almost there. But then, I'm going to Zandile's house, Qhawe will pick me up from there, which means instead of arriving at the airport to find my man waiting to take me straight home, I'm going to have to sit in this car for another hour while all these women and being delivered to their homes. I knew this was a bad idea.

We drop Thando off first. She looks like she's about to cry. I don't get it, I mean, the getaway was nice and all but we are all looking forward to seeing our men.

Zandile starts the car and leaves her standing there looking at the car like it's the last time she's seeing us.

"This man is not home,"-Gugu says when we drive inside her gate.

The house is dark, which means the baby is also not here because if Nqoba had fetched him from MaMnguni they would both be home by now.

Hlomu's house is also empty.

"I hope haven't left for the airport already," she says.

It's a bit early though. Our flight from Durban was going to leave an hour from now. MaMnguni is in her house, which means wherever they are the kids are with them.

Now it's just the two of us. Zandile seems excited by the fact that we're going to arrive unannounced. Maybe Nkosana loves surprises, I don't know. But I know I wouldn't pull this stunt on Qhawe, not on purpose, he's too paranoid.

"I think they're all here," she says when we park outside.

They are, all the cars are here, including MY Maserati.

I sent Qhawe an SMS a few minutes ago saying I can't wait to see him.

“Hello,” Zandile says with a smile on her face.

Nobody is smiling back, all we see are big eyes looking at us like we're ghosts.

“You're here?”- Sambulo speaks first.

Of course we're here.

“We decided to take a road-trip instead,” -Zandile says.

They still look stunned.

Qhawe stands up and comes to me.

There's noise, it's the kids.

“I'll see you tomorrow,”-Qhawe says to all of them and pulls me by hand out the door.

“I wanted to see the kids....”

“You'll see them tomorrow, it's late now let's go home,” he says pushing me inside the car.

What the hell is going on?

“What's going on?”-I ask

He's not looking at me.

“What's going on where? Nothing, I was waiting to go fetch you from the airport and now that you're here we can just go home. So how was the beach?” he says running his hand up my thigh.

I hope they weren't up to some dodgy bullshit because the way he pulled me out of that house was very suspicious.

His hand is still on my thigh and it's going high up.

“What are you doing?”-me

“Touching my property,” he says.

Why is he always horny?

“So you can’t wait until we get home?”-me

“No,” he says pushing his hand inside my panties.

Why am I telling him to stop yet I’m sitting with my legs open?

“It’s so warm in here,” he says.

This guy though!

I push his hand out and sit with my legs closed. I can’t let him continue because he might just repeat what he did in the garage that night.

He was so shocked when I told him my father was getting married. But then, he said he knew my father had a woman in his life because no man can live without having sex. Just the thought of my father on top of a woman makes me cringe.

He thought it was funny but said that maybe when he has a wife he will stop terrorizing him. I haven’t told them that the game-farm situation was a joke. They still think they’re buying a game farm. But I heard Nkosana saying they will talk to my father about it again at the right time. I’m not sure what he meant by that.

The house is dark, which means he left during the day.

He leaves me in the garage and goes inside to turn the lights on.

“You can come in now, it’s safe,” he says.

He never forgets that his girlfriend is a psycho.

Damn! I missed this place.

His phone rings.

“Bafo,” he answers.

“Eish...”

“Hlomu...???”

“Eish...”

“We’ll talk in the morning,” he says and hangs up.

He has his hands over his head.

“What’s going on Chawe?”

He stops and stares.

“Nothing,” he says.

He must stop lying because he’s bad at it.

“I’m serious, it’s nothing to worry about, just.....a little problem that we shouldn’t worry about,” he says, picks up my bags and walks upstairs.

I’m tempted to call Hlomu and find out if everything is okay. But then again, what if it’s personal and she doesn’t want to talk about it, especially not to me.

I’m just going to take what this lousy liar told me and hope that I’ll find out the truth eventually.

“Did you eat?” I ask when he comes back downstairs.

I know he won’t say yes, that’s how much he loves his food.

“No I’m hungry,” he says

Why did I ask?

His phone rings again, he goes outside this time.

I’m going to make him a sandwich, he can’t expect me to start cooking at this hour. Besides, they should have ordered that deadly food they always eat when they are alone together, skop and tripe and all that stuff.....

I wonder what they fed those kids, including the crawling one.

“I haven’t seen you wearing your present yet,” he says standing in front of me.

I look up at him once and look down again.

I only wore it once, and that was when I tried it on.

“I’m going wear it on special occasions,” I say

“To me, every day with you is a special occasion,” he says.

Oh, I’m hanging out with the sweet Qhawe tonight.

“Chawe it’s a Hublot, I’m scared to wear it randomly, what if I drop it or if I lose it.....?”

“I’ll buy you another one,” he says.

Really?

He knows I loved it and I was happy when I found that box under my pillow. I didn’t open it until my dad and sisters were gone and I was left all alone in my house, and then I called him screaming.....

But I don’t understand why he’d buy me a R70 000 watch when there are starving children all over the world.

But then again, they say when you have too much you forget about what the world outside looks like.

Let me just ask...

“Chawe,”

“Mmmmm”

“Do you give back? As in, do you have something that you do to give back to society? Donations and stuff like that?”

He looks like he’s in deep thought.

“Yes, but I’m not sure who it is exactly that we give to, it’s Hlomu’s kind of thing. If she says she wants this much money to give to whoever, it’s given to her, no questions asked,” he says.

Oh. I had no idea. At least some good is being done.

“She also had this thing set up for children of our drivers, the ones who do well in matric go to tertiary with that money,” he says.

That is cool....

“And oh, she and Xolie made us apologise to the people of Mbuba, and the next thing we knew we were building a school and a clinic and some community centre place,” he says shaking his head.

I can just tell that he’s not into this thing of giving back. There are things about him that make it obvious that he has never had a woman in his life on a full-time basis.

I promised Lesedi this.

“You know Lesedi is a teacher right?”

He nods.

“In a high school,”

He nods again.

“So I was thinking that if you have time, whenever, it would be nice if we went there and you know, we could stop by the school and just.....”

He looks confused.

“Lesedi says a lot of boys are dropping out of school because of things like drugs. Some come from fatherless homes so they think it’s their responsibility to find work and support their families.....it’s a long list really,”-me

He’s still confused.

“So I think it would be nice and helpful if you go there and give a talk. Tell them your story and how you came from nothing but made it this far. You could save a lot of them, they just need someone to tell them that it’s doable,”  
I say

Silence.

Maybe I shouldn't have.....

“When?” he asks.

Huh?

“Whenever you're ready,” I say

He nods.

Wow!

—————

“Hi, I brought you breakfast in bed,” he says.

He still does this thing of waking up early every morning.

“Really? What did you make?”

It's a cereal. Sigh.

I stand up and go to the bathroom. I don't even know what time it is.

When I come back he's sitting on the bed, his eyes all over the place.

Something is wrong.

I pick up the cereal bowl and start eating.

“What time is it? Where's my phone,”-I ask.

Normally the alarm clock wakes me at 7am.

He doesn't answer.

I look around the bedroom, I don't see it anywhere.

“I must have left it downstairs last night,” I say He

looks relieved.

“No, it was here next to me when we went to sleep, I remember I sent Tshedi a message just before I slept,”

He's quiet.

Oh well. I'll look for it later.

He's a bit anxious.

"I'll drive to Kimberley with you, we can leave now so that we can be there early," he says.

Normally he doesn't want me to leave when I'm here, and now all of a sudden he wants me to go home?

Did something happen while we were away?

"I want to go to the mall first, I need a few things for my house. I thought we'd have lunch too, I mean, I'm going home next weekend so I won't see you,"-I say

I'm a bit worried.

"We can do lunch another time Naledi. I'm sure you can find whatever you're looking for in Kimberley,"

I don't understand.

What's going on?

"Shower when you're done eating so we can leave," he says.

Why is Qhawe trying to get rid of me?

So many thoughts are rushing to my mind right now? What did I do? What did I say?

"Chawe, what's going on?"

"Going on where?"

I stare at him.

"Why are you trying to get rid of me? Why don't you want me here? What did I do? Is there someone else....?"



“Whoah! Naledi!”

I’m breathing fast. I think I’m going to have a panic attack....

“I’m not trying to get rid of you. And what do you mean there’s someone else?” I don’t know. I’m panicking.

There’s a sound of a phone vibrating. It’s not his, his is on the bed and it’s not vibrating.

He ignores it.

“Is that my phone vibrating?”- I ask

“What phone? I don’t hear anything,”

What is going on with him?

“Chawe give me my phone, it’s in your pocket, I can see it moving,” I say

Why would he hide my phone?

He stands up and walks to stand by the door.

This is really strange.

“Chawe I want my phone!” I shout.

He walks away.

What the fuck!

I follow him.

He stops and raises his hands.

I pull it out of his pocket.

He stands still.

So many missed calls and messages?

I look up at him.

“Baby,” he says.

What on earth is going on here?

Most of the calls are from my sisters. There are two from Tsietsi and some numbers I don't recognise.

There are dozens of Facebook notifications too.

I look up at him again, he drops his eyes.

I'll start with the messages.

**“You're worrying me now, answer your phone,”-Tshedi**

Huh?

**“Qhawe says you're still sleeping, I don't believe him, I'm coming over there,”- Omphi**

“What's going on?”-I ask him.

Silence.

Next is Facebook.

I'm all over it. There's a picture of me in.....

“What??”

He tries to snatch the phone from my hand.

“You don't have to read that.....”

It's a picture of a tabloid front page.

MEET THE “DYNAMITE” MRS QHAWE

ZULU I'm “Mrs” now?

And what do they mean “dynamite”.

“Where did they get these pictures Chawe?”

I have all kinds of emotions taking over me. How can they violate my privacy like this? Now my body is splashed out for the world to see...

“How did this happen Chawe?”

“Baby I’m sorry, I don’t know...”

He tries to hug me but I push him away.

***She isn’t bad looking but she’s not exactly what we expected from Qhawe. The man is known for his love of the magazine cover perfect type. Now, we’re not saying the good doctor, (yes, at least she has brains) will take up two chairs at family dinner tables, but we are saying she is a bit of a downgrade from Oleta(may she rest in peace).***

I stop reading. I can’t anymore. What did I do to these people?

“I want to go home,” I say

He stands still.

“I want to go home Chawe,”

“Naledi,”

“No! Don’t touch me! You let this happen! You should have stopped them but you didn’t. You can get anything you want right? You can pay anyone to make things go away but you allowed this? You allowed this to be done to me Chawe? I’m done! I’m going home!” I scream.

He grabs me by my waist but I push him off. He almost falls.

I go back to the bedroom and lock the door.

My phone rings, it’s Omphi, I switch it off.

I start packing.

This is not what I signed up for and I won’t allow it to happen again. If this is what life is going to be like with him, I’m sorry I can’t be here.

“Naledi open the door please, can we talk about this?”

What's there to talk about? I thought he was supposed to protect me from these things. What's my father going to say when he sees those pictures?

What are my bosses, my patients, my colleagues going to say when they see that?

I should never have listened to those women when they told me to take my dress off. Nothing is being said about them because they are skinny and perfect.

And me.....a downgrade? They're calling me a downgrade? Is that what I am to Qhawe?

"I'm not leaving until you open this door! I'll sit here and wait all day if I have to!" he shouts.

"Just leave me alone Chawe!"

"That's not gonna happen," he shouts.

This is all his fault. He should have just left me alone and not pursued me. I was fine before him.

I want to leave now, but he won't let me go past him.

Why is this happening to me???

"Naledi! Naledi!" he shouts.

I wish I could cry silently but I can't.

He banging on the door and shouting my name.

I need a break. I just need a break from everything, including him.

"Naledi your dad is on the phone," he says.

Where did my dad get his numbers? He's lying.

"I'm sorry.....I don't know how it happened....I understand.....yes it's my fault...."

Is he really talking to my dad?

“Give me the phone!” I say snatching it from him.

He tries to push his way in but I slam the door on his face.

“Ntate,”

“Naledi, where are you?”

“I’m at Chawe’s house,”

“Tshedi called me crying, are you okay?” he asks.

I don’t know what to say, I don’t want him to hear that I’m crying.

“I’ve always told you this, people who say mean things about you are not worth your tears. They don’t know you, you don’t know them, don’t allow them to hurt you with words,” he says.

He doesn’t understand...

“Ntate I don’t care much about what they said, but why did they have to splash pictures of me like that? Now the whole world has seen me naked.....”

“Yes and so what? Is it going to kill you? Is it going to take anything away from you?”

He’s just saying that. He doesn’t know how it feels.

“Come home now or I’ll drive there!” he says.

I can’t do that. How am I going to face him?

“I’ll think about it,”

“No, you won’t think about it, come home,” he says.

I say goodbye and hang up.

I hate feeling like this.

Qhawe is still there, I just know it.

I have to sit.

If I have to sit on this bed all my life then that's what I'll do. I can't go out to face the world, not when it does this to me.

I hear another voice outside the bedroom.

“Baby.....” he says knocking.

He must go away

“Naledi, baby please open the door,” he says

Ignore.

“Baby Zah is here, she wants to see you,” he says.

Bloody hell!!!

hell!!

# Twelve

I'm going to be honest with you, I love the Zulus dearly but boy oh boy am I glad to be home.

I'm not accusing my family of being normal but at least our drama is limited to five people, there are 21 people in that family of big eyes and each one comes with a unique bar-code.

Have you ever seen a car worth over R1 million burn to ashes? I have.

You know the shit you see in Madea movies? The ones where a wife throws her man's clothes all over the yard and threatens to kill him? I've seen that.

I've also recently realized that I participated in a crime unknowingly. Yes, that man I'm sleeping with is as sly as they come. I can't believe I was convinced that was one of the twins. I should have figured things out when he pulled me out of that house on that night we came back from the south coast.

Men!!

I haven't spoken to Xolie since that day she found out about Sambulo having a child she didn't know about and burned his car down. I won't know what to say to her, and besides, she's gone real psycho on everyone. Qhawe says he's scared to even bump into her.

He said Sambulo slept at his house on the two nights that he was in Kimberley this week. He's sleeping at Mqoqi's house tonight and he'll go to Mpande's house one of these days.

He can't go to those with wives because you know, they might just poison his food or stab him in his sleep, that's how angry they all are. It's not about the child per se, it's about them keeping a secret for six years, all of them, and involving the kids while at it.

It worries me too because if they can cover for each other for so long, it means they can keep anything from us.

Bad as it was, that incident helped me realize I was whining about petty stuff. So what if the whole world saw me in a bilini? I was at the beach, and like Qhawe said on that radio interview, people wear bikinis to the beach.

The media has never left me alone after that. I don't know where they get all this information about me but I wouldn't be surprised if they wrote about the colour of my toothbrush tomorrow.

Naledi

So, nate's girlfriend, or granny friend I don't know what to call her, is coming over today.

I don't know her but I just know I'm going to be awkward around her.

My dad? A woman? It's a little creepy I tell you.

My phone.

I hope they're not asking me to buy yet another thing they forgot to buy.

"Tshedi."

"Yes, bring olives," she says.

Urgh! I knew it.

"I'm already on my way back Tshedi."

"Yes but we need olives for the salad. We're trying to impress our new mommy here," she says.

What new mommy? That woman had better not think she's going to start mothering us now. Her job here is to take care of our father and make him happy, she has nothing to do with us.

I do a U-turn, again, back to the shops.

Qhawe gave me the Range Rover for this weekend. He said he thought I'd need a bigger car, but I think he just missed his Maserati. He drives my car sometimes, when he misses me. He says he misses me all the time when we're not together. I miss him all the time too.

He's also pestering me about opening a private practice but, I'm getting a feeling that he just wants to move me from Kimberley because he keeps suggesting places in Johannesburg south. That makes me think a lot about what Gugu once said to me.

**"You do know that soon you're going to be barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen with a half-a-million worth diamond on your finger right???"** she said.

We laughed it off but.....it's bugging me. I've already let Qhawe get away with his controlling ways a few times and I'm worried he might end up turning me into some housewife, like all of them. I refuse to be a kept baby factory, I worked too hard studying to become a doctor.

"Naledi,"

Hub?

Oh my God!!

"Hi," I say.

What's he doing here?

"It's been a while," he says.

I don't know what to say.

"You didn't come to the funeral,"

It sounds like he expects me to explain myself.

"I couldn't Tshabanello, I just couldn't. He almost killed me,"

He looks upset.

"Well, that's what you're telling us. My parents would have loved for you to come to us and explain what happened, especially the part where he fell and hit his head and died, alone in a cell."

What does he mean? I wasn't there. And why should I explain anything to his parents, they never liked me anyway. Besides, they were well aware that he was abusing me, even a year after I left him but they still did nothing about it.



"I have nothing to explain Thabi, you know the things your brother did to me. I don't know what happened to him, I wasn't there,"

Why do I have to answer to him again?

"I see you've already moved on," he says.

What does he mean 'already'?

"It's been almost two years since I broke up with your brother, so yes, I've moved on,"

He's starting to piss me off.

"It's strange that you get a new rich boyfriend and suddenly my brother dies mysteriously," he says.

Seriously? I had not even slept with Qhawe when Tlabane died, he didn't even know his name until that morning when I told him he was dead.

I say goodbye and leave him standing there.

How dare he? He knows exactly what I went through. I used to call him asking for help. I'm the one who called him and told him about his brother being arrested. He knows that the psycho tried to rape me, and now he's asking me why I didn't come to the funeral? Nx!

It's Qhawe. I'm going to ignore him because he'll know the moment I answer the phone that I'm upset, and then I'll have to tell him what just happened.

He calls again.....and again....

"Hey,"

"Are you okay?"

"Yes Chawe I'm fine,"

"No you're not, what's going on?" he asks.

Sigh.

"Nothing, Tshedi has been making me run around to and from the shops, but I'm going home now,"

He's quiet.

"How are you...?"

"Naledi," he says.

I know that tone.

"I'm fine Chawe, I really am...."

"You know I'm going to drive to the North West now if you don't tell me what's going on,"

Jizas! I want to scream and pull my hair right now!!!

"Talk," he says.

Eish...

"I bumped into someone I know. My ex's brother, he asked me why I didn't come to the funeral and I got upset," - that's all I'm going to say.

Silence.

This is what I was afraid of, him overreacting.

"Mmmmmmmmm," he says.

What does that mean?

"I miss you," he says.

What?

"Is it possible for you to drive to Joburg in the afternoon?" he asks.

Really Qhawe?

"No, my dad expects us to be here all weekend,"

Ntate:

"Okay, I'll drive to North West then," he says and hangs up.

He is so frustrating!!!

Now what am I supposed to tell my family when I leave the house to go to him?

"Yes 'Tshedi!"

"Where are you? We're running late."

Running late for what?

"I'm almost there," I say

I don't know why she's panicking, it's not like we're looking forward to meeting this woman.

I have a lot on my mind. I keep remembering that I lied to the wives, with a straight face. I've been thinking about calling Hlonu and telling her everything. But what is she going to think of me if she knows that I have such baggage. Maybe she'll understand. I was caught off-guard, she just came out and asked: "abuse?"

I didn't know how to answer so I just went with the yes and no answers. If it was just the two of us I would have told her the truth. But I lied, so now they think my ex is still alive and that Qhawe doesn't know about him.

But at least I confessed to Qhawe. He didn't understand why I didn't tell them the truth, but he's not a woman and he doesn't understand how we women are. With us everything counts, every little thing. I didn't want to have to explain that night to them, like I've just had to explain to my ex's brother. Also, I didn't want them to think I put Qhawe's life in danger by getting involved with him when I knew I still had a dangerous ex following me wherever I went.

Anyway, he didn't think it would have freaked them out if I had told them.

I don't understand why we have to go all out for one person but Tshedi, she's just 'Tshedi.

"Here are your olives."

She snatches them and opens the bottle very quick. You'd swear this is about her.

Ntate has been relaxed, too relaxed. Ompfi has been in a bad mood all morning. I hope she's not going to be herself and spoil ntate's day.

I can't help wondering if she's ever slept here, in this house, with my dad, and had sex.....ewwwww! Just the thought of it makes me shiver.

"She's here," -ntate says.

Yes, she's here, there's a car parking outside.

I see.

"Don't do that," -ntate

We're looking at her through the kitchen window.

The car door opens. This can't be her.

I look at ntate, he's smiling.

He goes to open the door. She walks in. Tshedi and I look at each other.

This is not what we expected at all.

She smiles, a wide smile when she walks in.

Ntate hugs her.

I cannot!!

"Hi," she says.

"Hi," - Tshedi and I say at the same time.

They follow each other to the lounge.

I'm in a bit of a daze here, it's like a dream, you know that hectic dream that you get when you're sleeping during the day? It's that kind of dream.

Omphi and Lesedi find us standing in the kitchen looking like dead people.

"Is she here?"-Omphi

We stand still. They both go to the lounge. We don't hear them speak again.

"Tshedi! Naledi!" it's ntate shouting.

We drag ourselves to the lounge and sit on a couch across them.

I think Tshedi is sitting here thinking: "all that cooking? For this?"

Omphi and Lesedi are us stunned as we are.

Ntate clears his throat.

"Girls, this is Menkwe her surname is Malope," he says looking at her and smiling.

We're not smiling...just shocked.

"These are my daughters. Tshedi is the eldest, followed by Lesedi, and then Omphi, the youngest is Naledi. They're all grown up and have their own houses so you don't have to worry about mothering them," he says jokingly.

It's not funny.

She thinks it's funny.

Ntate looks at all four of us.

Tshedi clears her throat.

"It's nice to meet you Mme Menkwe...." she says

"Nice to meet you too,"

I haven't said anything. I'm still trying to get my head around how my dad and this woman ended up together.

What do they do together? What do they talk about? What do they have in common?

She flaps her eyelashes a few times. They are as long as my weave.

Omphi nudges me because I keep looking at her from head to toe.

I wear make-up most of the time, but I've never worn it that thick.

"You look beautiful,"-Lesedi says, randomly.

She looks a bit too much I think.

I, and I think my sisters too, expected a middle-aged woman wearing isishweshwe and a doek on her head to walk in. I expected her to be thick and simple and natural and rural. That's how I pictured her in my head, a typical rural chief's wife.

But no, Menkwe here has a bumper-curl, artificial eyelashes, a manicure and hectic make-up. She's on six-inch heels and a two-piece suit, clearly expensive. She's half my size with a flat stomach and all.

How did dad even look at her twice?

Ntate looks at Tshedi, I think he's trying to tell her to get moving.

Okay. I follow her to the kitchen, only because I'm itching to gossip about all this.

"Do you think she eats any of this food? I think I should have prepared cucumber sandwiches and lemon water instead.

I don't think she eats at all. We should have bought sushi and champagne.

"What's ntate doing with a woman like that?"-me

"This is a dream, dad will say this is all a joke later,"-Omphi.

I didn't see her behind me.

Naledi

"What does she do for a living? She looks like a gold-digger,"-Tshedi

We are whispering.

I shrug. I have no idea what she does or where she's from. All I know is, she is not what I expected and I can't see myself treating her like a mother.

She looks well in her fifties but...she is not village material.

"How long have they been together?"-Omphi

None of us know.

Lesedi seems to feel different about her. She's interested, really interested.

"I'll call the kids,"-me

"No leave them," Tshedi says.

They're playing outside. I don't know if they are ready to meet their new granny yet but I know Agape is going to put her through some serious interrogation. She's like that, too intelligent for her age. I see her as the best thing that's ever happened to Lesedi after what she went through.

Our new mommy offers to say grace before we eat, at least she's religious like ntate but I suspect that is all they have in common.

"Me, what do you do for a living?"-Tshedi.

She was always going to be the one to ask. Tshedi, she's as clear as stream-water.

"I run my own business, catering and eventing," she says.

She probably started it with ntate's money.

"But it's still new, before that I was employed as a financial manager. I'm an accountant by profession,"

Whoah! That's unexpected.

All four of us look at each other.

She's dishing for ntate while we all sit here in awe.

And then she stands up, goes to the kitchen and comes back with a wet cloth and gives it to him to wipe his hands.

Okay...

She waits for him to start eating before she picks up her own utensils.

Her plate is actually full, with meat and everything.

"Do you have any kids?"-Lesedi.

She looks at ntate and smiles.

"Yes, a daughter, she's the same age as Omphi,"

I see.

I want to ask if she's been married before but dad is already giving us judging glances. I want to make sure that he won't be dealing with crazy exes in future.

Somehow my dad is very comfortable around her. It looks like they've known each other for a long time.

"I'll ask Dikeledi to make tea ntate,"-Tshedi.

"No no no. I'll do it myself. Dikeledi puts too much sugar sometimes, I keep telling her the same thing over and over..."

Oh hell! She lives here!

---

"What's with the silence?"

What does he care?

"If you have something to say you can say it," he says.

As if it will make any difference.

His eyes go through all of us.

He leans back on the couch and sits with his arms folded.

"I did say it doesn't matter what you think, what's important here is what I want," he says.

Urgh!

"Naledi don't roll your eyes at me," he snaps.

I don't care.

"Does she live here?"

It's not that I have a problem with her. In fact, I think she's taking good care of my father and they look happy together. The part that irked me was the realisation that she lives here.

"No, she has her own house. But she's my woman and so yes, she is here often."

He's being polite now, but I know it won't last long, soon he'll be telling us where to get off.

He looks at all of us again.

"Have I ever stood in your way? Have I ever told you how to live your lives?" he asks.

What does that have to do with anything?

"Now, I've dedicated all my life to the four of you. I put you before everything, raised you by myself and trust me it's not easy being a man trying to raise girls into women. I've had women in my life, but none of them lasted because I couldn't give them all of me, it's my girls first and everything else later, they all knew that," he says.

Yes but.....

"It's time for me to live now, it's my time and you have to allow me to be happy," he says.

He's being himself, totally disregarding our opinions.

"How much do you know about this woman nate?" -me

"I know enough. Like I said, we've been together for a long time. The best thing will be for you to accept her now because she's not going anywhere," he says.

She's going to take him away from us, I just know it!

He leaves us sitting in the lounge when he decides he's done traumatising us and wants to sleep.

"I think we should tell him about Mme."-Lesedi

That will make things worse.

"No, he's going to think we're trying to get them back together," -me

"Yeah so, I think our estranged mother is better than Khanyo Mbau here," -Tshedi

The truth is, we can bitch about it all we want but nate has made his decision, and we all know he never backs down.

"I'm here," -SMS

Great. I really need to breathe some air outside this house.

"I'll knock on your window when I come back," I say to Tshedi.

I'm 30-years-old, just so you know, that's how hectic my dad is.

"He's here?" -Lesedi.

Naledi

"Yes. Tshedi, please, it would be nice not to bump into you in the morning driving my man's car,"

She laughs.

"Chawe is my skeem, he won't mind me taking his Range for a spin. So when is he giving us another R50 000 to go shopping?"

Tshedi though!

"R50 000 to go shopping?" -Omphi

I'm out of here!

I take a deep breath as I lie back on the passenger seat.

He doesn't start the car.

I raise my eyebrows.

"Hi Qhawe, I missed you, let me give you a kiss?" he says.

Oh that.

"I'm sorry baby, hi," I say leaning over to kiss him.

I don't know where we're driving to.

"How is the old man?" he asks.

I don't want to talk about it, but, this is Qhawe, he'll make me talk about it.

"He is going through a mid-life-crisis, and hopefully he will get over it before it's too late,"

He laughs.

"Okay, I'm listening, we have to talk now because I'm not staying overnight, I have to go back to Joburg, Zandile is making us go to church," he says frowning.

Church?

"That's nice,"

"What's nice about going to church?" he asks

"That you're going to church,"-me

"As long as Jesus is white, I don't see where I fit in there. Now, tell me about what's bothering you so much about your father's love life," he says.

I just know he's not on my side.

"New mommy is not exactly what I expected,"

"What's wrong with her?"

Everything.

"She's...I don't know...not what I expected from my father. I don't know if she fits the 'chief's wife' image. She's very...glamorous if I can put it that way. She has artificial nails and all that,"

He frowns.

"Are we judging people by how they look now?" him.

I did say he was not on my side.

"No but, presentation is important, especially if you are about to take up an important position in the community. I mean, how is she going to relate to the women around here with the 12-inch heels and hectic weave, they're never going to take her seriously,"

He doesn't understand, it's written all over his face.

He shakes his head.

"I don't get you Naledi. This is not about the community, this is about your father. If this is the person he wants to be with, then the community will just have to adjust to her."

He's being his usual wise and reasonable self now. This is not the time!

"I'm just saying that you don't have a say in this, it's not about you. You expect people in your life to accept me as I am because you love me and want to be with me, but you don't want to accept the person your father wants to be with? Don't you think...double-standards...?"

Sigh.

"I think she's a bit too hectic..."

"I think this is you being worried about her taking your place in your father's life. You're scared."

What? That's not what this is about.

"What about your sisters? How do they feel?"

"Lesedi seems to be warming up to her,"-me

I didn't hear her complain at all. But then again, she doesn't get involved much.

He takes a deep breath.

"What's the story with Lesedi anyway?" he asks.

What's the story with Lesedi? She's just Lesedi.

"She's a bit complicated. She lost her husband a week after they got married. He was killed."

He raises his eyebrows.

"This is a subject we never talk about."

"By who?" he asks.

"We don't know, the killers were never caught. Lesedi's problem is that she's still holding a grudge, she will never find closure until she knows who killed him."

He nods.

I hope he won't go investigating. I hope not.

"Who was her husband? What did he do for a living?" he asks.

"He was in security, cash-in-transit. It was his first day back at work when he was shot during a robbery. The sad thing is, he was the only one that got shot. The colleagues who were with him couldn't identify the robbers but they said the shooter looked like he was very young."

His jaw tightens.

I think he's about to go on a full investigation.

# Thirteen

**D**o they even have electricity here?"  
"Because I won't be able to sleep in this heat."  
Why did your sister choose this place anyway? She could have worked anywhere she wanted..."

He's been like this all afternoon! He won't stop! He just won't stop!

"We're almost there. I'm sure there is electricity and air-conditioners since it's the 21<sup>st</sup> century,"-me

He looks at me and frowns.

When has heat ever killed anyone? I mean, we were in Mbuba recently for Zandile's umbondo and I had to cook up a storm, in the scorching heat, he never heard me complain.

"Here, drink some water," I say handing him a sealed bottle.

He snatches it, opens it quickly and drinks half of it at one go.

"Do you feel better now?"-me

"No," he snaps.

Wow! In his mind I think he blames me for this weather. Forget that it's October and it is supposed to be hot anyway.

"We should have brought sunscreen,"-me

"I don't need sunscreen Naledi, I'm pitch black in colour. What I hate is this dry air....."

Can we get to Nkomazi now please before I lose my mind?

We are sleeping at Lesedi's house, she insisted. And so I had to work really hard to convince this man that sleeping at my sister's house is not a crime against humanity.

He wanted us to book a guest-house, but this is Nkomazi, not Sandton.

We didn't tell anyone from his side of the family about this. Well I didn't tell anyone, I'm not sure if he did. I'm still shocked at how easily he agreed to do this. No questions asked, just a simple and definite yes. Maybe he's passionate about these things because he also came from nothing.

"Take the left," I say.

That water helped, he's calmer now.

"About 30 more kilometres and we'll be there," I say touching his shoulder.

I told him to let me drive.



But then, he seems to be over the torture he was going through just minutes ago. He's looking out the windows as he drives. It's like I'm not even here.

Why is he pulling over?

"Chaw..."

He's out of the car.

"How come I don't know about this place?" he asks.

I've come to stand next to him. Not too far from us is the Nkomazi River, on its banks are groups of women talking and laughing and doing laundry.

"I've been here a few times, it's very nice," I say.

He puts one arm around my shoulders and pulls me close to him.

"It's beautiful," he says.

This reminds me of my father. We had to stop and watch the river, like this, when we came here with him for the first time.

"We can stay a couple of days longer and have a mini-holiday? What do you think?" he asks.

You've got to be kidding me.

"Sounds tempting, but I have a job you know," I say

He looks bored by what I just said.

"Trust me, they'll still be crazy when you go back," he says as we walk back to the car.

Schalwyk died last month. I was broken. He didn't have much to live for but you know, he was one of my first patients in that hospital. Qhawe tried to comfort me but I could just see he was not sincere at all.

He kept saying: "It's okay, he's resting, he's in a better place now".

What better place? What does he know about a better place? He won't even go to church!

He's driving very slowly now. It's clear that he likes this place, and its people. There's something very lovely about rural life.

"There are game reserves around here,"-me

"Really?" he asks with a smile.

Little boy right there.

"Yes, I'm surprised you didn't know, I thought you were a traveller," I say

He shakes his head.

"Mpumalanga not so much, they have dodgy weather. And I wouldn't know where to start with this province because its geography is also dodgy. It's like all the provinces chose space they wanted, and then whatever was left after that became Mpumalanga," he says

I have no idea what he just said. I won't try to understand it.

"There is Lesedi's house," I say pointing at it. I'm getting excited, strange, Lesedi is not like Tshedi, she's a bit detached.

Her house is not too far from the school. She built it, just like most teachers that aren't from the area.

To me, her building a house here means she plans to stay here forever. She even speaks the language now.

"Are these kids from her school?" he asks

"Yes, they take afternoon classes, at least some of them, matric mostly," I say.

He nods.

My sister is already waiting for us at the gate. We drive in.

Naledi

"She needs to fit an electric gate here," he says.

Excuse me! Is this your house?

We park behind her Corolla! She's such a teacher!

He gets out of the car first. I thought he didn't want to sleep here.

"Come on in, I'll help you with your bags," she says.

But Qhawe wants to carry them all, by himself.

"Mme Ledi!"

That shoots straight to my brain! Her voice is so squeaky you can feel your ears tremor when she screams.

I open my arms right in time to catch her.

"When did you get here? Is that your new car? Are you coming from Khimani? Why did you leave remokgolo alone...?"

My head is buzzing.....

Whew! She stops.

"Did you cut your hair Mme Ledi?"

No, she was just catching her breath.

"Hello Agape. How are you?" -I get to say, finally.

"I'm fine," she says looking at Qhawe.

He is as stunned as I am.

I put her down. She goes to stand in front of Qhawe and looks up at him.

She pushes her glasses up with her index finger.

We are all waiting for her to speak, we know she will.

The problem is, she's very unpredictable, she might just shock us all right now.

Qhawe is still leaning on the car.

He opens the door, reaches to the back seat and pulls out a big pink box.

Oh, I had forgotten about the doll.

"This is for you," he says handing it to her.

She takes it, with both her hands. She looks at it, and then she looks up at him.

"It's nice, thank you, but I'm a big girl now, I don't play with dolls anymore..."

Oh Lord!

"I thought so," he says placing one finger on his cheek, like he's thinking hard.

"So, I decided this would be perfect for you," he says walking around the car to the boot. She follows him.

"I think this is more suitable for a big girl like you," he says handing her a big paper bag.

What?

She pulls the box out and starts screaming and jumping all over the place.

Really Qhawe?

I look at him, he shrugs.

"Mme look, it's a computer!" she screams.

It's one of those kiddies' laptops.

Where and when did Qhawe buy this?

"Thank you....."

"Uncle Qhawe..." -Lesedi says

"Thank you uncle Qhawe," she says, hugs him around the knees and runs back to the house.

She's such a little diva!

"She's so grown," I say

"Yes and so has her mouth,"-Lesedi

Qhawe is still in a bit of a daze with that smile stuck on his face.

"Come inside," -Lesedi says pulling my suitcase.

At least we're staying for only one night, just one night. I know Qhawe will be uncomfortable the whole time. He has this thing about his space, which is funny because he is always invading mine, if he is not forcing me to be in his all the time.

Shame Lesedi went all out. This bed linen, it looks new, it matches the curtains.

Ntate sleeps in this room when we visit. Well actually we've been here only three times, for Agape's birthday party, her graduation to big-school and once when Lesedi invited us for Christmas, which was also a housewarming party.

I doubt she'll ever leave this place, she's so rooted here.

"Is that the bathroom?"

"Yes but it doesn't have a shower," I say

He doesn't mind. Strange. These nice-life-problems types fuss about everything.

I've been meaning to ask.

"And then? The laptop?"

He laughs.

"I bought it for Niya last week. I hadn't had time to take it to Flornu's house. I was still going to ask you if it's proper because I always buy the wrong things for the kids. I bought her a bike for her 1<sup>st</sup> birthday, it was pink so I thought it was perfect, until I was told she can only ride it when she's four years old," he says.

LOL. That is not like him at all.

I haven't asked him if he's nervous about tomorrow, not that I've ever seen him nervous about anything, unless it involves my father.

"So Lesedi lives here all by herself? With Agape?" he asks.

"Yes it's always been just the two of them,"

He frowns.

I hope he's not about to buy them a mansion.

I have a feeling he has more questions, but I know he's going to reserve them. That's how he is, he notices everything. I think it has a lot to do with his obsession with being in control of everything around him.

He goes to stand by the window, his hands in his pockets. His back is on me but I know he is thinking hard, and whatever it is, it's not a happy thought.

I wrap my arms around him from behind and press my face on his back. He doesn't move, or speak.

I wait.

"Do you think it's going to make any difference?" he asks.

I'm not sure what he's asking.

"Me, talking to those kids, telling them my story, do you think it's going to be worth it?" he asks.

I take a deep breath.

"Chawe, sometimes the only thing a child needs is proof. Proof that anything is possible, and you are that proof,"-me

Silence.

I think the best thing here is for me to answer when he asks.

We are close, very close. We are friends before we are lovers but I know that there's a lot I still don't know about his past.

"So, must I tell them that I started by stealing....." he asks

Oh Lord!

"No, leave that out. We're trying to build academics, not thugs,"

He laughs.

It's strange that his random intense moments don't bother me anymore.

-----  
 "Does he like kids?"-Lesedi

"Yes, he does. He doesn't have any of his own but his brothers' kids are everything to him."

Agape has him wrapped around her little finger. They've been on that laptop all evening.

"You have to get pregnant, soon,"-Lesedi

What??

"Why?"

She laughs.

"No I'm just joking. But I do think you two are rushing things a bit. I mean, it hasn't even been six months but already he's all over our family business. I was so shocked when he called me, and worse he introduced himself like.....like I was supposed to know who he is."

I laugh. She's right, he's all over our family business.

"He probably thinks we are crazy hood-rats," she says.

This must be about that fight he witnessed between Omphi and me.

"No, we talked about that, he understood,"-me

That was embarrassing. It's still my biggest regret.

"So, how is he in bed?"

What??

"Lesedi!!!"

She laughs.

This is the side of her that doesn't come out often.

Oh crap! Qhawe is looking at us, he knows we're talking about him.

"Agape, it's time for bed,"-Lesedi

It's getting really late and I think Qhawe is tired too.

"Uncle Qhawe, are you going to be here in the morning?"-Agape

Errrrr he's not your daddy.

He nods.

"Okay, I'll see you in the morning," she says, picks up her new toy and runs off to the bedroom. She's always running.

Lesedi says her goodbyes and leaves us alone in the lounge.

"We're going to need chewing gum tomorrow, a lot of it,"- he says.

At first I'm a bit lost.

I laugh.

"Don't worry, she falls asleep very quickly," I say.

She used to fall asleep the moment the car started moving. I'm not sure about now.

"She's a lovely child," he says.  
Our eyes lock.  
Unspoken words.  
I take a deep breath.  
"Yes, she's lovely, and smart too. Let's go to bed,"

-----  
The hall is too small, some of them had to sit on the floor, others are standing leaning against the walls.....they're just all over the place.

Lesedi ordered that all windows be opened because you know, we have about 600 men in here, and except for one and a few teachers, they're all teenagers.

I wanted to stay behind and not be part of this but he needs my help. Trouble started when we arrived, it continued when we entered the staffroom, it got worse when we walked past classes on our way to this school hall.

Girls were told to stay in class, that this was about the boys only. Mr Zulu is here to talk to the boys.

So, I'm sitting somewhere on the right end corner because I don't want to be a destruction.

I know he's never done this before, but I'm not worried at all because this is Qhawe. He may be crazy and stupid sometimes but he has wisdom.

He stands up.

It becomes dead quiet as he stands in front and scans the whole room with his eyes.

"How many of you are in matric?" that's the first thing he asks.

Hands go up.

He looks at Lesodi. She gets him.

"There are 23 boys" she says.

"How many boys were there when they started Grade-8 five years ago?" he asks.

There are rumblings.

"They were 51," -one male teacher shouts from the back.

I see him raising his eyebrows.

"How many of you have thought about dropping out of school at some point in the past five years?"-he asks.

It's quiet before hands start going up, slowly.

I count about 72 hands.

He walks to stand in front of one boy.

"Why?" he asks looking at him.

"My father left, after my mother died" the boy says.

He nods and walks back to the front.

"How old are you?" he asks looking at one boy. He looks like he's the youngest of them all.

"14," the boy says.

He nods, and then puts his hands in his pockets.

"Do you want to know where I was when I was 14?" he asks.

There's a very low yes from the crowd.

"Jail," he says.

What??

Valodi

He stands still and watches all of us until we're done being shocked.

He's never told me this.

"Yep! They call them Youth Correctional Centres, sometimes Reformatories but actually, they're hard core prisons," he says and stops to clear his throat.

"I learned a lot in there, and no it was not good lessons," he says.

"Why?" a voice from the crowd. It's that same 14-year-old boy.

"Why were you in jail?" he asks.

Qhawe doesn't answer immediately, instead his eyes go around the room again.

"My younger brothers had to eat, so I had to steal," he says.

Silence.

"How many of you have ever felt they had no choice but to do wrong in order to do right, to fulfil a responsibility?"

Silence.

They're all looking at one another. No hands.

"Okay," he says and shrugs.

He scans the room again and clears his throat.

"My name is Qhawe Zulu, some of you know about me, others don't," he says.

There are rumblings.

"What do you know about me?" he asks

"You're rich....! You're a millionaire! You're a businessman! You own trucks...." It goes on and on, they're all talking at the once.

He's just standing there watching the chaos.

He starts speaking again when it's quiet.

"Yes, I'm all that. But most of you in this room, if not all of you are more educated than I am," he says.

Silence.

I know he didn't finish matric but what does he mean "if not all of you"? There are Grade-8s here too. I'd like to think he did get to high school.

"I made my first trip to Eshowe Prison when I was 12-years-old, two years after my parents were hacked to death and set alight. Now, I know you're all sitting here thinking I stole a loaf of bread or a tray of meat from the supermarket to feed my little brothers or something like that....." He stops.

It's still quiet.

"I stole a car," he says.

Huh?

"Yes, and it wasn't the first time," he says when he sees the confusion on all our faces.

At 12-years old?

"I spent six months there. I don't know why they let me go after that but there was a social worker involved, she told them I was not going to do it again. She never even asked me if I was planning on stealing more cars in future but she told them I wasn't going to do it again,"

It's still quiet.

"But, I was back there two years later, for eight months this time," he says.

I don't understand why he never told me about this, he's very open about his past.

I don't think these kids expected this. I think they expected him to tell them how to get rich and be like him one day.

"I'm seeing the young me in many of you. Every day is a struggle and you are stuck in a place where not many people have been able to get out. Everything seems so far and out of reach. But, you are here now, and you need solutions now, so you are likely to make choices that will make things easier for you now, but trust me, the same choices will come back to haunt you in future."

I hope that these kids understand what he's trying to say.

"I left school in Grade 11," he says.

Gulps.

"I was smart, we were all smart me and my brothers. My teachers begged me to stay in school. They said I could make it and have a bright future. What they didn't know was, I wasn't concerned about a bright future, it was too big a dream for me, I was more concerned about where my next meal would come from," he says.

"But you made it, without an education, you became rich," one boy says.

I knew this was in their minds. They are kids, so obviously this is the first thing they're going to look at.

"Yes I did," he says and pauses.

"Right after washing taxis at Bree taxi rank for two years, after living at a men's hostel for three years, being stabbed in Johannesburg and almost dying, being a taxi driver for years, watching two of my brothers almost die in my arms....."

I know about all this, including Nkosana and Sambulo almost dying, but I'm feeling really emotional right now.

His eyes find me. I see a brief frown on his face. I nod. He continues talking.

"See, the difference between you and me, is that you have choices, I didn't have much of that, or at least I believed at that time," he says.

This is why I didn't want to be part of this, look now, I'm crying.

"I may have millions now, but every single cent to my name was worked for, really hard," he says.

"I want you to understand that there are no short-cuts in life, where there are, they come at a price, a painful price. It might be tough now but there is no easy way to making it. You have choices,"

"What choices?"- a voice says from the crowd.

Silence.

He's trying to find whoever said that with his eyes.

"What choices do we have?"- that voice again.

It's an older boy.

"A choice to be in school because if you leave, the only choice that waits for you outside these walls is crime,"-Qhawe.

"So what if I finish matric? What happens after that? What choices do I have if my only guaranteed meal for the day comes from the school feeding scheme? What choice do I have if I'm responsible for three of my younger siblings? Where am I going to go?"-same boy.

I really shouldn't be here.

"You've gotten this far haven't you?"-Qhawe

"I'm getting tired,"-boy

Naledi

He looks down at his feet.

"What if I gave you a ladder and told you to climb as high as it takes you?"-

Qhawe

"I'd have to climb it with each of my brothers on each arm and my sister on my back. The ladder would definitely break,"-the boy.

This is a deep conversation.

"And if I gave you four ladders?"-Qhawe

Silence.

They're staring at each other.

"I don't accept hand-outs Mr Zulu,"-the boy.

"I don't give hand-outs,"-Qhawe

Silence. Awkward silence.

He finds me with his eyes again. I've stopped crying but my eyes are still puffy.

"How many of you here have girlfriends?"

They laugh and whistle, but none of them raise their hands.

Qhawe is laughing too.

"I take it you are the player around here," he says looking at one boy who is laughing the loudest.

The kid blushes.

"I know you all have girlfriends, I had my first girlfriend when I was 12," he says.

What??

The whistling.

Geer! Boys!

"Mornings are a struggle aren't they?" he asks laughing

The boys laugh louder.

I look at Lesedi. It looks like we're both missing something here because even the two male teachers are laughing.

"Be careful not to break your wrists," he says.

The boys laugh even louder.

Sigh.

"There are two main things that can completely destroy a man, laziness and a woman," he says

There are rumblings.

"Your role as a man, and you are not men yet you are boys so you are exactly where you are supposed to be, at school....."

"I know that right now girls are the only thing you think about...."

Laughter.

"But wait till they become women, that's when they will really drive you crazy..."

Loud laughter.

"I'm serious. When their boobs are bigger and they...."

Really Qhawe?

He looks my way and I give him an angry look.

"See, this is what I'm talking about, I have to shut up now because she doesn't like what I'm saying" he says looking and pointing at me.

All the boys turn to look at me.

Really Qhawe?



The bell rings. I take it school is out. But the boys sit still.

One hand goes up.

"Yes,"-Qhawe

"If you had nothing, no parents, no education, no home, where did you get the money to start your business?"- one very tall boy asks.

They all look interested in hearing his answer to this.

"I have seven brothers, you all know that right?"

They nod.

"So, we stuck together, all of us. We all did what we had to do to survive and make money, and we saved every cent we made until we were able to buy our first taxi," he says.

"So you didn't steal any more cars?"-same boy.

Laughter.

"Naaaah, stealing cars became boring," he says laughing.

"I'm joking, stealing is bad, don't do it," he says.

The male teacher walks to the front.

"Okay everyone, those that take the bus to Malelane, it's already waiting outside. Hopefully Mr Zulu will come back again soon to talk to us....."

There are cheers.

"But he also has to go now, you all know he came all the way from Johannesburg," the teacher

There's movement.

Outside it's already buzzing with girls, some trying to get a glimpse of what is happening here.

Some boys go to shake Qhawe's hand before they leave. But he's trying to find someone in the crowd.

Where is Lesedi? She was here just now.

I'm standing alone now. Okay, no problem.

I wait until they've all left the hall and we are left alone.

"Boys...boys...boys..." he says hugging me.

"You were great Chawe," I say looking up at him.

He really was great.

"You think?" he asks.

"You were amazing my love,"

He kisses me.

Someone clears their throat.

It's Lesedi.

He lets me go.

She's with a.....

Whoah!

"What the...?"-Qhawe

Lesedi puts one arm around the girl's shoulder.

"This is what I was telling you about," she says looking at the girl, and then at me.

I look at Qhawe.

He's staring at the girl, who looks rather nervous and stunned.

"Where are you from?"-Qhawe

"Here,"-the girl.

Naladi

"Her name is Nonjiko, but everybody calls her Noni,"-Lesedi. She looks excited.

Qhawe raises his eyebrows. I think he knows what the name means.

"Who gave you that name?"-Qhawe

"My grandfather,"-the girl.

He nods.

It's really awkward now.

What does Nonjiko mean by the way?

"Okay, she has to go now, I just wanted you to see what I was talking about..."-

Lesedi

"Can I take a picture of you?"-me

I have to show Hloimu this.

She smiles and looks at the camera, says goodbye when I'm done and runs off.

There are only a few kids left when we walk to the car.

Qhawe is distracted. It looks like something is bothering him.

It's getting late and we still have to drive to Joburg but Lesedi insists that we have lunch first, besides we still have to go past her house anyway to pick up Agape.

Tomorrow is Shlangu's 1st birthday party and because people bring kids to birthday parties, I'm renting my sister's little diva. After that I'm shipping her off to Omphi and they are going home to North West.

"Are you okay?" I ask when he hasn't said anything until we are approaching Lesedi's gate.

"I'm fine baby.....I'm fine," he says.

He's not fine.

Agape is already waiting with a pink suitcase.

Sigh.

"I'm ready Mme Ledi,"

That's the first thing she says when I open the car door.

It's going to be a loooooong trip.

Qhawe picks her up and we go inside the house.

She's just too excited.

There's food, I don't know when Lesedi found time to cook but there's lunch.

And so we are going to sit down and eat because Qhawe never says no to food.

"Lesedi, the boy I spoke to, how good is he at school?"-Qhawe

We both know which boy he's talking about, but we look at each other first.

"He's a top student. He's left a few times but Msibi always goes to find him, and bring him back to school. We're just hoping that he will write his exams next month. We know he's going to pass, very well, and we're hoping that a miracle will happen after that."-Lesedi

"Mmmmm,"-Qhawe

"So he's raising his younger siblings?"-me

"Technically yes, the only reason the social workers have not taken them away is because there's a grandmother, but she's totally dysfunctional, too old. And that is why he feels he has to leave school and go to find work, because he's scared that when his grandmother dies the state will take his siblings away from him if he can't support them,"-Lesedi

Does life really have to be this tough?

"At 18 years old, that's what he has to worry about," she says.  
And here I am worrying about what birthday gift to buy a one-year-old tomorrow.

"Agape, put your hat on,"-Lesedi

"But mama I don't like this hat," she says

"I'll buy you a new one, just wear this one for now,"-Lesedi

She rolls her eyes and gets in the car.

It's gonna be one long trip to Joburg.

-----  
"Finally,"

It's so peaceful, so silent, so relaxing....

He laughs.

"I miss her," he says

Is he serious? The little squirrel has been interrogating us throughout this trip!

"Does she sleep with her glasses on?"-Chawe

"Most of the time yes, because when she wakes up she looks around her and starts talking,"-me

He laughs.

Agape has him wrapped around her little finger.

She's fast asleep on the back seat. At least now we can talk about serious stuff.

"Chawe can you pull over please, I want to get a jacket from the boot so I can cover her. The sun is coming in through the window," I say.

"No, use my jacket, here," he says.

The jacket he was wearing earlier is hanging behind his seat. It's big enough. Agape is hugging her laptop as she sleeps.

She's so cute and adorable. Sometimes I wish she'd stay this young forever, that the cruelties of this life never find her. But that's a pipe dream, we all had to go through them before we found ourselves.

"You're still distracted, is it about the boys?"-me

It's time he let it out, he's been like this since we left that school.

"Yes, that and everything," he says.

I don't understand.

"Why were you crying?" he asks

Eish that!

"I don't know it's just.....I was imagining you going through those things and it hurt me,"

He smiles.

"Do you love me that much?" he asks.

Okay now he's being his silly self.

"I love you too much,"

He takes my hand.

"And I love you too too much," he says.

"I can't wait to get home so I can undress you," he says.

I look behind me. She's still sleeping.

"Chawe, there's a child here....."

He laughs.

I tried to seduce him last night but he flatly refused. He said he was not having sex at my sister's house! Never!

"Are they nice to her? You know, at school, no bullying or name calling?" he asks.

It's not avoidable is it?

"She's a tough girl, she always has been," I say

I hope she'll remain this tough and outspoken as she grows.

There's something we need to talk about here, I know it's on his mind too.

"That kid sure looks like Hlomu,"-that's my way in.

He takes a deep breath. I knew he was thinking about it too.

"Please don't mention it to her, I want to talk to Mqhele first," he says

Huh?

"Her name, Nonjiko, it's connected to the Dladla surname," he says

Dladla?

"Hlomu's maiden name is Dladla. And that child, Hlomu's father looked exactly like her, exactly like Hlomu and Langa," he says shaking his head.

I'm confused.

"But Hlomu's father died a long time ago, and I'm sure he was too old to have a child this young."

He shakes his head. I think there's more to this than he's telling me.

"Okay, don't mention any of this to Hlomu, not before I speak to Mqhele because he will know exactly what to do..." He says.

Okay, now I'm even more curious.

"Hlomu's father died unexpectedly. It was a heart attack, one minute he was fine and the next he was gone. So as we were preparing for the funeral, a son nobody knew about appeared. He's older than Hlomu and Langa by a few years. There was no guessing who he was, he looked exactly like their father. The problem though was that he hadn't come in peace. He was rude the moment he walked in there. He started demanding things, threatening to kick Hlomu's mother out of the house because he is the eldest son and all that."

Whoah!!

"Hlomu's father left everything he owned to his wife, and an education fund for Lethu, she was still very young. So things got really bad after the funeral. Hlomu took the whole thing of her father's death very hard. She was mourning her father and on top of that there was this new brother tormenting her mother. And so, we had to intervene..." he says and stops.

I see.

"You managed to make him stop?"

He sighs.

"Yes we did," he says.

I'm waiting for him to tell me how.

"How Chawe?"

He turns to look at me.

I won't look away.

"We paid him off," he says with his eyes on mine.

Whew! Sometimes...ugh let me leave it.

"Do you think this.....?"

"I think it's his daughter. He once worked here in Mpumalanga at some point. And if she was given that name by her grandfather, I think it was Hlomu's father," he says.

Wow! It sounds a bit like Sambulo and Mabutho's story. Why do men do these things though?

-----  
It's buzzing.

I expected it to be full but, seeing as I don't know any relatives or actual friends, I didn't expect it to be this full.

This family is like the mafia, except for the families of the wives, there are no outsiders, there are only business associates.

The only person who is inside, but is not a blood relative is Lwandle's friend Zamani. But then again, he is like an adopted son of Nkosana's.

"Is this a house?"-Agape asks as we approach the front door.

We're late, we had to go buy a present first, for a one year old. He won't even remember it.

"Yes, it's aunty-Gugu's house," I say

"It's big like uncle-Qhawe's,"

She put him through some serious interrogating last night when we arrived at his house. She even told him to send money to some country that recently had an earthquake because children there are hungry.

Qhawe finds her fascinating, I find her testing.

We had to fight all morning about what she was going to wear. In the end I won and she put on a pink dress, and a pink hat.

"Welcome....."-Zandile says as we walk in.

Damn! There are marqueses and stuff floating in the air and clowns and all that! I can't say I'm surprised though, it happens when you have your first child at old age.

There is Xolie. She doesn't look like herself at all.

"Heyyyy...."-Hlomu says. I'm not sure where she came from.

She's looking down at Agape.

"You look cute," she says.

"Thank you,"

"I'm mami,"-Hlomu

"I'm Agape," she says reaching out for a handshake.

This child!

"Lovely name Agape, what does it mean?"

"It means God's love," she says.

I didn't even know that.

"It's beautiful, come on, let's go put your gift on the table outside,"

And with that, they leave us here.

Hlomu sure is the mothering type.

"She's Lesedi's," I say when Zandile looks at me like I should explain.

"Oh I remember, she said something about her daughter when we were in Kimberley,"-Xolie

She doesn't talk much lately. She's changed completely, it's like she doesn't care anymore.

Sarabulo is another story. I think he's lost his mind. I don't know where he's staying but after that family meeting that didn't go too well, things started going downhill for him.

It's highly likely that Mabutho is also here, not that I can tell him apart from all these other double-lenses of this family.

Hlonu walks back in.

"It's hard to believe he's one hey,"-Xolie.

Silence.

"You know, I never got to thank you guys, for everything,"-Gugu.

"You survived, that's the important thing,"-Hlonu

Survived what?

I'm lost, I might as well leave.

"I'm going outside to greet everyone," I say.

I haven't seen Qhawe since this morning. He left early, said there was something they had to do with his brothers before the party. I think he went to see Mqhele about that issue from yesterday.

There are too many kids here. There are also people in the tent, most of them looking rather.....I think it's the taxi industry people.

Oh and there is the family "tokoloshe". That's what they call him, he's the family lawyer. I take it the little green-eyed red-haired boy is his because he's the only white kid here.

"Hello," I say

They all turn around. It wouldn't be them if they weren't drinking at a toddler's birthday party.

"MaMontsha,"-Mqhele

I look at him and nod.

They all return the greeting. Qhawe stands up and comes to me.

"Are you okay? Did you get whatever you were looking for?" he asks

He didn't understand why we had to buy a gift for Shlangu, not that I was surprised.

"We did. Agape has abandoned me,"-me

She's gotten lost in the crowd here, but she'll be fine I know.

There's another marquee and that's where the party is at.

"I'm gonna go say hello to Gugu," I say, give him a brief kiss and walk on.

It really is a party in here.

There's a "Barney" cake and a very active one-year-old who is walking and crawling around destroying everything he touches.

Where there is Shlangu there is chaos. He started walking at nine months, and that was when all the problems started. When you don't see him, you worry because it means he is somewhere getting up to no-good. This other time when we were in Mbuba, we thought he was sleeping until Niya asked where he was.

We all looked for him, everywhere until we started getting really worried. Right at that moment, the kitchen cupboard opened and out came Shlangu covered in flour from head to toe. The only reason he came out was because it had started to get in his nose and he had to sneeze.

"Why are you speaking Zulu?" I hear someone asking outside.

It's one of the kids, either one of the twins or Mabutho judging by the hoarse voice.

"It's not Zulu it's Swati,"-Agape  
There's silence.

"Okay....but why are you speaking that language because you're white?" the hoarse voice again.

I get that feeling in my stomach....

"No Msebe, she's not white, she has albinism," - another kid.

I think it's Phakeme.

"What's albinism?" - another one.

"It means I don't have melanin! It's not a disease, it just means I'm lighter. So, I'm not white," she says, like a diva that she is.

I don't know how she learned this but she's always ready to "educate" those that stare at her or ask questions.

They're back to playing and laughing and screaming.....

Let me go find Hlomu, I'm sure there's alcohol wherever she is.

She's still in the house with all of them and in comes Mqhele. I didn't realize he was right behind me.

"Hey,"-he says hugging Hlomu from behind.

"Hi," she says turning around to face him.

"Excuse me, there are children here,"-Gugu

He laughs and leaves.

Why was he here again? Qhawe was right when he said Mqhele's hobby is Hlomu.

"How long have you been married?"-I ask

"Almost 13 years now,"-she says.

That's a long time.

"Wow, and you're still in-love?"

"Yes we are. And yes we've been to hell and back. We've hurt each other too but when we look back at it now, we realise it was a test we had to go through. Trust me, nothing is worth giving up on someone you love, on someone that completes you," she says.

I guess she's right. I've also done some crazy things in the name of love for Qhawe, and I've only known him for five months, but I know I'd be incomplete without him.

In comes one big-eyed boy, it's Mabutho.

He walks to stand next to Xolie near the sink.

My phone. It's an SMS, Lesedi is asking how we're doing. I've forgotten about Agape....

Whoah!:

Hlomu just pulled Mabutho away, very quick.

Oh shit! Xolie almost...

"Mabutho, come with me," I say pulling him by hand and walking outside.

What the heck was that??

I'm not going back in there.

.....

People are leaving. I still don't see Xolie, maybe she's taking a nap or something.

We also start gathering in one marquee, one-by-one until all the guests have left.

Gugu says she thought we'd have dinner inside the house, but it's hot, so we'll have it in here.

Agape.....well....she's fine and doesn't need me at all. I think she's assumed a role of Niyw's older sister, and I know she's bullying those boys.

Nqoba says something about being born in prison. I'm not sure what he's talking about but everybody looks shocked by what he just said.

Oh, there is Xolie coming, she's with Zandile.

She sits next to Sambulo. Wow. Tension.

The food is here. Great. We've just been saved.

The party ended a long time ago but the caterers are still here. Overtime maybe?

Qhawe is just sitting looking at his plate.

Strange. He's always eating.

"Are you okay?" I whisper.

He turns to look at me, but says nothing.

"Aren't you going to eat?"

"No, I don't want to eat," he says.

What's wrong with him?

"You're not hungry?"

"I am but I don't want food," he says.

"What do you want?"

His behaviour is worrying now. It's not even about him not wanting to eat, it's about the way he is right now.

"I want to change your surname,"-Qhawe.

What??

I look at him. He's looking at me.

Everybody else is looking at me.

Did he just.....?

I'm stunned!

"Okay," I manage to say.

"October 30 it is then,"-Nkosana says.

What about October 30?

I give him a questioning look.

Oh, it must be the date for.....

"October 30? That's in three weeks,"-I say.

He nods.

Whoah!

An image of my dad flashes in my mind. My stomach turns.

Wow. I'm officially engaged.



# Fourteen

This is the first time in my life that Tshedi hasn't come through for me, the first time ever.

"You're a grown woman Ledi, I'll always have your back but I can't hold your hand all the time. This is something you have to do yourself," she said.

They're all happy for me, all three of them but I know what Omphi and Lesedi are thinking, they think it's too soon, that we should have waited at least a year.

Tshedi is the only one that understands.

I know what I want. I've found a man who would walk through the fire for me and I'd be stupid to turn him down just because I've known him for only a few months.

I thought about telling Mme-Menkwe first, and then ask her to tell my father but, well, we're not that close yet. I'm not about to play a daughter to her.

I thought she'd be here when I arrived but I found ntate all alone.

He was happy to see me. But he knows me, he knows me too well.

I saw him looking at me from head to toe, like he was trying to read my body language.

"You're an early bird all of a sudden?" he asks from behind me.

I turn around and smile at him.

"I've made you summer tea, and an omelette with your favourite, white cheese," I say

He smiles.

"Menkwe makes it with mushrooms," he says.

Shame, he's so happy, so in love. I wish he had done this sooner, you know, be open about their relationship, it would have made things very easy.

"Are you ready to eat?"

He nods.

I follow him to the dining table with a tray

"This looks delicious," he says.

I have a cup of lemon water in front of me. I have no appetite at all, that's how nervous I am.

"By the way, how did you get here? Your car is not here," he says.

Oh I didn't think of that, I might as well be honest.

Naledi

"Chawe dropped me off, he's here on business. He's in Rustenburg actually so we decided to drive here together. He dropped me off last night and left."

I'm lying. He's in a guesthouse not too far from here. He's as nervous about this as I am.

My dad nods. That's all he does, nod.

"We've decided on February," he says

Huh?

"February, the wedding. We don't want something big but you know, the village does so that's what we're going to give them."

I see.

As to why the village would expect a 60-year-old man to have a big wedding? I don't understand.

"Ntate,"

He raises his eyes.

I take a deep breath.

"He asked me to be his wife," I say.

He stares. And then he looks down at his plate.

Oh shit!

"I said yes ntate. I want to be his wife. I love him,"

He's still quiet. I don't know what this means.

He picks up the fork and starts eating.

Okay. What now?

I'm just going to sit here and wait for him to say something.

But he's just eating.....

"You know, I had put all my hopes on you," he speaks when I least expect it.

I'm lost

"I decided a long time ago that it was going to be you. That's why I kept pushing you to come back home,"

I'm still confused.

"I'm not getting any younger Naledi. When I die someone will have to take my place," he says.

Whoah!! What??

"No, don't frown, I'm telling you the truth," he says.

Is he even listening to himself?

"Ntate, what do you mean? I'm a woman,"-me

"So?"-him

"So, I'm a woman ntate. I can't take over from you, none of us can."

He looks at me like he's disappointed at what I've just said.

"In case you haven't noticed, times have changed. If I ever believed none of my daughters would be capable of being chief I would have found a woman to bear me a son soon after your mother left. I raised all of you, I know all of you, but I chose you because of your fighting spirit. You've always been the one that goes for what she wants, no matter what anybody says....." He stops.

Is he serious?

"But in the past few months....I just....I knew the moment I saw that boy that I didn't stand a chance anymore,"

"Ntate....it's not like that,"

He raises one hand.

"No, don't worry, I'm not trying to make you feel bad."

What's he trying to do then?

"You chose him without thinking twice. You chose him over me....."

"Ntate,"

"No Naledi, I told you, I'm not trying to make you feel bad. Actually, I'm proud of you. But I'll never let that boy forget that he disrespected me...."

Can he just get over that please?

"Ntate he's going to be your son-in-law now, please give him a break, he apologized. He even almost bought a game farm just to show how sorry he is,"

There's a smile. We're making progress.

"Are you sure about this? Are you ready for it?" he asks.

I think so.

I nod.

He stares at me for a few seconds and nods too.

"Where did you say he was again?" he asks.

Huh?

"He's in Rustenburg,"

He raises his eyebrows.

"I don't believe that. For all I know he's parked somewhere behind this house," he says.

Errrrr!

"Tell him I want to see him. He must come here, now," he says, stands up and walks to the bedroom.

What the heck???

I expected many things but not this.

Why does he want to see him? What's he going to say to him?

"Baby!"

Whoah! That was quick!

"Hi,"

"Hi, how did it go?"

He's breathing fast.

"Easier than I expected, at least he didn't say no,"

He takes a deep sigh of relief.

"He wants to see you,"

"Huh?"

"Yes Chawe, he wants to see you, now," I say

Silence.

I'm waiting....

"Why does he want to see me?"

Tough question.

"I don't know my love, but he wants to see you and he knows you're here,"-me

"Okay," he says.

I can just hear that he's nervous.

Do other men have to suffer this much to get the woman they love or is it just mine?

My dad has been tormenting this man since day-one!

I know he'll be here soon. What I don't know is what will happen when he arrives.

I think about calling Tshedi to tell her about this but I decide otherwise, she's already thrown me in the deep end as far as this is concerned.

The Zulu's are excited, too excited.

It's only been two weeks since that weird proposal but things have changed. Everything has changed.

I noticed things had changed after I met his family, on his birthday.

But now, things have really really changed.

It's like.....I don't know how to explain it.

The conversation about where I stay has changed from him trying to convince me to move to the Modder River house, to him not understanding why I'm not moving to the Modder River house.

It's like: "you're about to be Mrs Zulu, you can't not be living in a mansion with high tech security".

I can't drive myself to Joburg, the jet picks me up like it's a metre taxi. As a matter of fact, I can't drive myself anywhere anymore.

I also feel like there are people following me. Like wherever I go there's someone watching me.

It's a war I tell you.

Last weekend we went to some function together. All I can say is I'm glad there was no ring to go with that strange marriage proposal because we'd probably be the talk of the town right now.

I'm in that family, in too deep.

It's going to be Lwandle's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday soon and apparently I have to be involved in the planning. Zandile and Nkosana are having their white wedding in two months. My dad is getting married in six months.

It's crazy I tell you.

But I've never been this sure about anything in my life before. I love Qhawe, I trust him. I believe him when he says he'll be good to me. I want to marry him more than anything. With all his faults, I want to marry him and I don't want him to change at all.

My dad's reaction was better than I expected but I know that this doesn't mean it's going to be a breeze from now on. They're going to want to do things the Zulu way, I know they won't compromise.

My dad, I'm not just any girl, I'm a Montsho, the daughter of a chief, and he's going to let them feel that.

Oh look, it didn't even take him 20 minutes, maybe dad was right.

"Go to the bedroom,"- nate says.

I didn't see him coming.

I stand still. I can see Qhawe approaching the door, but my dad is standing in front of me, he wants to open for him.

"You can go Naledi," he says.

I'm not going anywhere.

He knocks twice.

My dad opens.

He freezes. I think he expected me to open the door.

"Zulu,"- my dad says.

"Come on in," he says.

Only my dad can do this to Qhawe. His eyes look like they're about to pop out.

I'm still standing behind my dad.  
Our eyes meet but he looks away quickly.  
He follows my dad to the lounge.

I have a feeling I won't be part of this, my dad has already told me to go to my room like I'm some five-year-old.

Qhawe is too nervous, he keeps rubbing his hands together, and at least he's not wearing shorts or something that will offend my dad in his house. He's even wearing a jacket, in this North West heat.

I'll make him something to drink.

"So, is there something you want to tell me?"-dad

Why is he doing this?

Qhawe clears his throat.

"Yes....."

"I'm listening,"-ntate

"I'd like to ask for permission to marry your daughter,"-Qhawe

This is so 1950s!

I can hear them but I can't see them.

"I see,"-dad

"And if I say no?"

Whaaat??

I put the tray in front of Qhawe, but I don't leave.

Dad looks at me. I stand still with my hands on my hips.

My eyes meet Qhawe's and he raises his eyebrows. He wants me to leave. Nx!

I go back to the kitchen. I'm going to eavesdrop on them live!

"With all due respect ntate....."

Oh no! This is something people say when they are about to disrespect you....

"...I hope that you're going to say yes because I'm not going to take no for an answer,"

Qhawe thought!!

"She's my daughter,"-ntate

"She's the love of my life,"-Qhawe

Why oh why??

Silence.

I wish I could see them.

"Drink your juice," dad says.

I know he's too nervous to even pick up that glass. And worse, he doesn't like juice, he dinks water.

"So when do you want to do this?"- ntate.

"On October 30,"-Qhawe

"But that's next weekend,"-ntate

Eish.....I should have done this two weekends ago.

"Who is coming? Who are you sending?"- ntate

"My older brothers and three other people, they are family elders," he says.

Mzimela, Ngcobo and Gumbi, apparently negotiating lobola and imposing charvinist ideas in the minds of the Zulu brothers are their favourite hobbies, especially Ngcobo, none of the wives like him.

"Family elders, but I.....I thought you didn't have....."- ntate says and stops.

"It is family we've made along the way,"-Qhawe

Naledi

They are having a conversation now, a smooth but intense one.

"I see," - ntate

I hear Qhawe coughing.

Crap it's my fault, it must be the juice, he doesn't like juice. He drinks water and beer only. He doesn't have a sweet tooth at all!

"It's short notice, don't you think?" -ntate

Silence.

This is my fault. I had been postponing coming here to tell my father about this.

"Are you willing to compromise?" - dad

"I don't compromise when it comes to Naledi," -Qhawe.

What's he doing? Is he crazy?

"Oh, so we're doing things on your terms now?" -ntate.

Silence.

"Lesedi told me about that talk you had with the boys," -ntate

That's an unexpected change of topic.

"Oh, I had no idea," -Qhawe

"She told me that you've offered to help some of them with their studies?" -  
ntate

There's that too. I didn't know Lesedi told ntate about that.

He's taking ten of them to tertiary.

I knew he'd do something but I didn't expect it to be so many kids. But like he said, he doesn't give hand-outs, so they'll be working at Sbobho Logistics during school holidays. It's strange though because they'll be earning salaries.

"It's alright then, I'll see you, or your people next weekend," ntate

I must say, I'm a little shocked by today's events. I didn't expect this at all.

My dad stands up.

"I have a gun, and I know how to use it, remember that," he says and walks away.

I find Qhawe laughing in the lounge.

I have a wide smile on my face. My two favourite men didn't try to kill each other today. It's a miracle.

I want to run to his arms, but this is still my father's house.

"Are you hungry? I can make you something to eat," I say in a low voice.

He shakes his head.

"No I want to get out of here, now," he says jokingly.

But he does really want to get out of here.

"I'll wait for you outside the gate," he says walking to the door.

But then he stops and rushes back to the lounge, snatches a picture frame on the display stand and rush out.

Did he just?

He just stole my dad's favourite picture of me!!

I was about 14-years-old when it was taken. I had just won a trophy for being the highest maths performer at school.

Now I need to get out of this house.

Do I still have to make up a lie? Now that I'm officially on my way to being Qhawe's wife?

I take that slow walk to his bedroom. All of us, his daughters, have taken this walk before, when we had to lie about where we are going.

He's reading a book.

I walk in and lean against the wall.

He doesn't raise his eyes.

"Ntate..."

"Go," he says without looking at me.

I stand still.

He still doesn't raise his eyes.

"I said go," he says.

Whoah!

I rush out of the bedroom. I don't even tell him when I'll be back.

Does it even matter to him that I'm 30-years-old?

Qhawe hugs and kisses me the moment I sit in the car.

"I thought you stopped stealing," I say

He laughs.

"You were too cute, look at that," he says turning the picture to me.

I look like there's something in my mouth, that's how fat my cheeks were.

"That's my dad's favourite picture of me,"

He shrugs.

"We share a lot of favourite things with your dad, you, this picture....."

He still makes me blush, after all this time.

"Where are we going?" I ask when he starts the car.

"To have sex," he says.

He still shocks me too! I don't understand how!

"What? I need some sex after that court trial your father put me through," he says

I love him but sometimes I want to strangle him, and kiss him while doing it and break his legs and.....

Urgh! Who am I kidding? I love him just the way he is.

He's booked at the same guest house, the one he stayed in the first time he came here.

We are fussed over the moment we park the car. It's that same guy, the manager or owner, I never really asked.

"You got the same room?" I ask.

He nods.

"Yes, it has some interesting memories, like the one where you left me to smoke in my car," he says.

He's stupid.

"I came back didn't I?"

"I was going to get you back either way, even if it meant going to your father's house and kidnapping you," he says.

I laugh, although a large part of me believes he would have done that.

"I love you do you know that? And thank you for agreeing to be my wife,"

Now I'm blushing. But his hands are already on my thighs.

"I like it when you wear dresses and show those perfect Zulu wife legs," he says.

He's starting.

Naledi

I'm about to shoot back when he pulls me closer and holds me tight, pushes me off and starts unzipping my dress.

He's on that slow and tender tip today, I just know it, it always starts like this....

I lift my arms as he pulls my dress off over my head.

"Your skin is so soft," he whispers as he kisses my neck.

I want to wrap my arms around him but he's going down. He's kissing me all the way down until he's on his knees. It's a good thing I shaved last night.

My hand is on his head. I'm still on my feet but my knees are getting weak.

He comes back up. I start by taking his jacket off, and then his t-shirt. His hands are on my breasts.

"Ouch!"

He's just squeezed them too hard.

He looks a bit confused but lets them go anyway.

I look into his eyes as I unbuckle his belt and drop his pants to the floor.

He wants to push me to the bed but I push him to the chair.

My body is already warm, that was quick.

I feel his finger coming in.

"That was quick," he says.

It really was.

I sit on top of him. He gets it now. All he has to do is sit and let me do what I want to do to him.

"You like controlling me don't you?" he whispers.

"No, I like owning you," I whisper back.

I see a slight smile on his face. His eyes are getting smaller.

My hand goes down, he knows I like putting it in myself so he lets his body loose and lets me find it.

"Mmmmmmm," he cries when I push him in.

"Don't move," I whisper.

He holds me by the waist instead, very tight, too tight.

I'm breathing in his ear, my arms are around his neck. I'm moving slowly and he's getting impatient. His grip on my bums tightens.

I move faster, he gets louder....I slow down.

"Baby," he says pushing me further down.

I like playing games with him, pushing him to lose control.

But he gets frustrated very easily when he's not getting what he wants.

I want to play with his mind more but he stands up and carries me to across the room, throws me on the bed and gets on top of me

He's about to take what's his.

He squeezes my breasts again. I scream. It hurts.

"Sorry," he whispers

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"Naledi," he says

I stop and turn around.

He doesn't say anything, he just looks at me, but he's not looking at my face, he's looking at all of me.



He stretches his hand. He wants me to come to him. Okay.

I walk to him. He looks at me until I'm standing over him at the edge of the bed.

He's looking at me everywhere, except my face.

I'm confused.

"What's wrong?"

He shakes his head.

"Nothing, it's just that I haven't watched you naked in a while, I'm appreciating the perfection," he says.

Oh! He likes seeing me blush.

I walk back to the bathroom. He can be weird sometimes.

He's still lying on the bed when I come back.

I feel like there's something here, something worrying him. He must be nervous about next weekend. I'm nervous too, it's a big step for both of us.

I lie next to him with my head on his chest.

He keeps kissing my forehead and twisting my hair.

I love the way he smells after sex, perfume and sweat and me...

"I think we should have the wedding sooner, in December maybe," he says.

December? What? Is he crazy? It's October now.

"What's the rush?" I ask.

His eyes are all over the place.

What is wrong with him today?

"What's the delay?" he asks.

Really Chawe?

"There's Zandila's wedding, after that there's my dad's wedding,"

He frowns.

"I just think we should do it sooner," he says.

He's starting to get on my nerves now.

"Why Chawe?"

He raises his eyebrows.

"No need to get mad at me, I was just suggesting," he says.

Why does he think he can dictate everything? He should know by now that I won't let him.

It's getting late, I have to go home and cook for my dad. He always gives the staff a day off when we are around. I just know Dikeledi won't even be in the yard tonight.

"I have to go Chawe,"

"Go where?"

"Go home, it's getting late and my dad is all alone,"-me

I'm lying, he's never alone. Well he may be alone in the house but not in the yard.

"But he lives alone. Well not really because there are always people there. And where's his girlfriend?"-him

He's on another level today.

"You know what I mean. And besides, I want to spend more time with him since he believes I'm being taken away from him, by you,"-

There's an arrogant look on his face.

Naledi

"He's right to believe that. I'm not going to be left alone in a guesthouse again after next week, not when you are officially my fiancé," he says.

He's serious.

I'm going to leave because I have a feeling that if I stay any longer we're going to have a fight. That's where we're headed, I can just sense it.

He pulls me back to his arms when I try to get up.

"Stay another hour, please. It's not that late," he says.

It is late actually, but I do want to lie in his arms for another hour and smell him and touch him.

I put one arm around his stomach and lay my head on his shoulder.

He wraps both arms around me.

I could lie here forever.

-----  
I open my eyes and they meet his.

How long have I been asleep?

It's dark outside.

"What time is it?" I ask

He's quiet, just watching me. I have a feeling he's been sitting like this, watching me sleep for a while.

"I have to go home Chawe," I say

He's quiet.

He's acting rather weird.

"I organised you food," he says.

Great. I'm hungry.

"Okay, thank you," I say getting up.

I get a bit dizzy there for a second. My body is a little heavy too. I think I'm going to get flu soon.

I'm still naked, my clothes are on the floor.

This is too much food. But it's just fruit and yoghurts and a chicken salad.

Are we eating healthy now?

He watches me as I walk to the table. He's obsessed with my body today.

This is nice, it's not what I expected but I'm enjoying it.

"Aren't you going to eat?" I ask.

He shakes his head, and then he stands up and walks to me.

He wraps his arms around my waist from behind and kisses the top of my head.

"I don't want you to go baby," he says.

I don't want to go either, but I have to.

"Let's just respect my dad, just until next weekend,"

He takes a deep breath.

"When are you moving to Gauteng?"-him

Sigh.

I've been avoiding the subject, but I knew we were going to have to discuss it eventually.

"I can't just leave Kimberley Chawe, not now anyway."

I know he's not going to accept that.

"Why?" he asks.

He's being unfair.

I turn around to face him.

"What am I going to do with my house? My job? I have a life there Chawe."

"But I want your life to be with me, next to me. Are you trying to tell me that we're going to be doing this to and from forever?"

"Not forever," I say.

He's making me uncomfortable with this conversation now. I'm battling to look him in the eye, he notices and follows my eyes wherever I turn them.

"Talk to me," he says.

No I don't want to tell him this.

"Naledi," he says.

Whew.

"I don't know Chawe, I'm a bit scared. It's like I'm giving up everything, everything I've worked for all my life. My career, my independence..."

He drops his eyes. I think he's hurt a little.

"I'm not asking you to give up anything Naledi. You can still have it all but I want you to be my wife, I need you close to me especially now that..." he stops.

Now that?

"Now that we are about to make this official. I want to come home to you every night and I want to wake up next to you every morning," he says.

What's with him today? First he wanted to rush the wedding and now he wants me to leave everything and move to Gauteng?

"It will happen, I promise," I say and hug him tighter.

He presses his forehead on mine and kisses me.

He wants me again.

-----  
I don't know if it's a good idea tell him this but I will anyway.

"Do you want to hear something funny?"

"Are you sure it's funny?" he asks.

He's being a moron I see.

"Whatever, never mind," I say and look out the window.

He laughs.

"Okay, I promise to laugh, tell me," he says.

Mnx!

"My dad, this morning when I told him about you wanting to come and pay lobola. He told me something that shocked me,"

He doesn't laugh. He looks worried.

"So as you know, it's just us girls, he doesn't have a son,"

"Yes, okay," he says.

"He said his hopes were on me," I say and look at him.

He frowns.

"What???"

"Yep, he said he made a decision a long time ago that I'd take over from him,"

He looks shocked.

"But....."

Naledi

"Yes, I'm a woman. But he said things had changed. That if our people didn't know that he'd let them know. He seemed serious about it, like he really believed that a woman could become a chief. He said if he didn't believe one of his daughters was capable of being a chief he would have found a woman to bear him a son."

He doesn't understand this at all.

I don't understand it too.

But let me relieve him before he starts panicking.

"But he said he knew from the day that I left his house with you that he'd lost me. That I'd choose you over my people,"

"Would you do that? Would you choose me over everything?" he asks.

He doesn't get it does he?

"I chose you a long time ago Chawe, I'd still choose you again,"-me

I'm being honest. I don't think I could ever love anything more.

He takes my hand and kisses it. He holds on to it until we reach my gate.

He's still holding it when I open my door.

He really doesn't want me to go. I feel bad.

"We can leave early tomorrow, just so we spend more time together before I go back to Kimberley," I say.

He nods, but he's still not happy about this.

"You stopped smoking right?" he asks.

What?

I frown. Where is this coming from now?

"Yes baby I stopped, I've even forgotten what cigarette tasted like,"

What is it with him today?

"Promise?"

I'm so over this!

"What? You don't trust me now?"

"I do, I'm sorry, you know I'm a health freak. I want you to live forever," he says.

Sigh.

"I love you," I say kissing him and getting out of the car.

Oh, new mommy's car is here. I didn't know she was coming over.

Oh no I shouldn't see this.

"You're back!" my dad says with a big smile on his face.

He's still standing with his arm around her waist.

When I walked in she was feeding him something with a spoon.

She's cooking, she must have been letting him taste the food.

"Yes ntate, Mame, how are you?" I ask walking to her.

She likes hugging and kissing on the lips. Considering that I don't have mother-love experience, I feel awkward around her.

She stands with her hands on her hips, and a smile.

"I could make your wedding dress," she says.

Oh hell no!

She's the second person who's offered to make my wedding dress. The first one is an over-the-top character who dresses the Zulu brothers for functions and is planning and decorating and styling and.....doing everything that has to be done for Zanele's wedding.

I don't even know who told him I was getting married.

"Errr...I haven't even decided on the date yet. I'm not even sure if we're having a white wedding, Qhawe is very culture conscious. He might want to have a Zulu wedding only, a proper one." I say.

I've been thinking a lot about that. He doesn't sound interested in a white wedding at all. But I know he'll give me one if I want it.

"You'd look very nice in a wedding dress. I'm thinking puffed shoulders and a big bottom," she says.

Lord save me! Puffed shoulders??

My dad is watching us talking with a smile on his face.

It's important to him that we get along, but then again, he was clear that she's his and not ours, so our feelings are not exactly important to their relationship.

Who is this now?

"Hi, Naledi," she says.

I'm lost.

"Oh this is my daughter Lerato,"

Oh, that one.

"She's about two years older than you. I'm sure you two will get along,"

Mnnummm I'm not sure if I want to be friends with my new step-sister.

They're looking into each other's eyes again. I must leave this kitchen.

Lerato follows me.

"They're like teenagers," she says.

We laugh.

I want to go to the bedroom and call Qhawe but she's right behind me.

"When are you going back to Kimberley?" she asks following me to my bedroom.

"Tomorrow, that's if I'll make it there on time. I'm going via Joburg,"

"Why do you have to go to Joburg?" she asks.

She has this look on her face, one that tells me she likes asking questions.

I'm not about to pour my heart out to her.

"I left my car there so I have to pick it up," I say

My car? I don't even remember how it looked inside.

"Oh, I see. So you're a doctor?" she asks.

I did say she was nosy.

"Yes, what do you do?"

"I'm in Communications. I started out as a journalist but moved to government communications, it pays better," she says.

To be honest, I'm not exactly interested. My mind is not here, it's with Qhawe. If I had known my dad had company I would not have come back.

"So I hear you're dating one of the Zulu brothers?" she asks.

She looks fascinated by all this.

"Yes I am, I take it you saw that article too?"

She laughs.

"Don't worry about it, I'm sure you'll survive, you look like a tough girl," she says.

The part I don't understand is whether they're leaving or staying over.

My phone rings.

"Baby,"

Naiedl

"Hi, are you at the guest-house already?"

"I am," he says.

I'd have expected step-sister here to leave the room but no, she's standing watching me and smiling.

"I miss you," he says.

"I miss you too my love,"-me

Can this woman leave my room please?

"Chawe, can I call you back? We have guests and...."

"No it's fine, call me before you sleep. I love you," he says and hangs up.

He was supposed to drive back to Joburg this afternoon but since I ended up sleeping until sunset, he's going to leave in the wee hours of the morning so that he can make it to church tomorrow.

I was surprised that they actually agreed to do it, religion does not exist in that family.

I could tell this girl doing that was rude but I don't want to sound like an evil sister.

"So how did you two meet?" he asks.

Oh no!

She's probably one of those many girls mesmerised by the Zulu brothers. And it's going to be a problem because she's family now which means she's bound to see them occasionally. The problem is, Mqoqi and Mpaude will bed her if she's not careful. Those two are like little rabbits.

"We met in Kimberley, he was there on a business trip,"

I'm not about to tell her all the details.

"And he approached you? Just like that?"

Sigh.

"I didn't really know who he was, not until later,"-me

"Oh wow! Where do you live? Everybody knows the Zulu brothers. They're like a dream!!"

My suspicions have just been confirmed. I must keep her away from those men.

"I honestly didn't know them at all, but they're good people, they're not just handsome guys, they have brains and personalities,"-me

I know every woman would like to sleep with them but I don't think they're just penises on display, they're family men with self-respect.

"So have you been to Greytown yet?"

Huh? She sounds like a stalker now.

"Yes, I've been there. And now that we're getting married it's going to be officially home....."

"You're getting married? Oh my word! They're going to be family....."

She stops talking when she sees the look on my face.

I will not tolerate skanky-ness, she must know that.

"Yes, I'm going to be family with them," I say.

She raises her eyebrows.

"They like you all feisty, don't they?" she says.

What does she mean by that? She doesn't even know them or their wives.

Dad shouts that dinner is ready.

I've been saved.

"She actually wanted to sleep with me in my room. Can you believe that?"

"But, she's trying to be your sister," he says

He finds all of this funny. I don't know what's wrong with him.

They were not home when he arrived to pick me up.

Dad wanted all of us to go to church but I couldn't. I told him I wanted to get to Kimberley early.

And when he found me still at home when he came back all he did was shake his head.

Qhawe drove to Joburg last night just after our last phone conversation. And then he drove back here after church. He hasn't said anything yet about how bad it was, although he does seem a little distracted.

We're flying out to Kimberley at 8pm, and as usual he is coming with me.

But before that, I'm going out to lunch with the wives, apparently they do this on Sundays when all other normal women go to church with their children.

"I'm feeling sleepy," I say

I woke up tired this morning.

"You are? Slide the chair back and sleep," he says, very quickly.

This is new, normally he doesn't want me to sleep when he drives, but I do anyway.

He's also been trying to force me to eat some avocado and ham bagel he bought from Woolworths. The thing tastes like cardboard. I took two bites and left it.

"I think I'm coming down with flu, I have to get antibiotics before it gets me," I say.

His eyes are wide!

"No Naledi, you can't do that. You must go to a doctor first, you can't just medicate yourself," he says.

Really?

"I AM the doctor Chawe, and yes I can medicate myself,"

Why is he freaking out?

"No, you can't do that. If you think you're getting flu, drink some lemons and garlic, you can't just take antibiotics,"

When did he go to medical school again?

Whatever! I want to sleep.

We decided to postpone the issue of our mother, all four of us, just for nate's sake. We don't want to complicate his life. We've never seen him this happy before and it would be unfair of us to spoil that.

Lerato was trying to convince me to get involved in planning the wedding. The way she talks about it, it's like it's her wedding.

His phone is ringing.

Oh good, the loudspeaker is not on today.

"Bafu," he answers.

It's one of his brothers obviously.

"Yes....we'll talk when I get home. I'm almost there...."

"No.....I'm going to be in shit again.....I don't know, we'll decide..."

Naledi

What's he talking about? And who is he talking to?

"I'll meet you there," he says and hangs up.

I'm looking at him. He knows I want to know what that was all about.

"I'm talking to Mqhele, it's a work thing, there's something I forgot to do," he says and looks ahead at the road.

I know about the business but I don't know everything. I just know it's proper and well handled. I worry sometimes about their tendency to outsource things.

For instance, they use an accounting firm to handle their taxes and all auditing, I think it would be better if they had an in-house department to do all that work.

However, they're really smart people and I have a feeling they have their reasons for doing that.

He takes my hand and holds on to it tight.

I catch him staring at me and smiling.

I give him an inquiring look.

He frown-smiles.

I raise my eyebrows.

"Nothing, I'm just.....I'm looking forward to our life from now...from next weekend," he says and kisses my hand.

"Me too. I can't wait to be Dr Naledi Montsho-Zulu,"

"Dr who? Forget it! Your surname is going to be Zulu. Once I put that ring on your finger Montsho dies and disappears," he says.

Oh hell no! I sit up!

"Why? I want to keep my surname, what's wrong with that?"

His face says he doesn't believe I'm really asking him this question.

"Because I'm going to take you to Mbuba, to my father's house. You're going to enter the gate wearing isidwaba and we are going to smear you with gall. And that my love, will mean you are officially a Zulu. Even if you leave me, which will never happen because I'd shoot you if you tried, you'd still have to be buried by my family when you die."

I hear him, but I'm still stuck on that part where he shoots me if I leave him. But he's probably joking.

"So I don't have a say at all?"

"Nope, you don't have a say. And besides, why would you want to keep Montsho, it sounds like something you'd chew,"

Did he just diss my surname? The moron!

"It's better than yours. Imagine me introducing myself as Naledi Zulu, people would start thinking I'm going to beat them up or shoot them....."

He laughs out loud.

"Dr Montsho, Zulus are misunderstood by all these other people..."

By "all these other people" I assume he's referring to the rest of the world.

"We are warriors, natural born warriors," he says with a smirk on his face.

"Arrogant and bossy warriors.....?"

"Not Am I arrogant?"

Sigh.

"Do you really want an honest answer to that?" I ask.

He frown-smiles.

"I thought you wanted to sleep. The world is much more peaceful when your eyes and mouth are shut," he says.



Chra!!

"Mux! My life is much more easier without those xenon lights you call eyes,"-me

He laughs out loud!

"I'm watching you," he says opening them wide.

I can't help laughing. He can be a little boy sometimes.

He catches me smiling to myself.

"What's that smile...?" he asks tickling my arm.

"I'm thinking about that night we drove to Joburg together for the first time, after you lied to me that you were stranded,"

He bites his lower lip.

"I had never in my life met a woman so stubborn! I mean, I had to fly to Kimberley and have lunch at a parking lot with lunatics watching me through windows before I got your attention," he says.

It seems like a long time ago now.

"You were annoying and I had no plans of going out with you, ever,"

He shakes his head.

"Tell me that the next time you scream my name as I shag you," he says.

I've been laughing throughout this conversation.

We're 20km away from Alberton, no point in trying to sleep now.

And besides, I'm already running late. When we get to the house I'm just going to freshen up and go to meet with the ladies.

I had asked Omphi to join us but she went away with her friends for the weekend.

"I'm driving you there," he says as we enter the house.

I expected this. He's too clingy this weekend, I don't know why.

"Okay that's fine. I'm going to change into a maxi dress, it's too hot,"

He likes me in dresses anyway.

I have about ten minutes to do all that and leave this house.

"Baby, what do you think about this house?" he asks

Huh?

This is a bit random.

"I love it, it's home,"

He looks around the bedroom.

"Yes but, is it.....? I don't know, safe?"

What does he mean?

"I thought security here was tight, that's what you said. Why? Did something happen?"-me

"No, I mean, the house is glass, maybe we should get one with walls and doors and privacy and lower stairs,"

Is he crazy? I love this house.

"This house is perfect Chawe, we can still live here for years. Besides, we already have three houses, two in Kimberley and this one," me.

"No actually we have eight in total, there's one in Zanzibar ....." he says

What the fuck?

His phone rings.

"Tshedi's birthday is next month right? You can all go there. I have to take this call baby....." he says and walks out the door.

Did he just say he has a house in Zanzibar?

He has eight houses?

When I said we had two houses in Kimberley I was counting mine as well.

Exactly how much money does this man have?

"Ready?" he asks. He's done with the phone call.

No, we still have to talk about that bomb he dropped earlier.

"You have a house in Zanzibar?" I ask.

"Yes I have a house in Zanzibar, and other houses all over the place. Look, I was thinking that you could go there for Tshedi's birthday for some bonding or whatever it is that women do together, maybe even invite your new step-sister," he says.

I didn't even know you could buy a house in Zanzibar. I pictured it as a small island with exotic looking people who sell coconuts.

"I'll think about it,"-me

He's already walking out the door. I follow.

Tshedi is going to be happy about this but it's a bit weird. This life here, it's a bit weird. I'm not going to lie, my life was never hard, my dad provided and I come from a family of high status, but even I find this life strange.

It's this thing of having too much. It makes me feel guilty.

"You won't drink any alcohol right? Not until you have that flue checked out, buy another doctor," he says.

I don't feel like drinking anyway, but I might, just to rebel against his controlling ass.

"I won't, I promise,"-me

He's doubting me.

"I'm not a drunkard Chawe, I won't drink alcohol when I'm sick."

"I'm glad to hear that. I'm going to see Mqhele. It's either I'll pick you up from here or we'll meet at Mqhele's house later,"

We're doing lunch at Cedar Square.

They're all here except Xolie, she's always late for everything.

"Here comes the Mrs....." -Gugu says as I approach.

They're already halfway through a bottle of wine. I promised the dictator I wasn't going to drink today.

"Hi ladies," I say as I sit.

Hlonu is on the phone.

"Start talking, how did it go? Is the chief going to let us have you?"-Zandile.

I laugh.

"The chief shocked me, he was actually nice to Chawe but he did say he was going to shoot him if he put one foot wrong," I say

They laugh.

"Don't worry, he's going to like him eventually,"-Hlonu

She's her usual plain and simple self, Zandile is her usual perfectly crafted doll and Gugu is.....well, glamorous as usual.

"I'm starving, have you guys ordered?"

They haven't. I take it they were waiting for me, and now we have to wait for Xolie.

The waiter appears with an empty wine glass.

"No I'll have juice please," I say.

They all look at me.

"I'm coming down with flu. And I promised Chawe I wasn't going to drink," I say.

The look they're giving me!

"Naledi, don't let him tell you what you can or cannot do, you have to be careful with these men, they live to control us," -Zandile.

This I did not expect from her.

In comes Xolie.

She looks different, better than the last time I saw her.

"Pour me a glass pleaseeeeeeee," she says.

They drink. They really drink.

Hlomu's phone rings again.

She's a busy bee today.

"Zah, how are the preparations going? Have you strangled Lloyd yet?" -Xolie

She rolls her eyes.

"No, but I know it's coming. He wants floating lights, in the pool. I don't know how that's going to work. And he says I must have three dresses, one for the ceremony, another for photographs and the last one for the reception. I don't know what's wrong with that guy," she says.

Lloyd is apparently Hlomu's twin brother's friend. He's also a designer, a stylist and an event organiser. I met him only once but I already know I'd strangle him if I had to live with him every day.

"I'm trying to find a school for Niya. It's a problem because her father is fussy. He doesn't want her to go to school, he says other kids will bully her or she'll get hurt or....." she says waving her hand.

The child is three years old, she should be going to school already.

"Mqhele though! If he could keep Niya in a bubble for the rest of her life he would," -Gugu

"Nkosana is worse when it comes to Niya. It's like she's an egg that could break anytime," -Zandile.

It's understandable, she's the only girl-child, but damn they spoil her. She gets anything and everything she wants.

"Are you okay? You don't look like you're enjoying that," -Hlomu says to me.

I'm not, it tastes like rubber. It's pasta but it tastes like rubber.

"I'm not actually, it tastes funny," -me

"Order something else then, a salad maybe," -Gugu

No, I don't want to seem like a drama queen here, there's already too much attention on us.

I can't help noticing the three girls at the table across us. They keep looking at us, at me mostly. I saw them looking at me and laughing a few times.

I'm definitely sure they're talking about us.

Oh well, I don't know them, they don't know me, so I shouldn't be bothered. I think it's about those pictures of me in a bikini, people have never forgotten about that, I'll always be that girl.

"We talked," Xolie.

Silence. Awkward silence.

"We talked about it. I haven't allowed him back home yet but at least we're talking. I've suggested counselling. He obviously doesn't understand what that is but he said yes. So, we're going to do it one step at a time,"

Whew! That's a relief. This thing was taking a strain on the whole family.

Sambulo was wrong, they were all wrong. But at the end of the day there is a child, an innocent and adorable blabbermouth child who shouldn't suffer for their sins.

He's living with Mqoqi, Qhawe takes him sometimes too.

Xolie still can't get herself to like the child. It's understandable, he'll always be a reminder of Sambulo's infidelity.

"You know, I'm still hurt and angry, but I hate what this is doing to my kids. They're confused as to why their father doesn't come home every night and why he's always so sad. A part of me will never forgive him, he lied to me for six years..." she says and stops.

Someone please come with some words of wisdom!

"And I still love him. I was fooling myself thinking I wanted to divorce him," she says.

"If it can be fixed, fix it,"-Hlonu says.

At least someone is talking.

"And then what? Live with the child? I don't trust myself enough,"-Xolie.

"Xolie, if I could forgive Nqoba, I'm sure anything is possible,"-Gugu

Forgive Nqoba for what?

"And you know how many times I've forgiven Mqbele for his bullshit. It's tough when things like this happen but once you decide to let go and accept that it happened, things get easier,"-Hlonu.

I'd really like to chip in on this conversation but I've never been married so I don't know if my little opinions will be welcome.

There's loud laughter. It's those girls again, I catch them looking at me again.

My eyes meet Hlonu's, I look down.

She looks behind her, at them. And then she looks at me.

"Are they talking about us?" she asks.

Oh no!

"I know one of them," she says and signals the waiter to come to us.

"Please call the manager for me," she says to the waiter.

I hope she's not about to cause a scene.

Her face is already hard when the manager arrives.

"Hi," she says.

The manager guy looks nervous.

"Is everything okay Mrs Zulu?"-he asks.

We're all sitting here looking at Hlonu.

"Not really, see that table over there?" she says pointing at them.

They are watching.

"They're making us uncomfortable. Please do something or we leave," she says.

Whoah!

The manager nods and walks across to the table.

There's a minor argument between them and the manager. Two bouncers appear. The girls pack and leave the restaurant.

Our eyes meet again, she smiles and drinks her wine.

This is a side of her I didn't know.

"You know one of them?" -Zandile asks Hlomu.

"Yes, that one with a blonde weave was with Qhawe for a couple of months. He had to block her numbers when they were over. She's that type," she says, like it's nothing important.

The appetite that I didn't have in the first place has just vanished.

"Don't worry about it, if she was important you'd know about her," -Xolie says.

I'm not exactly worried about that girl, I'm worried about the fact that Qhawe once slept with someone besides me. Yeah I know, I'm crazy.

"Everybody has that annoying ex," - Xolie.

"Not Miss Virgin here," -Gugu says pointing at Hlomu.

They laugh.

"Miss Virgin?" -me

"She's only ever had sex with Mqhele. Imagine, how lousy is that?"

Gugu though!

Hlomu rolls her eyes.

"I do have an ex, it's just that I wasn't a teenage hoe. I dumped him for Mqhele. I bumped into him a couple of years later and Mqoqi almost beat him up, for hugging me," she says.

LOL, that's weird and funny but totally believable.

"And knowing Mqoqi, he would have beaten him up for sure," Xolie says shaking her head.

"And you Naledi, what's up with the ex? Is he still bothering you?" -Zandile.

Sigh. That. Let me just be honest.

"No, he died actually," I say.

Silence. Stares.

"He tried to attack me, at my house, luckily the cops arrived and he was arrested. But he didn't make it to the next day, he fell and hit his head in the police holding cells and died." I say.

That stare.

"When was that? When did he die?" -Xolie.

It feels like a long time ago.

"Months ago. Soon after I met Chawe," -I say.

"Mmmmmmm," -Hlomu says.

It's the same thing Qhawe said when I told him the news.

# Fifteen

I have three new patients.

All of them arrived on Monday and I'm struggling, really struggling.

If I'm not tired I'm irritable.

That flue never came. I hate to say this but Qhawe was right to force me not to take those antibiotics. Imagine, I would have had to finish the whole course for a flue that wasn't even there.

I'm looking forward to seeing my sisters this weekend.

A few of my uncles and aunts and cousins from my father's side are also coming and it's going to be a circus, that's how hectic my family is.

Qhawe is here. He left on Tuesday and came back yesterday.

I don't know what's wrong with him lately, he's so clingy. He wants to be with me all the time, he fusses and fusses about everything.

Since Monday I've been coming in here in the morning and only leaving this building in the afternoon when I knock off. He's been making sure that lunch is delivered, with snacks and juices and fruit. My bar-fridge is already piling up and thanks to Chelsea who comes in here and eats my stuff without asking, its door can still close.

On top of all that I have to deal with Tshedi exaggerating everything while Mme-Menkwe on the other hand wants to be too involved.

There's also Lerato. She said she wasn't going to be there but she keeps calling me asking how everything is going and who is going to be there.

As far as I know all the brothers are coming. It's the three old men with Nkosana, Ngoba and Mqhele who are going to be doing the negotiations, so I'm not sure why the other double-lenses want to be there too.

I'm praying for things to go smooth. Qhawe told me that in his culture women do not get involved in lobola negotiations, but in my culture, the girl's aunts are allowed to sit in throughout the process although they don't really negotiate what needs to be paid and how.

I foresee a culture-clash situation along the way, with my father being who he is.

*"We're sleeping in Modder River tonight,"* he SMSs

What he should have said was: "Is it okay if we sleep in Modder River tonight?"

But no, not Qhawe Zulu.

"Okay," I respond.

I don't want to fight with him. His penis is on another level these days, maybe that's why I'm always tired.

"Great, I'll have food delivered there,"

I won't even ask what food that is, it's not like he asked for my opinion anyway.

He says he prefers working from home lately, that's why he's here. And so he drives me to work and picks me up every day.

It's 3pm, time to see.....what's her name again? Mrs Sprackett. She went crazy after her husband divorced her for a woman half her age. She started cutting herself and all that stuff, and she has cancer now. The moment I always dread has arrived, breaking the news to her. I've done it a million times but it's still as testing as it was the first time I did it. The look on someone's face when you tell them they could die any day from now is indescribable.

Her ward is not too far from my office, which is great because it's that time of the day where I don't want to be engaged in small talk with some random colleague.

Urgh! That smell, it's making me nauseous.

It's nicotine.

It's Tsietsi behind me.

I expect him to walk past me without saying anything like he usually does but he stops, and looks at me from head to toe.

"Hi, stranger," he says.

I don't know what to say to him.

"You look...different," he says.

"Hi Tsietsi,"

He's still looking at me in a strange way.

"How are you? It's been a while," he says.

"A while? I see you every day Tsietsi, it's just that you always walk the other way when you see me," I say.

I stopped getting frustrated by this beef between us a long time ago. Hard as it's been, I've accepted that our friendship is over.

He starts walking again.

Oh well, this was pointless.

"When was the last time you went to see a doctor?" he stops and asks.

And then?

I frown.

"I was just asking," he says and walks on.

It wouldn't have made any difference if he hadn't stopped at all. I don't know what it is exactly that he wants from me. If I were to apologise to him, I don't know what I'd be apologising for because I never did anything bad to him.

"Mrs Sprackett,"

"What?" she snaps.

I should have brought a male nurse with me.

"I've come to check up on you, how are you feeling?"

She bites her lip.

"What's in that envelope?" she asks.

I should have brought a counsellor.

"It's your test results," I say.

Naled

I have a feeling she's expecting the worst. She took her medication, so she's more sane than normal. The problem is, her insanity is always replaced by anger.

"What do they say?" she asks.

She must sit down and allow me to prepare her for this.

"Mrs Sprckett we need to talk first. If you're not in a good space today we can do this whenever you're ready,"

I see her chest moving, she's breathing fast.

"I have cancer don't I?"

Oh crap!

"Tell me! I have cancer!" she screams.

She tries to snatch the envelope from me! I step back!

She's screaming and shouting and cursing.....

I'm on the floor! On my back!

"Dr Montsho!"

It's a man's voice.

What just happened?

There are two male nurses trying to restrain her. The envelope is on the floor. She's screaming.

"Let me help you up," - the security guard says to me.

I'm bleeding! My forehead is bleeding!

There's broken glass on the floor! She threw a glass at my face.

"Dr Mphahlele is here," the security guard says.

I'm pulled out of the ward.

Tsietzi keeps asking me what happened.

I don't know, I have blood all over my face and top.

He's pulling me by my arm.

How did this happen? So quick? She was too quick!

I've never been attacked by a patient before.

"Sit here," Tsietzi says when we are in one of the consultation rooms.

I'm getting a headache now.

"I need painkillers."

"No wait, let me see how deep this cut is first,"

He's wiping blood off my forehead, it stings.

"It's not too deep, no need for stitching....."

"Yes but it's painful, I want painkillers Tsietzi!"

He doesn't answer me. He stands still.

Why? He's supposed to be getting me painkillers.

"I'll give you Panado," he says.

What? Panado is for fucking minor headaches! I'm bleeding here!

"It's fine, I'll get the pills myself," I say pushing him away.

I try to walk to the cupboard next to the door but he pushes me back to the bed and stands there blocking me.

What's his problem? Does he hate me that much now?

"I'll drive you home," he says.

Ghrr!

"No! Chawe will pick me up. Where's my phone?"

I can hear voices outside on the corridor. I think the whole hospital has come up here.



That woman is really crazy!

My phone is still in my pocket.

*"Please come pick me up"*- I SMS

I want to get out of this place! Now!

*"Bunking work? Okay, I'm on my way,"*

He has no idea.

"Tsietsi please, I need strong painkillers, an injection if you can,"

I can't stand this throbbing pain anymore. My whole face is burning.

He slaps my wrist when I try to touch the wound.

"Stop that! And no I won't give you any painkillers...."

"Why?" I ask.

"Because contrary to what you believe Naledi, I still do care about you. You must go home now, is your boyfriend coming to pick you up?"

He calls this caring about me?

"Yes he's on his way,"-me

I hope he'll be here soon so that we can go past the pharmacy to get pills.

"Here, wipe your face, the bleeding has stopped," he says handing me a wet wipe.

I don't want to see my face right now, I can't! But I know my forehead is swollen, I can just feel it.

The CEO runs in like someone is chasing her.

"What happened? Are you okay?" she asks almost touching my forehead before I move away.

I don't want them fussing that's why I have to get out of here now. And this CEO, she's new, she's only been here for two months but she wants to get involved in everything under this roof.

"Have you examined her? How bad is it?" she asks Tsietsi

"She'll live, she won't need stitching."

I'd be celebrating that fact if I wasn't in so much pain.

"Painkillers?"-CEO

"Not a good idea, she'll be fine she just needs to go home and sleep,"-Tsietsi

My phone beeps.

*"I'm outside. What's all this commotion? There are people standing outside,"*-SMS from Qhawe

*"I'm coming now,"*- respond.

I don't want him coming in here and seeing all this.

"I'm leaving, I'll be fine," I say to the CEO and try to fake a smile while at it.

"You can have the day off tomorrow, we'll see you on Monday," she says.

That's not necessary.

I have to go and get my handbag from my office and lock up before I go.

"Where?"

I know that voice! How did he get in here?

"Where is she?" he shouts.

He's coming down the passage!

Oh shit!!

The door swings open.

Eyes first.

Naledi

"Take everything you own. You're never coming back here," he says in what seems like a threat or a bias or.....

The look on his face! I can't describe it.

"Chawe please..."

I expected a hug and comfort, at least. Not this.

"No Naledi. I'm not losing you or my child because of these lunatics you are so obsessed with, let's go!" he says.

Child??

What child??

"Come on let's go," he says pulling my arm.

What child??

"Naledi, we're going home. I'll send someone to clear your office tomorrow," he says.

Tsietsi and the CEO are just standing here watching all of this, stunned.

"We'll talk tomorrow," I say to them as I am pulled out the door.

By now, everybody here, and pretty much the whole of Kimberley knows I'm dating Qhawe Zulu. So yes, the whole building has come out to watch.

He's not smiling with anyone, or greeting or even looking at anyone, he's pulling me down the passage and down the stairs.

I'm still in pain.

"I told you I don't want you working here! I told you!" he shouts as he starts the car.

Why is he shouting at me? I've been through so much today already.

"I knew this was going to happen! I knew it!" he shouts.

I haven't said anything at all. I'm in so much pain I can barely pay attention.

"Chawe, what child?"

That's all I'm thinking about. This tantrum that he is throwing here is not important.

He doesn't answer me.

Hell no!

"Do you have a child I don't know about?" I ask.

He looks at me and frowns.

He still doesn't answer me.

"Is it painful? Are you in pain?" he asks.

I don't fucking care about the pain!

He takes a deep breath.

"You can't take any medication," he says.

What the heck is he.....?

I'm looking at him, he's looking at me, our eyes lock.

Nooooooo!

"Chawe....."

He doesn't answer me.

A lot of things are.....

They're starting to make sense now.

Him stressing and fussing all the time and bringing me food and forcing me not to drink and.....

"Chawe,"

He's still looking into my eyes.

The look on his face says he is worried...

"We need to see a doctor," he says.

I know exactly what's going on. Why didn't I see it? How could I be so careless? There were a few times where we didn't use protection and we spoke about it afterwards but...shit! This is so unlike me!

"How did this happen?"-me

I didn't mean to say it out loud.

He raises his eyebrows.

"It's too soon Chawe, way too soon," I say.

He looks a little hurt, that's what I'm seeing on his face. He doesn't say anything but I know what he's thinking.

I don't know what I'm thinking but all I know is I'm not ready for this. This was not part of the plan.

"You don't look happy," he says.

The atmosphere here has totally changed. I've even forgotten about the pain I'm feeling, and the headache.

"I'm shocked that's all," I say and look out the window.

I'm pregnant? Pregnant? Seriously Naledi?

Chawe probably thinks I did this on purpose. Who gets pregnant less than a year into a relationship? Let alone a 30-year-old woman?

I'm too old to get pregnant by mistake. I'm disappointed at myself.

"You have to put a plaster on that thing," he says.

He's talking about my swollen forehead. It's the least of my problems.

He's driving straight to my house.

"I need painkillers, can we go past the pharmacy please," me

"There's Panado in the house," he says.

I don't want Panado.

"I want something stronger,"

He furiously swerves the car to the side of the road and stops. I almost hit my head on the dashboard.

What the hell?

"Why did you agree to be my wife if you don't want to have a child with me?"

He's angry. Why is he being so unfair?

"Why did you do that Chawe?"

He doesn't care.

"For crying out loud Naledi we're having a child. We're two adults, why are you behaving like a teenager?"

I'm not going to entertain his tantrum, not today, not now.

"I'm just...shocked that's all," I say.

I'm having a fucked-up day. That's what I've concluded.

And how is it that he saw it first?

And Tsietsi too?

"It's not that I'm not happy Chawe, it's just that...I didn't want it to happen now, not before we're married. I don't want it to look like I'm...I don't know, trying to trap you with a baby,"

He takes a deep breath and starts the car.

"I don't know what to do with you anymore Naledi. I don't know what you want from me," he says.

Neledi

What's that supposed to mean?

I raise my eyebrows.

He looks at me briefly and continues driving.

---

He's been quiet all afternoon. Actually he's been giving me silent treatment, which is totally out of character.

I don't know a Qhawa that doesn't talk, this is totally new to me and I don't know what I should make of it.

He handed me a plaster and a pack of Panados, and that was all.

And so we've been walking around this house with tension all over the place.

I still don't know if I'm really pregnant because I haven't done a pregnancy test. It could be a false alarm. Yes, maybe that's all it is, a false alarm.

But then, I know my body, and I know that I feel different. I feel like something is happening, something is growing.

What's my father going to say? What's everybody going to say?

They're going to think I'm careless and reckless.

What's he thinking?

We're not married yet, so what surname is this child going to be called? Mine? I don't think he'll allow that at all.

Now that I think about it, he must have seen it on that day we were at the guest-house, that's why he was trying to rush us to get married.

We're doing the lobola thing this weekend so technically I'll be his wife in two days.

I'm starting to think that maybe my reaction earlier was a bit unfair.

I'm lying here watching him sleeping next to me and I know this is what he wants, to be a father, and he wants to be a father to my baby. He wants me to be the mother of his child.

I remember that day, on that trip we took across the province, he said: "We are going to be the best parents ever".

He knew from the beginning that this was what he wanted. He knew then that he wanted to make this, us, permanent.

And yet, I just can't get it through my head that he is here to stay.

That's the problem with finding yourself with a good man after you've had to survive a very bad man. You find it hard to believe that he is really here.

Tabane killed me, he destroyed me and all the trust I had in men.

I keep screwing up in this relationship, this...best thing that's ever happened to me. I keep screwing it up because every time I realise that I'm at a perfect place, I start asking myself if I deserve it.

This man here, I'm pretty sure he will love me and our child with everything he has.

He has done everything in his power to show me that he loves me, but that question at the back of my mind keeps popping up. Why me? Why would he love me that much? Of all people.

I've never imagined myself being someone's mother. How does it work? What do I do? I have no idea. How am I going to be a good mother to a child when I don't know what it is exactly that mothers do?

Tshedi and Lesedi are doing it very well. But then again, they grew up mothering me so they do know what to do.

It should come naturally because I'm a woman, but I'm scared, I'm really scared.

"Chawe,"

He doesn't answer me.

"Chawe, wake up," I say shaking him.

He opens his eyes very quickly.

"We have to go to the pharmacy,"

He frowns.

"We have to go now,"-me

He looks at his watch on the pedestal.

"It's after midnight," he says.

But we have to go...

"There's a hospital down the road, its pharmacy is open 24-hours. We have to go now,"

He's still confused. I'm already putting clothes on.

"Why? is it still painful?" he asks.

Huh? Oh. He must think it's that cut on my forehead.

"Yes," I lie.

He puts on shorts and a jacket and follows me downstairs.

He's still not talking much but he insists on driving.

I'm also not talking because I have so much going on in my head. I have to make sure because you could find that we are fighting about something that's not even there.

"Turn left after that robot,"

He does as I say.

It's strange that he hasn't asked me what I want to buy from the pharmacy. The last time I checked he was against me taking any medication because he is convinced that I'm pregnant. But now, he doesn't seem to care at all.

He parks the car and sits still.

I look at him, he doesn't move.

He's going to let me get out of the car and walk inside a hospital alone? Just like that? It is so not like him.

"I'll be back just now," I say when I realise that he's serious about staying in the car.

I take three and I'm going to use them all. I need to be sure.

"Did you find what you were looking for?" he asks when I sit.

I nod.

I'm nervous. This could change everything.

He parks the car, gets out, and walks inside the house. He doesn't even look back to see if I'm following him.

Wow.

He's already back in bed when I walk in the bedroom.

I go straight to the bathroom.

I'm going to say a little prayer before I do this. But...what am I praying for? Is it for it to be positive or negative? I'm not sure which is better.

"Chawe," I shout from the bathroom.

"What?" he asks. He's already at the door.

I open and hand him the stick.

He looks at it and frowns. He has no idea what it is.

"Hold that for one minute and tell me what you see," I say and close the door.

He looked really lost.

I'm sitting on top of the toilet seat, biting my nails. It's been a few seconds but the wait is killing me.

"There are lines," he says.

Lines?

Oh crap!

"How many?" I shout back.

"Two I think, yes it's two lines,"

My God!!

"What is this?" -him

I don't think I need the other two pregnancy tests anymore.

I open the door. He's still standing with the stick in his hand.

"You're going to be a father," I say.

He looks at the stick, and then at me, and then the stick again.

"We're going to be parents Chawe,"

He's staring at the stick. I'm staring at him.

I see a bit of excitement on his face...and then it fades. We need to talk.

"This confirms it?" he asks waving the stick in his hand.

I nod.

Strange enough, I feel a little excited too, all of a sudden.

I'm really going to be a mother.

He's looking at me now. I know. He wants to know.

"I do want it Chawe," I say.

He raises his eyebrows. I really did put him off earlier didn't I?

"Let me see it,"

He hands the stick to me.

It really does have two lines. I'm really pregnant. This is the last thing I expected when I woke up this morning.

We are now just standing here not knowing what to do next.

At least he's had a whole week to get used to this. It is totally new to me.

"When did you know?"

He clears his throat.

"I saw you last weekend, at the guest house,"

Wow.

"Is that why you've been like this? Dictating what I eat and keeping a close eye on me?"

He nods.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

He blinks a few times.

"I wanted you to find out for yourself," he says.

"And I wasn't sure about your reaction,"

Sometimes I think I don't know him at all. He shocks me. This is not how he'd normally react, what he'd normally do. He's a straight-up guy. But, I've said this before, when it comes to things that are really important, too important to him, he becomes reserved. I guess this is that important.

"Do you want this? Is it a good thing? Do you want a child?"-me

He looks at me like he's judging me for something.

"Why wouldn't I want my own child Naledi? What's more important in life than this?"

That's how he sees it?

I hope my earlier reaction didn't spoil everything we've built so far. I hope he's not seeing me differently, or even doubting me now.

"I had no idea. I wasn't expecting this and I was shocked because..."

"It's not about whether you want to have this child or if you're ready Naledi, it's about that bullshit you said about trapping me. What the fuck was that about? I thought we were past the money thing."

Oh no. There was that too.

How do I fix this now?

"I'm sorry."

That's all I can come up with. Sometimes I can't control what I do or say. It's just the way I am.

And why are we still standing?

He's not looking for an apology, I can just see it in his eyes.

"We are past the money thing Chawe. We really are..."

Nothing.

"I don't know...I'm just, scared."

"Scared of what?" he asks, in a snappy tone.

I'm scared of many things.

I take a deep breath.

"What do mothers do?"

It's an honest question really.

He frowns...and then looks confused...and then widens his eyes.

We have an eye-lock moment.

"Come here," he says, stretching his arm.

I go.

"We are going to be great parents. I told you that," he says.

He did, he was serious.

He's always loved me hasn't he? Right from the start.

We're driving to the North West tomorrow, we have to get some sleep.

"What time are we leaving tomorrow?"

"Before 8am," he says.

But why?

It's 3am now.

I'll sleep through that whole trip, I'm not a vampire.

"Good night,"-me

"I love you," he says.

"I love you more," I say and close my eyes. His eyes are still open. I don't know how but I know he's not trying to fall asleep. He shifts closer to me. His hand is on my belly. I put my hand over his hand. I can sleep now.

# Sixteen

**T**hey didn't tell my father.

Nopel They just went on with the negotiations like they haven't committed a sin in this house.

I don't think Ngecobo and the others know that I'm pregnant. If they did, one of them would have been sane enough to convince all of them to tell the truth.

It's the terrible twins, Qhawe and Mqhele, they are as terrible as the real twins Msebe and Langa who haven't even started real school yet but are driving their teachers to mental institutions.

They left about two hours ago, leaving me with the unstable Montshos. Yes, they are unstable and tribalist. Only a few of them are happy about this, simply because my soon to be husband is not Tswana or royalty.

I'm not even going to entertain that shit. The man has more money than all of them combined.

**"How is my baby mama doing?"**- SMS

The last one was about six minutes ago.

**"Baby mama? That's all? I thought I qualified as wife now,"**- me

"I like that, baby mama wife. How is he treating you? Are you still eating chips and cheese?"

He'd better not start making fun of me.

That's what I had when everybody else was eating lunch.

I sent him an SMS from my bedroom telling him what I was eating while he was sitting in the car waiting for them to finish.

**"He's a bit heavy today, it must be the eyes,"**-me

My phone rings. He's calling now?

"You have to start behaving like a wife. You can't be making fun of your husband and his family," he says.

I'm laughing as he speaks.

"Is he really heavy?"

Sigh.

"No Chawe he's eight weeks old, he's not even a complete person yet. But I'm tired, I think it's from all that hectic stuff...."

"I told you to rest and let your sisters handle everything."

Here we go again. It's time to change the subject.

"How far are you?"



"Driving past Rustenburg, I want to come back," he says.

I wish he would.

"I'll see you tomorrow my love, it's just a few hours away,"

Never in my life did I ever think I'd meet a man who'd be this obsessed with me, who'd love me like I'm the only thing that exists in his world.

I know it's still early, I'm not sure early for what exactly but it's what everybody keeps saying.

**You're taking things too fast Naledi.....it's only been a few months Naledi....are you sure you know him well enough Naledi?**

Nx! It annoys me really!

I know it's going to get worse when they find out I'm already pregnant.

I'm not telling my father. Qhawe had better make a plan soon. He did this to me, he must tell my father.

**I'm going to take a shower, it's bloody hot here- I SMS Tshedi.**

I don't know where she is in this house, there are people all over the place.

I'd love to know how much they paid for lobola but I've been told that in Zulu culture, I'm not supposed to know.

I have a feeling this Zulu culture thing is going to drive me crazy eventually.

Next is umembeso, which I should start organising because Qhawe wants it done as soon as possible, I suspect his rush has everything to do with this baby situation.

He's already said he wants us to get married before the baby arrives. I think he's crazy. I'm not walking down the aisle with a balloon stomach. The baby will still have his surname even if it's born before the marriage certificate.

I've been thinking up names for a boy, because chances of it being a girl are slim. I like Khumo which means 'wealth', but you know, there's some irony there. I like his beautiful bank balance but I'm not going to go as far as naming his child after it. So I think Tau would be great, it means lion, a great leader, a powerful king.

Whoah!

They're sitting on my bed, all three of them.

Why are they looking at me like that?

"And then?"-me

What's that look on their faces?

"And then what? We can't come to your room now?"-Lesedi

They must want to talk about lobola things.

"I'll come to the lounge when I'm done here,"-me

They don't move.

"It's fine we'll wait for you here, we can all go to the lounge together,"- Omphi  
Sigh.

"Okay, let me get dressed then,"

They sit still.

"Okay, get dressed then,"-Lesedi.

I have a bath towel around me. Do they really expect me to get naked in front of...

Oh shit!!

I'm standing with my hand on my forehead.

"I knew it!!"-Tshedi.

Naledi

She must have noticed the look on my face.

"I told you!"-Omphi

I can't deal with this! Not today!!

I sit down. I'm not sure what to say to them.

"How far are you?"-Tshedi

They're not going to leave me alone.

"Eight weeks," I say.

"Is that why you're getting married? Because you're pregnant?"

Really Omphi.

"No, we only found out two days ago. Well, I found out two days ago but he had known for a week, he saw it first. And no Omphi, he asked me to marry him before we knew I was pregnant."

How could she even think that?

"And they didn't say anything about it today?"- Tshedi.

I shake my head. I also think they made a mistake, they should have come clean.

"Mmmmm ntate won't be happy Ledi,"

Geez! I'm go!

"Chawe will make a plan, he's going to come back with his brothers to tell him, soon," I say.

I'm lying. We have no plan whatsoever.

"How does he feel about it?"-Lesedi.

"He's happy, too happy. He's already asking me if it's heavy and all that. I mean, it's not even a complete human yet, it's still just a clot,"

"Yeah and it's a millionaire clot,"-

Tshedi!!!

At least we're all laughing now.

I think this is the best time to bring this up.

"Tshedi, we could go to Zanzibar for your birthday, the four of us,"

Silence.

They look shocked.

"Okay, Chawe has a house there, a holiday home he bought just for investment purposes. He said he can fly all four of us for your birthday,"

I hope this doesn't backfire.

They look at each other.

"Just as long as he knows we're not about his money,"-Omphi

Sigh.

"Trust me, he knows that. He doesn't care much about all the money,"-me

"Yeah that's because he has too much of it. I'm all for Zanzibar, definitely. We're definitely going."-Tshedi

It's her call anyway.

"We could take Levato along,"-me

Eyes rolling. Frowns.

"She's your step-sister,"-me

"She's clingy,"-Tshedi.

Okay.

I put on a very large dress. I have to hide a human being from other human beings.

*Zanzibar is happening*"- I SMS him.

---

"Has he been with you all weekend?"

He shakes his head.

"We left him with Zandile yesterday,"

Oh, they were all here by the way.

I was shocked seeing him in the car when they arrived to pick me up.

My father and his girlfriend left early for church again. They were gone when I woke up but I think I remember hearing dad shouting that he was leaving.

Normally he would come to my bedroom and wake me to say goodbye but now that he's a love-struck teenager he just leaves without seeing me, even though he knows I'll be gone when he comes back.

The negotiations went well. Whatever it is that they were supposed to agree on, they agreed on.

I was worried about the language issue but it turned out the perception that Zulu people think their language is universal is not true at all.

They battled it out with my very Tswana uncles who know no English and will have you know that when you step into their house, you will speak their language or forever keep your mouth shut.

There were three old men. I had seen all three of them before in Mbuba. One of them apparently used to be a security guard at a building where Hlomu used to live. That's how they met him.

There was Ngcobo too, the one who expects us to kneel when serving him food. Hlomu doesn't like him, she says he's dodgy.

I don't know if it is because he has three wives or if it's because he looks like the type that's into black magic.

That being said, the three men are like fathers to these Zulu brothers. Each has a role. Mizinela saved their lives, Ngcobo looked over them when they arrived in Johannesburg and Gumbi is the voice of reason, he is all about the importance of being a good man.

"Why are there no houses here?"

Geez! He starts again!

We thought we were getting a break, but no he was just finishing his drink.

"Because there is no electricity around here,"-Qhawe says.

He really doesn't think before answering, now we're going to be asked why there is no electricity here.

"Oh okay," he says.

Wow. Shocking.

This child's situation is getting really sad now. If I could, I'd take him in permanently but I don't want to start things here, Xolie could be offended if I do that.

They are talking with Sambulo, which is great but I assume they're still focusing on their relationship before they get to what should be done about the child, that's why he's still living here and there.

However, I must commend these men for being good fathers. The child doesn't even realise there's a problem, he's just happy. He has eight fathers and

he knows they all love him.

The mothers are a different story. Hlonna is too close to Xolie, she'll never do anything that could hurt her. Zandile is the only one that's been defying everyone. Gugu is too occupied with her own hyperactive terrorist of a child. I swear one of these days Shlangu is going burn their house down. This other day, he almost flushed all their toothbrushes down the toilet.

But Ngoba couldn't care less. He just wants his child to be happy and if flushing toothbrushes down the toilet and painting their walls with Gugu's lipstick makes little Shlangu happy, so be it.

Gugu always jokes and says that's the problem with becoming a father at old age, it turns a man into a softie.

I just want to get to Alherton and sleep now. Sleeping during the day is my new hobby. Qhawe will see how he entertains Mabutho, they get along very well anyway.

He touches my belly and smiles.

Damn! He's so excited about this.

"I was thinking up names," I say.

I'm really starting to behave like a pregnant woman. I didn't mean to say that but it just came out. Hormones!

"Really? Already?"

I nod. I might as well.

"I was thinking Khumo or Tau,"

He frowns.

"You're not giving my child some Lesotho mountains name. He's going to have a Zulu name and that's it," he says.

What??

"It's my child too Chawe,"

"I know that. But I'm the father, so he's a Zulu child, and that means he's going to have a Zulu name."

He's serious. He's not being his usual playful self this time, he's serious.

"So I don't have say in it? Am I going to have a say in how he's raised?"

He removes his hand.

"There's no need to get upset Naledi. I'm just saying that my child must know who he is. He's not going to have a Tswana name and he is going to be raised according to Zulu culture. It's not negotiable."

Jizas! He's not laughing. He really means this.

"No Chawe, I'm not going to let you erase who I am and where I come from, he has to know his other side of the family. What about my father?"

He looks upset.

"What about your father? This is my child,"

Oh my God!

"So he won't be part of its life?"

"He will be but that doesn't mean he can make decisions on how we raise him," he says.

I can't believe this!

"Chawe,"

I'm lost for words.

"Baby, don't get me wrong. I'm just saying that we raise our children a certain

way. You know how deeply I feel about culture. Yes your father will be in his life, but I don't want any Tswana traditions imposed on my child, he's not a Montsho, he's a Zulu from Mbuha."

I'm looking at him and thinking: is he really being like this?

I know he's controlling and all but is he really going to be like this?

"Don't do that?" he says

Don't do what?

"Don't get mad about this Naledi. You're marrying me, you're going to be my wife and you're going to take my surname. That's why you're going to leave your home to be part of my family, not the other way round."

I'm beginning to think this marrying out of my tribe thing is going to be a bit more complicated than I thought.

"The problem Chawe is it's always your way or no way, that's the problem. What you say goes and you don't believe in compromise. That's not how a relationship should be,"- me

I'm going to get emotional if this conversation continues.

"We don't compromise when it comes to our children," he says

"What do you mean "we"? I'm marrying you not all of you."

He's making me really angry now.

"You're marrying into my family. The word "I" doesn't exist with us. You have nine children, ten including the one you're carrying and one grandchild. You're responsible for every single person in my family, just like every single one of them would drop everything for you. That's how it works, that's who we are, I thought you'd figured that out by now,"

I don't know if I know this side of him.

We're having a fight, and I'm angry.

I'm done talking.

He keeps looking at me, I can feel his eyes on me, but I'm just going to look out the window until we get to HIS house.

"It's fine I'll carry it myself," I say snatching my bag from him.

"No you're not carrying a heavy bag yourself," he says.

He's also angry. I don't understand why.

Mabutha is already sitting on the couch with the remote in his hand.

I go straight to the bedroom.

No in fact let me go to the spare bedroom.

It's a good thing I changed the linen and all that white shit that was all over this bedroom. Maybe his beloved Oleta allowed him to control her life but not me, I'm not going to be some invisible woman who does whatever he says. I'm not here for that. We can forget it.

"Naledi,"

What does he want now?

"Why are you sleeping here? Why aren't you in our bedroom?"

Really?

"This room is cooler Chawe."

He's standing, looking at me.

"I'll switch on the aircon," he says.

"No, I'm fine here."

Just leave please!

Naledi

"But this is..."

"You want to control where I sleep now? Or is it because this is your beloved Oleta's favourite bedroom...?"

"What??"

He looks shocked, or offended I don't know.

"What does that have to do with anything?"

Ghral! I'm done talking!

"Come to our bedroom, please," he says and leaves.

Fuck off!

I'm going back to my house tomorrow. I'm not going to stay here for this! I'll call work and tell them to cancel my leave.

If I stay here I swear I'm going to strangle him!

And no it's not hormones talking!

And why is Hloma calling me? I don't want to talk to anyone.

"Hi,"

I'm trying really hard to sound calm.

"Naledi, you guys need to come to Xolie's house now. Qhawe must come and deal with this, I don't trust his brothers they're going to snap and make things worse," she says.

She's breathing fast!

"Hloma what's going on?"

"Just get Qhawe here please," she says and hangs up.

It sounds serious. Maybe Xolie and Sambulo are fighting.

"Chawe!" I shout running down the stairs.

He comes running up to meet me.

"Are you okay.....?"

"I'm fine, Hloma just called, I think something bad is happening, she says we should come to Xolie's house immediately,"

I already have my handbag and car keys.

"Mabutho come," I shout pushing the door to the garage open.

Qhawe snatches the keys from me and opens the passenger door very quick. He closes it when I'm seated and Mabutho is on the back seat.

"Did she say what the problem was?" he asks.

"No she just said I must get you there because your brothers are going to snap and things could get worse. I have no idea what's going on, can you drive faster please?" I say

He looks at me like he's surprised I just said that. Can he just hurry please I'm worried.

"Stop worrying I'm sure it's not too bad," he says touching my hand.

Mabutho is busy talking to himself at the back.

Alberton to Houghton is not that far and it's Sunday the road is empty, I don't understand why we're not there already.

I'm anxious! I keep looking at the road and out the window and at him and at the back.....

"I can't drive too fast Naledi I'm carrying precious cargo in this car, my wife and my child," he says.

I get butterflies in my stomach. When he says stuff like that he just melts me away.

Let me stop rushing him.

"I hope everything is fine, I'm really worried," I say brushing his arm.

To think I hated him just 15 minutes ago!

My phone. It's Hlomu again.

"We're on our way Hlomu,"

She says okay and hangs up.

Now I'm even more worried.

Oh shit! We're going to Xolie's house! With Mabutho.....what if she??

We're here! That was fast, I didn't realise we were almost here.

There are so many cars here! It looks like they're all here!

There's a taxi with an unusual number-plate!

"What the fuck?"-Qhawe

"Ha! baba you're swearing?"-Mabutho

Where am I going to hide him?

Sambulo is standing outside smoking. He looks like.....he looks scary! I hope he didn't do anything bad to Xolie! I really hope he didn't!

He nods when I greet him and picks up Mabutho who's just ran to his arms.

I could leave the child here with them but Qhawe is trying to talk to his brother.

"Mabutho come on," I say taking his hand.

Xolie will have to understand that I had no choice.

There are so many people here, I can hear them talking in the lounge.

Phakeme appears from nowhere and pulls Mabutho by the hand. He rushes off with him.

What the heck is going on?

"It's not going to happen! Forget it!"- that's Nqoba, I can tell by the hoarse voice.

"Well then we have no choice but to involve the police,"-someone says. His accent sounds familiar. It's like that of my relatives from Botswana.

"Involve those police, tell them to come here and talk nonsense to us,"-Mqhele

Things are really hectic here, whatever they are!

"Zah,"

"Naledi, I'm glad you're here. Where's Qhawe?"-she asks.

I point her outside. She rushes off.

Someone please tell me what's going on here please!

Xolie and Hlomu are also in the lounge.

I'm not sure if I should go in there too.

They're sitting next to each other. Xolie is just...staring into space.

Qhawe walks past me and straight to the lounge.

My eyes meet Hlomu's and she points me to the empty space next to her.

I go there and sit.

"Good afternoon," Qhawe says to everyone. He's so calm. All his brothers look angry.

All attention is on him now. He sits next to Nkosana.

"I see things didn't start very well here. But I believe we can come to some mutual agreement if we all calm down and hear each other out,"- he says.

The tension in here!

"That's what we've been trying to do here. We came all the way from Botswana

thinking we were going to find reasonable people with manners..."-one man says.

"What?"-Mqhele

Qhawe gives him a look.

There are women too, two of them.

"Where were they all along?"- Mqoqi

Who are they?

"We didn't know about the child, my sister never told us. When she came to visit home she never came with the child,"- another man.

"That doesn't change the fact that the child is ours and he knows us,"-Mpande Mabutho. This is about Mabutho!

"Bafa please let them talk,"-Qhawe.

Silence.

They still look pissed.

This man is talking to Qhawe now, I guess he's given up on all the others. I think Hlonu is here just to make sure they don't kill anyone. Xolie doesn't look like she wants to be here, but it's her house.

"They think they can just come here unannounced and demand...."

"Ngoba please..."-Qhawe.

"Why is Sambulo not here?"-I whisper to Hlonu

"They had to take him outside he was losing it,"-she whispers back.

Whoah!

"We found a copy of a birth certificate in my mother's things, and pictures of my sister pregnant, and pictures of her with a baby and more pictures of the child after she died. We found a phone number and an address, a Pretoria address. When we got there we were told that the owner of the house lives here, so we came here,"- the man.

"Okay, I understand you. So, why are you here?"-Qhawe.

"For my sister's child. As far as we know she never married anyone in South Africa, so the child belongs to its mother's family, and that is us,"- the man.

He's a typical arrogant middle-aged man.

"This child has a father, and he's been in his life since he was little. He took care of everything, that house in Pretoria was bought specifically for the child to live in,"-Qhawe

Xolie takes a deep breath.

None of his brothers are talking now.

"That doesn't change anything, the child still belongs to us. You know that, it's the same in all African cultures," - another man.

The women are too quiet, they don't even raise their eyes.

We're also quiet. It's worse with me because I know exactly what these people are talking about. A child born out of wedlock belongs to the mother's family. The father's family has to go to the mother's family, whether they raised the child or not, and ask to perform *dithari* before they can claim the child.

But I'm just gonna sit here and pretend these people are talking nonsense like everyone else.

"So what do we have to do to make the child ours?"-Qhawe

Nqoba gives him a side-eye.

Nkosana is too quiet and it's worrying me. I hear he's the violent type.

"We don't want you to do anything, we want my sister's child to come home



with us, to where he belongs.”- the man.

“This is crazy.

“Here is the thing. We’re not going to give you the child, but we’re willing to perform whatever ceremony we have to perform to make him ours. And by the way, we did pay damages to your mother and some people she claimed were family. So in our culture the child belongs to us, as you can see, his surname is Zulu. We gave your mother a comfortable life when she was still alive, I assume you saw the house she lived in.....”-Qhawe

“This is not about your money....”

Qhawe raises his hand.

“Yes it’s not about our money it’s about our child, whom you are not going to take to Botswana with you. Your mother never said anything about having a family back home. We took care of her. Even when she died we took it upon ourselves to find her family in Botswana, which I assume is all of you here and send her body across the border with a luxury coffin,”-Qhawe

Xolie is shaking her head as we listen to this. I should be shaking my head too, these men are experts at keeping secrets.

“We appreciate that, although we never asked for your charity....”

“This is bullshit!” Nkosana says standing up!

He walks out!

Whew!

“Mabutho doesn’t have a passport, he has a South African birth certificate, he is a South African citizen,”-Qhawe

The men look at each other.

“What were you going to do? Sneak him out of the country? Forget it!”-Mqoqi

“Let us....”

Oh wow! They can speak!

“Let us try to come to some kind of agreement,”-one of the women.

The men are looking at her like she’s gone crazy.

“I suggest that.....now that we know each other, the families have met, we work out a way to share the child. He can come visit us, or we can take him to live with us and he can come here and visit you,”-woman

“The last part is not going to happen,”-Mqhele

I see what Qhawe was saying now, they don’t compromise when it comes to their children, for real.

“Well then we’re going to speak to our social workers to speak to social workers this side,”-woman

Is this a threat?

“If that’s what you want to do. But remember that we did pay damages, we will go to court if we have to,”-Mqoqi

I don’t believe the court part, I don’t think they are the type that solves disputes using legal ways.

I hope this situation doesn’t worsen.

“We’ve been sitting here for too long, I think we’ve said everything that needed to be said, this meeting is over,”-Ngoba

He’s rude, naturally.

Silence.

“That means you can leave,”-Mqhele

Naled

Sigh.

These people don't look like they are ready to give up. They know what they came here for and they are determined.

But did they really have to come in a taxi?

I also have a feeling they didn't expect it to be a family like this one.

"Can we see the child? We don't even know what he looks like in real life,"-  
woman

"He looks exactly like me,"-Mpande

Qhawe looks at him and shakes his head.

He's looking at me now.

I guess this means I must go and get Mabutho.

I stand up and walk out.

I don't even know where these kids are in this house. It's quiet.

They must be in their bedroom.

I knock twice but there's no answer.

The door is locked.

"Sisekelo"

No answer.

I know they're in here. Why have they locked the door?

"Phakeme!"

"Mah," - he answers in a low voice.

"Open the door, where is Mabutho?"-me

"No," he says.

What?

"What did you say?"-me

"I won't open the door," he says, his tone firmer.

Am I being told no by an 11-year-old?

"Open the door I want Mabutho,"

"No, they're going to take him away,"-he says.

Oh I never!!

Hlonu is here.

"Phakeme won't open the door. He says they're going to take Mabutho away,"-  
me

She frowns.

"Phakeme open the door!" she shouts.

"No mami I won't open, I won't let them take him away," he says.

When did these kids plan this?

No actually when did Phakeme plan this? Because I'm sure the others don't understand what's going on, not even Mabutho himself.

Mqoqi and Mpande are here now.

They must have figured there's something wrong when I didn't come back.

We tell them what's going on.

They shout and plead and negotiate!

"I'm not letting them take my brother away," - Phakeme keeps saying.

Xolie is here now. I'm not sure if this is a good or bad thing.

It's her turn to try.

"Phakeme!"

"Manuza, please don't let them take him away, please," he says, he's crying

now.

This is painful.

"No my baby they won't take him away, I won't let them." -Xolile

Silence.

"What's happening?" -Nkosana

I'm not sure where he's been.

"They've locked the door, they don't want to come out." -me

These kids are serious about this. We know they're all in there and they are all in on this, judging by how quiet the others are. Phakeme must have told them he was going to do all the talking and the others must just follow. He's like that, he's a leader. He is aware that he's the eldest amongst them and he feels responsible for all of them. It's kind of like Nkosana is with his brothers.

"Phakeme," -Nkosana

"Baba,"

"They won't take him, you have to trust me. I won't let them take him. Open the door," -Nkosana.

Silence.

Sigh.

Those people downstairs must be wondering what the heck is going on now. Mghele is still with them.

We hear the sound of the key turning, finally.

The door opens, very slowly.

Phakeme is the first to come out, followed by one of the twins, but they stand at the door.

Is it normal for kids to look at adults like this? Like they're ready to fight them.

"Where's Mabutho?" -Nkosana.

No answer, just big fierce eyes looking at him.

This is crazy!

Sisekelo appears, Mabutho is behind him, behind Mabutho is the other twin and behind him is Mvelo.

They come out as a group.

We are still stunned when they start walking, as a group.

"I told you about this Nkosana," - Zandile says.

We have no idea what she's talking about.

Hlomu goes inside the bedroom and comes out with Niya and Shlangu.

I think about the child I'm carrying, he's going to be one of them soon.

My eyes meet Hlomu's, she gives me a half-smile. Why?

Oh! My hand is on my belly, I didn't realise.

"I heard. Congratulations," she whispers and walks past me.

The kids are already walking down the stairs with the adults behind them.

Where is Qhawe by the way?

I rush after them.

"It's this one, his name is Mabutho," -Nkosana.

These people are as stunned as I was when I first met this whole family and their creepy resemblance.

They've all looking at him.

The man stretches his arm, he wants Mabutho to come to him, but Phakeme stands in-front of him.

Naledi

"Phakeme, it's fine,"-Miqoqi says.

He steps aside.

This poor kid is shit confused. He clearly doesn't understand who these people are and why they want to take him away from his family.

One of the women pulls him and kisses his cheek. The other one is brushing his head.

The look on the man's face is heart-breaking. They are, after all, his blood. His mother's blood. But he is Zulu blood too and just for that, he is not leaving this house with them, not now, not ever.

"How old are you?" the woman asks.

He raises six fingers.

"Do you know who this is?" she asks showing him a picture.

He looks at it once and says: "yes, it's koko, she went to heaven".

My eyes are getting wet. Bloody hormones!!!

Qhawe's arm goes around my waist, I didn't know he was standing behind me.

The kid is still confused, he keeps looking at all these people in this room but explaining to him would be pointless, he's too young to understand.

The man pulls him again and sits him on his lap.

"I'm malome, that is mmangwane," he says pointing at one of the women.

"And that is your brother," he says pointing at a teenage boy.

There's a brother?

We're all shocked. The boy was just sitting there quietly the whole time.

This could make things a little complicated because you can easily separate a child from its uncles and other extended family, but separating siblings is downright evil.

He's with the brother now. He's taking pictures of him with his cellphone. They take one together.

I think we're all feeling sorry for them now, I know I am.

They are ready to leave.

They weren't even offered food, that's how unpleasant this meeting has been.

"Wait,"-Nkosana says before they walk out the door.

They stop. He speaks to the man, the uncle.

"You can take my numbers, in case one of you comes this side at some point. But we won't allow you to take him across the border, at least not until he is 18-years-old," Nkosana.

This is probably the last time they'll ever see this child. I don't think he'll want to go anywhere near people he doesn't know when he is older, not with the life he'll be used to.

They take the phone number and leave.

The kids run upstairs, they look happier now.

We're all left standing here, in silence.

Xolie grabs her car keys and walks out.

"Xolie,"-Sambulo calls after her.

Crap!

We all got caught up in the moment and forgot what this was doing to her.

She drives out the gate. Sambulo follows her

What now?

I look at Qhawe. I want to get out of here now.

What I don't know is whether we are taking Mabutho with us.

"I'll take the kids,"-Hlonu says.

I still don't know if Mabutho is included there.

We were supposed to go shopping for outfits for Zandile's wedding tomorrow, us ladies, but I'm not sure if it's still happening.

Xolie will shut everyone out again from now on, I just know that.

Is marriage really this difficult?

Qhawe has already scared me with that baby-game episode. Now I'm watching this and I'm even more scared.

This is not an easy family to marry into obviously. With men like this and children like that, I don't think it's going to be a walk in the park. But this man next to me, I love him with all my heart, and if that is going to complicate my life then so be it, I'm prepared for the fight.

"Are you okay? Aren't you tired?" he asks.

Not really, but I do want to get out of here.

"I'm hungry,"- I say

He likes feeding me ever since he found out I have his big eyes growing inside me.

"We're leaving," he says to everyone.

Hlonu has already called on all the kids, hence the noise and chaos and running around.

It's decided that Mpande will stay behind until Xolie and Sambulo come back, whenever that will be.

He's the one that doesn't have a life anyway.

I haven't seen him with a woman since Thando disappeared without a warning. I still don't know what happened between them.

"MaMantsho, go well,"-Mqhele.

He'll never stop calling me that will he?

"Thanks, I'm still around though, I'll leave on Wednesday,"-I say

"Leave to where?"-Nqoba

The way he speaks and that voice of his scares me.

They're all looking at me.

"You're not going back to that hospital are you? Those crazy people are dangerous..."-Mpande

"Look what they did to you,"-Mqoqi

I still have that little scar on my forehead.

"It won't happen again. I'm not quitting my job," I say.

Silence. Stares.

Did I say something bad.....? Nkosana is looking at Qhawe.

Why do I get the feeling that they've discussed my future without involving me?

"Naledi, please call me when you get home, I'm going to need your documents,"-Hlonu says and walks out the door with the whole brood behind her.

Documents?

I'm confused.

"We'll talk later," Qhawe says taking my hand.

We leave the rest of them still in the house.

This has been one heck of a day. I'd drink a glass of something if I could, Vodka.

Naledi

He suggests we go to a restaurant and sit.

I always try to avoid those because we end up having to brave stares. He always says it's just people looking at us but I always think that they are judging me for whatever reason, that maybe I'm not suitable for his good-looking rich self.

"I think I'm going to need money....."

The shock on his face!

"Really? How much? Actually no, just take my card," he says.

Why is he so excited?

I wasn't asking him for money.

"I was going to say let's go past the ATM because I'm going to need cash tomorrow, my salon doesn't take cards," I say.

He frowns.

"What kind of a salon is that?"

He's about to start.

I roll my eyes.

"Okay, take my card anyway and go buy whatever you want to buy,"

I don't want to buy anything. Besides, I have my own money, my salary is piling up in my bank account because I don't use much money lately.

I have a petrol card that never runs out of funds. I'm always with him so he pays for everything. I also suspect he deposits money into my account now and again, which is strange because I never get the bank notifications.

"Okay, I'm going to need new clothes anyway, I'm getting bigger every day,"

"And sexier," he says leaning over to kiss my cheek.

"You're driving Zulu," I say.

"Call me that, call me Zulu, no more Chawe," he says.

The fool in him never rests!

"I bought you something," I say.

I was going to give it to him on our way from North West but he pissed me off before I could.

"Really?"

He's excited. Such a boy he is.

"Yes, here," I say handing him CD.

"Mbuso Khoza?" he asks.

I thought he'd know him.

"Yes, I thought you'd love it. He's great,"

He shakes his head.

"I've never heard of him before," he says inspecting the cover.

I was at the mall in Kimberley this other time when I heard a song playing in one of the shops. It turned out to be Musica. I went in and asked who the artist was and they told me. It sounded like his kind of thing, I've heard Vusi Mahlasela and Jabu Khanyile playing in this car a few times.

"It's called Zilindile?"

"Yes, and he's from eShowe, he's partly your home-boy," I say

He smiles.

I don't even know where eShowe is, but I pay attention when he talks about his background and I memorise and Google the places he mentions, that's how much obsessed I am with him.

He puts it on and immediately all the songs are listed on the screen. He clicks on the one titled "Eshowe".

The guitar....very lovely.

He looks at me and smiles.

"How come I don't know this guy? Where did you buy this?" he asks.

I think he likes it.

"In Kimberley."

He nods, no actually he's dancing, well, moving his head but I doubt his dancing skills go further than that.

"This is amazing!" he says.

Naledi you are boss...

I'm impressed with myself, next I'm taking him to his live show.

"Thank you," he says.

He's happy. When he's done being happy we're going to talk about what happened today.

I'm not going to have a kid that's gonna turn out like those big-eyed bullies.

# Seventeen

I'll never get used to strangers looking at me like they know me.

It's like, I don't know, like they are invading my privacy.

I don't like it at all and no, I won't get used to it. I just never know whether to smile or look away or stop or keep walking. I just never know, especially when I'm here at the mall.

Yes, I took his bank card and went shopping. He wanted me to, and I want to see him happy, so I took it and went wild with his money.

I even bought a birthday present for Tshedi. I would have bought a wedding present for Zandile too but I mean, the woman has a real life "genie in a bottle", she just snaps her fingers and it appears with diamond laced strawberries.

It's the same with all of them, it's like they have no clue what the outside world looks like. But also, their world is complicated on its own, sometimes more complicated than the outside world.

Qhawe had an early meeting so he dropped me off here and left.

I was happy because I could use some time away from him, even if it's a few hours. The man fusses too much for my liking.

I'm a doctor for crying out loud. I know that pregnancy is not an illness, it just requires strength and big enough balls.

We are ready for Zanzibar. Tshedi is excited but I'm not sure about the other two, they seem to be still overwhelmed. I invited Lerato along but she said she couldn't make it, although she asked too many questions about who else is going and how we are getting there and how much we are spending. She's so nosy she annoys me sometimes.

I've already sent Qhawe a message telling him to come pick me up. I'm tired, I'm always tired and I'm already gaining weight. I told him I wanted to see a dietician throughout the pregnancy, just so I don't balloon but he was totally against it. I was tired and hungry so I let it go, I'll raise it again after I find the dietician.

My father still doesn't know I'm....

"I hope you're thinking about my brother, that's why you're staring into space."

Oh no! Where on earth did he come from?

"Hi."

I don't want to say his name because I know he's going to laugh at me.



He notices I'm looking around for something, or someone.

"He sent me to pick you up, he's caught up somewhere," he says.

Seriously?

How can Qhawe do this to me?

I'm still sitting.

"I'll carry those for you," he says picking up my bags.

I'm okay when it's all of them together but this, I can't deal with it. What am I going to talk to him about?

I almost trip and fall when I try to stand up.

"I'm okay," I say and he lets me go.

How did he jump so quickly to catch me?

He's carrying all my shopping bags. I thought he hated doing that.

"I can wait if you're not ready to go yet," he says.

"No I'm done, I just want to go home now,"

There's panic on his face.

"Why? Are you okay?"

Sigh.

I thought I was the only one who had to deal with the constant "panic mode" all the time, it's clear Hlonu has the same problem.

"I'm fine Michele. It's just that it's hot today," I say.

He's laughing. He's trying to hold it back but I can see him.

I smile.

"Go ahead, laugh at me,"

He laughs a lot. But he's also very...blunt I've noticed. It's like when he's around and there's an awkward moment, everybody crosses fingers that he doesn't say anything and make things worse. I saw that too when he said to my father "I'm not Qhawe I'm Mqhele, we just look alike".

He's crazy, but he's honest. Qhawe is like that too, except he's just...not explainable.

We are both still laughing when we reach the car. I'm glad he didn't park too far like Qhawe always does. He always says it's because he wants us to "stroll" together.

Hlonu and Mqhele are into big cars I've noticed, probably because they have many kids. Well actually they have three kids but Hlonu is the mother-hen of this family.

"Straight home?" he asks.

"Yes, I've had enough crowd and chaos for the day,"

"I understand, you live in the bundus," he says.

Oh. He's also stupid like his almost-twin.

And Kimberley is not the bundus when compared to...

Let's not compare, but Kimberley is a fairly big city.

"So, MaMontsho, when are you moving to Gauteng?"

He's not joking anymore. I can hear it, I can feel it.

He has that thing about him that I can't explain.

"When I'm ready, I still have a job there."

He glances at me and nods.

"How is he?" he asks.

He's serious now. Just like that. He just switched to serious in a split second!

Naled

But I know what he's asking.

"He's great. I'm happy,"

He nods.

"He's happy too. Happier than I've ever seen him," he says.

Oh.

There's a slight smile on his face.

"He reminds me of myself when I first met Hlomu. It was like I didn't exist before her, like my life had been meaningless without her in it," he says.

Wow!

"She's gorgeous,"

Okay that was random of me.

He smiles.

"I know. But she's more than just gorgeous, she's smart and strong-willed and feisty. I think I love that more than her plumpy cheeks and killer smile," he says.

He's funny.

He blushes when he sees me laughing.

I gave her my ID last week. She said something about taking it to the lawyers. I didn't ask much, I trust her. I also think it's about the baby, that they want to make sure it's taken care of if something happens to Qhawe. Tshedi did say I was walking around with a "millionaire foetus" inside me.

"I need to go past Niya's school, to pick her up," he says.

The little spoiled princess is starting school next year, against his will. Apparently he doesn't want her to go to school because he thinks she might get hurt or whatever other senseless stuff is in his head.

But Hlomu went ahead and looked for a crèche for her. Today she went for any "interview". Yes, a three-year-old went for an interview. From what I hear, it involves spending a few hours with the teachers so that they can give the parent feedback.

My guess is Mqhele was parked outside the school all day until he was asked to pick me up.

Sometimes I think I don't get freaked out by the resemblance anymore, and then our eyes meet and I just see Qhawe.

We're having a simple conversation but I feel like he's here for something else. Like it wasn't by chance that of all of them, he was the one sent to pick me up. Besides, Qhawe drops anything for me, he would have walked out of that meeting the moment he received my SMS.

"How is your sister?" he asks.

"Which one?"

Why is he asking about my sisters?

"The teacher," he says.

Oh, Lesedi.

"She's okay. She's still trying make the world a better place,"

I thought he'd laugh at that, he doesn't.

"I see. I need to speak to her," he says.

The way he says it is...a bit scary, or am I imagining things? It felt like....I don't know, like it was coming from a dark place.

He looks at me and raises his eyebrows.

But this is my sister we are talking about.

"Why?" I ask.

He's surprised that I'm asking.

"There's something we need to discuss," he says.

I give him a look that says 'continue....'

"I just want her numbers," he says.

He doesn't get it does he?

"I'm going to have to call her first and tell her that you want to speak to her, about something important, and I'm going to have to tell her what that important thing is,"-me

There's a smile, or is it a smirk? But there's a very mysterious look on his face.

He shakes his head.

"You're going to fit in perfectly....." he says and looks ahead at the road.

I have no idea what he means by that.

His face is serious again.

"It's about Hlomu's niece,"

Huh? Hlomu's niece?

"The girl at her school, she's Hlomu's niece. But I haven't told her about it yet. I just want to make sure that uniting them won't bring us any problems. Family is important but knowing her brother, the girl's father, I'm not sure if bringing them into Hlomu's life will be a good idea," he says.

I'm still stuck on the "niece" situation. How small is this world though?

Qhawe did tell me once about a half-brother who suddenly appeared after Hlomu's father died and demanded inheritance.

"Are you sure? I mean..."

He gives me that look that Qhawe gives me when I ask him stupid questions like how he knows where I am all the time.

"So why do you need my sister? You already know everything about the child?"-me

"I want her to check the family situation for me, like how the child lives and who she lives with and all that stuff...."

Oh. Okay.

Strange, he could easily do that himself with just one phone call.

"I'll give you her numbers."

My life has been weird since that afternoon I got angry at a mall parking lot and blocked a man's car. And now I'm pregnant. My father doesn't even know yet but already the child I'm carrying is the heir to wealth I never thought I'd see in my life.

This must be the school. "Tiny Tots" is written in all colours of the rainbow on the wall.

I once thought about becoming a paediatrician but nope, kids are little unpredictable monsters.

"I'll be back just now," he says leaving me in the car outside the gate.

Qhawe hasn't called in an hour, he must still be stuck in that meeting of his. I miss him.

"Baba I'm too tall for this now, I want to sit in front,"-Niya

"No, you're not too tall for anything," he says buckling her in the car-seat.

I hope she won't start crying.

"Mama, where is Agape? When is she coming?"

And so the talking begins.

"When schools close I'll bring her over to visit you," -me

It's strange how these kids call every one of us 'mother'. I don't remember being introduced to them but they just referred to me as mother from the first time they met me

The craziest part though is when Shani calls me mother. I think I'm about five or six years older than him.

And then there's that crew led by Lwandle featuring Kolie's brother, Zandile's nephew and another boy, I'm not really sure if he's a relative. Zandile's nephew is named Mqhele. The ladies laughed about it the other day but none of them cared to explain to me why it's funny. I just know it had something to do with Zandile's cousin Nokuthula.

She's such a sweet funny lady. She always has alcohol stashed somewhere. I remember when we were in Mbuba for Zandile's umbondo, she had Shlangu strapped on her back, and somewhere there she pulled out a bottle of wine. I have no idea how she hid it there. We were both in the kitchen and kept sipping it from coffee-mugs. She gets drunk very quickly. Two glasses and she was talking non-stop about things that didn't even make sense like Zandile sleepwalking all the way to her father's house on the night of unembeso. Seriously, that's not even possible.

"Sorry I had to switch off the aircon. It blocks Niya's nose," he says

Oh Lord! That time, I'm about to start sweating, that's how hot it is in this car.

"I'll open the window, but only half-way," he says.

That thing again about not compromising when it comes to their kids! I see it! Now my weave is being blown by the freaking wind because big-eyed Zulu princess has allergies.

"She probably has sinus allergies, I could check her out sometime," -me

"Thank you, that would be great. Masetla says it will disappear as she grows but I want it to disappear now."

I know that Masetla person. He's the family doctor. We went past him on Friday for a scan because Qhawe wanted to hear it from him, even after we did the home test.

I wonder how much they pay him and how much "doctor patient confidentiality" he has to deal with.

We're almost home.

"So, when must we send a truck?" he asks.

Hub? I'm lost.

"A truck to Kimberley, to pack your stuff," he says.

I'm going to kill Qhawe!!

"I'm not moving to Joburg."

Silence. But he's staring at me.

"Okay," he says and shrugs.

I sense some sarcasm in that "okay".

"And besides, my dad will not allow me to move in with Chawe, not yet," I say.

He still has that look on his face.

"You're Qhawe's wife now, and mother of his child. That means you're not going to work at some mental hospital and drive across provinces every weekend."

I'm sorry, is he telling me or asking me this nonsense?

"So I'm supposed to give up everything now because I'm a Zulu wife?" I ask.

He frowns. I'm not sure if it's because I've just used the term "Zulu wife" or if it's because my voice is raised.

"Naledi..."

This is the first time he's called me by my name. I'm always MaMentsho.

"This is the only thing he'll ever ask from you. The only thing," he says.

This is going to drive me crazy! Thank God we're home!

"I want to go in! I want to see baba," -Niya.

Nope.

I storm out of the car without saying goodbye and leave them still parked on the driveway. They're gone by the time I get upstairs.

The nerve Mqhele has!

And Qhawe?? He thinks he can send his brother here to dictate to me?

I'm not going to be turned into some rich-cucumber-eating-muffin-baking-housewife! Never!

His phone is off! Moron!!

I'm so angry! So so angry and no it's not hormones! I didn't sign up for this!

Someone is at the door. It must be the complex security delivering some memo or something.

"Mrs Zulu," he says with a nervous smile?

I'm Mrs Zulu now?

"This is yours," he says.

It's an envelope, a big one.

He doesn't ask me to sign anything, he just hands it to me and leaves. It's not even addressed or written my name on the outside. But it's a bit heavy so I know there's a thick document inside.

It's Trust Fund documents and I have to sign them. There's another smaller envelope with bank cards. It's a Private Wealth credit card with a Spopho Logistics logo. There's a petrol card and a Cheque card too, and my ID.

So this is why Hlomu wanted my ID?

A normal person would be happy but to be honest I'm not, I feel like I'm losing Naledi and I'm being turned into something else. I'm used to taking care of myself but now it looks like I'm going to be taken care of. This is not how my father raised me.

Oh, finally.

"Baby, are you home?"

I'm still mad at him.

"Yes."

Silence. I can hear him breathing.

"Are you okay?" he asks, finally.

I'm trying to contain my anger.

"When are you coming back?"

"I could come back now if you want," he says.

I don't want him to come back, he must stay wherever he is.

"It's fine, you don't have to come back, you can stay there forever if you want,"

"Huh?"

"I said stay there Chawe, I'm fine," I say.

Yah no that containing anger thing is not working. I'm about to blow up!

"Okay, I have a few things I need to finish. I'll see you later. I love you," he says and hangs up.

Mnx!

I won't even cook for him, not today, he can eat wherever he is.

If I'm not careful I'll be a size 44 by the time we get to Zandile's wedding. I already did measurements and chose the pattern but I doubt I'll fit in that dress a month from now.

The dress is being custom made by a not so famous designer I was introduced to by Gugu. When she said we were going to see her designer I expected it to be one of those famous extravagant ones, but nope, we went to a little boutique in Killarney.

Gugu is.....I don't know, at first I didn't get her. She's here but she's not too involved, she's living in the moment I think. There seems to be roles here, specific roles for each of the women. Hlomu is the main-man, she's in control of everything and everyone. Xolie is right next to her but not on the same par, she's about a step or two behind. And then Zandile, she is like a... I don't know how to explain it. Like, say, the one thing that you come out with when your house is on fire, the one thing that you save and keep forever because it will always remind you of where you came from. That is Zandile, she is their Mbuba story, the one thing they had before they lost everything. She is their past and present and future, troubled and broken as she is.

I know there's still a lot I don't know about this family, but I have a feeling that the walls around it are made of hard concrete, they are hard and high, you don't just get in, and once you are in you don't just get out. I'm looking at this, this envelope here and these bank cards here and this person growing inside me and I know I'm already in too deep.

But I'm happy. Okay Qhawe tests my patience and sanity sometimes but I've never been this happy in my life. I've never been so deeply in love before.

I expected him to walk in here a while ago but he hasn't even called me, and it's been two hours. He can't still be in a meeting or still catching up on work, not this late.

Speaking of work, my dear violent patient has been moved to another institution. I told them I was fine with her staying, I understood why she did what she did, nobody wants to hear someone tell them they have a deadly disease. But yesterday Chelsea sent me a message saying I can come back to work now because Mrs Sprackett is gone. When I asked her why they moved her even after I told them not to, she said it was a quick and immediate decision by management.

Now I feel bad. The poor woman, on top of all the problems she has, is going to have to start from the bottom with some doctor she doesn't know. That little cut on my forehead is disappearing. I remember when I walked in at home on Friday, it was the first thing my dad noticed. I had not told him because I didn't want him to worry and give me the usual lecture.

News of my pending wedding has travelled far on village standards. I think it has more to do with who I'm marrying.

Seven months ago I would never have imagined myself sitting here, like this, in this house. It's true what they say, life is unpredictable. I might as well read this document that I have to sign before he comes back and I have to give him all my attention.

He still hasn't called or come home when I shower and change into sleepwear. I'm all alone in this glass-house. I'm not used to this. And worse, his phone is on voicemail. Now I'm worried, this is not like him at all. I know I told him to stay wherever he was but the Chawe I know would have driven straight home when I said that, because he always does the opposite of what he is told to do.

What if something happened to him? What if something bad happened and everybody is hiding it from me because they don't want me to stress out?

I need to know.

"Hlonu..."

"MaMontshooooo,"

Whew! She's in high spirits, that means everything is fine.

"Is Chawe there? He hasn't come home and I'm worried now,"

Silence.

I hear her take a deep breath.

"Don't worry they're fine, he'll be back by midnight, there's something they had to take care of," she says.

What's she talking about?

"His phone is off,"

"Don't worry about it Naledi. You should have come over, it's just me and the kids here. I can send a driver to fetch you," she says.

No can do! I've already embarrassed myself enough by calling her asking if she knows where my man is. I don't want to be that woman.

There's also something strange about the way Hlonu was talking. I think there's something she's not telling me, something serious, which makes me even more worried.

-----  
He stops just after he steps in and sees me sitting on the couch.

It's 2am. Where has he been?

"Why aren't you in bed Naledi?"

Really?

"Where have you been Chawe?"

He doesn't answer me.

Oh. I see.

He goes to the kitchen first, opens the fridge and closes it. And then comes to sit next to me. My eyes are focused on the TV in-front of me.

"There's something I needed to take care of," he says.

I keep quiet.

"I should have called," he says.

I don't care anymore.

"Where were you?"

He can't even look me in the eye.

"I'm going back to Kimberley tomorrow. I'll drive. And next time there's something you want to say to me, don't send your brother to do it for you. I will not tolerate that,"

He frowns. Why is he confused? He knows exactly what I'm talking about.

"Mqhele? What did he say to you?"

Naledi

Oh wow! On top of ignoring me all night, he thinks I'm stupid. It must be nice being him.

I stand up.

"Where are you going?"

Nx!

He follows me all the way up the stairs.

"Are you angry because I came home late?"

Oh Lord! He's still talking!

"I'm not angry, I just want you to leave me alone, like you did all day. Where were you exactly? Who is she? What's her name?"

He raises his eyebrows.

"What are you talking about?"

The urge to slap him! The urge!

"You don't want to tell me where you've been all night Chawe. What am I supposed to think? That you were working all night?"

He must not test me! He must never!

"I had a family emergency to attend to!" he snaps.

Did he really just snap at me? Really?

I fold my arms and look at him.

"And what about this family here? Are you going to leave us alone in this house to attend to family business? Are we going to come second to everything?"

Why is he looking at me like I'm overreacting?

"You're overreacting Naledi. I'm back aren't I?"

"At 2am Chawe? 2am? You didn't even bother to call me? I had to walk around this house worried about you. Did you even think about that? That I'd be worried?"

He shakes his head.

I give up!

"I'm going to sleep. Your food is in the microwave," I say and leave him standing there.

He's not in the bedroom when I come out of the bathroom so I assume he's downstairs doing whatever he is doing.

I have a feeling this marriage thing is going to mess with my head. If this is what is going to happen when we are married and live together with our child, we're going to have real problems.

And what family business was that? Why can't he tell me about it?

I won't tolerate dodgy tendencies, he must know that and he must know it now!

I should have gone to the spare bedroom because I am so angry I don't want him anywhere near me!

-----  
It's hot and I'm sweating and I need to pee.

Why do I feel....?

Oh. I'm in his arms. When did he come to bed?

I push him off gently and climb out of bed. I don't know what woke me, it must have been the heat.



Every time I go to pee I remind myself that I have to stop the habit of looking. Yes, looking at the tissue after wiping, I know you all do it too.

On my God!!

"Chawe!! Chawe!!!" I'm shouting and shaking him.

He opens his eyes slowly.

"What?" he asks.

"I'm bleeding."

"You're bleeding where?"

This can't be happening!

"I'm bleeding," I say again.

He's still lost.

"We have to go to hospital, there's something wrong," I say.

He throws the duvet on the floor and sits up.

"Something wrong?"

Yes, there's something wrong, I'm not supposed to bleed."

I have no time to explain here.

I grab a robe and my handbag on my way out.

"What does it mean? The bleeding?" he asks.

I'm so scared I can't even talk. It hasn't even been a week since I found out I'm pregnant and now this! No! I was getting used to the idea.

"How bad is it?"

I'm worried too but he can't drive like this, I don't want to die.

"You're driving too fast. I don't know, I just saw blood spots on the tissue. You're not supposed to bleed when you're pregnant,"

The doctor said everything was fine on Friday. He even showed us the scan which didn't show much but he said all was fine! I can't lose my baby! I can't!

"Ouch!"

"What? What's going on?" -him

"Nothing....I just hurt my toe,"

I'm lying. I've just had a cramp.

"We're almost there. Are you still bleeding?"

I don't answer.

I am. I can feel that my underwear is wet.

It's morning already. It's still a bit dark but the sun will come out anytime now.

He parks right at the entrance, runs around to my door and helps me out of the car.

I'm beyond scared now.

"She's bleeding," he says to the first nurse we meet at the door.

She flags someone to come to us.

"We need a doctor, now," -Qhawe

I'm not speaking. I can't. My mind tells me I'm about to be broken hearted, but my heart is holding on to little hope, hope for a miracle.

"Sit here mam," - the porter.

A wheelchair?

They don't understand. They're talking slow and walking slow and.....

I look at the female nurse in front of me.

"I'm pregnant, and I'm bleeding," I say, very softly.

Naledi

Silence.

And then mayhem.....

I'm taken straight to a ward, not even casualty.

"You can wait outside..."

"No!"-Qhawe

This nurse, she shouldn't even try.

"The doctor will be here in a few seconds," -nurse.

I'm past panicking and worrying. I'm just numb now. I'm numb even to the cramps that keep coming and going.

Qhawe seems to not fully understand what is going on, or maybe he's in denial.

The curtain swings open. It's another nurse with a set of forms. I didn't have time to register when I came in.

She asks for my names and age.

"Can't you do that later?" Qhawe

He's getting irritated.

"We need her medical aid particulars, we have to confirm....."

I'm starting to feel worse than I did earlier...

"Confirm what? Get a doctor here now!"

"But sir....."

"I can buy this hospital and everything in it including you and your bosses, so don't tell me about medical aid, get a doctor!!"

He's shouting now.

The doctor appears. She looks at Qhawe, and then me, and Qhawe again.

"I'm 13 weeks far," I say.

"Cramps?" she asks.

She's so relaxed.

I nod.

"It was a few spots when I realised but now it's heavy,"-me

Qhawe keeps looking at us as we are speaking.

"Let's get you checked,"-doctor

I know that she knows. But how do I tell Qhawe this?

Two men come in and my bed is pushed out of the ward. A hospital gown is placed next to me.

Qhawe is holding my hand. I feel sorry for him more than I feel sorry for myself. He's known this baby for two weeks, I've know it for only six days.

We enter the door at the far end of the passage, just after passing the maternity wards and theatre. It's a gynaecology consulting room. They have those in private hospitals, full with the ultrasound and all.

The doctor looks at Qhawe.

"I'm going to have to ask you to leave the room," she says.

I also want him to leave. I don't want to take off my clothes with him here. I don't want him to see all the blood and freak out. But more than anything, I'm tired of suffering in silence, these cramps are really bad.

He's still here.

I squeeze his hand.

"It's fine baby you can go, I'll be fine," I say.

I'm trying really hard not to let him see this.

He stands still and looks into my eyes. I'm trying to hold them back but they are pushing hard to come out.

"Please Chawe,"

"I'm not leaving you alone," he says.

"She can't do anything to me with you here, it's against hospital rules,"-me

We've been here for almost 15 minutes and nothing has been done to me. Even if my baby had a chance of being saved, it would be dead by now. But who am I kidding? I knew what was happening the moment I saw that blood. I knew the whole story, there was never really a chance.

He leaves, but I know he'll be standing next to the door.

The robe is clean, but my pyjama pants and underwear are bloody. This is it, this is where it all ends. That blood that I'm looking at is my first child, Qhawe's dream, our own creation, it's all there on my pyjama pants.

"You said 13 weeks?" she asks.

I nod.

She looks at my bloody clothes, and then at me.

"I know, I'm a doctor," I say.

There's a silent eye-lock moment between us.

She's a gynaecologist.

"Had you gone for a scan at all?" she asks.

That "had" means we are talking in past tense now. My pregnancy doesn't exist anymore. It's a thing of the past.

"I went to a GP, just to confirm after I did a home pregnancy test,"

The cramps are disappearing, slowly.

We are about to do the ultrasound scan when Qhawe walks in. I know that face, he's not leaving, not this time.

He pulls a chair, sits next to the bed, and holds my hand.

The doctor puts everything down.

"I'm going to give you a moment alone. When I come back we'll check whether we need to have something done on you. It was still a bit early so it should all take care of itself naturally but we still have to check," she says and leaves.

I'm not going to cry again.

He's too quiet.

"Chawe,"

He doesn't respond, but keeps his eyes on mine.

"It's gone, the baby is gone,"

There's a blank stare on his face.

I don't know what else to say. I'm going to wait. I feel like I just broke his heart.

"How are you feeling?" he asks.

Did he not hear what I just said?

"I lost the baby Chawe," I say. I hope he gets me this time.

"Are you still in pain?" he asks.

He's not ready to deal with this.

"The pain is better," I say.

He kisses my hand. His eyes are red. I'm still lying on the bed and he is still sitting on the chair. We are both quiet. We're never quiet around each other, never. But this, I never thought this would happen to us.

\*Aaled\*

I'm going to deal with it better because I know that it happens, and it's common. But him, he will not understand at all. He was so happy, so happy about this.

"Can I come in?" the doctor. She's back.

She has a piece of paper with her.

"I've already written your prescription, but it's just painkillers for now," she says.

She's talking to herself really, we are not here at all.

She puts her gloves back on and adjusts the ultrasound screen.

She looks at me.

"It's fine, I want him here,"-me

I've already told him, I don't need to protect him anymore.

I don't even feel the cold gel when she applies it.

I'm not sure I understand what is happening on the screen. It must be that my mind is not functioning well.

She frowns and moves the scanner back and forth.

She adjusts her earplugs.

"Wow, I've never had a case like this before," she says.

We're confused. It doesn't look like she was talking to us, it looks like she was talking to herself.

She keeps removing the earplugs and putting them back on again.

"Excuse me for a second," she says and puts the scanner down.

She walks to stand at a corner and types on her phone.

When she comes back she continues where she left off, but she's not telling us anything.

Minutes later a middle-aged man walks in.

He's on scrubs and a head-cap. He's a doctor too, theatre based. Oh Lord! I'm going to theatre. I hold Qhawe's hand tight.

The new doctor immediately takes over the ultrasound.

"Mmmmm I haven't had one of these in a while," he says.

Why am I feeling so lost?

I'm surprised Qhawe is still this calm about all this. But I know it's not going to last long if they continue keeping us in the dark.

"I'm Doctor Pillay," he says stretching his arm for a handshake. Qhawe doesn't move. I don't blame him, we've just lost our child and we're being offered handshakes?

"Miss.....?"- Pillay says looking at me.

"Mrs Zulu,"- Qhawe

Sigh.

"There's a baby in your womb. It's alive and breathing, with a normal heartbeat,"- Pillay

Huh?

Qhawe stands up.

"Yes, here it is,"- Pillay says pointing at a blur figure. Qhawe and I look at each other.

That's impossible.

"What do you mean there's a baby?"-Qhawe.

"Please sit so I can explain,"-Pillay

He's not going to sit.

"There's a baby, it's alive,"-Pillay

"So what the heck just happened?"-Qhawe

Pillay looks at me first, and then Qhawe, and then back at me.

"Unfortunately, you miscarried one twin,"

Whaaaaaat???

"What?"-Qhawe

He nods.

"Twins?" I ask looking at Qhawe

He's as shocked as I am.

"I know that this is painful for you, but from what I'm seeing here, the second baby wasn't going to survive at all. Even if it hadn't happened now, it was going to sometime in the pregnancy. The miscarriage was not caused by anything external," he says.

I don't know how to feel about this. Be happy that I'm still having a baby or be sad that I've just lost a baby?

"I suggest you stay here in hospital, at least until tomorrow morning, just to be sure,"- Pillay says and leaves. The other doctor follows him too.

Now it's just the two of us. We are lost and confused and happy and sad and drained.....

I don't know what to say to him. He doesn't know what to say to me.

We're still holding hands.

"Do you need something to drink? Or breakfast?" he speaks, finally.

I take a deep breath.

"No. I need you to hold me,"

He widens his eyes, like he didn't expect me to ask for that.

"Please," I say.

He sits on the edge of the bed and bends over to hug me.

He smells nice, after everything we've been through tonight he still smells nice.

He presses his forehead on mine and looks into my eyes.

"Are you okay?" I ask.

"I don't know, are you okay?"

I don't know either.

The door opens and in comes Hlonu, followed by Mqhele.

They stand still at the door.

Qhawe must have called them when he was outside.

The look on Hlonu's face says she knows that things are bad.

"Bafu," Mqhele says.

He looks worried, really really worried. I've never seen him like this before.

I appreciate them being here but I'm a little uncomfortable because I'm wearing a hospital gown and I definitely need a thorough shower.

A guy walks in with a wheelchair. Oh by the way, this is not a ward.

I can see Hlonu doesn't know what to say to me, that's so unlike her, she's always the one with solutions.

Let me just tell them that it's not as bad as they think.

"It turns out we were having twins. We lost one but the other is fine."

Hlonu looks confused. Mqhele looks traumatised.

Neledl

"Twins?"-Mqhele

"Yes, I have no idea what's going on but yes, that's what they said."-Qhawe

He's starting to relax a little, thanks to Mqhele being here.

The wheelchair guy is standing alone on the corner.

"We'll go get you some water," Mqhele says and they both walk out the door.

Omphf walks in.

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# Eighteen

I'm worried about him more than I'm worried about myself. I didn't grieve. I have nothing to grieve about because I understand what happened, fully. The second baby was never going to survive, so my body took care of it, but how do I make him understand this?

That talk I had with Hlonu at the hospital helped me feel better and less guilty. She told me she had a miscarriage once, and she didn't even know she was pregnant. She didn't go into full details but she said sometimes you have to understand that some things are not meant to be.

But, I'm now left with a man who doesn't seem to understand that. He wants what he wants and he wants it all, he doesn't believe in losing things.

I took a week off work after the incident. And when I went back everybody started congratulating me the moment I walked in. They heard about my pending wedding and they could see I'm expecting. I didn't know what to say so I smiled and said "thank you".

"Chawe, do you think it was my fault?"

I'm just asking. I'm not expecting an honest answer.

Silence.

I think that's a yes.

"No I don't think it was your fault," he says.

"So why are you like this?"

He raises his eyebrows.

"Why am I like what?"

Really?

"Cold."

He drops his eyes.

I thought he was tougher than this.

I arrived here last night. He came to Kimberley to fetch me. That's what he's been doing for the past month, showing up at my house whenever, unannounced, sending me flowers and food and messages saying he loves me, but he doesn't talk and he doesn't show emotion.

I thought about talking to someone, maybe Hlonu but no, I don't want to be that girl.

I had planned to buy something new for Zandile's bachelorette party tonight but I haven't had the strength to leave the house lately.

It's lingerie, that's the theme.

I bought some when I was given R50 000 to buy a life. I laugh when I think about that because right now, if I withdrew R50 000 from my account or the company account or the family account and whatever it is that is there, nobody would notice.

Infact I have access to so much money that I don't get excited about buying anymore.

I did my hair, at least, and nails.

I had planned not to go but Hlonu insisted. She said it would help me feel better, being around people and talking and laughing and having fun, and I plan to do exactly that, let loose.

I'll get dressed for the party at Hlonu's house, I think that's what everyone will do anyway.

"I'm ready to go," I say.

I don't know what his plans are. I know that the guys are planning to go out tonight but I'm not sure if he'll join them. He seems to want to be couped in this house all the time.

I plan to go back to Kimberley when we come back from Mbuha.

"Are you sure you want to go?" he asks.

"Yes, I could use being out of this house, even if it's just for one night."

He doesn't look happy about what I've just said, but then again, he's not happy about anything lately, including the child I'm carrying. And he never answered me when I asked him why he's being so cold.

"Did you fetch your suit?"

Under normal circumstances that would have been my duty, to make sure that he has something to wear at the wedding tomorrow, but since he's on a mission to shut me out, I'm lost on so many things.

Lloyd made all their suits, including Nkosana's.

"I did, I just need to buy cuff-links and I'll be sorted," he says.

Oh, I see.

"Why don't you wear the ones I got you for your birthday?"

I've never seen him wearing them.

"I'll wear them at our wedding," he says.

My stomach turns. There's still a wedding? I wasn't sure anymore. He hasn't mentioned it since that morning.

And by the way, my father still doesn't know about me being pregnant, or that I lost one child. We agreed with my sisters that we weren't going to tell him until the time is right. I don't know when that will be because I'm starting to show. I've started experiencing morning sickness too.

The awkward silence, I've gotten used to it. He's different, he's not the Qhawe I knew anymore.

There are people here, I don't know why because the wedding is not here and the bachelorette was supposed to have just ten people.

"Hello Qhawe! Get out of this car woman! I need you," he says.

It's Hlonu's twin. He has more female hormones than all of us combined. There's just never a dull moment with him around.

"Hi Langa,"-Qhawe

He can't even pretend to be excited.

"Call me when you're ready to go home," he says.



I might just spend the night here, I doubt I'll call him.

I feel his hand on my arm when I open the door. Langa is still standing next to the car.

I turn around.

He pulls me closer and kisses me.

"I love you," he says.

I don't say it back.

"Naledi," he says.

This is not the time.

"I'll see you later Chawe,"

Langa doesn't even notice that there's something wrong. He's just too excited about whatever it is that he wants to pull off tonight.

The whole thing is happening at the pool-house. I go straight there, it looks like everyone is there already.

Qhawe didn't go inside the house to see Mqhele or the kids.

"Want a cocktail?"-Langa

I take it he doesn't know yet, I'm cool with that.

I shake my head.

There's Zandile's cousin here and some woman I don't know.

The pool-house looks different. I can tell Langa went all out in whatever kinky stuff he plans to do here.

"We're going to put the pole here," he says.

Pole??

"Naledi you are responsible for that," he says

What??

This reminds of that night on Qhawe's birthday. I almost said yes to the pole but decided not to on last minute. I haven't been to that salon in a while. I miss that, that simple life I had then.

"Hey,"

Oh. Hlomu.

"Hi," I say

She has her arm around my shoulders.

"When did you get here? Where is Qhawe?" she asks

I have no idea.

"He dropped me off and left," me

She frowns.

"Move!"-Langa

Sigh.

Mqhele walks in just as we are pushed away by the bossy gay twin.

Our eyes meet. He drops his first.

"I'm leaving," he says looking around the pool-house curiously.

"Langa, I'm watching you," he says looking at him.

He laughs.

"Don't worry, all your wives will still be virgins tomorrow morning," he says and disappears to the back.

It's the three of us, I sense some awkwardness.

"Qhawe brought you here?" Mqhele

I nod.

Valac

"And he just left?"

I nod again.

He kisses Hlonu on the forehead and leaves.

I hope I'll be able to play along tonight. I don't want to be in a foul mood and spoil everyone's fun.

And in comes the woman of the moment looking like a perfectly carved female statue.

She looks excited.

"You're here," she says hugging me.

I didn't know she was a hugger.

She looks around and is equally curious.

Her cousin, Zakithi, has been sitting here looking like she's judging everyone. She's that type.

"Ladies the men are gone, we can start now,"-Langa

Isn't it a bit early? Oh, it's after 7pm actually, just that it's summer so it's not dark outside yet.

Nokthula is here. She's wearing a robe.

"I'm ready," she says taking the robe off and.....

We laugh.

"I know I'm sexy..." she says spinning around.

This I did not expect from her, fishnet pantyhose and all. She's almost as big as I am.

Hlonu has put on a red little lace thing over a bikini lingerie. Damn she's sexy!

"Zandile that's your chair,"-Langa.

Kolie appears from nowhere with something covering just her bums. Has she gained weight? It looks like she has.

There's about nine of us here. I understand, Zandile can't have much of friends having been locked up in jail half her life.

This Lulu must be her only friend.

I invited my sisters but it's Friday, they have jobs and lives, so they'll arrive in the morning for the wedding. Ntante and step-mother too. Lerato is not coming, not that she was invited but she heard about the wedding and called me before I called her to tell me she won't be able to make it.

"Okay, you sit here,"- Langa says pulling Zandile to the big chair.

"No pictures, no videos,"-Lloyd.

I didn't see him come in.

I wonder where Langa's husband is, I hear he looks like one of those ridiculously beautiful male models.

Male strippers?

Amen.

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This is nice but me and my big-eyed foetus are tired. I want to sleep. I'm just waiting for that moment where I'll be able to sneak out unseen and head straight to one of the bedrooms.

Qhawe has been sending messages asking me if I'm okay. I love him but I don't miss his grumpy self, so yes, I'm sleeping over here tonight.

Hlonu's mother chased the strippers away, and so we resorted to sex talk, which escalated to education about masturbating and a live demonstration while at it.

These women! To think I thought they were stuck-up snobs who shop and do hair for a living.

While I was reeling in shock Xolie dropped another bomb. The man we all thought she was going to murder has gotten her pregnant, and the child that almost led to their divorce is moving to her house.

I'm not really sure how things got here but I think that episode with Phakeme and the other kids when the mother's family came to demand him had a lot to do with her softening up.

It's a sad and painful story. Sambulo betrayed her in every possible way but like Qhawe once said to me, nothing can be done to change the past. And Xolie might not feel any love for the child, but he is still her children's blood and they love him. It's a sacrifice she has to make, for her children.

"I'll be back," Zandile says walking out.

I heard Hlonu saying something about the rings.

They're all drunk now, even the holly Zakithi. Xolie is on some water tip and I'm on some alcohol-free champagne tip.

Langa and Hlonu are squashed together on a single couch. They're telling everyone about how Langa lived on Mqhele's taxi money when he was still at varsity and how they once spent R7000 of his money shopping, on one day, in one mall.

They look very much alike. Actually they are identical. Langa doesn't have a beard at all.

"Do you remember when we were at Gateway and Mqoqi almost beat up your ex?"-Langa

What?

Hlonu shakes her head.

"Mqoqi has been ghetto since day-one, he once sold weed at my flat, imagine!" she says.

Mqoqi, that's just like him. He is the.....I don't know how to explain him.

I'm not shocked that he'd try to beat someone up for Hlonu, they have chemistry. They also seem to like the same things, books and stuff. It must be the same-age thing that they share.

I figure this is my chance to disappear, when they are all caught up on this trip down memory lane.

The lights are on in the main house, good for me. I'll find something to eat before going to bed, I know there's food in the fridge, it's Hlonu's house after all.

Oh good! A bagel! I win.

I'll use the bedroom next to the main bedroom, it has a balcony, Lord knows I need some air in this heat.

There's a sound...

"Zandile,"

She raises her eyes once and goes back to the piece of paper in her hand.

Is she crying?

"Zandile,"

She doesn't raise her eyes this time. She's standing in Hlonu's main bedroom,

in front of the safe, it's still open.

She drops the piece of paper on the floor and walks out.

I'm left standing here. I want to follow her to find out why she's crying but the look on her face said she was ready to burn someone alive.

That piece of paper. No, it's not one piece of paper actually. It's about four pages.

It's a letter.

I shouldn't read it. But I have it in my hand now so...

And besides, I have to find out what's making Zandile cry.

### *Dear Family*

*I don't know if I can call you that,  
I was never really welcome or liked here.*

*It has been a long battle for all of us. There were days where I  
thought about packing my bags and leaving, just disappear and never come  
back.*

*I know you all think I stuck around because I needed Ngoba's money, but the  
truth is, I have nowhere to go, you are the only family I have.*

*I've made mistakes, we all have. No matter how successful we become we  
will*

*always be broken, and now and again it will show.*

### *Hlonu*

*-I'm going to be honest and say I never liked you from the start. That's  
because you represented everything I was not, everything I never had.  
You had innocence, a heart that could love, a home, family and a man who  
loves you.*

*I know who he was before you, and I saw how you turned him into a human  
being. Your love is rare and it is beautiful, but I want you to always  
remember*

*that there's a part of him that can never be fixed, always bear that in mind  
because now and again it will show itself.*

*I'm sorry I involved you in that abortion thing. I'm sorry I asked you to help  
me "deal" with a dead body. I'm sorry I told you about Mghele's affairs. Most  
of these things were done to*

*hurt you, but I can't say it made me feel any better about myself.*

### *Mqhele*

*-I hope you don't end up treating your wife like you treated Nokzola. And just so you know, there was never a child. But she was desperate to be with you and that was the only way you were going to pay attention to her. But when you chose Hlomu even after she told you she was having a child, that was her I know you are probably arch enemies now but I wish that one day you make time to apologise to her for everything you put her through in the two years you were together. That's all she's longing for, an apology.*

### *Nkosana*

*-You must tell Zah the truth. She will understand. I know how deep your love for her is and I know how deep hers for you is. She will understand and eventually she will find it in her heart to forgive you....  
Just tell her the truth so you can be free.*

*You have to tell Zah that Buhle went to the police and told them where she was. She was responsible for her being caught and going to jail. You had done everything to make sure it didn't happen, you had paid everyone you could to keep her free.*

*A meaningless one-night-stand with Buhle destroyed all that. I warned Zah about her so many times but you know how she always saw the good in everyone. You slipped, it happens. Although a part of me always believed she planned everything. She wanted what Zah had and she went all out to find your weak spots.*

*She will understand, trust me.*

*What I never understood is why you let Buhle live, you don't let anyone live after they betray you.*

### *Qhawe*

*You probably didn't expect me to say anything to you. To be honest, I wasn't planning to. Of all your brothers, you hated me the most. You never acknowledged my presence in your lives. I know you blamed me for Ngobile's death, for Ngoba's misery and for Ntsika's trauma.*

*I'm sorry about Oleta. Yes, I saw it on the news yesterday.  
I hope that with time you will find someone you will love as much as you  
loved her. When you do, try as much as you can to hide who you really are from  
them because trust me, nobody, and especially no woman should have to  
experience that side of you...you know which one.  
Sometimes I stay up at night and try to count the number of dead bodies you  
have to your name, on all your names but I stop along the way.  
The taxi industry revenge killings I understood, but the others...  
The good you is very good, but the bad you....I don't wish for anyone to ever  
meet.....*

### **Sambulo**

*I always thought you....*

I can't do this! I can't!  
Who wrote this and why? What do they mean by "dead bodies" to their  
names? What do they mean Qhawe has another side?  
"Naledi,"  
It's Hlomu.  
I'm sitting butt-flat on the floor with the letter still in my hand.  
"Naledi," she says again.  
She's speaking very soft but the look on her face is cold and hard.  
"Give me that," she says.  
I look at her and hold on to the letter.  
She bends over and snatches it from me.  
My hands are shaking and I'm breathing fast. What have I gotten myself into?  
"Where is Zandile?" she asks.  
I stutter a few times.  
"She left, I found her reading this and then she just left, she was crying," I say.  
I'm staring into space as I say this, I can't even look at her.  
She walks to the door and locks it.  
It's the two of us in the bedroom, a locked bedroom. Suddenly I feel uneasy  
around her.  
"How far did you read?" she asks.  
Far enough.  
"Who are you people?" I ask.  
The question is on my mind, it's been on my mind since I got to the part about  
"not letting anyone live".  
She raises her eyebrows.  
She seems different, she's nothing like the Hlomu I know and adore right now.  
"I left my phone in the pool-house, can I use yours?" she asks.  
I give it to her. Honestly, what choice do I have?  
She dials, she knows the number by head it seems.

"Qhawe," she says.

"Come to my house, now, all of you," she says and hangs up.

This is not the Hlomu I know. This is not her at all. There's nothing cute or warm about her now. That smile that she always has, I haven't seen it at all.

And why did she lock the door? Why has she locked me in? And where are the other girls?

My phone rings.

She answers it.

"Gugu, hi..."

"No, we're fine, we'll be back just now..."

"Please tell Xolie to come to the house, we have to sort out the kids' clothes for tomorrow," she says.

Why is she lying?

We both sit quietly and wait. I'm not sure who we are waiting for, Xolie or the men she just summoned to come here.

I hear foot steps and someone humming Lira's "I wanna feel good....."

It's Xolie, she loves that song.

The door swings open....

*"I wanna see that smile upon your fa....."*

She stops. And stares.

Her eyes go from Hlomu to me....from me to Hlomu

"What's going on?" she asks finally.

"Lock the door," Hlomu

She looks at me....and then locks the door.

The letter is on Hlomu's lap.

"What's going on?" she asks again.

"Mandisa's letter,"-Hlomu

She looks shocked, too shocked!

"Zandile read it too,"-Hlomu

Xolie looks at me, and then at Hlomu.

"How far did she read?"-Xolie

I'm not sure if she's asking about me or Zandile. But they both look like they know.

"They're on their way, I called them,"-Hlomu

I must admit that a part of me is really scared right now. I'm more scared of these two women here than I am of what the future holds for me and this baby that is going to be born into this.

There are footsteps coming up the stairs. I know Qhawe's footsteps.

That was quick.

Mqhele is the first in. He's breathing fast. He's been running, they've all been running. There's Ntsika too.

Mqhele's eyes go through all of us.

"What's going on?" he asks.

No answer. I'm still sitting on the floor.

Qhawe comes to bend next to me.

"Naledi," he says.

I can't speak. I think I've lost my mind.

"Ntsika close the door," Hlomu





survive but I came out of all of it alive. And now I'm your husband and father of your child," he says.

I don't want this child anymore.

"Did you think I'd never find out?"-me

"I knew you would eventually. But what difference would it have made if I had told you everything? I can't change my past anyway," he says.

Come to think of it, he did tell me, several times. But I just assumed he was joking.

"I don't want to be a part of it,"

I'm too calm, it's getting me worried.

"Part of what?" he asks.

"Part of this, this life, this family,"-me

I'm being honest.

"This afternoon when I dropped you off here you wanted to be part of it all, you loved me, what has happened to the love?" he asks.

I don't like the tone of his voice.

"That was before I knew who you are,"

He narrows his eyes.

"We've been together for eight months, and then one night you read a paragraph with my name on top of it in a letter written by some mad woman who killed herself and you conclude that I've been faking everything for eight months?"

What's with the interrogation? I'm not the cold blooded murderer here.

"I'm just saying that I'm not cut out for this life. I can't be here with you knowing what you are capable of....."

"You know what I'm capable of?"

The way he asks this question says there's more to it than him just asking.

"This relationship....."

"It's not a relationship, it's a marriage," he says.

I turn to look at him. I'd been looking down the whole time.

"And if I want to go?" I ask.

The look on his face when I told him about my ex. The look on his face when he found me sitting with Letswalo. I'm seeing it now, for the third time since we met.

"You're not going anywhere,"

# Nineteen

I'm hungry, that's what woke me, hunger and the kick. It's the first kick. The last thing I remember is us sitting here in silence. It must have been the early hours of the morning.

I slept here, on the floor in Hlomu's main bedroom. There's a pillow and there's a blanket over me. He took my shoes off too and placed my phone next to me. Its battery is low.

It's quiet here. Everyone must be at Nkosana's house already.

It's 8am, the wedding is supposed to start at 11am, if there's going to be a wedding, but I doubt it, I'd never marry a man after I find out his betrayal landed me in jail for 17 years. Just like I'm not going to marry a man whom I know is evil and cold-hearted.

I have to get out of this house. I have to leave this place and go back to my life.

If Qhawe thinks he's going to threaten me into staying with him he is wrong, totally wrong. I'll go to the police if I have to.

I'm still wearing lingerie and a robe on top. That's what the three of us women were still wearing when that whole drama happened last night. It was so hectic that none of us cared about being properly dressed.

I have a missed call from Lesedi, she must be in Gauteng already. Tshedi arrived last night and slept at Omphi's house.

I must check on Ntate, I didn't speak to him at all yesterday.

Oh. My clothes are on the bed, the ones I arrived here wearing yesterday. I don't know and I don't care who put them there. I just need to get dressed and get out of this place, this dark life I've gotten myself into.

This bathroom, it's big enough to be a bedroom. There's a large shower and a bathtub that looks like it was just placed there, in the middle of everything.

I'm looking at all this stuff differently now. Before, I saw them as fortunate and successful, but now, it's all blood money, all of it.

It makes sense why Qhawe doesn't care much about all the wealth, why they all seem to care more about stuff they can't buy, like family and their children, it's because of guilt, guilt that comes with each cent they have to their names.

I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror. He's growing. He's only 19 weeks old but I can already feel him.

I think I do want him. Forget who his father is, I'll raise him by myself and I'll be the best mother and father ever.

I remember what Qhawe once said to me. He said we were going to be the best parents ever. But now, none of that is going to happen. I honestly can't picture myself sleeping next to him every day when I know what he is capable of. My conscience will never allow me to be that person, love aside.

Shit!!

I freeze at the door. I don't know whether to speak or just walk past.

"You're awake?" he asks.

Obviously.

Has he been sitting here outside the door all morning?

"Great because we have to go home and get ready for the wedding," he says.

I take it Zandile is back then.

"Can I take a rain check? The wedding? I don't feel well," I say

He frowns.

I get it. I have to go to the wedding, whether I want to or not. That is what my life has become. I'm his prisoner now, his property. That's what he thinks but the only reason I'm going is because my father is going to be there, and I don't want him asking questions.

"I made you breakfast," he says.

I hope it's not poisoned.

"I'm not hungry,"

He scratches his chin. I don't know what that means.

I feel a bit dizzy as I walk down the stairs, it happens a lot since I got pregnant.

He puts his arm around my waist when he notices I'm struggling.

I feel a kick immediately. There really is a human being inside me.

The house is clean, and quiet.

I'm holding my robe and lingerie close to my chest as we walk to the car. My handbag is already on the backseat.

"Why didn't you wake me?" I ask.

I don't even know why I'm asking.

"You needed to rest," he says.

Yes I did, after everything he put me through.

My dad will probably find out that I'm pregnant today. My dress is loose and flowing but I just know he will see me, it's already obvious.

Since losing the other twin everything just started showing, including the symptoms, the throwing up and stuff.

I'm quiet. He's quiet. I don't know what he's thinking.

His phone rings. He looks at it once and ignores it.

Mine is about to die, it keeps flashing a red light.

"Chawe,"

He looks into my eyes. I look away.

"It kicked,"

He's lost.

"The baby, it kicked for the first time this morning. It kicked again when we were walking down the stairs, when you touched my waist,"

He doesn't say anything but I can feel his eyes on me.

When I turn.....

I never thought I'd see this in my life!

He's blinking rapidly. I know he is trying with everything he has to fight them

Naledi

back.

I hate this.

"So he's alive?" he asks.

"He's fine Chawe, this means he's fine."

Having this baby will mean permanent attachment to this, this thing that we have that I want out of now.

Can things really just change? Just like that? So quick?

I leave him sitting in the car, I don't know why he doesn't come inside the house with me.

I'm still very hungry but I'm too depressed to eat in this house.

I wish I could call Tsietsi. I wish I could go back to my simple life. I had problems but I don't know if they were this painful emotionally, I don't remember, it feels like a long time ago, it feels like my life was empty before Qhawe. And now it is filled with much more than I can handle.

I wish I could smoke, or drink, or take random trips to do my hair and nails and hang around mentally ill people and bury myself in paperwork after hours. I miss Naledi. I miss Dr Montsho.

He's sitting on the bed when I come out of the shower.

I sense that he has something he wants to say. I'm not in the mood, not today.

I'm just going to get dressed, he can watch if he wants but I have nothing to say to him.

I struggle with the bra a bit, it's tight, everything is beginning to be tight.

He stands up and comes to me.

"No I'm fine," I say

I didn't ask for his help.

I'm still trying to pull the zip up and I'm getting more and more irritated by it. This dress fit me perfectly when it arrived five days ago, what is wrong with it now?

"Let me help Naledi,"

Is he trying to piss me off on purpose?

"Help? You want to help Chawe? I've been doing this alone for a month, a whole moth Chawe!! Now you want to help? I've been pregnant alone for the whole month while you've been walking around treating me like I don't exist,"

"It's not like that..... baby,"

What the fuck?

"It's not like what? I asked you to tell me what is wrong and you didn't! You think you're the only one that lost a baby Chawe? Is that what you think? That you can neglect me because I'm now giving you half of what you wanted?"

"You're shouting..."

"Yes I'm shouting so what?"

I'm not going to that fucking wedding!!

"Baba,"

I hear him, but I don't see him. The voice is coming from outside the bedroom.

"I'm coming Sbani," -Qhawe

There's Sbani here?

He pulls my zip up quickly.

"You can come in," he says.

My eyes meet his just as he appears. He looks so much like Qhawe. But this is

our bedroom and he shouldn't be here.

"Mah is still not back. I don't think the wedding is going to happen today,"-  
Shani

It's 10am, the wedding is supposed to start in an hour.

"Mah, how are you?" he asks.

It still feels weird hearing him call me that, he's a grown man.

"I'm fine," I say.

There's awkward silence.

I'm going back to the bathroom to put on make-up and fix my hair. My nails are a mess. I don't remember the last time I shaved or waxed. I feel like I've let myself go, like I don't love me anymore.

I haven't even been home to see my dad in weeks.

I can hear them talking in the bedroom but I can't make out what they are saying.

I take it Shani slept here, I'm just not sure why because there's big enough room in his father's house.

He seems to be closer to Qhawe than all of them, I guess it's because they're almost similar.

When I come out of the bathroom Shani is gone, Qhawe is getting dressed. He knows I'm behind him but he doesn't turn around.

"You have to eat something," he says.

I do, but I don't want to.

"I'm fine,"

He turns around.

"I didn't mean to neglect you Naledi, or be cold or.....I didn't mean to be like that," he says.

He's talking? How strange.

"I'm going home with my dad after the wedding. I'm not going to Mbuba and no, it's not negotiable. I'm going to tell him about the baby today and I'm going to tell him everything that happened..."

He raises his eyebrows.

"No, I'm not going to tell him about your evil crimes, but I'll tell him that we are over, that there will be no wedding. I'm going to stay at home for a couple of days, after that I'm going to go back to Kimberley, back to my life. I'll update you about the baby and the doctor's appointments. I'll call you when I go to labour, you can be present if you want. After that we'll work out how we raise the child."

He must know that I'm serious.

"Just like that? You've made all those decisions just like that? By yourself?"

What kind of stupid question is this?

"Yes I have, and that's that. I'm ready, let's go," I say grabbing my clutch-bag.

The grip on my arm!

"Chawe, touch me! I dare you! Lay a hand on me and I will abort this baby before you blink!"

He lets go. Slowly.

Change of plans, I'm not going to be in a car with a man who thinks he can threaten me.

The keys are still where I last saw them.

We've used this car only three times since I left it here. He said he drove it

Naledi

occasionally when he missed me, that explains why the petrol tank is half-filled. It smells of him, of one of his perfumes.

The car that was parked behind it is gone. I assume Sbani left in it.  
I'm out of here!

---

It's already full.

The wedding should be starting now but it doesn't look like it's going to happen.

The garden is beautiful, Lloyd did well.

"Mme Ledi!! Mme Ledit"

She's running to me. I have to put one hand over my belly just to make sure she doesn't bump me.

"There are flowers all over this place, and a piano!" she says

The excitement on her face!

"That's because there's going to be a wedding,"-me

"Whose wedding?" she asks.

Sigh.

And where on earth did Lesedi buy this pink frilly dress? I'm surprised Agape agreed to wear it, she's such an independent mind, nobody can force her to do anything, not even her mother.

"Your dress is nice," I say.

She rolls her eyes.

I knew she hated it!

"Mme said she was going to leave me behind if I didn't wear it, so I did, Niya has a white one, and pantyhose," she says.

Niya, she's a flower-girl.

"Uocele Qhawell!" she screams and runs to him.

He must have been driving close behind me.

He opens his arms and catches her just as she throws herself at him.

I look at him once and walk on.

I'll talk to my dad after the wedding, for now, I'm just going to avoid bumping into him.

There are my sisters standing with little plates.

"This is nice, where do you guys get this stuff?"-Omphi

She's talking about some little biscuits.

"I don't know, the caterers,"-me

I hug all three of them.

Tshedi looks at me from head to toe.

"You'd better come clean with ntate before he sees you, you're even becoming a yellow bone," she says.

She's right, my complexion is changing.

"What's going on? Aren't we supposed to be starting now?"-Lesedi

I have no idea.

"Weddings are always late ladies,"-me

I'm lying, Nkosana is never late for anything.

I wonder where they all are.

"Morning ladies," he says.

He's still carrying Agape.

"Uncle Qhawe says he's going to buy me a wedding."-Agape

They all laugh.

I wish I could laugh too.

"I'm going to check on the guys," he says, puts Agape down, kisses me on the cheek and leaves.

Wow! He's still playing perfect couple?

"They're already serving champagne? These are my kind of people."-Tshedi  
Really?

"Is nate here?"-me

"Yes, he's already sitting. You should see the hat step-mother is wearing,"-  
Omphé.

She doesn't like her, she can't even hide it.

Awkward as it's going to be, I have to see Xolie and Hlonu to find out what's going on, in case people who came here through me ask questions. I wish I hadn't invited anyone, not even my sisters.

"Naledi, hi," he says.

I don't know him.

"I got the documents thank you. I'm sorry about what happened," he says.

It must be the lawyer. Does he know everything that happens around here? He has a tall blonde girl in his arm, it must be the one he married not so long ago that Qhawe told me about.

I make my way to the main house, that's where they must be.

Nkosana's house is enormous. You have to walk up the stairs before you actually get to the main door. There are people going in and out and knowing him, he must be shit irritated right now.

"Hey booo, you disappeared last night, I'm mad at you. You look great...are you? Oh God! You're pregnant! What is wrong with you women! You're like baby factories," he says and leaves me standing there.

Sigh.

I can hear Xolie's voice coming from upstairs, from one of the bedrooms on the first floor.

I have to be brave. I don't know if I should tell them what I've decided, but after last night, I think they are more committed to this family than I thought. I doubt they'll understand or be on my side.

"Hi,"

Silence.

It's just the two of them, Xolie and Hlonu.

Hlonu smiles.

"Hey girl," she says.

I want to smile back but I can't.

"What's going on?" I ask.

They look at each other.

"Zandile hasn't come back. How are you? Did you sleep well? Where is Qhawe,"-Xolie.

"I don't know, somewhere in this house. So what does this mean? Is the wedding still happening?"-me

Naledi

I probably shouldn't be here asking questions.

"We don't know Naledi, we don't even know where Zandile is," Hlomu says with a sigh.

I feel like there's something they want to say to me.

Has Qhawe told everyone that I've ended things? But when?

"I saw your dad earlier, and your step-mom, she looks familiar," -Hlomu says and leaves the room.

They aren't even dressed for the wedding yet and it's supposed to have started already.

I wonder where Zandile is, I hope she's okay. She must have been as shocked and disturbed as I was by that letter.

And who is Buhle? Who is Nokzola? Who is Nqobile?

-----  
"Can we just get through today baby, please, can you do this for me?" he says.

We have to pretend that things are okay between us now? Just for people?

This is so unlike him.

The wedding went well, five hours later.

But now, all I want to do is get over this and go home.

"Zulu."

It's my dad. I've been avoiding him all day.

"Ntate," -Qhawe

He looks at me, and then him, and then me again.

"When were you going to tell me about this?" he asks.

We both know what he's talking about.

"We were going to come to you when the time was right. We were waiting for this wedding to pass so that Nkosana could make time," -Qhawe

I didn't know about that. But I've been told some things cannot be discussed with me, especially ones that involve them meeting with my family.

I can see Qhawe is drained. This is just adding to his problems now.

"Naledi, is this why you haven't been coming home?" -ntate

I could say that. But I shake my head instead.

My dad walks away. I think he's mad, or disappointed, or both.

We have to go, the reception is about to start.

He takes my hand. I try to pull away but he holds it tight, too tight.

I feel the kick.

We sit at the same table as everyone, it's right in front. My sisters are sitting with my dad and the step-mother. Agape is with the other kids somewhere.

"MaMontsho, how are you feeling, how is little Zulu treating you?" -Nqoba.

I'm surprised he asks about it, it sounds a little weird actually.

"I'm fine. He kicked for the first time this morning," I say.

Silence.

They're looking at Qhawe.

"That's sweet," Gugu says.

I'm not sure if I'm reading their faces right but I see relief. Did they think the baby wasn't going to make it?

The couple of the night is walking in.

They look so happy. It's like that chaos earlier today never happened.



I wonder why Zandile decided to come back. Did she just forgive and let go? Just like that?

She's a better person than I am.

"Bafu, how are you holding up? Hlomu hates me when she's pregnant. Sometimes I think she's planning my murder?" -Mqhele

They all laugh.

"No I don't hate you," Hlomu says with a frown combined with a smile. I'm uncomfortable with this conversation.

"I'm holding up," -Qhawe.

He says it so dryly.

"I'm bracing myself for another eight months of hell," -Sambulo.

Xolie side-eyes him.

The guys are confused.

"You think it's easy carrying your big-eyes in my stomach for nine months?" -Xolie.

"Whoaaaaahhhhh," -Mqoqi says.

It's out.

And so this is how Xolie and Sambulo announce their next child.

The second speaker is done. Mqhele stands up and goes to the front.

I'm not sure who he is speaking on behalf of, friends or family. I noticed that they don't have friends, their friends are their brothers. The only outside people I know in their lives are the taxi people. They even come to the houses and bring their kids to the family children's birthday parties.

He clears his throat first.

"We almost didn't have a wedding," -Mqhele.

The whole tent is silent. Is he really going to go there? With all these people here?

"Because the bride was late. It's normal, I had to wait for my bride too many years ago. I still have to wait for her now, every day, because you know, that's how they are," he says.

There's laughter.

Whew!

He changes to serious face immediately.

"Today is the greatest and happiest day for this family. Those of you who have known us for many years will understand what I'm talking about. Two years ago we never would have thought we'd be sitting here today, witnessing this. We never thought we'd ever see Nkosana be happy, completely happy, because that's what Zandile is to him, she is his happiness," he stops and clears his throat again.

There's tension all over this table.

"Most of you, if not all of you, don't know our father. But you know about him and what he was. What you don't know though, is the man that he was inside the walls of our home in Mbuba. The man he was to his family, his children, his wife. I see that man in Nkosana every day. A man who protects and preserves what is important to him. A selfless man who keeps giving, sacrificing, compromising and a man who keeps getting up no matter how hard life drops him. But I also know that the one thing, the only thing he's ever wanted more than anything in this world is to wake up next to Zandile, and today, it's finally happening," he says.

He's speaking from his heart, from deep deep within.

"The one thing that has kept these two together for so long is their ability to accept each other as they are. Knowing that to truly love a person is to look beyond their flaws, their shortcomings, their mistakes and their past, good or bad. You can only ever claim to love someone if you are willing to be their pillar through every storm. If you look at them and think "I'd definitely jump after her if she fell into a crocodile-infested river," he says looking at Hlomu

There's laughter.

Qhawe looks at me.

"So today, I have no advice to give to Nkosana and Zandile, they don't need marriage advice, they've already survived pretty much everything there is to survive in a marriage. Bafu, you can live your life now, take Zandile wherever you want to take her and grow old and grey together," he says, drops the mic and walks back to the table.

I didn't know he was this deep.

He hugs Hlomu after he sits.

Everybody here seems too lovey-dovey, even Xolie and Sambulo.

I'm thinking that our babies, me and Xolie, will be almost the same age.

Too bad I won't be here to watch them play together.

"I'll be back," Qhawe says standing up.

I was about to stand up too and go to my dad. He's sitting alone at that table, eating.

Oh, he's going there. I hope he doesn't upset him.

He rubs his hands together before he starts speaking.

I wish I could hear what he's saying to him.

"Are you okay girl? You seem distracted, you've been like this all day,"-Gugu

If only she knew.

"I'm fine, I just need to rest, it's been a long day,"

The truth is I want today to end, now.

The tent is almost empty except for a few people, and Hlomu's loud ghetto cousin.

Lloyd and Langa are sitting at the main table, just the two of them. To say they are sloshed would be an understatement. I don't understand how and when Lloyd got drunk because truth be told, this was his wedding more than it was Zandile's.

"Ntate is leaving,"-Qhawe

I didn't see him coming.

I stand up and go to his table. Step-mother is next to him now. I saw her briefly earlier. She looked at me once and raised her eyebrows.

"Ntate, Mme,"

They both look at me.

My dad doesn't look as angry as I expected him to be.

"It's late, we're going back to the hotel, we have an early morning tomorrow," he says.

But why?

"But you don't have to leave early, I'm going back to the North West with you tomorrow,"

They look at each other.

"We're not going to the North West tomorrow,"-Mama

Huh?

"We're going to Knysna," -ntate

"Knysna?"

"Yes, we are going on holiday, we booked it weeks ago. We'll be gone for a week-and-a-half," he says, puts his arm around her waist and leave me standing here.

Oh. Okay. He's just going to leave, just like that? Go on holiday with her when he can clearly see I have stuff that I'm dealing with?

He's not even mad that I'm pregnant? He looks like he doesn't even care!

Qhawe is still standing where I left him, waiting.

"I'm going to say goodbye to my sisters, they're about to leave too," I say walking past him.

He follows me.

"Oh, Chawe, hi. Do you have another family function coming up soon that you can invite me to? Before your wedding preferably because I think that's not anytime soon, I don't see this one agreeing to walk down the aisle with a big stomach. Anything?" -Tshedi.

Sigh.

"I'll let you know, I might just throw a party just for you, since you had to cancel Zanzibar," he says.

It was her suggestion. I thought she'd be disappointed but instead she suggested that we cancel the trip after I had that miscarriage. She had already gone to apply for a new passport but she said it wouldn't be right to go.

"Ledi, I left the wedding gift in my car, can I put it in your boot please? You'll give it to her in the morning." -Tshedi

We leave Qhawe still chatting with my two sisters.

"I had no idea what to buy her. I mean, the woman has everything, I couldn't even buy a voucher because she was probably going to forget about it, it's not like she needs it. Here, I bought a set of knives, I hope she likes them,"

Errr.....knives? What's she gonna cut? She can't even chop onions, I'm not going to start explaining the horror that is her cooking skills.

"I'm sure she'll love it," I say searching for my car keys in my clutch-bag.

There they are.

"Whoah! Did you come in that?" she asks with a look of disgust on her face.

Really Tshedi?

"Yes I came in my car,"

"I didn't know you still had this thing. What happened to your car?" she asks. I roll my eyes.

"Chawe let you drive in this car? I thought it didn't have airbags,"

Can she shut up please!

"Let's go back inside. Everybody has left except you. Did you know that ntate is going on holiday with his girlfriend? Knysna, imagine!" -me

She doesn't seem bothered.

"Yes, they're going somewhere else after that, I don't remember where. Ntate is living his life lately, and he's happy," she says.

That's why he doesn't have time for me anymore.

I'll tell Tshedi everything tomorrow when we drive to North West. She left her girls there with Dikeledi because Sallo was on yet another business trip, if that's

what it is.

I used to think she loved going home that much, but now, since she told me about Maradona, I know exactly why she's always at home.

Ntate would freak if he ever heard about this.

"She'll be fine, schools are closed anyway, we'll go to Mbuba with her,"-Hlonu

Who is she talking about?

"Maybe next time, we have an appointment with her paediatrician on Monday that she can't miss. I promise you I'll let her stay longer next time,"-Lesedi

Oh, this is about Agape.

They love her, all of them. I've been saying that this family is strange. They are not at all what you expect them to be when you're looking at them from the outside.

My sisters are gone. I want to go too.

"I'll drive with you," he says.

I thought they were supposed to leave for Mbuba, now.

"I won't let you drive alone at night Naledi, I'll take you to the house," he says.

I'm tired of fighting with him. I've been angry and irritated enough for one day.

We have to stop by the pool-house before we leave.

I thought we were coming here to say goodnight to everyone but now, I'm shown the couch and because I don't want to embarrass him in front of his brothers, I sit and pretend everything is fine.

It is decided that everyone will leave for Mbuba at 2am. Qhawe didn't mention that I'm not going to be part of that trip. I wonder why he's doing this. Qhawe is a straight-up type, I'm not sure what this is all about.

Surely, everyone can't expect me to be nice and comfortable after reading that letter. I'm sure they are shocked that I'm still here, still with him.

He's surprisingly quiet when we drive home. I insisted that we use my car because I'm going to use it in the morning when I leave. He'll be gone by the time I wake up anyway. I told him I'll pack all my stuff and leave his keys with the security guard.

He didn't answer me, he just looked ahead at the road.

Oh, the Audi is here?

"Sbani is sleeping in the spare bedroom," he says.

Sbani again?

"Why?"

"He's staying here for a few days," he says

Oh wow! It would have been nice if I had been informed. I still don't understand why he has to stay here, the kid should have an apartment in Gauteng by now, he has a job. And because he's always getting into trouble with his father.

Just the other week they had to go and rescue him from some girl's uncle. Apparently, of all the girls he could have, and he can have all of them, he went for the daughter of his father's arch enemy, Zandile's ex.

I hear the families have been enemies for centuries. But Sbani, he just had to go for the honeypot that's surrounded by the most bees.

I go straight to the bedroom. This is the last time I'll ever sleep on this bed. Maybe I'll come by now and again when the baby is born. I'll still be the mother of his child after all, we'll still have to be civil with each other.

He doesn't follow me upstairs.

Whatever.

I planned to sleep without showering, but the make-up on my face will not allow me to.

I figure, wiping it off with make-up remover will take the same amount of time and work as jumping in and out of the shower.

He's still not in the bedroom when I change to pyjamas.

Okay.

I set the alarm clock for 6am.

I want to leave early.

I'll pack in the morning.

---

"Mmmmmmm,"

Why is it so cold?

My arm. What's?

"Wake up."

Huh?

"Chawe?"

"Wake up," he says.

What's going on? When did he come in here?

I check my phone. It's 4am.

Really?

"Naledi, I said wake up. Your bags are packed. Leave. Now," he says.

I don't understand. He's supposed to have left already.

And what does he mean my bags are packed?

His eyes are red, he hasn't slept at all.

"Chawe it's 4am, I'm leaving at 7am...."

"No, you're leaving now. You have 20 minutes to shower and put your bags in your car. Don't worry about leaving your keys with security, just leave them on the kitchen counter."

Oh my God! What is happening here?

I sit up.

Is he...?

The look on his face says he is.

"Chawe what's going on?" I ask.

I've never seen this look. He's never looked at me like this before.

"I said 20 minutes. Five minutes is already up. Make it snappy," he says and leaves the bedroom.

I'm lost. My bags are really on the floor, all packed, even the handbags that have been here for months are on the floor.

He can't do this, not to me. He's probably joking. He just wants to see my reaction.

I'm going to go downstairs and talk to him.

The Audi is not on the driveway. Sbani must have already left for Mbuba. Why didn't Qhawe leave with him?

"Chawe,"

Naledi

He turns around.

I gulp.

"What is this? I told you get dressed and leave,"

Oh My God! He's serious!

"Are you kicking me out of your house?" I ask.

Things are starting to be clearer now.

"No, I'm letting you out of my life. It's what you want isn't it?"

I'm standing with my mouth open wide. Did he really just say that?

"Not like this Chawe,"

"Like what? What do you expect me to do? Run after you? Kneel at your feet like I've been doing for the past eight months? I'm done with that," he says.

What is wrong with him?

"So this is what you do? Throw me out at 4am like I'm rubbish? What was I supposed to do Chawe? Accept that I'm marrying a killer and smile all the way to the aisle?"

He's making me angry!

"Naledi, who exactly did I kill? You're calling me a killer so give me at least three names, or two, whatever suits you. Who exactly are you talking about?" he asks.

I don't like the way he's narrowing his eyes, it looks like a threat.

"You didn't deny what was in that letter,"

He doesn't move his eyes.

"Did you ask?"

"I didn't have to. You didn't deny any of it,"-me

He stands with his hands on his waist and looks down.

"Naledi, the only reason I haven't physically dragged you out of my house is because you're pregnant, that's the only reason. Now, I said pack and leave, your 20 minutes is up, you're leaving in those pyjamas," he says.

He's scaring me, but I'm not going to cry.

"So this is how it ends?" I ask.

He takes a deep breath.

"You ended it," he says.

Oh it's my fault now?

"Wow, nothing is ever your fault anyway," I mumble and...

"What did you say?" he shouts.

I take three steps back. He's coming towards me.

"I asked you Naledi! I asked you if you were with me, if you were willing to stand by me and you said yes! You said yes you were going to stick it out no matter how tough it gets, but you have done the total opposite throughout this relationship!"

I take another step back. He's shouting. Loud.

"I've tried my best to prove to you that I love you, that I want to be with you for the rest of my life but it's been pointless. You're not ready for commitment, you're not ready for anything so I'm not going to waste my time trying to turn you into something you're not,"

"Chawe I didn't say I was not....."

"How many times have you left Naledi? How many times have you walked out the door and left me hanging since we met. That's all we've been doing, you

walking out and me chasing after you. That's what our relationship has been."

"That's not true.

"You have a problem with everything about me! You can't even do one thing for me! Just one thing Naledi as simple as moving to Gauteng. That, you can't even compromise on that and you tell me you want to be a wife? My wife? Do you even know what that word means?"

"I'm not going to answer him, not when he's like this.

"Damn you Naledi! I've had a tough day, a really tough day! My brother almost didn't get married. Instead of being there for him I had to follow you around all day. Instead of being supportive you were busy sulking over bullshit I can't change...."

His phone rings. He takes it and throws it on the wall.

"I'm not safe here.

He rubs his forehead and clenches his teeth.

"You know, I've managed to overlook your bullshit this whole time because I love you, I really do. I've never loved anyone as much as I love you Naledi...."

"Yes, I didn't love her as much as I love you....." he says when he sees the surprised look on my face.

"But what you did this morning, no! I can't. Walk out that door, and walk out now! You're not going to tell me that you're going to abort my child just because I pissed you off. What is it? Is this baby your hold over me now? You're going to use it to threaten me? To force me to do whatever you want me to do? I won't have that. That was low and disgusting of you and I'm not going to tolerate it. Now, we're done here. There are no choices to be made. It was either you accept me as I am, with my past, or you don't. You've already made your choice. So please, for the last time, take your things and leave my house. I still have to drive to Greytown, I have to be there for my brother, that's what family does," he says.

I hold my breath as he walks past me and up the stairs.

"I'm going to get ready to leave. I want you out of my house by the time I come out of the shower," he says.

I have been hurt in my life before but never have I felt like this, like my heart is being literally ripped into pieces.

# Twenty

**D**oes it really have to take this long to open the gate Lesedi?"  
I don't have time for this, not today!  
"What is wrong with you? Your hormones are making you crazy," she says.

I need to shower and get out of here. I'm going to Kimberley, I have nothing to go to the North West for.

"Why are we being waken so early in the morning? And why didn't you go to KZN with your people?" - she asks.

What's with the bloody questions?

I go straight to the spare bedroom. Tshedi is fast asleep with Agape next to her.

I'm going to shower in Omphi's bedroom instead.

She's not here, that's strange.

I came in with just one bag. I left my make-up case in the car, all my shoes too.

"Ledi, what's going on?" - Lesedi. She's standing inside the bathroom, just outside the shower.

I won't answer her.

She gives up and leaves.

I wish I could turn back the clock and change everything. Everything from that moment I left the hospital to meet with the captain. I wish I could go back.

I wish I could erase the past eight months, just so I don't find myself here, feeling like this.

This whole thing, it's been a lie. If he can treat me like he treated me this morning, then it was all a lie. The problem is there is no going back now, I'm stuck with him forever. As long as I'm having this child, I'm stuck with him.

For the first time in my adult life, I wish I had a mother. I wish she was here to tell me what to do now, where to go. I don't even know where to start.

Yesterday I was sure. I was certain that we were going to handle this like adults. I was going to walk away, go back to my life and carry this baby until I give birth. We were going to make a plan, make an arrangement on how to raise him. But now I don't see that happening.

The side of him I saw this morning says everything about where we are going with this.

The sun has come out. I'm standing at this window looking at those people



walking on the street, their lives must be more simple than this.

That's Mqhele's car parking at the gate. The passenger door opens. What?  
That's Ompfi coming out!

No this can't be happening! She can't do this!

The driver's window rolls down.

Whew!!

She runs in, like she doesn't want to be seen.

"Hi," I say when she walks in.

She almost jumps!

"Ledi,"

"Hi,"

"What are you doing here?" she asks.

"What are you doing with Hlonu's cousin?" I ask.

She looks surprised, and guilty.

"Nothing, we just went out after the wedding," she says.

Really?

"Went out to have sex?"

She frowns.

"What are you? My mother? I'm an adult I can do whatever I want,"

Why is she being defensive?

"With Hlonu's cousin? Of all people? Do you even know him? You met him  
for the first time yesterday and the next thing you're opening your legs for him?"

She looks at me, frowns, and goes to the bathroom.

Nx! People are just doing everything in their power to fuck me up! Everything!

I'm leaving, I can't stay here.

"Where are you going?" Lesedi

She's really on my case!

"I'm going to my house Lesedi, where I live,"

She follows me down the stairs.

"But wait, where is Qhawe? Isn't he driving you there? What's happening  
Ledi?"

Urgh.

"I don't know where Qhawe is. And no he's not driving me. We're over! It's  
over and no I don't want to talk about it."

I slam the door behind me.

---

The first thing I see when I open the wardrobe is his jacket. His flops are on  
the floor next to my bed. There's his perfume too.

His toothbrush is in the bathroom and that shower-gel I bought him is still on  
top of the sink, next to his shaving machine.

I swear this house still smells of him.

There's bottled water in the fridge, dried fruit and little packets of cashew nuts  
that he loves so much.

I haven't spoken to him all day. I don't expect him to call and I know he's not  
somewhere waiting for my call either.

I have to go to work tomorrow and be professional, act like everything is fine

because really, I can't take my personal baggage there with me. I've done too much of that in the past months. I've missed many days of work. First it was that thing with my ex, and then it was that thing with the attack, after that I had to take leave for the lobola negotiations, and then there was the miscarriage which led to me being absent for almost two weeks.

My relationship with my colleagues has changed, a lot. I feel like they see me differently now, like I'm not who I used to be anymore. I've become some kind of a celebrity that they have to skate thin around. It's like I'm high up there now and they can't reach me.

And then there's Tsietsi. Our conversations are brief lately. They're not even conversations, just greeting and asking how the other is. I've been meaning to make things right with him but I've been too busy with my own complicated life to try.

I miss my dad. I miss his attention and his over-protectiveness. I know I complained when he still had time for me, but now I wish I could go back there. He's living his life now, he's stopped living for me and I would be unfair if I complained.

The baby has kicked only once today, when I was driving. I stopped at the garage to get some food and water. I noticed people looking at me, pointing at me, talking about me. That's the life that comes with Qhawe. I'm going to be honest and say he did tell me, and I thought I could handle it, I really believed I could.

It's complicated, but what I don't understand is why I still love him. I really do. Even after everything that happened this weekend, I love him.

I'm trying to imagine how he must be wherever he is. Is he laughing with his brothers? Does he miss me? I don't think so, not after this morning. He seemed to be done with me altogether.

My phone. It's Lerato.

I hesitate before answering.

"Heeeeey,"

She sounds excited.

"Hi Lerato,"

Sigh.

"I'm trying to get hold of the pensioners but both their phones are off. How was the wedding?" she asks.

"They're probably out of batteries or something. They're in Knysna,"-me  
I thought she knew that.

"Yes my mom told me. How is Greytown?"

Urgh!

"I'm in Kimberley, I have to be at work tomorrow so I came back,"-me  
I don't have to explain anything to her, she's not even my real sister.

"Oh. Okay. So here is the thing, I'm coming to the Northern Cape tomorrow, work things. I'll be in Kimberley so maybe we can hang out. I'll come to your house," she says.

I don't want her to come here. I don't want company, especially not her and her annoying questions.

"Okay, call me when you get here."

I don't want to be rude to her either.

-----  
I could sleep more.

The first thing I did when I woke up was to check my phone. I'm used to being woken by his call, or a kiss on my lips or him standing over me and watching me.

His baby kicked, that woke me otherwise I would have overslept.

This car has a squeaky sound, it must be that it was parked for a long time. I still have those bank cards, I forgot to leave them behind but I have no plans of using them anyway.

I have to go by the mall later today since I have a visitor. I hope that she'll understand my situation and not expect me to be exciting company.

"You made it," Tsietsi says

We meet like this, all the time, in parking lots, in corridors, that's what our friendship has turned into.

"Yes, I made it. I still have to make a living you know," I say

The way he's looking at me. He could always see through me, always.

I wish I could still talk to him, still tell him all my problems.

"Let me carry that for you," he says

It's my lunch bag, or is it a cooler bag? I packed my lunch in it because I don't want to leave my office at all. I don't want to see people and I don't want people to see me.

I'm becoming slower and heavier every day and I'm not even six months pregnant yet.

I have to make an appointment with a gynaecologist for some time this week. I've made peace with that I'm going to do this all alone.

"Wanna share lunch today? I brought more than enough food," I say just as he's about to walk out of my office.

He turns around and smiles briefly.

"Are you sure? I don't want to eat all your food, you're eating for two,"

I wish he'd just ignore that.

I roll my eyes.

"I'll see you at lunch,"

I just need to get through today, and maybe it will be easier to get through tomorrow, and the day after that and the day after that.

I haven't heard from him at midday and to be honest, I'm not expecting anything. It's just that I'm used to him being all over me, always being present even when he is miles away.

Things are still the same even when Tsietsi walks in for lunch.

"So where's the food? Bring it," he says.

He looks so happy and free.

I put the lunch bag on the table start taking everything out.

"Is this the food? Salad and dried fruit and all these organic things? Where's the pap? Where's the meat?" he asks.

Really? Beggars can't be choosers dude.

"It's what I eat, Chawe..." I stop.

I don't even know why I'm mentioning his name.

He pulls a chair and sits across me.

The look on his face, I know where this is going.

"Wanna talk about it?" he asks opening a packet of dried fruit.

Naledi

"Why? So you can say I told you so?"

He raises one eyebrow and grins.

"I told you so. Now that that is out of the way, talk to me," he says.

He can be an arse sometimes.

"It's over. We're over."

He looks into my eyes briefly.

"Just like that?" he asks.

I could tell him the whole story but....it's complicated.

"Yes, I'm not sure anymore if it was his decision or mine, but I told him I was leaving and he told me to leave. He packed my stuff and told me to leave at 4am yesterday morning and that was it. I walked out that door and told myself I was never going back, child or no child...."

"He kicked you out of the house at 4am? I always knew that guy was a thug, I just always knew,"

Thug is a bit of an exaggeration but he did tell me that he was bad news.

"What were you fighting about anyway?" he asks.

Where do I start?

"About a lot of things. I guess this one was the last straw for the both of us, we reached breaking point,"

I guess that's what it was, breaking point.

"It's the nature of relationships ngwana, some work, others don't,"

I laugh. He's confused.

"I just, it's just that I haven't heard that in a while, "ngwana", I'd forgotten we used to call each other that,"

He laughs.

"Before life got complicated," he says.

There's that silence. I think we're both looking back at how simple our lives used to be, when all we did was get drunk and share food and share smokes and bitch about each other's love lives and being broke and how much our job sucked.

Right now, I don't even know what's happening in his life.

"How have you been Tsietsi?"

We have a brief eye-lock moment.

"I've been good, the past eight months have been interesting. A lot happened," he says.

I want to know about it.

"It's your turn to talk," - me

He smiles briefly.

"Are you sure you want to know?" he asks.

Of course I want to know.

"Talk," I say.

He puts the hot-cross-bun on the table and leans back on his chair.

"While you were becoming rich and famous and gracing tabloid covers, I was going through a journey of self-discovery," he says.

Like he even needs to discover himself.

"I decided to be true to myself, at last," he says.

I wonder what crazy tactics he got up to this time....

"I'm gay."

He says almost too sudden.

Huh?

"You can close your mouth, that food looks gross in there," he says.

Did I hear him correctly?

"You are what?"

"I'm gay. I prefer sex with men, I find them more attractive than women. Sex with them is better, as I have realised in the past eight months. Do you want me to demonstrate for you.....?"

Does he even understand what he's just told me? And that I'm shocked beyond imagination right now?

"But you love women, a lot,"

He rolls his eyes.

Oh he's an eye-roller now?

"I thought I did, but I've always known I love men more. And now that I've decided to act on it, I've found that they are faaaaaangar better, less whiney and less complicated. Plus I don't have to lick boobs and all that stuff..."

I laugh, I can't stop myself.

I didn't see this one coming at all...

Well, I've been drunk to a stupor around him before but he has never tried to take advantage of me. We've even shared a bed a couple of times and I always found my cookie still intact the next morning. Maybe that was one of the signs. I thought he was just being a great friend.

I realise that if Tsietsi had told me this eight months ago, I'm not sure how I would have reacted. I think it would have been awkward and that a part of me would have been mad that he kept it from me for all these years, or even judge him I don't know. But now, I've been through so much that his coming out is not an issue, not a single bit.

"And...the family?"

He bites his lip.

"They don't have to know yet. They're still expecting me to walk in with a dotting bride one of these days,"

His father is a traditional healer. I always tease him and say he followed in his father's footsteps by becoming a doctor.

"Anyway, thanks for the lunch..."

The door opens. Oh no. Not today.

"I see, you don't invite me to these things anymore?" she asks.

We've never invited her to anything.

"Hi Chelsea," I say

She's already sitting down and helping herself to whatever is on the table. She didn't even ask.

"I'm sooo hungry and I don't even have money for lunch. Naledi how is the baby? Do you know if it's a boy or girl yet? You look good, pregnancy suits you....."

That talking non-stop thing of hers.

"I'm not sure yet, I'll find out on my next doctor's appointment,"

I'm lying, I want to surprise myself. But we're already referring to it as a "he".

"I can go with you if you want," she says.

Naladi

Sigh.

Tsietsi looks annoyed.

"The other day, I accompanied Latoya to her ultra-sound, she's having a girl. You know my friend Latoya right?"

No we don't.

I shake my head.

"Oh well, she's seven months pregnant. And then, this weekend, her husband dies,"

Oh my!

"That's bad, what happened?"

"He was shot on duty? He's a cop. Captain Phalane,"

No!!

"Phalane? Are you sure?"-Tsietsi

"Yes I'm sure, don't you listen to the news? He was responding to a robbery and he got shot, just like that. Now his unborn child will never meet him. I'm going to Latoya's house from here."

I hadn't spoken to him in ages! I didn't check on him at all after that thing with my ex. This is really bad!

I look at Tsietsi, he's shocked too.

I stand up and go to my computer. I have to confirm this, Chelsea is.....Chelsea.

"I'm looking at the Diamond Fields, it's on the front page,"

Tsietsi stands behind me.

It says here that the police were tipped by a random person about a truck hidden somewhere behind trees. There were men offloading goods from it. It turned out the truck had been hijacked hours earlier. It says when police arrived, the men just started shooting. Phalane died on the scene.

I remember that SMS that Qhawe received from Phalane. His explanation was that he knows him because their trucks had been hijacked on this highway on the way to Namibia. But this one can't be theirs, all their trucks have the Sbokho logo on them, Qhawe told me that.

"Did they say where the truck was going?" I ask Chelsea

"What truck?" she asks with food in her mouth.

Urgh.

What was I thinking? She probably heard the guy was dead and that was it. She leaves us still trying to get more information.

"I feel sorry for his family, the guy was a good cop,"-Tsietsi

He was. If he had time to attend to my case, he really was a great cop. I can just imagine how his wife is feeling right now, having to give birth to a child knowing that you are going to raise it alone? It's going to be really tough.

"I have to go back to fixing brains, I'll see you later. We must do drinks tomorrow night. Oh, it's juice for you, shame," he says and closes the door behind him.

I think I'm going to like the gay Tsietsi, he's.....free.

I wonder how Qhawe would have reacted to this.

"I'll be at your house at 7pm, I'll bring some wine, LOL"- SMS from Lerato.

Lord save me!

I throw meat in the oven and vegetables in the microwave, that's what we're having for supper.

I'm already in sleepwear, this way she will clearly see that I plan to go to bed very soon.

I still don't know what she's doing in Kimberley except that it's work. She works for a government department so it must be one of those out-of-town meetings that could have easily been done through Skype, but instead end up costing R50 000 to put together because you know, it's four months before the financial year ends but we still have to discuss "strategic planning".

My phone rings, it's the gate. They call every time someone asks to come to number 4, they have both his numbers and my numbers. I hope they didn't start by calling him.

"Yoh! Security here is hectic, I had to give them my ID, and they made a copy," she says looking shocked.

It's not standard procedure, it's number 4 procedure. I must tell those security guards not to worry about it anymore.

"Hello stranger," she says.

I hug her back and tell her to come in. She has a bag with her, I take it she's sleeping over.

"This is nice," she says looking around the house.

Her eyes go all over the place.

"Oh, I'm sleeping over, that's if you don't mind. I'm not a fan of hotels,"

Sigh.

"It's okay, you can use the bedroom on the left,"

She rushes upstairs.

The food is ready.

I'm going to try to be accommodating but I'm really not in a good space. I haven't spoken to Qhawe since yesterday morning and on top of that, there's that captain thing. I'm hurt by what happened to him.

"Congratulations by the way, mom told me, when I finally managed to get hold of them," she says.

Mom? Were they talking about me?

"She said I must let you rest and not keep you up all night because you're pregnant. Well, I've never been pregnant, I guess that's why she was giving me instructions," she says.

She talks. A lot.

She's just always alert, always wide-eyed and always asking questions. She's been in every room, even the balcony and she hasn't even been here for more than 10 minutes.

I wonder if she's like this with everyone or if it's just me.

She doesn't look at all impressed with the food but I don't think that's why she's here. I think she's trying to create some sisterly-bond with me. I know she's an only child so it's understandable that she'd try hard to forge a sibling relationship.

But, I have three sisters and they are all hard work, the last thing I need is another one.

"When are you going to Joburg?"

And the questions start.

Neledi

"Not anytime soon, I'm tired of being on the road now."

She's going to ask another question and I'm going to have to come up with another lie.

"Oh, when is the rest of the family coming back from Greytown?"

Sigh.

"Tomorrow or Wednesday most probably, they have some stuff to take care of."

She looks curious. This is the thing about people, I see it all the time, they are fascinated with people they don't know. They think the Zulu family is all about glitz and glamour and everything great.

She's one of those, you should see the stupid look on her face right now.

"Where is Mqoqi, is he seeing anyone at the moment?"

Sigh. Really?

"He's around, and no I haven't seen anyone lately. You know, just because you see them on TV doesn't mean you have the right to pry on their lives. They are people with feelings just like all of us," me

People just don't get this!

"I know. But we are technically family now so I was just.....preparing myself for when I do meet them one day,"

"I know there are older kids, do you have to treat them like your kids? Do they call you mom?"

I could roll my eyes at her right now.

But let me amuse her, I have nothing to lose anymore anyway.

"Yes, Sbani the eldest is far taller than me. He's in his early 20s I think and he calls me mom,"

She frowns.

"Sbani is the academic right?"

She knows a lot.

"Yes, he has a big brain for books and a small brain when it comes to girls,"

She laughs. I end up laughing too.

"What did the poor boy do? I thought they were supposed to be the ultimate charmers," she says still laughing.

"That's the problem, that charm is the problem. He decided that of all the girls in this world, he's going to choose one from Mbuba and one whose family the Zulus have history with."

She smiles and shakes her head, but gives me a look that says "I'm listening".

I might as well. It feels great talking about the Zulus to someone who doesn't know them and has no beef with them. It's even easier because she thinks they are God's gift to life and all that.

"We went to Mbuba for his parents' umbondo....."

She looks confused.

"It's a Zulu culture thing that's done just before a wedding." I say waving my hand dismissively.

She nods.

"Somewhere there, he meets a girl from the village. I don't know where and when but they ended up together,"

"But who would say no to a Zulu son?" she asks and giggles.

Sigh.



"The problem is, the girl is the daughter of Zandile's ex," I say.

She raises her eyebrows.

"Nkosana's wife?" she asks.

I nod.

"She has an ex? Wasn't she in jail almost all her life?"-her

All her life?

"Yes, an ex she almost married when she was a teenager, before she had children and before she killed her mother. Actually Nkosana kind of stole her from him and there's been beef between the two families since then. No actually the beef apparently dates back three generations ago."

I have never understood it myself.

"So, Sbani, knowing all that, went for the girl?" she asks.

I asked myself the same thing.

"Yep! And everybody knows there's no love lost between the Zulus and the Ngculungas....."

Whoah!

"Are you okay?"-me

She's still coughing. She almost choked on that wine.

"Sorry," she says fanning her face.

"The Zulus and who...?"-her

I hope this is not about me not being able to pronounce the stupid cliques.

"The Ngculungas. The girl's dad died a long time ago. He was stabbed or beaten to death during a house robbery, something like that. I think his name was Gwaza or something."

She gulps. What is wrong with her?

# Twenty-One

**T**he boys will stop by in Kimberley later today, please give them the keys for the Modder River house

It's Saturday morning.

Tomorrow will be exactly a week after I last saw or spoke to him.

And this? This is the SMS he sends me?

And who are these boys he's talking about?

I started crying, really crying on Tuesday when Tsietsi was absent from work and Chelsea was too busy and Lerato was gone. When I was all alone, that's when I started crying.

I understand that Qhawe maybe wants nothing to do with me but picking up the phone and making just one call to check how his child is doing won't kill him.

None of them, not even a single one of them has called to check on me, not even Hlomu.

I'm still deciding whether to respond to this SMS or not. And how does he know I'm in Kimberley anyway? It's the weekend and I could be in the North West.

I'm going to ignore it.

I'm not a fan of Ndivhu but knowing him comes with benefits sometimes. We are going to be inside a tent, sitting on proper chairs with shade over us, yes, we are VIPs at a funeral inside a soccer stadium. We are there somewhere with the MECs and other important people.

Ndivhu may have gotten us in here but we are still not on his level, he's sitting right in front, very-close to his father-in-law, next to him his "mother-of-all-weaves-and-sunglasses" wife. The family of the captain is also somewhere there, featured and paraded.

"That's us,"-Tsietsi says.

We are late so we have to tip-toe all the way to our seats.

There are print-outs of the programme of events on each chair.

"Yerrrrrr this will take all day,"-me

Tsietsi is thinking the same thing.

"MEC.... Provincial Commissioner..... Community Policing Forum..... Station Representative..... School Principal..... yerrrr do all these people really have to say something?"-him

That time, Kimberley is burning hot and I'm wearing black. Black dress, black shoes, black sunglasses, black straw hat. Yes, straw hat. I'm pregnant and depressed, understand that.

I keep checking my phone, typing and deleting my response without sending it. I don't know if I should say "okay" and leave it at that, or to tell him that I'm not home and I don't know when I'll be back or to just totally ignore him.

After each speaker comes a gospel artist, a different one each time. I wonder how much money is spent on these free-for-all funerals. If it's not politicians turning them into rallies, it's the media sensationalising everything. There'll be pictures of the weeping widow on every front page of every newspaper tomorrow, you'll see.

His three children, they must be 12-years-old and younger, are on stage. They've written a poem for him.

"Did you really love the captain that much or is it the hormones?" he asks  
I pinch him, he's being an idiot.

"I'm just thinking about his wife and what she must be going through, with that baby inside her."

People are going to see me crying and start thinking I'm the deceased's side-chick. It happens at funerals, the side-chicks cry in silence, at the back. I think I'm well positioned here.

An announcement is made that only family will go to the burial site. It's understandable, there must be thousands of people here.

We watch as the coffin is paraded out of the stadium, with police fully dressed in uniform carrying it and the visibly physically drained widow walking slowly behind it with her children next to her, and Chelsea.

Why do good cops die early though?

It's clear that this is about to become a festival, judging by the loud music that just started pumping.

I type and delete again.

Urgh what the heck?

"Give them my numbers, I'll meet with them after the funeral."-  
sent

"Who are you chatting to?"-Tsietsi

Sigh.

"Chawe sent an SMS saying i must give the Modder River house keys to the boys, I don't even know who those boys are,"

"He's kicking you out of that house too?" he asks.

No...

No wait! Maybe he is, maybe this is his way of taking the house keys away from me. He didn't say anything about them being returned. I hadn't thought of it that way. It's clear I'm still in denial about things. Qhawe couldn't go an hour without talking to me, and now, it's been a week.

I want to let go, but what am I going to do with all the love?

He doesn't respond, not even to ask whose funeral I'm attending. That's how much he's stopped caring.

It's strange because deep down, what I found out about his past doesn't scare me at all. I still see him as Qhawe but I'm angry, I'm just angry. If he had told me all this in the beginning I think I would have walked away there and then. But

now, it's late. This thing is going to totally destroy me.

Tsietsi is there talking to Ndivhu. I'd join them but I'm a little uncomfortable around his wife. She doesn't know I'm an ex but, it's still weird.

And besides, I'm ready to go. I'm hungry.

"Ndivhu says hello, the wife too,"-Tsietsi

Ugh.

It takes us forever to get out of the stadium because you know, everybody wants to be seen and recognised.

"Are we doing lunch?"

"No, I just want to go home and sleep. I have all my food there," I say

"Are you still eating those green things?"-him

"Yes, I am. You sound too much like a man for a gay guy,"-me

He laughs.

"I'm masculine gay," he says

He's right, that's probably why I never noticed anything. He's as manly as they come.

"Mah, we've just arrived in Kimberley, please give us directions to your house,"

Oh, it's one of the boys judging by "Mah".

The part I don't understand is why they are in Kimberley.

I SMS them the address.

"The Zulu boys are coming here to get the keys,"

He frowns.

"The kids, I'm not sure which one it is,"-me

He's busy on my stove making greasy food that's about to make me throw up. He's drinking Qhawe's beer too.

He opens the cupboard.

"What's this? Chivas Royal Salute....nice. I've never seen it before. Do you have ice?"

What? Is he crazy?

"You can't drink that Tsietsi,"

He raises one eyebrow.

"Why not? He's probably forgotten about it, and besides, he's never coming back here. I thought he was a beer guy," he says.

I snatch the bottle from him and put it back in the cupboard.

There's a knock, strange, security didn't call.

Tsietsi rushes to the door and opens.

It's Lwandle...and Mbulelo, Zamani...and Mqhele.

"Mah,"-Lwandle.

Why does he look angry?

"Hi," I say with a smile. It's not returned.

He looks at Tsietsi.

Oh.

But really? He's a kid.

"Come on in, I'll go get you the keys," I say walking up the stairs.

The keys are in the first shelf, they've been here forever.

Next to them is a white piece of paper.

**Dear Dr Montsho**

**I want my R350 back.  
You can deposit it at Shoprite.**

**Thank you.  
Q.Z.**

It's that note. Tears fill my eyes.  
Get yourself together Naledi...you're a tough girl.  
I find all of them still standing, looking at Tsietsi.  
"Sit down I'll make you something to drink," I say  
They don't move.  
Sigh.

"This is Tsietsi, my best friend, your father knows him," I say.  
I can't believe I'm explaining myself to teenagers.  
"What's he doing here?"

"Lwandle!"-me  
I'm not his father's property, he must know that.  
My feeling is he doesn't even know that we are no longer together.  
"Sit down I'll make you something to eat," I say  
The all sit.

Tsietsi has this look on his face, like he wants to slap the shit out of all of them.  
But Lwandle is so tall he towers over all of us in this room, I don't think Tsietsi stands a chance at all. And the kid is not even 21 yet.

They look like typical boys their age, t-shirts and capri-shorts and sneakers.

"What brings you to Kimberley by the way?" I ask.  
It's weird that they're here.

"We're just passing. Mqhe is going to start his in-service training in Postmansburg so we're driving him there," -Mbulelo

Mqhe, full name Mqhele is Lwandle's cousin, Nokthula's son.

"Postmansburg? Do you even know that place?"-me  
It's a one-horse town.

"No, my interview was in Joburg. But I'll survive, I'm from Mbuba after all,"-  
Mqhe

Trust me, Mbuba is far better than Postmansburg.

I have a full chicken I bought from Woolworths yesterday afternoon. I went specifically for it because I was craving chicken but by the time I got back here I wanted to throw it away. It's still untouched.

They're just gonna have to eat it with bread because I have nothing else, and I'm not cooking.

"No it's fine mah, you can just give us one plate,"-Mbulelo.

He's Xolie's little brother. He's what you'd call a "pretty boy". He has eyes just like Xolie's, and he also blinks a lot.

The chicken is on a plate in front of them, with a full loaf of bread next to it.

Tsietsi has been standing behind the kitchen counter the whole time drinking

Naledi

his beer and watching all this.

"I'll get a knife,"-Mqhe

"A knife? Are you a girl now?"-Zamani

They laugh.

I really am surrounded by teenagers.

They go on attack-mode, as in literally attacking that chicken and that bread.

Ten minutes later there's a plate full of bones and an empty plastic.

I'm in awe!

I grew up in a home of girls only and I have never in my life seen four people eat and finish a whole chicken so fast.

I don't think that 2lt coke is going to survive the ordeal. It's fascinating to watch I must say.

"Naledi, I'll see you later," Tsietsi says, already walking to the door.

He looks at all of them with a very disapproving face before he closes the door.

"What's he gonna do? Strangle us with those leggings he's wearing?" one says in a low voice.

"I heard that," I say.

I hear giggling.

What is wrong with these kids? Don't they have respect for elders?

And those are not leggings, they are skinny pants. But these boys are not the skinny jeans type. One would expect them to be blue-eyed black boys, especially Lwandle and Zamani but no, you'd swear they grew up in Tembisa.

Lwandle stands up and walks to the kitchen with the plate.

He's washing the dishes? That was unexpected.

"Is there a Spar around here?"-Lwandle

I take it they want to buy something they're going to eat tonight because that house has no food whatsoever.

"There's one down the road. It's a little centre with other shops too,"-me

I don't have to give them directions, they have a GPS they say.

They'll leave tomorrow but they don't say anything about returning the keys.

I won't ask, it's not my house anymore.

Lwandle promises to see me on Saturday.

What's on Saturday?

Oh, Xolie's gala dinner.

The kid has no idea what's going on.

I love them but I'm glad they're gone, now I can sit alone and dwell on my misery.

I still haven't heard from him when I go to sleep. It's over Naledi, except that. You're the one who wanted out remember? You're the one who said you weren't going to marry a killer.

I don't know what's worse, the heartache or the loneliness I feel. My dad has no time for my problems, he's busy with his own life.

I told my sisters about the break-up but they are all taking it lightly. Tshedi keeps saying we will work things out. They think it's the hormones that make me not want to be with Qhawe. They say it's normal.

But they don't know half of it, and I can't really tell them.

I have no plans to destroy him or his family.

Why do people call other people in the wee hours....?

"Hello,"

"Mrs Zulu,"

Huh?

"Hi,"

"Is that Mrs Zulu?"

It's a man.

"Errr yes, no, it's Ms Montsho," I say

Who is this now?

"Oh, we were given your numbers by your sons. They're here at the police station," he says.

Sons? Police station?

"You can come through if you want, but we are keeping them here until Monday, the court will decide what happens next," he says.

What the hell is going on now?

"I'm on my way,"-me

What have these kids done now?

I stop myself just as I'm about to press "call".

I'm not calling him. I'm sure the cop has already called Nkosana or Zandile or whoever else they had to call.

I hope it's not something bad. No it is something bad if I have to go to the police station.

Should I call Tsietsi or just go there alone?

Shit! I'm so confused.

I slam the hooter when the security guards don't appear.

It's gam I know but they're at work here, they're not supposed to be sleeping.

"Are you okay mam...?"

I don't have time for them.

I drive out of the gate in high speed!

I hope nothing bad happened to one of the boys. I'm thinking the worst right now. What if there was a break-in at the house and one of them got injured or something?

Maybe it was a car accident. But I would have been called by a hospital if that was the case.

These traffic lights are scheming against me! They turn red just as I approach, all of them!

"Hi, I was called to come here," I say when I walk in.

The cop behind the counter looks at me once and tells me to sit on a bench.

He's on his phone, scrolling and typing.

"No, I can't sit, I was called to come here....."

"Ousie, there...." he says pointing at the bench and immediately returning to his phone.

I'm panicking, but that doesn't bother him.

I give up and sit with my handbag held tight to my chest.

There are three people, obviously drunk sitting across me.

Just as I reel in shock a group of girls in skimpy clothes walks in. They are

rowdy and noisy.

"What is it this time? Were you short-changed by another truck-driver?" the cop asks with his ear-phones still on.

The girls all speak at once.

"Did he rape you?" he asks.

They speak at the same time again.

"I asked you if he raped you?" he asks looking at all of them.

No answer.

"Good, now go sit on that bench," he says pointing them to my bench.

They sit. They look angry about something.

"I told you about him, he doesn't pay. He does this all the time," one says to the other.

Oh. Prostitutes.

It must be ten minutes later when another cop appears from the back.

He looks at the one behind the counter, he still has ear-phones on.

"Are you here for the four boys?" this cop asks me.

I nod and stand up.

"Follow me," he says.

I adhere and follow him to the back.

It's a long passage with doors on either side. One is open and when I peep I see a number of cops inside, sleeping on chairs.

This is why crime is so rife.

We enter an empty office with just a desk and a pile of brown files on top of it.

"Where are they?" -me

He doesn't look at me, he has a piece of paper in front of him.

"In the holding cells," he says.

What?

"Why?"

He raises his eyes to look at me, he has a smirk on his face.

"Disturbing the peace and keeping the whole of Modder River awake all night. Feeding under-age girls alcohol, including the MEC's daughter and the provincial commissioner's 16-year-old daughter....do you want me to list all of them?"

Lord! What have these boys done?

"So you arrested them?"

"Mrs Zulu, did you not understand what I just said to you? This is Modder River we are talking about. They were playing loud music, drinking and keeping everyone awake. The commissioner thought his daughter was sleeping in her bedroom until he was called by the neighbours and told to go and shut down the party, because he's a cop..."

This is bad.

"And when he gets there what does he find? His daughter sitting on your son's lap, with alcohol in her hand. Now, what do you think happened after that..?"

Shit!

"Are they okay? Did he hurt them?" - me

I'm really scared now.

"No. Not that he didn't try, they ran, but we caught them," he says.

What does he mean they caught them? I hope they didn't assault them during arrest.



"I'm going to call their father, excuse me..." I say standing up.

He raises one hand.

"No, don't worry, sir. This doesn't have to go further than this police station," he says.

He has a very suspicious smile on his face.

"But if they have to go to court they're going to need a lawyer..."

He shakes his head.

"It doesn't have to get to that..."

I don't understand, he said they were arrested.

"I can talk to...some people, you know, to make it go away," he says.

Sigh.

Really broer?

I'm waiting.

"See, Mrs Zulu..." he emphasizes on the surname.

"We don't want a situation where the commissioner and the MEC's daughters are going to be in the media for the wrong reasons. I mean, you know how your family is always being followed by the media," he says.

Oh, I see now.

I'm waiting for him to get to the point.

He starts moving and placing the brown files all over the table.

"What do you want?"

"What are you offering?"-me

Nx!

I have R1500 in my purse.

I place it on the table.

He grabs it really fast and puts in the shelf.

"I'll be back," he says.

The stupidity of some people, risking his job for R1500. Nx!

I was planning to do my hair and nails with that money tomorrow. This morning actually.

He walks back in but they stand at the door looking like cold chicken.

I could slap the shit out of all four of them right now.

"Let's go,"

They follow me.

I'm so angry I can't even speak.

How could they do such a stupid thing?

The hookers are still sitting on that bench and it doesn't look like this cop is going to attend to them anytime soon.

"I'm going to report you," I say when I walk past him.

He raises his eyes, smirks and goes back to his phone.

These little fools haven't said anything to me at all.

They all sit at the back.

"And then?" I ask.

They look at each other, nobody wants to sit on the front seat.

I turn around and look at all of them.

Lwandle opens the door and comes to sit on the front seat.

Nx!

"You're going to court on Monday, you have to be there at 8am," I say



Na ad!

They look shocked.

Do they not understand what being "arrested" means?

"We're sorry man,"-Mibelele

"Tell that to the magistrate, and the MEC and the police commissioner," I say.

Silence.

"And your father,"

I hear gasps.

Silence.

I'm not taking them back to that house. I don't want to be woken in the wee hours of the morning again because obviously they are *zapped*.

"Use the guest bedroom. I'm going to call your father and tell him about this, you need a lawyer," I say

Miche looks more worried than all of them. The others look scared more than anything.

"I'm supposed to start work on Monday," I hear him say as they walk up the stairs.

He should have thought about that before deciding to be stupid.

I doubt I'll get any sleep now. It's already morning.

Should I call Gharwe? Or Hicann?

It's a bit too early. I don't want to wake them from their multi-million sleep.

I'll call in the morning.

"He's going to kill us this time," one says.

I can hear them talking in the other bedroom.

"He'll make us work at the rank again," another says.

"They make them work at the rank?"

-----  
Lerato is starting to be too much now.

If it's not calls from her asking questions that have nothing to do with her, it's those forwarded inspirational quotes that I never read.

I've spoken to my dad only twice this week. I miss him a lot. I'm going home next weekend.

It's quiet in this house, I take it the party-animals are still sleeping.

I'm craving orange juice but I don't have it in this house.

I almost walk out of the bedroom with just the kanga, but then I remember I have guests.

The house smells fresh. It feels like a Tuesday when my helper comes over.

Oh. They're awake.

They're in his lounge, quiet.

They all stand up when they see me walking down the stairs.

Wow, even the furniture is shining.

The sick is dry and the floor is squeaky clean. They mopped? Wow.

"Hi Makh,"- Lwandle is the first to say

Oh, I see, they are trying to make up for their sins.

"Hi," I say looking at all of them.

They look down.

Sigh.

The Home Series

"Have you had breakfast?"

They shake their heads.

"I'm going to Spar to get orange juice, make yourselves some food," I say.

"I'll drive you."-Lwandle.

The generosity is too much now.

"Okay, take the boys," I say shaking my head.

If they think their generosity is going to soften me, they are wrong. I'm still thinking about suitable punishment.

I still haven't called the family.

"Mish," he says as we drive out of the gate.

I look at him.

"I'm sorry about what happened. We didn't mean to put you through all that," he says.

This child.

"You shouldn't have done that Lwandle, it was stupid and irresponsible of you. You were supposed to sleep over at that house and not throw a party."

He's biting his nails

"I know, we got carried away. It was supposed to be just the four of us but the next thing we know there were people all over,"

Yeah right.

"And when did you plan this? Who do you know in Kimberley?"

"Nobody. We checked in on Facebook and the next thing we knew people were on their way," he says.

I don't believe that for a second! Who gave them the address?

"So you were partying with people you don't know?"

He nods.

They're more stupid than I thought. He knows who his family is and he did this? What if one of those people had been some crazy who wanted to hurt them?

"Mish, could you please not tell bana about this. We're already in trouble with him. I'm fine with it, he'll forgive me eventually but I'm worried about Zamani, he's paying for his studies and it's going to be a problem if he keeps disappointing him."

He's asking me to lie to his parents now?

"You don't have to go to court, they didn't lay any charges. But one slip and I'm telling your father about this," I say getting out of the car.

I hope this won't get me into trouble but I also don't want to be responsible for Nkosana giving up on this Zamani child.

Spar is full and I generally don't like queues.

"Come on, we'll buy it here at Tops," I say

He follows me but I can see he's reluctant. He's walking very slowly.

We are greeted with a very wide smile.

"My man, how did it go? You almost cleaned this store out yesterday," this guy says.

He works here.

I look at Lwandle, he scratches his head. The guy notices what is going on and walks away quickly.

I'm going to slap this child!

14 Oct

"Get the juice!" I snap

He rushes to the fridge.

We pay and leave.

I wonder how much they blew on alcohol.

To be young and foolish!

They eat their breakfast without me. Fried eggs smell worse than a burning tyre.

I hear footsteps on the passage. They stop at my door.

Sigh.

I don't understand why they aren't knocking.

I open the door and all four of them are standing there.

"We think we should go now," -Mqhe

Okay.

"All our stuff is still in Modder River, including the car," Mama st.

Oh by the way...and I've just had the brightest idea.

"Okay, make sure you clean up that house before you leave," I say.

They stand still.

"I'm not driving you, you will walk," -me

Shock on their faces! It's called punishment you monkeys!

"They will open the gate for you. I don't have to call them because you are walking anyway. Mqhe, good luck on your new job. All of you, drive safe," I say and close the door.

I expect to hear footsteps but nothing.

They're still standing at my door.

Two minutes later they are still at my door.

What now?

I open

Silence.

I raise my eyebrows.

"We don't have money for petrol," -Lwanda

Someone please shoot me now!!!

---

"Have you ever wondered how it is that Thabane fell and hit his head, alone, in a single cell?"

Huh?

What is this now? Who is this?

I call the number back but it says it doesn't exist.

This is strange. This SMS just arrived now and already the phone is off?

And what do they mean "have I ever wondered".

Eight months later?

Max!

Let me go to sleep.

## Twenty-Two

**T**wo weeks and it's still as painful as it was when I left that house with my bags that morning.

Tonight is Nolie's gala dinner. They didn't even call to ask if I was coming.

I'm sure right now they are busy preparing for the event while I'm here at home hoping my father will make time for me.

He looks great, better than I've ever seen him. It's like he's young again. He laughs and jokes more. He's just . . . happy.

I saw him briefly in the morning before he left for some community meeting. He used to go to the Tribal Authority offices almost every week day but now he doesn't appear to be that committed anymore.

He left Mimi-Mankwe here. I thought they'd go together, they're always together.

This house too, it feels more humanely with her around.

She officially moved in after my dad paid lobola.

Imagine, a 60-year-old paying lobola for a 52-year old. Personally I don't think they should have a big wedding. But step-mother here is all about glam and glitter so I foresee a Top Billing situation.

Even now, she's in high heels. She's in the house and I don't think she's going somewhere but she's all dressed up.

I feel like there's tension between us today. Like she has something that she wants to say or ask but she's waiting for the right moment.

"Harata tells me she came to visit you?"

Here we go. I was comfortable with the silence.

"Yes, she wasn't really visiting me, she was stopping by," me.

She nods and looks away.

Whaw!

"I've noticed you've lost weight, shouldn't you be gaining!" she asks.

That's it, that's what she's been meaning to ask.

Yes, I have lost weight in the past two weeks. I'm depressed. I'm trying to deal with the status of my relationship while also trying to keep this person inside me alive. It's a battle and it's taken a toll on me.

That's why I decided to come home, for some peace.

Meredith

"How is your your husband?" she asks.

"That's the last thing I want to talk about."

"He's fine. When is state coming back?"

She's still looking at me with that look I can't describe.

"Later. Why? Is there something you want to talk to him about?" she asks.

"What's with the questions?"

"Yes."

"You can talk to me," she says.

I don't know her that well, but she seems like a wise woman. And if she's going to be my mother I might as well start warining up to her now.

"It's about Chawe, we broke up, the wedding is not happening anymore."

Just saying it breaks my heart.

"Oh," she says

Is that all she's going to say?

"Why?" she asks.

Does it matter?

"Just a few things we couldn't agree on,"-me

She points me to the lounge, I hope she's not about to go "hibe study" on me.

She has a cup of tea. Typical middle-aged black woman, they are all addicted to tea and church and stovels.

"Naledi, you don't end a relationship because you don't agree on things. Sometimes your father and I don't agree on things but we talk and get through it," she says.

Great, I'm in therapy now.

"It's more complicated than that. And besides, I didn't end the relationship, we both ended it,"

"That's the truth really."

"Oh, so you sat and decided you were over?"

"No, I told him I wanted out and he said I could go."

She raises her eyebrows.

"So you ended things. You initiated the break up," she says.

Everything is always my fault isn't it?

"I had my reasons,"

She sips her tea.

She can't expect me to tell her those reasons.

"Trust me I've seen it all, you can tell me," she says.

She's the first person I'm talking to about this. Tsietzi was not interested in the details, he's just glad I'm single again and back in his life.

"It's about his past, he has a dark past,"

She looks surprised.

"We all know that family has a dark past, everybody knows who their father was," she says.

"No, that is not the past I'm talking about. This has nothing to do with his father. It's what he did," I say.

Why am I telling this woman all this? What if she tells some one?

She places the cup on the table and folds her arms.

"It's fine, you don't have to tell me the details of what he did...."

Thank you!

The House 50444

"But, you say he has a dark past?" she asks.

Sigh.

"Yes."

"I see. How is his future? Does it look dark too?" she asks.

What kind of question is that?

"I don't know... I'm not."

She looks into my eyes, for longer than my comfort.

"I'm thinking, you are in his present, and probably will be in his future seeing as you are carrying his child. So, I don't understand why you are worried about his past."

Is she listening to herself?

"The thing Mine is I can't be with a man who is capable of doing the things he did."

"Do you know why he did the things he did?"

Whose side is she on?

"No but....."

"Did you ask him why he did those things?"

"I didn't have to....."

"But you agreed to marry this man? You got pregnant with his child but you can't sit him down and ask him to explain his past to you? Did he give you an impression that he was perfect?"

I keep quiet.

"Are you perfect?"

What?

"No, but I'm not a criminal..."

She raises one hand and says: "No, I said I don't want to know the details. Whatever that man did in his past has nothing to do with you. Before you found out whatever he did, you believed he was a good man and that's because that's what he had been to you, a good man. You walked out of this house with him, defying your father....."

She knows about that?

"And now, you find out one thing about him and you don't love him anymore?"

"I do love him...."

"So why are you here?"

She's starting to sound a bit.....aggressive. I won't have that.

"This is my home and I'm here to talk to my father."

She looks calmer now.

"How long has it been since you broke up?" she asks.

Urgh.

"Two weeks."

"Two weeks and you are sure it's over? You're ready to tell your father?"

I nod.

She shakes her head.

Why is she being so judgemental?

"If that was the case you wouldn't be losing weight and looking like the world just collapsed on you."

I'd look well kept but I had to bribe a cop to get some kids out of jail.



Naledi

And this woman is starting to get on my nerves.

"Here is what is going to happen...you're not going to tell your father about this," she says.

"What?"

Who does she think she is?

"No no no listen to me, you're a grown woman and I'm not going to allow you to stress your father with your problems. You are the one that decided you wanted to be someone's wife. Your father is getting old, you know that. Right now he believes he has done his job as a father and he's starting to live his life for himself. For 37 years he has lived for the four of you, he gave up everything to raise all of you. He even left home to live in Mafikeng so he could keep you away from all the family squabbles...."

This has nothing to do with her really.

"If you tell him this he's going to start worrying again. He thinks you are off to start your own family with the people you chose. And now you are back here, pregnant and carrying problems? No!"

"He's my father...."

"Listen here, I've been with your father for 17 years! I've watched him be a mother and father to you. He has been giving and all you have been doing is taking. You run to him when you have problems but you all chose to live in different provinces, far away from him. Who do you think has been taking care of him? I'm the one that holds his hand at every doctor's appointment. He may be your father but he is my man and now is his turn to be happy. He's done his work, now it's time for you to grow up and solve your own problems. This is my house now, I have enough of my problems, you go to your house and deal with yours....."

She's going to regret this! My dad will never allow her to come between us.

"You will never come between me and my father."

"That's not what I'm trying to do. I'm trying to talk to you woman to woman. Your father will not live forever and I want his life to be great from now on. Naledi do you understand how good a man your father is? Do you know how lucky you are to have him? Can't you put his happiness before yours? Just once...?" she stops.

But...I do care about my father. She's making it sound like we abandoned him. I'm not angry anymore, I'm hurt.

She notices.

"Okay look, I'm just saying that your father is....he's just started to feel young again. He's doing stuff that shocks even me sometimes. I'm seeing a side of him I never saw when he had to worry about whether you were okay in Cuba, whether Tshed's was happy in her marriage and if Omphi was not being wild and if Lesedi was so detached from everyone because he did something wrong as a parent...."

This is news to me. I always thought Naledi was fine and happy.

"I remember when you went to your matric dance and he was worried thinking the boy you were going with was going to take advantage of you, that's why he made you wear an ugly dress..."

Hah!

"I know it was an unkind thing to do but it came from a good place."

Wow. She's been here all along.

"You may not know this, but I raised you. I wasn't here physically but I was always here. Your father came to me for everything. When it got tough for him as a man trying to raise four women, he always came to me. Sometimes I wanted to give up because I could not bear not being able to love him openly but he begged me every time and I ended up staying. He used to say "Let me finish my job as a father first, let me make sure they can stand on their own feet."

"You have no idea what your father has had to do to protect the four of you, that is why you have no business judging that man," she says.

She's the only one talking now, I'm just listening.

"He adores your husband, he thinks you're in good hands and he will be broken if he finds out what is happening. I'm not saying go back to him, if you think that you have reason to leave, do so, but that reason must not be his past because you are not in his past."

She wouldn't be talking like this if she knew he threw me out of his house. Yes, I was horrible to him before he did but he shouldn't have treated me like that

There's a car outside. My dad is back.

She stands up and goes to open the door for him.

A baby kiss! Oh Lord!

"Guess what I got you," he says with his hands behind his back.

She blushes.

"This!" he says.

It's Nandos.

Someone smoo me now!

"Hi," he says to me. He's not even looking at me.

Sigh.

At least one of us is happy.

---

***We need to talk. I will contact you when you are back in Kimberley. Enjoy home.***

Who is this now?

It's the same phone number that sent me an SMS last Sunday. It still says the number doesn't exist when I call it.

Obawe would have known what to do, but I won't call him, I don't need him.

I'm flipping through channels because I have no life. The pensioners went out to dinner, they didn't even ask me if I wanted to come along.

I feel like I'm crowding their space.

Maybe step-mother was right, maybe I should leave my father alone to be happy.

My problems are mine and not his.

Eva dreading that long drive back to Kimberley tomorrow. I'm going, to be honest and say I miss the life of being flown and being driven and being taken care of. Every time the baby kicks I think about him, about how we were supposed to be sharing these moments with him. I imagine him smiling and being excited when he feels the kick.

Sometimes I think that maybe he is as miserable as I am about all this. That he misses our life as much as I do but then I remember he is Obawe Zulu and he is

Yala.

and fat and pregnant, he can move on whenever he wants.

The thought of that girl from the restaurant that Filamu said was his ex  
arouses my mind. What if he goes back to her? What if he furms about me?

The thing is I'm throwing hands and about his past but my heart is betraying  
me big time.

I love him.

Oh, and the...?

It's the gala dinner, they're on TV.

That's Mkwana and Mandile, followed by Thoma and Mphela. They're all  
dressed up and looking elegant.

I hadn't even started shopping for an outfit. I was going to go to Lloyds and it  
would have had to be done on short notice because my body size keeps changing.

There is Mpunde. He's with a girl? She looks nothing like Thando, she's a  
complete opposite of her. She's still dark but she doesn't look like a model at all.  
She looks out of place too, like she's not used to these types of things.

Oh, it's Spand. He's with a girl too. I assume then that he's over that girl with a  
strange surname because he wouldn't dare bring her there.

There are other people going in that I don't know. It looks like the place is  
packed.

It's him, he's all alone. He rustles through the red carpet and ignores everyone  
around him. He looks different, he even has a beard.

"What's going on there?"

It's my dad, he's standing behind me. I wonder how long he's been here.

"Nothing, just a gala dinner hosted by Kofie," I say.

I don't want to turn around and look at him because I'm trying to hold back  
tears.

"Oh, you didn't want to go?" he asks.

I could say that.

"No I haven't been feeling well," I say.

"So where is Qhawa?"

By the way, he can pronounce the cliques too.

"He's there too."

Can this conversation end already?

"I'm surprised he hasn't arrived here this weekend, he's always following you  
around. Maybe he still thinks I'm trying to marry you off."

Really mate?

I shake my head.

"When I saw that car parked on the second street from here earlier I thought it  
was him, I almost walked over there to tell him to come in but I changed my  
mind. I realised it was a bit when I found the car still parked when I came back  
later," he says.

He's getting old for sure.

"What kind of car was it?"

"I don't know, big car, dark windows. I came down here to get water..." he  
says and walks away.

I doubt Qhawa would be sending dark cars to park here. He's too busy doing  
his own things to be stalking me.

I'm going to leave early tomorrow, there's no point of me me being here.

And so,

"There's a car outside. At this time?"

"I forgot to tell you Lerato was coming," my dad shouts from the kitchen  
Oh hell not! Oh really not in the mood.

"Hello hello," she shouts when she enters

How am I going to get out of this one?

"You're still up? Great! I was worried I'd miss you. How are you feeling? How's  
the little one treating you?"

And so the questions begin.

"I'm good, how are you?" -me

She's already moved on to something else.

"Oh good, it's still on. I thought you'd be there too," she says sitting next to  
me.

She's talking about the gala dinner.

I should have changed the channel the moment she walked in.

"No, I didn't feel like going. I wanted to be with my dad."

She looks at me briefly.

"Trust me they don't want to be with us at all. I have to come here if I want to  
see my mom and it's not like she pays attention to me at all when I visit..."

Yeah I know what she's talking about...

"Is that Siani? Wow! She's with the Ngqutunga girl! My word!"

Bob?

"I'm not sure what she looks like..."

"I'm sure that's her. She's Cwaza's daughter. Bheká didn't have girls, just three  
boys. She was about five when he died. Dudúla and his wife raised her....."

"Stop right there, and you know all this how?"

She stops talking and looks a little nervous.

"Actually...they are well known people, for the political violence in the 90s  
and all that. So, how are your patients...?"

That was a quiet change of subject. But then, her eyes are on the TV, it doesn't  
look like she wants to hear about my patients at all.

The Szwari and Thabitha story is one of forbidden love. Everyone has tried to  
keep them apart, both families have tried but they just won't budge. And so, we're  
just going to sit and watch.

Thabitha has moved to the Eastern Cape. It's fun now, but the problem will be  
when they decide to get married or get each other pregnant.

"Zandile is so beautiful...." she says.

I think she didn't mean to say that out loud.

Her interest in this family is a little disturbing.

"How long was she in jail again?" she asks.

I want to roll my eyes.

"17 years, her kids didn't even know she was in jail, they thought she left  
them." me

Why am I still talking to her? The plan was to complain about being tired and  
get out of here as soon as I can.

"They didn't tell them?" she asks.

Sigh.

"They wanted to protect them. It's a good thing Thoban showed up and raised

Ketani

them. "This other time she told me about Lwandle being kidnapped when he was 7-years-old, on the day of her traditional wedding, and how since then they have had security around them all the time..."

She looks like she is thinking very hard, or counting in her head.

"How old is Lwandle now?" she asks.

"I'm not sure, over 20 I think,"

She's still counting in her head.

"Whoah!" she says.

I look at her. I'm lost.

"And then?"

She looks freaked out.

She smiles briefly.

"Nothing. Oh there is Sambafo and Xolie, they are my favourite couple," she says.

Someone shoot me now please!

The narrator goes to Qhawa, he's fiddling with his phone. He really looks different.

"There's your boy, you must tell him to shave that beard," she says smiling.

I'm out smiling.

I nod.

I hope she doesn't start asking me personal questions.

"It's late, I'm going to sleep," I say and leave her sitting there.

She doesn't care, her eyes are glued to the TV screen.

---

There's something wrong with this car. I don't know what it is but it kept making squirky sounds the whole trip.

I must have it checked out before it kills me.

Ezrato left very early in the morning, I don't know why.

My father and his girlfriend, oh, it's wife now went to church early too, they didn't even wait for me to wake up.

All I got was a call from my dad telling me to drive safe when I was already halfway to Kimberley.

I don't know if I should still be driving in my condition. I'm six months for but this baby is big.

I should have gone past the shops to get supper but it's not like I can eat and keep anything in my stomach anyway.

I'm just happy I got here before dark.

"Maun, here is your mail," the security stops me just before I drive in.

It's a big white envelope written "Dr Moutsho".

No address, nothing. Just "Dr Moutsho".

"Who is it from?" I ask.

I know it's a dumb question because really, how would he know?

He shrugs.

"It was brought by a delivery company, they didn't ask me to sign for it," he says.

Oh well.

The Thabane series

I leave it on the kitchen counter and go upstairs to shower.

I left my bedroom window open? Strange. I never do that.

The wardrobe is open, it must have been blown open by the wind coming through the window.

I've learned not to look at my phone all the time. It doesn't ring often lately, and when it does, sometimes I ignore it.

I have a missed call and new SMS.

**"Now that you are back, I have a parcel waiting for you..."**

It's that same number. I call it, and again it says it doesn't exist.

**"I'm going to go to the police now"**- I reply.

Nothing.

Five minutes later...

The response is five laughing faces and **"trust me, that's the last thing you want to do"**

It says it doesn't exist again.

Now I'm really scared. Who could this be?

Is Qhawe playing mind games with me? Is it him? But why would he do this? It's nothing like him.

I have to see what's in that envelope, now.

It's not heavy so it can't be bomb that will blow up in my face.

My hands are shaking as I open it.

What is this?

Pictures?

It's the captain with Qhawe.

Yes I know they know each other, he told me the captain and his team were investigating truck hijackings in this area.

There's another one. It's Thabane's dead body, in a police cell. His face doesn't look like he died immediately though. It looks like there was a struggle of some sort. I know this face, I've confirmed too many deaths and read too many post-mortems in my career.

If he had suffered blunt force trauma there'd be blood coming out of his nose or ears and there'd be blood on the floor where he's lying.

There's no blood in this picture, just him lying on the floor, dead.

But what does this mean and why would he send me a picture of Qhawe and the captain?

There's no note, nothing, just this picture.

But the thing is, Qhawe was with me on the night Thabane died and we weren't even dating then.

So why would he kill him?

Besides, it was during that time where I left him hanging in Joburg and he left me hanging after finding Tshetsi in my house.

This person is playing games with me. I will not entertain this shit.

Thabane tried to rape me. He would have killed me if the captain hadn't showed up.

He's been dead for almost a year and yes, I'm over it. I don't care.

I throw the envelope in the dustbin.

Now I can take that shower.

It's so good to live alone because you can just walk around naked, not that

hated:

Q: I've wanted me to be in clothes anyway.

The cop is holding.

And this?

It's a note, next to the top.

**R1 million. You probably have far more than that in your account.**

**You can have the rest of what I have after you pay.**

What the heck is going on here? I'm being blackmailed now? For what?

And why would this person think I have R1 million?

I must call Tsietsi!

No, I can't.

I'll call the police, but what am I going to say to them?

I rush back to the kitchen and take that envelope out of the bin.

There must be something more to this than what I see if this person is demanding this much money from me. For what though?

"I'm going to the police" - I SMS

I hope there'll be a response.

Nothing.

I won't sleep tonight. I just know that.

Now I'm really scared of being in this house.

I have to do this.

"Is there a way I can sleep in the Moutler River house? Just for tonight?" - I SMS him.

He probably won't respond.

He doesn't.

I'm going to Tsietsi's. I'll make up some story when I get there.

-----  
I didn't do any work today, I couldn't.

This could be a mistake but I don't think I have a choice here.

"I'm here to see Mpu'o?"

That's what was on his name badge if I'm not mistaken.

"Mpu'o? He's on night shift. Is there something I can help you with?" he asks.

Nope, I'm not talking to anyone but him.

"It's fine, I'll wait for him here, it's almost 6pm anyway."

He shrugs and points me to the bench with his eyes.

It's the same bench I sat on when I had to hail out those little brats.

It's busier than it was that night. People are coming in and out and there are cops all over.

I never thought I'd sit in a police station, like this, in my life.

I'm not even sure what I'm going to say to this guy when I see him. I mean, he is a corrupt cop so obviously I can't trust him. But seeing that we have a history of being corrupt together I trust that he'll be nice enough to help me.

I'm not sure what I want more, to have this person who is blackmailing me caught or to find out what really happened to Elhabane and why I'm being blackmailed for it.

One thing I know for sure is that he did not die there in that cell. There is no way that it would look that clean, and he would look that clean if he had fell and

hit his head there.

I'm trying to block this off but now that I know Qhasve's history, a little voice inside me keeps telling me to go back. But then again? He had no reason to murder him, he didn't even know him. He wasn't even here.

And then there was that call from the captain about a constable who wanted to talk. But also, he gave me a good explanation for it.

I'm so scared and confused. Maybe I should leave Kimberley, maybe it's time now. What if something happens to me? I'm so far from home.

"You're looking for me?"

He's standing right in front of me, I was so lost in thought I didn't see him there.

"Yes," I say standing up.

"Can we talk somewhere?" -me

He looks at me from head to toe, I see a bit of fear in his eyes too.

I follow him to that same office.

I sit, he doesn't sit. He looks nervous, he's all over the place.

"I don't know if you can help, but I have a few questions...actually information that I need," -me

He's still standing.

I'll keep talking.

"I knew Captain Phalane." I say

His eyes are wide. Why is he shocked?

He sits.

"I had a problem with an ex-boyfriend, Phalane helped me get a protection order against him and when he violated it and broke into my house, Phalane arrested him," I say.

He nods.

"He came here, to this police station, but he died on that same night..."

His eyes are all over the place. Now I'm beginning to think this was a bad idea.

"I never got to find out how he died, I was just told that he fell and hit his head, alone in a cell..."

He's looking me in the eye as I speak.

"I just want something, a post mortem or something. Or maybe someone who was here that night to tell me what exactly happened. He was a police officer so I'm sure it should be easy to find out," -me

I don't think this guy is going to help me. He has the same look he had on his face that night. I have a feeling he's about to ask me for money.

"I remember that case, I was not on the shift but when I came in the next morning they were still cleaning up the cell. Yes, he fell and hit his head. He was screaming and banging his on the walls all night, I think he lost his mind that night because he knew it was over for him. He was going to lose his job and trust me no cop wants to end up in jail with the criminals he arrested. If we hadn't taken his gun he was going to shoot himself. So he banged his head on walls instead and somewhere there he fell, hit the cement bench and landed on the floor. The only mistake we made was not to take pictures immediately. We didn't want his family to have to see blood all over, he was still our colleague after all. The only pictures available are those we took after we placed him down on the floor, on a clean spot," he says.



March

As I listen to him speak it feels like a huge load is being lifted off my shoulders. Suddenly I feel very light.

"Oh, I understand. So it ended there and then?" I ask.

He nods.

"Yes, we wrote a report and that was it. His colleagues in Rustenburg said he had been acting strange anyway so they weren't surprised to hear the story," he says.

I guess then this is where the chapter ends.

The person who is trying to blackmail me is playing games, whoever it is. I have the full story now and it's a happy story considering the circumstances. The best part is, it's all recorded on my phone. I wasn't going to take risks.

It's time to leave.

"Thank you very much, I just needed closure. Thank you for your time," I say and leave.

He doesn't walk me out.

# Twenty-Three

**T**here hasn't been another SMS, or a parcel delivered. It's been two weeks. I take it me threatening to go to the cops scared whoever that person was.

Qhawe never replied to my SMS.

I'm alone in this, I've made peace with that.

He kicks more and I feel him moving now and again.

He's the only thing that keeps me going really.

I've given up on waiting for that call, it's never going to come.

At some point I'm going to have to tell my dad before he starts asking about the next step.

I see Qhawe in the media sometimes. I hear him on radio talking about business.

The boys never returned the keys to the Modder River house so I concluded that was the end of the chapter. I don't know what is happening with the house, maybe it's been sold.

I'm going for another ultra-sound scan today, a 3D scan, alone.

I'm over six months pregnant and I'm all alone. The man who did this to me won't even call to check how his child is doing.

I know he doesn't care about me but I expected him to at least be supportive.

Yes, I did say I would call him when the baby is born but I didn't expect him to abandon me just like this.

I've been catching a lift with Tsitsi to work because my car broke down. I don't know what the problem is, they said something about the engine.

I plan to go shopping for a new one when Tshadi comes over next week.

She's been annoying me about working things out with Qhawe but why should I make the first move? He's the one that kicked me out of his house like I was trash.

I'm not going to beg a man to come back to me, I'm not going to be that kind of woman. If he loved me he would swallow his pride and work things out between us.

Great, the cab is here.

"I'm going to Homestead Medicare," I say

He nods and drives.

I know the gynec is going to give me a lecture about my eating when I get

there. I'm losing weight. I'm slimmer than I've ever been in my life and so this belly is just popping out.

The truth is I can't stomach anything. I'm six months far but I'm still getting morning sickness.

It's fair, but I had an appointment so I expect to be inside at exactly 12pm or I'll start throwing tantrums here. They must know that.

Some women here are with their partners looking all lovey-dovey. Me and a few others, we are all alone.

I have changed so much that people don't recognise me anymore. To think I was the talk of the town, a celebrity not so long ago. Now I'm just another pregnant woman who has to brace herself for single motherhood.

I'm picked out from the crowd, good, we won't be having problems here today. "Dr Montsho," he says.

I told him to call me Naledi but no, he insists.

"Dr Soukamaa,"

"Have you been watching your diet? Because it doesn't look like it. You of all people should know how important it is. Have you been taking your vitamins...?"

Here we go.

"I've been doing all that," I snap.

Yes, my hormones are a little evil.

He looks at me briefly.

"You know the drill, the bed is right there," he says.

My feet are swollen.

He starts with checking my blood pressure. It's fine, I was worried.

I'm lying on my back and I can't see my feet, that's how big this belly is now.

"That's one big head," he says smiling.

I laugh. Not that I found that funny but I'm laughing because I'm happy, I'm seeing my baby's face.

"Is he eating his fingers?" -me

"Yes because you don't feed him enough," he says.

I'll take that as a joke.

He is so big!

"He looks like a real human being," -me

"He is a real human being," he says.

And then I start crying.

I don't know if it's happy tears or a realisation that I'm going to have a lot to explain to this child when he comes to this world.

"Yes I know, it's always an emotional moment. Most of the time the fathers start crying before the mothers," he says.

Sigh. Fathers.

I know he wants to ask, but I won't give him the platform.

"Is he fine? Is everything perfect?" I ask.

He nods.

I wish he would open his eyes so I can see how big they are, but I don't think they do that while still in the stomach.

He switches it off. I still want to look at him more.

"On your next appointment we're going to have to discuss the birth details, are you planning on natural birth?" he asks.

I thought he was the one who should advise me on that.

I haven't even thought about where I'm going to give birth and who is going to be there with me. The best thing would be to go to Kustenburg or to Tshedí's house. She has experience, she can help me.

I'm not going to pin my hopes on step-mother, she doesn't have time for me. It's in situations like this where I wish I had my mother in my life.

There's an envelope on my floor, the same one as the last time.  
Someone was here.

"Dr Montsho" is written on it.

It's the same envelope. I thought this person was gone.

What is this now?

There's a note.

**"Meet me at RP garage behind the mall. I have something to give you since you think I'm bluffing."** - it reads.

How does this person keep getting inside my house?

The envelope was slipped under the door this time, but how?

I'm not going anywhere!

I'm going to call Mpulo.

But no, I never told him about the blackmailing.

As SMS.

**"8pm"**

That's all it says.

I have two hours to think about this.

This person wants money from me, and he thinks I have it, so he probably won't kill me before he gets it.

I know this is me being stupid but I sure must put an end to this.

**"No, 7pm, my house,"** I reply.

But since when am I this brave? It must be the hormones.

**"Calling the cops would be a bad idea. I will go down with people you love, trust me, this doesn't have to end badly, I'm on my way,"** he replies.

I'm putting my life and my baby's life in danger by doing this. Right now I really wish I had Qhawe stalking me. He would have solved this problem a long time ago. But now he is past that, he moved on a long time ago, I'm on my own.

I'll leave the sliding door open in case I have to run out screaming.

What am I doing? What if this person is a hardened criminal?

I'm pregnant. I won't be able to fight back if he tries to hurt me.

There's a knock. My heart starts pounding.

I'm not opening that door!

he knocks again.

Security didn't call, how did he come in?

It's 7pm.

**"Tshedí, if I don't call you by 8pm, call the cops,"** - sent.

My phone rings immediately.

"Ledi!"

Baba

"Do what I said," I say and hang up.  
I know Tshedi, she's going to call the cops now.  
I switch my phone off and open the door.  
Relax Naledi.....

He rushes in and closes the door very quick.  
He pushes me to the lounge and looks around the house frantically.  
"There's nobody else here right?" he asks  
I nod.

I'm so scared I can't stop myself from shaking.  
"Good, now sit down," he says.

I think I've seen him before, I don't remember where or when but I've seen  
this face before.

He goes to the sliding door and closes it.  
I'm in shit!

He sits across me.  
He looks as nervous as I am.  
I think he's younger than me, mid-20s or so.

"I'm not going to hurt you, so don't try anything because if I have to defend  
myself you will end up getting hurt. I'm not into hurting pregnant women," he  
says.

Something about him makes him look desperate.

"I promised Phalane that I would destroy everything. He kept all this because  
he wanted to protect himself if shit came back to him. Now that he's gone, I can't  
do the things we used to do, which means I can't make any more money..."

Phalane? What does he have to do with this?

"This is not who I am, trust me on that. But I'm desperate and you are the only  
person that can help me. I'll drop the amount to half-a-million, I know that is  
nothing to you. I'll take half and give half to Phalane's wife..."

This guy is talking non-stop and I have no idea what he's talking about.

And now I remember where I know him from, he was one of the cops that  
were here that night Phalane was arrested.

"Here," he says taking something out of his pocket.

It's a memory stick.

I'm still confused.

"I have copies, so don't go to the police after this. I can still bring him down,"  
he says.

"Bring who down?" I ask.

"Watch what's in there and you'll know. I want the money by the end of the  
day tomorrow or I'm sending this to the Hawks, and the media. I wouldn't want  
such a powerful man to end up in a jail cell," he says.

Powerful man? Qhawe?

He stops talking. He looks like he's just seen a.....

He tries to stand up....

"Sit down," a voice says behind me.

He sits, very slowly.

Hua?

I turn around.

What the heck?

the Mthethwa Series

"Naledi, stand up, go outside, there's a car parked downstairs, get on the back seat and don't look at the driver. He will drive you, don't ask him where he's taking you..." he says, slowly.

It doesn't sound like a request, it's a non-negotiable instruction. But he's calm, too calm. He's not looking at me as he speaks, just him.

It's Sambulo.

How did he get here? When?

"What is going on?" I ask.

He looks at me this time and raises his eyebrows.

I look at this blackmailer guy.

"Naledi, step outside. Now," Sambulo says, still too calm.

But it sounds more like a threat.

He's not that soft-looking Sambulo who is always cracking slow-jokes.

The look on his face says I shouldn't argue.

I grab my hand bag and laptop bag and run out the door. I still have the memory stick and pen in my hand.

It's that Jeep.

How the heck did Sambulo know what is happening?

I jump in and sit quietly like I was instructed to.

We drive off.

I'm lost and confused and....

What has my life become?

The windows are dark. I can't see outside and I have no idea where I'm being taken.

No wait.

What if they know what this is about and they don't trust me to keep quiet?

The powerful man the guy was talking about must be Qhawe, I'm sure it's him.

What if they're taking me somewhere to kill me or something?

Qhawe doesn't care about this baby anymore. He doesn't care about me either. No! I have to get out of here!

"Stop the car! Stop!" I scream.

He doesn't turn around or respond, he keeps driving.

When I scream louder a glass separating the front and back part of the car goes up.

I know he can't hear me now.

I'm getting out of here!

The doors won't open! The windows don't break!

What am I going to do?

My phone. It's still off.

I switch it on to call 'Tshed'i but there's no signal. How is that possible?

It's 7:40pm.

In 20 minutes 'Tshed'i will call the police. They will find Sambulo and that guy but how are they going to find me?

The car stops. I have no idea where.

I hear a sound of doors unlocking.

I grab my two bags and rush out.

It's the Modder River house, we're parked right at the door, it's already open.

"Go inside," the person says.

veled

I try to run away but he grabs me by the arm.

"Go inside mama," he says.

He looks and sounds scary.

Mom's already touched me. I know the rules. Drivers and security don't touch the wives. It doesn't matter what we do. They don't put their hands on us. They also don't make conversation.

I take it the "precious wives" rules don't apply here, the man grabbed my arm. I'm in shit.

I slowly walk inside the house.

It's empty but the lights are all on.

I have never been this terrified in my life.

He stands outside, at the door.

I sit on the couch with both my handbag and laptop bag held to my chest.

I still have the memory stick in my hand.

If I'm going to get killed for this, I might as well find out what it is.

I already know his evil ways anyway so this won't make a difference.

How could I have do this? How could he murder Tiabane?

He had no right!

To think I trusted him!

I remember what he said when I told him.

"mmmmmm" that's what he said, like it wasn't a big deal.

I'm going to have a child with a serial killer! That's what he is!

There is one file here.

It's titled "phone records".

I recognise one phone number.

Oh, it's Phalane's

It's SMSs mostly.

They're from different people.

Most are highlighted in red. They're from the same number, it's saved as 'courier'.

This must be the important ones because they are the only ones highlighted.

"chief, it's on the way,"-one from Phalane reads.

"Good, don't be late,"-response

There's another one about two hours later.

"We made it, it will be up by the morning,"-Phalane.

"Make sure,"- response

Another one, sent at 3am.

"It's gone,"

"Good,"-response from whoever courier is.

I check the date. They're from that night Tiabane was at my house, the night he died.

Let me just.....

I read the number under the name "courier".

It looks familiar.

Not I know this number by heart!

Not!

It's 8am

"Fsked! Don't call the cops! I'm fine! Don't call the cops!" I scream.

"Two already called them. They're on their way to your house. What's going on Ledi?"

Oh My God!!!

Sambuko's phone is off!

I can't believe this!

"Mama," he's running in shouting.

He almost touches me but stops when I raise my eyes.

"I'll get you water," he says and goes to the kitchen.

I'm sitting butt-flat on the floor. It can't be no, it can't be true! It's impossible.

I drink up the glasses of water.

My phone rings, it's Tshedi.

"Ledi. Where are you? What's going on? I tried to call ntaata..."

"No! Don't call ntaata! Nothing is going on. I found the window at my house broken when I came back so I thought there was someone there. I'm at the Modder River house now, don't worry I'm fine," I say, trying really hard to sound calm and less confused.

"You don't sound fine though, should I call Tsisisi?"

Sigh.

"No, I'm fine, thanks for the cop thing, I'll see you at the weekend," I say and hang up.

There are more SMSs, even calls, they speak in codes but I understand what they are saying clearly.

There has to be a mistake here, this is impossible. It doesn't even make sense.

I have to go!

"I need a blanket, and pain killers in that bathroom," I say pointing to the door at the far end of the passage.

He walks there.

I stand up, grab the car keys from the kitchen counter and run outside.

How do I start this car?

There!

He comes out of the house running.

I'm gone!

"Naledi sit down please, you're making noise,"

No! No! No! I want answers!

"Where is he? I want to speak to him! Where is he?"

"He's coming down, he's getting dressed. What's going on? It's zero for crying out loud!"

I hear footsteps, he's coming down.

I need him to tell me I'm imagining things! That this is all a mistake and I'm totally wrong! Yes...that's what he's going to tell me!

"What's going on? Naledi? Are you okay? How did you get here?" he asks.

That's the one who should be giving me answers.

"Ntaata..." I say.

They both look at me.

Where do I start?



Kaladi

"Did you know Klabane?"

He gulps.

No!

And now his face is blank.

"What do you mean?" he asks.

He's not about to lie to me, not when I'm looking him in the eye! I'm his weakness, I'm my mother's image he knows he can't win.

The look on his face is giving everything away.

"Can we please sit down?" Mine.

"No, don't touch me!" I scream.

I look at my dad.

He drops his eyes and walks to the lounge.

I need to sit. I feel like throwing up! I'm sweating!

"Here, drink some water,"-Mine

She already has a glass in her hand.

I don't want the bloody water!

She has her hand on my back and is pushing me to the lounge.

"Sit here," she says.

I think I'm losing my mind right now.

We are all sitting in silence.

I drink up the water.

"Ntate, what did you do?" I ask.

Silence.

I don't understand. Not my father, not the greatest man I know, the kindest man and best father in the world, not him! Never!

Oh, I forgot.

"Mine, could you excuse us for a few minutes, I need to talk to my father in private." I say.

She doesn't move. Instead she sits back and folds her arms.

She doesn't understand does she? This is not something she wants to hear about the man she loves.

I look at her.

"She knows Ntate,"-ntate

What?

I frown.

"She knows everything," he says

What does he mean everything?

"Did you do it nate? Am I not imagining things here? Please tell me it's all lies, please tell me I've got it all wrong."

Silence.

Wow. My father is a killer too. It's not just the father of my child, my father too.

Everything I thought I knew and believed was a lie. My whole life has been a lie. I thought I knew who I am, how I was raised and who raised me, but no, I'm a senseless little girl, that's what I am.

How am I going to look at him, at all of them, after this?

He should have lied to me. He should have said I'm imagining things instead of putting me through this.

the Home-Ser as

"How did you find out?"-Ntata.

Does it matter?

"Who else know-va ntata?" I ask.

"Nobody," he says.

I wish he would deny it, say this all a joke and he is the man that I thought he was.

"You weren't supposed to find out, it's a long story...."

"I've been blackmailed ntata, someone has been blackmailing me for weeks. He was at my house last night demanding...."

"What?"

That's not important now.

"Who? Who did that? Did he hurt you?"

Urg! Please man!

"Why? You want to kill him too?" I scream.

"Naledi!"-mame

She must shut up! This has nothing to do with her! She's not part of this fatally!

"Don't speak to your father like that," she says.

I've had it up to here with this woman!

"Mankwe, you're not my mother, you can't tell me what to do. Was this your idea? Did you put him up to this?" I scream.

I can't control myself.

"Naledi this is my wife and you're not going to talk to her like that. She didn't put me up to anything. First of all you hid what this boy was doing to you from me for years. I had to find out through people."

I'm going to find out who those people are and I'm going to deal with them.

"I had to do something. If I hadn't done something he would have killed you, and I wasn't going to lose my daughter like that. I had to do something," he says.

He speaks with such...he sounds sincere. Like he needs me to understand and take his side.

But how am I going to take his side when he took somebody's life? Just like that.

"Ntata, he was somebody's father, he had a family, he had two kids,"-me

He shakes his head.

"You are somebody's child. You are my child. He should have thought about his children before he did what he did to mine. I was thinking about my child when I decided to do what I did," he says.

There is no justification for killing someone. I don't care how bad they are, there is no justification at all.

"What happened? How did it all happen? Who did it? Was it Phulane?"-me

He shakes his head again.

"You don't have to know the details. You don't have to tell your sisters too. You see you found out, you weren't meant to. And just so you know, I don't regret doing what I did. I'd do anything to protect what's important to me, anything," he says and stands up.

This is the worst thing that's ever happened to me!

"Now, go get some sleep," he says and leaves us sitting there. Mame stands up and follows him.

stare:

Where do I go from here?

---

It's up to me? I can't believe it, I slept until upon?

My phone is off, battery is dead.

Shit! Reality. I'm at home.

Shit! Reality. My dad is a killer.

Shit! Reality. I'm pregnant and I'm on my own.

I stole a car last night from a scary looking man.

I left two men in my house last night and I'm sure one of them is dead.

I shouldn't have woken up, I should have slept for two more days.

But I'm hungry, the person inside me is hungry, he's kicking me.

"I'm sorry baby," I whisper and brush my belly.

I slept in my clothes, the same clothes I was wearing when I left my house for work yesterday morning.

Oh crap! Work! I should be at work!

I'll call and explain later, after I come up with a lie.

I put my phone on the charger and go downstairs.

Oh, the love-birds are in the dining room, looking in love and united in murdering people.

They stop talking when they see me walking down the stairs.

They're having lunch.

"There's food on the stove," mima

How could I say no?

"Thanks," I say

There's grilled meat and mash and gravy. It smells nice. Strange, I hate red meat lately.

I dish up and go to sit with them at the table. They look shocked, like they didn't expect me to.

"Mate aren't you going to the Tribal Council today?" I ask.

They still look shocked.

"No, I'm taking a day off," he says.

I see.

"Thanks for the food," I say

I haven't looked them in the eye since I sat here, both of them. I can't.

It's just the sound of cutlery, nothing else. no speaking and no looking at each other.

We're going to be that kind of family from now on. I just know it.

"Tshed's has been calling. I told her you're fine and you'll call her back when you're awake. she's worried," mause

Tshed called her?

"That boy too, your friend. He said he'll tell your bosses you aren't feeling well,"-maute

I can't wait to go on maternity leave.

I don't have much to say to them so I'm just going to continue eating, in silence.

I have to figure out what to do, where to go from here.

The Flame Series

Saying I'm lost would be an understatement, "at my lowest."

"I think you should stay for a few days Kaledi just until you're fine. You need to rest a bit, and eat," she says with a smile.

Sigh.

Sometimes I'm not sure if it's hormones or the stress I'm dealing with, I just can't be nice to anyone lately.

"No I have to go back to work," I say.

My dad keeps glancing at me, I think there's something he wants to say but he's trying to find a way to raise it. I hope he doesn't want to talk about the Tlabone issue because I'm done with it, it's done and dusted. I want to forget about it.

"I won't tell anyone niate," I say.

He looks me in the eye.

"I know," he says.

What's that supposed to mean? How does he know? I'm the only person with a conscience here, he must know that.

"Let's take a walk," he says.

He's talking to me? I thought he was talking to his wife.

I want to say no.

He stands up.

Mina is looking at me like she's begging.

Let me just do it, maybe it will make me feel better. I doubt it though.

I'm full now, my baby is sleeping.

I follow him out the door.

This car. Sigh. I wonder what happened to that driver. I wonder what happened to Sambuio.

He puts his arm around mine. He used to do this a lot when we took walks together.

When I was little he'd hold my hand every time we walked together.

I looked up to him, he was my hero, my idea of a perfect human being.

"This car, is it your husband's?" he asks.

The honest truth is I don't know the story of this car.

"Yes I think, but someone else drives it, a driver. He uses it when he's in Kimberley, sometimes."

He looks at me briefly.

"It's the same car that was parked here the other weekend when you were here. The one I told you about, two streets away," he says.

What?

"No, it can't be..."

"It is, I remember the number-plate," he says.

I don't believe he'd memorise a car number-plate just like that.

"What's going on? Between you and your husband, what's going on?"

That's one subject I'd rather not discuss.

"We're having some problems," -no

He nods.

This nodding of his!

"Is there still going to be a wedding?"

Ugh!

Naledi

"No, we're not."

Please don't ask me why! Please!

"And you left? You have problems, and just like that you and things?"

Why can't anyone take my side? Just for once.

"But ntsa why do you assume I'm the one that left?"

He looks into my eyes briefly again.

"Because Naledi that man loves you. He'd do anything for you," he says.

And he knows that how?

Not so long ago he was beating him up, and now he thinks he knows him?

"It's complicated ntsa, he's still my baby's father but it's complicated."

I know he's not taking what I'm saying seriously, I can just see it in his eyes.

He still thinks I'm at fault here.

"That's what your mother said when I asked her why she was leaving me, with four children. She said it was complicated," he says.

This is the first time I hear him mention my mother. The first time ever. And I don't know this face that I'm seeing now, I've never seen it before.

"It's been two months ntsa, I haven't seen or spoken to him in two months. He doesn't even call to check how his baby is doing. I'm carrying his child but he doesn't even care..."

He shakes his head.

"No man would do that, no man would go to sleep not knowing if the woman carrying his child is fine or not, especially not that man," he says.

Is he just going to dismiss everything I say? I'm the one experiencing this, I'm the one doing this alone.

"Naledi, I think that maybe this is my fault. Maybe I was so obsessed with being the perfect father that I raised you to believe you are too important to look beyond yourself. It's not always going to be about you, life doesn't work like that. If you accept someone into your life, and give them full access to you and say you love them, you have to see beyond yourself where they are concerned..."

What does he mean?

"I waited for your mother for 18 years. When I met Mankwe, I was still waiting for her. It was too long, I waited for too long but I only realised that later. Even if your mother walked through the door today, now, I wouldn't care."

"That man has been waiting for you for two months. You're the one that walked out, I know that because I know you. I raised you like that. I raised you to be firm and to stand up for what you believe in, but that's not the only way to approach life. Sometimes your beliefs are not going to be the other person's beliefs and you're going to have to accept that. It can't be your way or the highway, not when you're hurting another person's feelings while at it..."

We've been walking for a while now, I don't know where we're going.

And what does he mean I hurt Qhawe's feelings?

"I know that your anger at him has nothing to do with him not checking on the baby, it has everything to do with him not checking on you, not coming to beg you to come back to him like you expected him to..."

I frown.

He raises one hand.

"No no no, don't deny it. You were used to him following you around and doing things for you and treating you like you're glass. The man was willing to

buy a game-farm just so he could have you, and my blessing." he says.

"That was then, things are different now..."

"Would you be with someone you know is capable of doing bad things to other people again? Just like that?" I ask.

He bites his top lip.

"Have you never done bad things to other people?"-Jiri.

"You know now that I've done bad things, a bad thing. But do you love me any less now? Am I no longer your father?" he asks.

I'd be lying if I said I loved him less now.

His phone rings.

"We have to go back, I have to go to the Tribal Council, someone stole someone's goats..." he says after hanging up.

Working with crazy people is far better than his job.

I'm going to take a nap after I eat again.

I have missed calls and voice messages from Jisetsi and Tshedi and Lesuli and Guphi.

I have none from Ohawe.

# Twenty-Four

I knock once and push the door open.

There are now curtains.

Who the fuck is this???

She's sitting with her feet on the couch, remote control in her hand, a chocolate cake on a plate on the coffee table.

What the fuck?

"Hi," she says.

I'm going to pop this baby! Right here! Right now!

Calm down Naledi...whooooosaaaaa...No! It's not happening!

"You have five minutes! Five minutes to pack your shit and get out of here!" I say.

What's that look on her face? Didn't she hear me?

He's rushing down the stairs.

He sees me, stops, and starts walking again, slowly.

I look at this girl, she's still sitting.

"I'm counting," I say looking at her.

She frowns.

"And you are?" she asks with such attitude.

Why do people like testing me?

"Naledi," he says.

The kick.

Calm down Ledi...breathe in...out...

"Qhawe who is this?" she asks.

She knows exactly who I am!

He stands still, hands in pockets.

"My wife," he says.

She looks confused.

"I said five minutes, pack your shit and leave, now," -me

Oh about to do something I'd regret later. This girl must not push me, she must not!

Qhawe looks at her, and then at me, and then at her again.

"She's a bit crazy, trust me, she'll rough you up," he says to the girl.

She stands up slowly, grabs her car keys on the kitchen counter and walks out.

Yes Didi, walk....

We stand still for seconds, looking into each other's eyes. He's standing at the bottom of the stairs, I'm standing in the kitchen.

"Hi," he says.

I don't speak.

"Long time no see," he says.

I'm trying to calm myself down, that's why I'm quiet.

I didn't come here to fight. I'm not sure what I came to do.

He takes two steps forward and stops, I stand still.

I'm trying to read his face, it's not hard but it's not soft either, I don't know what he's thinking.

It feels like that day a long time ago, the day I stood here and screamed at him for leaving me in Kimberley.

He starts walking again, I don't move but I can feel him getting heavy around me, the scent and the power, it's consuming.

He's standing in front of me. My eyes are on his chest but I can feel his eyes over my head. I can't look up, I don't want to look up.

"You found your way back home?" he asks.

I keep quiet.

My body is about to betray me. I'm fighting the urge to move my hands and touch him.

I can hear him breathing over my head.

"It's not what you think," he says.

I'm thinking a lot of things right now.

"What is it?" I ask.

He places his forehead over my head. He's too close, I can hear his heart-beat.

"I love you," he says.

He hasn't answered me. I didn't expect to find what I found, but I still want answers.

"What is it Chawo?"

I'm getting angry all over again.

"She's Nkosana's P.A.,"-him

He's going to have to come up with something better than this.

"You've moved on?" I ask.

I'd really like this conversation to stay on this level, this peaceful level.

"I haven't moved at all, not an inch," he says.

I shouldn't have come here unannounced.

And if it's Nkosana's P.A, she would know who I am.

"We were waiting for a car to take us to the airport, I'm going to Durban. business," he says.

It didn't look like that.

I want to scream and throw a tantrum, but a part of me tells me I have no right. We are broken up after all.

He grabs something on top of the counter, it's an envelope.

He gives it to me.

He doesn't say anything but I know he wants me to open it.

I do.

It's two flight tickets, one for a Miss Qhawe Zulu and another for a Miss Nandii Zulu.



valet:

Oh.

"When are you leaving?" me

"I'm not," he says, his forehead still on the top of my head.

I'd have expected her to know who I am

"You look different," he says

Is he reading my mind now?

He's right, I look nothing like the Naledi I was four months ago. I look different, horribly different.

Now what?

I don't know what to say to him.

"Did the scan go well yesterday?" he asks.

Huh?

How did he know?

"You don't have to fix that car, we'll sell it," he says.

I want to sit.

"I need to sit,"-me

I try to move but he wraps his arms around me and pulls me close to him, it's a bit of a struggle, my belly is big.

The kick. He feels it. He pushes me off and puts his hands on my shoulders.

"He just kicked you," I say.

The look on his face, I don't understand it.

He pulls me to his chest and holds me tight again.

The kick, again.

He holds me tighter.

"I'm hungry,"-me

Have we even started talking about why I'm here? I don't think so.

"Come on, sit, I'll make you food," he says pulling me by hand to the couch.

I look around the house. It feels like it's been years since I sat here.

I don't want to think about that day I left, I was sure I was never coming back.

And here I am now, back.

He makes a quick sandwich with rye bread, avocado and white cheese I think. I forgot he was a bourgeois.

"I need peanut butter."

He frowns.

"And tomato sauce,"

He frowns, and then smiles. I never forget his smile.

"You're going to eat peanut butter with avocado? and tomato sauce?"

I nod.

He laughs.

I missed his laugh.

It's strange how he seems so...comfortable, like I never left, like I've been here with him the whole time. But I feel the space, the time we spent apart. I feel it, I'm struggling to connect.

"Please bring me Coke as well,"

He frowns and shakes his head.

"No, you're drinking water," he says.

He brings a sealed bottle, with peanut butter.

"I don't have tomato sauce. I don't even use tomato sauce and the last time I

checked you didn't either," he says.

"That was before you got the passport."

I don't know where that came from.

His phone rings.

"Beifo," he says.

It's one of his brothers.

"I'm not going anymore, got Mqongi to go," he says and hangs up.

I hope it wasn't an important business trip.

I'm still puzzled though as to why Nkosana's PLA would go with him, where is his PLA?

I know they're not sleeping together or anything but it's still confusing.

He sits back and watches me eat.

I'm enjoying the food, it's been long since I did.

I catch him staring. I stare back thinking he'll look away, he doesn't. There's a slight smile on his face.

I need to talk to him, I know he'll know what to do. I have to tell him everything, but first I have to ask.

"Chawe, what happened to Sambulo? Is he okay?"

The expression on his face doesn't change.

"We'll talk in the morning," he says.

His eyes are still on me.

Maybe we shouldn't talk tonight, maybe he's right.

He hasn't asked why I came back, it's like he expected me to.

Oh I almost forgot.

"I left your car in North West,"

He frown-smiles.

"I know, it's still parked on your father's yard,"

I borrowed Mine's car, that Jeep gives me creeps.

I have another question.

"What happened to the driver?"

"He's fired,"

What?

I stop chewing.

"He knows the rules, he broke them, he's gone," he says.

Just like that? But I'm the one who nicked him, and I tried to run that's why he grabbed my arm.

I don't think I'll get proper answers to this one so I might as well leave it here.

I'm done eating. He takes the plate and goes to the kitchen. He comes back with an apple and places it in front of me.

I'm gonna eat it to.

But...

"How did Sambulo...?"

"We'll talk tomorrow," he says before I can finish asking.

He's serious about this talking tomorrow thing.

Okay.

I'm the first to stand up.

He walks very close behind me up the stairs. I have to hold on to the rails because I can see the floor under them and it's making me dizzy.

about.

This bedroom, the last morning I spent here I'd rather not think about.  
I don't have clothes. I didn't bring any bags. It's like déjà vu.

"I'll run you a bath..."

"No I can't use the bath, once I sit in it it's difficult to get up. I'll use the shower."

He seems lost for a moment.

I close the bathroom door behind me.

Everything is still the same, exactly like I left it.

I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror, it doesn't look like me at all, even my face is "thin".

The door opens. His face peeps in.

"We're getting married in four months," he says.

What?

"Yes, so that the next time you want to dump me, you have to go to court to do it," he says and shuts the door.

I'm laughing. It feels weird.

And I don't remember saying we were back together.

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He's still asleep? This is new.

It's 7am.

I want to pee. I want to throw up. I want to eat.

I untangle myself from him, I don't know when he put his arm around me.

I try to sneak out of bed very slowly and carefully, but I feel a hand on my arm just as I'm about push off the duvet.

"I have to pee." I say.

His eyes are half-open.

"Are you going to come back?"

Really?

"Yes I just need to pee,"

He lets go.

It's weird that he's still in bed, normally by this time he's up and showered and ready for the day.

Ugh...really.

I'm not even thinking about work, or my house or the shit that I find myself in. I just want to get through the day. I want to get through the next three months and I'll be fine, I'll figure it all out then.

"Are you okay?" he asks from outside the bedroom.

He's up.

He must be patient, I'm still throwing up.

"I'm fine, don't worry."

"I'll get you water," he says.

I'm in the bathroom, there are six taps here.

"I'm done, I'll shower now."

I don't want to come out smelling like puke, and besides, it's hot.

He doesn't respond, maybe he's already left.

I'm nervous about the "talk" that we're supposed to have anytime from now.

The thing is, when I woke up from my nap yesterday afternoon and decided to go and then to get in the car and drive here, I had no plan. I had no idea what I was coming here to say but I knew it was something I should have done a long time ago.

I expected him to be complicated. I expected to be thrown out or to be asked what I'm doing here.

But when I saw that girl I just lost it, I felt like something inside me was boiling. And Qhawe, he's been too cool, it's like I never left.

When we were in bed last night I shifted far from him, I left the space because really I had no clue what I had to do.

He shifted closer, and the baby kicked, I think it can feel his presence.

I feel lighter too, like everything that has happened in the past two months is in the past.

I feel like things are going to be okay, I don't know how.

But then again, why did that guy send me his picture? What's the connection? I think I'm going to have to tell him about my father. I know he won't judge him because he's done the same thing before.

The two men I love with all my heart versus my morals, is there even competition between the two?

I'm wearing his robe, I have no clothes in this house. He packed everything, even my hair clip when he kicked me out.

I wonder if he feels bad at all about that, I'm over it.

He's made breakfast?

Oh, it's oats, ough.

"Mm," he says kissing me on the lips.

He's weird.

I take the bowl and go outside. The lake, I missed it. We sat right here the first time we had breakfast together, the first time I woke his penis from sleep.

I feel him behind me. He hugs me from behind.

Qhawe though, how can he be like this? Like nothing happened?

He kisses the back of my head.

"Did you talk to your father?" he asks.

I guess we are having that talk now.

I'm poking the food with the spoon.

But why is he asking me about my father? Does he know what's in that memory stick?

"Where is that memory stick? You have to destroy it, I've destroyed everything else," he says.

What???

Oh shit!

"You know?" I ask, horror written all over my face

"That's not important, what's important is..."

I raise my hand.

"Chawe! No, you knew about this? You knew all along? What about that cup? Did you know he was targeting me?"

Don't raise your voice Naledi.....count to three...breathe.....

"Calm down..."

No!

Naledi

"That cop was harmless, he was just desperate for money..."

Why is he talking this so rightly?

"I sent you an SMS one night waiting to go to the Modder River house because I was scared, you never responded,"

He waves his hand like that was nothing important.

"I knew you'd be fine," he says.

"What is wrong with this guy? Does he even understand what I've been going through?"

"I could tell you everything, but I'm scared you might just walk out that door again," he says.

"Naledi, there are things you don't have to know, like this one. You didn't have to go digging. A daughter is not supposed to know things like this about her father. He did what he had to do, it was his duty..."

The fuck?

"How did you find out?"

Silence.

He must start talking.

"Why do you always want to know everything?"

I thought he knew me by now.

"Because I like to know exactly where I am and who I'm dealing with,"-me

He shakes his head.

"You father did a clumsy job, I had to clean up," he says.

He's not making sense.

"Did my father personally.....?"

He raises one hand.

"No, Phalane was in charge of everything, I made calls that morning after you told me the guy had fell and hit his head and died. I knew there was something there so i made calls. The job was a disaster so..."

He calls killing "the job"?

"So I got people to clean up so it doesn't come back to your father," he says.

Where the hell am I?

"But Phalane kept things, and worse shared them with that little cop boy, and now he thinks he can blackmail my wife?" he says shaking his head.

I haven't touched the oats, suddenly I don't feel like eating.

"Eat," he says.

I forget he's a mind-reader too, not just a shady character.

"He's kicking. I think he's hungry," I say.

That was not planned, it just came out of my mouth.

His face lights up

"Really, he can communicate with you?" he asks. The fascination on his face!

"He's inside me Chawe, when I'm hungry, it means he's hungry. When I'm stressed or sad he feels it, everything I go through, he goes through it with me."

His face changes, there's no longer fascination, there's concern now.

"Are you serious? That's what happens?" he asks.

I nod.

Okay maybe I'm exaggerating a bit but....

Now, back to the subject at hand.

"What did you do to him? The cop, what did you do?"

He rubs his hands together.

"Don't worry about that," he says.

He's not going to tell me.

I could ask more questions, like ask if he's been watching my every move this whole time and if he had people following me, but I already know the answers.

I should have figured it out very early that he was never going to let me go just like that, not with his child.

"I went to see this cop the other day after I received an envelope with a picture of you and Phalana. I went to ask what really happened, he gave me a story that made a lot of sense, that's why I almost went crazy when I found out....."

He frowns.

"What cop?"

He doesn't know about that?

"The cop who arrested Lwandle and the boys that time....."

"What??" he asks.

He's shocked. He didn't know about that???

Oh shit! I promised not to tell.

"What happened? Who arrested Lwandle and why?"

Sigh. What did I just do?

He raises his eyebrows, that means "speak".

"When the boys were in Kimberley, they threw a party at the Modder River house, made noise all night and got arrested. The police commissioner lives in the same neighbourhood, his daughter was at the party too, drinking."

Geez, he really didn't know, his face says so.

"So how did they get out of it?"

Now the worst part.

"I was called by the police saying my sons were in jail and they were not going to release them until after they go to court that Monday. I rushed there, spoke to the cop and ended up giving him R1 500 for the whole thing to go away,"

I'm looking in his eyes as I say this.

But I don't see much reaction. He's just looking at me, quietly, like he's seen me differently all of a sudden.

"What time was it when they woke you up," he asks.

"I don't remember, about 3am."

He nods.

"By the time I'm done with these boys....."

"Chawe no, I already punished them. I made them walk from my house to Modder River,"-me.

Silence.

And then we both break into laughter.

Why did we break up again?

He switches to serious very quickly.

"Don't do that again. Bribing cops, don't do it," he says.

I'm lost, if I had not done it his son would have stayed in jail all weekend.

There's still so much we need to iron out.

"Why didn't you come Chawe? Why didn't you try to get me back?"

I asked myself this question every day.

He stares at me for a while.

Nak'ji

"I could be Nak'ji, not this time. Not when you left me for the reason you left me for. It was tough but you had to come back because you want to, not because I'm inside you," he says.

I hear him.

He takes a deep breath.

"I'm here, this is me, nothing more and nothing less. Yes, I've done things, bad things and I knew they'd complicate my life in future but I can't change anything about my past, so you might as well take me as I am."

"To be honest I don't even care about his past anymore.

"I hear you. I'm not going to ask you to give me details of what you did to whom, but I need you to assure me that it's over, for our future and for this child I'm carrying. I don't want to have to worry about you coming home alive, or going to jail or..."

He raises one hand.

"I'm done with that life, I promise."

I believe him.

"Chawe, does nrate know? Does he know that you know and that you were part of it?"-me

He shakes his head.

"No, and don't tell him I know. It will make him lose his power over me, I don't want that," he says.

Sometimes I think he cares more about my family than I do.

"It was very early in our relationship Chawe, this Tlabanc thing, it happened before we even started officially dating. Did you care that much already?"

He doesn't answer me. I think the answer is yes.

Good. I have it in my hand bag.

"Do you have your laptop? I left mine in the Jeep,"

He stands up and goes inside the house.

"There," he says when he comes back.

He looks tense, I think he thinks I want to show him what's in that memory stick.

But I have a different memory stick with me.

"Come sit next to me," I say.

He pulls a chair quickly.

His eyes go wide when the video starts playing.

"He's eating his fingers," I say.

He looks...

"Is this him?" he asks.

"Yes, it's your boy. He's big,"

He pulls the laptop close to his face. I can't see the screen now.

I see a smile...

"He has your big forehead," he says.

What?

"I don't have a big forehead."

He looks at me briefly and smiles.

"Yes you do," he says.

I smile and shake my head.

I missed him.

He's replaying the video over and over again.

"We can go do another scan if you want, so that you can see him."

He's not paying any attention to me.

"I'm going upstairs."

He doesn't respond.

Okay.

The dilemma of having no clothes to wear is upon me again. I also have to figure out how I'm going to take Mine's car back and get his Jeep here. He doesn't care at all about that problem though.

I wonder if he's told everyone that I'm back here and what they think. How am I even going to reconnect with them? They must all be mad at me for judging them and leaving just like that. I don't think they'll ever trust me again.

I promised loyalty but when the first test came I ran like a child.

Now I understand why loyalty is important here.

He walks in just as I search his wardrobe for something that will fit me. It's a fruitless exercise. He has the laptop under his arm.

"I'm trying to get something to wear," I say.

He puts the laptop on the single couch and comes to me.

I think he's going to hug me but no, he unties the robe.

He brushes my tummy. The kick.

"He's greeting you," I say.

He smiles.

"Hello Mageba," he says.

The kick again.

His hands are warm, his touch is tender.

My body is getting warm.

He kisses my belly. I think he's going to get up but he goes down and kisses my thighs.

I feel tingles all over my body.

He's up in my face.

"I missed you," he says.

I missed him too.

I wrap my arms around his neck and kiss him.

He knows what I want, but I think he's scared.

"It's okay, but you have to be really gentle now," I whisper in his ear.

"I will be," he says.

He drops the robe on the floor.

I pull him to the bed.

I'm not sure I know how we're going to do this.

I'm thinking he's going to try to lie on top of me and just do this because I have no time for foreplay. I need him, now.

But he pushes my legs apart and goes down.

I'm going to come, here, now?

I pull him up when it gets too much. His eyes are smaller, he wants to come in but he doesn't know how to do it.

"You have to come in from the back," I say lying on my side.

He gets it.

I hear the first "mmmmmmmm"



Naledi

"It's nice, where did you buy it from?"

"I don't know, some shop at The Glen, they looked at me funny," he says.

I'm not surprised. And no, it's not nice. It makes me look like a granny.

We're taking the car back tomorrow.

I expected him to say he was going to send someone to deliver it and come back with the Jeep but no, he insisted that we take it back ourselves.

Problem is, even at home I have no clothes, so we're going to have to stop somewhere so I can shop.

I haven't left the house at all today.

My dad doesn't know I'm here, he thinks I went to Tshedi.

Oh... I didn't know we were going to have visitors.

"There's a car parking outside.

I look at him, he doesn't say anything but goes to open the door.

Kolie walks in. Whoah! That stomach is big!

"Girl what are you wearing? Is that a maternity dress? Where on earth did you get this? Nobody wears these anymore," she says.

When she's loud, she's really loud!

"Hi," I say reservedly.

It's been a long time.

"Hi," she says hugging me.

Samhelo is right behind her.

Our eyes meet, he smiles briefly and goes to talk to his brother.

"Are you okay? You look different but at least you're not ballooning like me," she says.

I laugh. I feel a little awkward, like I owe them an explanation or something.

"I'm hungry," she says going to the fridge.

Now I get it. Qhawe went to that store and asked for a dress for a pregnant woman, and they gave him this.

I didn't know they were coming so I didn't prepare anything.

There's another car.

"Qhawe,"

"Mmmmm," he says.

I signal for him to come to me.

"I'm going to order pizza and have it delivered,"

He nods.

He doesn't think this is a crisis at all. I'm panicking.

The smile is the first thing I see. And then a frown.

"That... is horrible," she says.

Sign. I'll never hear the end of it.

"I told her the same thing,"-Kolie.

"People, please leave my wife alone. that dress looks good on her."-Qhawe.

He'd better defend me because this is his fault.

"Are you okay?" Hlorra asks hugging me.

I think I need her an apology more than all of them.

the Hlonu Series

"MaMuntsho,"-Mqhele.

He sees nothing wrong with my dress, I know that  
I smile and greet him back. He goes to join his brothers.

Now I'm expecting Gugu and Zandile

I wasn't prepared for this.

I thought Qhave would let me settle in before inviting them over, but a part of me believes they don't have to be invited, they just show up.

The last time I saw all of them was the night of Zandile's wedding. Well, except Sambuho who just showed up at my house that night.

I still don't know what he did with that cop.

"I've ordered pizza, it will be here shortly,"-me

They don't seem to mind.

"How's the baby? Do you have ultrasound pictures yet?"-Hlonu

It's like nothing happened, like I never judged them and left.

I nod.

The guys are talking and laughing.

It's a familiar scene. I realise now how much I missed this, this family thing.

It comes Gugu and Nqoba.

We're going to have a full house.

She looks at me from head to toe.

"Jesus fix this," she says.

It's about the dress again.

"I know, I don't have any clothes."

Silence. They're all looking at me.

"It's a nice dress,"-Mqhele

Really?

"In fact, you should all start dressing like this, MaMuntsho is a good example,"-Mqhele.

Hlonu shakes her head.

"This is why I want to donate him to charity sometimes," she says.

We all laugh.

"How are the big eyes doing," Gugu asks, poking my tummy.

I'm going to show them the video, just for fun.

"Come and see him,"

They follow me up the stairs.

The guys are left downstairs laughing about something.

Hlonu is the last to come in and close the bedroom door.

"Two months? Damn girl give me a high five,"Gugu says.

Huh?

"You Naledi, are a legend,"-Xolie

What? I'm confused.

"Gugu held the record of two weeks. I never really left but I did kick him out of the house,"-Xolie

This is not what I expected at all.

"I left for eight hours, only eight hours," Hlonu

They're treating this as some kind of a joke, better than being put in a court.

"Seriously though, are you guys okay now?"-Xolie

voice?

Just when I thought we weren't going to go there.

"The kids were asking about you." -Gugu

Now I don't know what to say.

They're all looking at me expecting answers.

"The fact we're fine now, it's just that I panicked and...I was shocked and scared, that's all," I say.

I hope they understand. I'm sure they had the same reaction when they found out who their husbands are.

A part of me believes they don't know anything about the 'Ilabane thing, which would be great because I don't want it to ever come out.

"You wanted to show us the pictures?" Hlonu

Yes, that.

"It's a 3D scan," I say turning the laptop to them.

Qhawe left the memory stick still connected.

"Noooooh,"-Hlonu

She's the career mommy after all.

"He looks exactly like Shlangu on his 3D scan,"-Gugu

"Now I'm broody,"-Gugu

I'm just sitting here watching them be excited. It feels so strange that just two days ago I thought they had moved on from me.

It's also weird that they are not angry or treating me like an outcast. Maybe I should have talked to them before I decided to leave. I should have asked how they are able to live, to be this family with everything they know.

I'd be lying if I said I didn't miss them.

"Where is Zandile,"-me

I expected her to be here by now.

"We don't know. They're all over the country. They came back for the gala dinner and left again,"-Hlonu

Huh?

They can see that I'm lost.

"After the wedding in Mbuba, Nkosana called all of us and announced that he was officially retiring, from that day. They've been on honeymoon since then. Sometimes we can't even reach them on their phones,"-Xolile

I'm smiling. I think it was nice of Nkosana to do that. They need all the time there is in this world to catch up.

"Zandile sent pictures of them riding quad bikes somewhere yesterday,"-Gugu

I'm imagining Nkosana on a quad-bike, it's a funny picture. Zandile must be making him do all kinds of things.

I haven't seen the younger brothers either.

"Oh, by the way, we have a new member. She's from Mbuba,"-Hlonu

New member?

"New member?"-me

"Yes, Mpende has had one girl<sup>2</sup> since for two months. She's promising. They met at Zandile's traditional wedding. Her father is one of our drivers,"

Oh, that's... unexpected.

It must be that girl I saw him on TV with then, the one he took to the gala dinner.

There's a knock

The afternoon.

"The food is here," he says from outside.

We're having pizza for dinner.

Gugu and Xolile stand up and leave.

Hlonu stays put.

I stand up.

She sits still.

"Do you remember that talk we had?" she asks.

My stomach turns. She's not as sweet as she was when she walked in this house.

"Yes," I say.

I know what talk she's referring to and I know where she's going with this.

"What did you say to me? What did you promise me?"

Oh shit!

"I'm back Hlonu, I came back,"

"I know that, but I trusted you Naledi. I let you in because I trusted you wouldn't do what you did,"

She's going to force me to explain myself, I don't even know what my explanation is.

"But Hlonu you have to understand that I didn't expect...when you said I should be loyal I didn't know you meant turning a blind eye to things,"

She stops me.

"What things? You don't know anything about things around here. You read a letter and that's it, just a few paragraphs of a letter, you don't even know the person that wrote it but you made up your mind there and then."

"Naledi, you cannot be at a place where you can wake up tomorrow morning and say you want an aeroplane, and get it before the end of the day. You cannot be at a place like that and think it doesn't have its perks. I'm sorry that you found out the way you did but what was in that letter has nothing to do with you, and you had no right to judge anyone."

I keep hearing these words.

There's a knock. The door opens.

"Is everything okay?" -Qhawe

"Yes, everything is fine," -me

We both stand up and follow each other out.

"I'm glad we talked," -Hlonu

The look on her face says this chapter is closed.

I don't want to get on her dad side, ever.

-----  
"You know, my dad doesn't know we were broken up,"

"I know, he would have come here to shoot me if you had told him," he says.

I laugh. He'll always be scared of him.

"He likes you," I say.

He smile-frowns.

"I'm serious Dème told me that he likes you, he thinks I'm in good hands that's why he's abandoned me to live his own life. You should see them together they're like teenagers,"



# Twenty-Five

**W**hoah! Did I miss something?

"Zulu," he says.

"Ntate," Qhawe.

They shake hands and follow each other to the lounge.

I look at Mme, she smiles.

This is great.

"Come," she says.

Oh wow! She's cooked up a feast.

"I prepared lunch for mogwenyana, I hope he like likes it. Does he like local? I made pap too..."

She's anxious.

"It's fine mme, he'll love it. He'll love that you cooked for him even more."

She smiles.

I almost bought food on the way, I had no idea she'd do this. I expected to find them cuddling somewhere in this house like they always do.

They're talking in the lounge, I wonder what they're talking about.

"Naledi, give them something to drink. There's a jug of juice in the fridge, with ice. Put everything on a tray, and a clean cloth next to it so they can wipe their hands."

Ghosh....

Are we really going to be like this? Qhawe drinks water, from a bottle.

"They're fine mme. Chawe had something to drink when..."

She side-eyes me.

"This is mogwenyana, you must treat him with care. Here, take this to the lounge," she says showing the tray to me.

Sigh.

They stop talking and look at me when I walk in.

Since when are they buddies?

We came here to get the car and leave, why does Qhawe look so comfortable on that couch now?

Mme is behind me.

"Please come to the dining room so we can have lunch," she says. I don't know if this is respect or submission I hear in her tone.

But then...her man in a chief, maybe this is how she's supposed to address



They're all laughing when I come back from the kitchen with more food on his plate.

"Agape has been raving about the bike you sent her "-ntate

What?

Qhawe smiles.

What bike?

"She says: "It has a helmer goggles!"

"We'll never hear the end of it," -mme

Okay, I'm the only one who's lost here.

Qhawe thought Agape a bike? When? Where?

I want to ask but ntate doesn't know all the details about the two months break-up so I'm just gonna sit here and be lost.

Oh it was Agape's birthday last month, by the way. I didn't call her, I completely forgot about it. And Qhawe remembered? I'm embarrassed.

"How is the Namane Project going?"

Wrong question Qhawe! We're not leaving this house any time soon, not after you raise the Namane Project.

"I'm going there after this, I haven't been there in days."-ntate

Urgh. It's just cows.

"I'd love to see it,"

Really Qhawe?

My dad's face lights up.

"Well then, you're coming with me," -ntate.

I catch Mme looking at me and smiling.

I should be happy that they're getting along, but I'm a little uncomfortable instead because they are similar, very similar.

Forget that they helped each other kill my ex, they're also very firm and persistent and particular about what they want. They're both good men, too.

Ntate is the first to stand up.

"I'll keep dessert, you'll have it when you come back," -mme

She made dessert?

And just like that, we are damped for cows.

She calls Dikeledi to clean up. I guess the submissive wife shezade is over.

I need to talk to her.

"See, I told you," she says smiling. She looks pleased with herself.

"Look at you now, back in your house and happy."

Oh, that's what she's talking about?

I still can't get over that she knew all along what my father did and she's okay with it.

I'm not about to discuss my relationship though.

"Mme, I've been meaning to talk to you about something,"

She sits back and folds her arms.

Good. Because this could either build or destroy us.

"There are things I want to get past before I get married. I don't want to get into it with all these issues that I still have,"

I know she's not sure where I'm going with this.

"I don't want to do this without you knowing so...I'll understand if you have a problem with it, it's just that I think it has a lot to do with the way I am, the way I



benefit things, including my relationships..”

“I’m rambling aren’t I?”

She’s still sitting quietly.

“When I first met Qhawe, I told him about my mother.”

No reaction. Okay.

“He...he made some calls. He said he had found out something but he wasn't sure if it was enough. He also doesn't know if she's dead or alive.”

I don't know if the look on her face means she's happy or angry

“So I'm thinking, instead of having this thing at the back of my mind all the time,

I'm thinking about going through with it, meeting her and just...I don't know, I

want closure. I want to get it over and done with before my child is born and

before I get married...”

She clears her throat before she speaks.

“Did you tell your sisters?” she asks.

I'm gonna be honest.

“Yes, we all agreed that we want to see her, but we were going to tell nate first.

But, on the day we were going to tell him, he told us about you so we decided to leave it like that. I know nate doesn't care about her anymore, he moved on a

long time ago, but she's still our mother and we need answers more than

anything. We don't need her to mother us, we just want to get answers and move

on...”

I haven't discussed this with my sisters, or Qhawe, or nate.

“Your father never talks about your mother,” she says.

She's right, he never does.

But I still don't know how she feels about this.

“Are you okay with that? Because if you're not....”

“No, it's fine. She's your mother.”

I don't want to bring complications here.

My phone.

**He hasn't murdered me yet, I'm okay**

Qhawe though!

**“Now that you're new best friends.....”**-I reply.

**“I miss you”**-him

I miss him too.

**“Don't stay too long there, we still have to drive a long way”**

I doubt he's going to listen to what I say, my father will make him stay there for as long as he can.

In the meantime, let me email my resignation.

---

I decided, well, we decided to turn that other bedroom to a nursery, the one that was all white when I arrived.

I haven't started shopping yet but because we already know it's a boy it should be easy.

Qhawe is excited, too excited. He says he wants to be in the ward when the baby is delivered but I won't let that happen. Childbirth is not for men.

I've delivered babies in my career but the whole thing of a human coming out of

another human through a very small hole still freaks me out  
Speaking of freaking out, that's what Tshezi did when he heard I had resigned  
and when I told him I was not coming back to Kimberley.

He went as far as calling me stupid.

A truck was sent, it came back with all my clothes but not the furniture and  
everything else that's in the house.

I haven't decided on whether to sell or keep it. In fact, I want to keep it, it's the  
only property I own, the only thing I have to my name.

I hadn't started accumulating things yet. The plan was to enjoy my success and  
spend money on whatever I want on my 20s, and then after I turned 30 I was  
going to start focusing on bigger things, on the future. But, I'm 30 now and I have  
a bank card with over a million in it and a baby worth millions inside me.

I've gained weight in the two weeks that I've been here. That's probably because I  
sit and eat and get driven to lunch and the apa and Qhawe treats me like an egg  
that could break anytime.

The only exercise I get is the sex that he wants all the time. When I joked about it  
the other day he said it was because he had to live without it for two months. I  
had no come back to that.

He pops in at least once during the day but always comes back late in the evening,  
because he's on rank duty.

The part I don't understand is why they have to be so hands-on. Why can't they  
just sit at home and hire people to do everything for them like all rich people?

**Baby, there's a problem with our meeting venue, we're going to have  
to do it at the house**

Huh?

What house?

I call him back.

"Baby,"

"Hi, house?"-me

"Yes, we'll be there at 2pm, it shouldn't take long, just a couple of hours," he says.

I'm lost...

"But, where in the house Qhawe? Do we even have...?"

"It's just 13 of us, it's the taxi association. I didn't want to just rock up with people  
without telling you. I have to go now, love you..." he says and he's gone.

Taxi association people?

Maybe I must give them space, go somewhere and come back when they're gone.

Or maybe just lock myself in the bedroom.

It's 11am now, I have to tidy up at least. And where are they going to sit? We don't  
have 13 chairs, we have eight.

Qhawe didn't sound like he expected me to do something, why am I worrying  
myself?

But, what are they going to eat?

I have to do something.

**"Omphi, what do they eat?"**

She calls.

"What does who eat?"

"The Zulu people, what must I cook for them?"

"You've been with those people for so many months and you still don't know what

they eat?"

Ugi: What's wrong with her?

"I'm not talking about the family, Uta talking about other Zulu people, specifically taxi people,"-me

She's quiet for a while.

"Ledi, when are you giving him? Your state of mind starting to be questionable..."

Really Omphi?

"Look, the taxi association people are coming here to hold their meeting. Chawe just called. I don't know what's expected of me but I think I should cook something, or prepare drinks or..."

"Do you have meat? Taxi rank people eat meat, red meat and chicken. No pork please they all go to the Sheube church, and no fish," she says.

I don't know about all of them going to the Sheube church but there is meat in this house.

"Yes, but I don't think it's enough for 15 people. I'll go to the shops."

I should have figured this out myself, there was really no need to call Omphi.

"Take pictures and send them to me," she says laughing.

She can be silly sometimes. We have a lunch date on Friday. I need to talk to her about this mom thing.

The driver is not here. calling him will delay me even more. I have four hours to put this thing together. Whatever it is.

I haven't cooked in a while simply because certain types of food smell horrible. I even hate rice. Qhawe normally just brings dinner or pick me up after work to eat out.

I don't know when I'll figure this wife thing out, I'm failing dismally.

I'll buy ready-made salad. No, on second thought, I don't think they are the salad type.

"Hi, I need meat enough for 15 people, mom," I say to the butcher guy.

"Men? Actually you need meat enough for 30 people. Which one?" he asks.

No pork.

"Eat lamb, chicken cut in quarters and steak."

Yes, that will work. But, what are they going to eat it with.

"Are you having a braai?" he asks.

I wish I was having a braai.

"No, my husband's business partners are coming to my house for a meeting, it was short notice and..."

He has a smirk on his face. He's a young guy, probably doing this temporarily while he waits for his big break. He kind of reminds me of my Wimpy days, but that wasn't as hectic as Foodlovers Market, this place is always busy.

"My advice is rather buy the meat that is already marinated, that way you can just throw it in the oven and do other things."

He has a point.

"Do you have pap that's already cooked?"

He laughs.

"No, but if you go to South Gate there's a shop behind the garage there that sells ready-to-eat steamed bread. It will work well with the meat and a couple of salads. Make some gravy too," he says.

He's nice.

I've worked since I got pregnant that people, especially men are always willing to help me.

The price is rather alarming but hey, my days of counting change are over.

I'm going to need drinks, ice, and fruit which I'm pretty sure they won't eat.

Now, South Gate, I've only been here once. Why does it always have to be so full?

"Mama, how are you?" His guy says with a very wide smile on his face.

I greet him back. He's looking at me like he knows me, I don't know him.

"Have a great day," he says opening the door of a taxi parked next to me.

Oh. The tax is written "Shopho Transport" on the door. I should have been more nice to him.

There's a queue. Sigh.

It's mostly men, they are rowdy and loud and some are sitting in here with mountainous plates eating all kinds of unhealthy food. It feels like being in a taxi rank, deep inside Bree or Noord.

Everything is being done quick, the dishing, the eating the paying.....

"Sister, move with the queue, what do you want?" the guy behind the counter.

Manner of approach?

"Steamed bread please," I say

I am so out of place here.

"How many?" he asks

"For 15 people."

He widens his eyes at me and goes to the back.

Do people here have to be so loud?

He comes back with six disposable food containers.

The man behind me is looking at me furrow.

"Is she buying all the food?" he shouts.

I shake my head and pull out my bank card.

"Hhaye! sister, we don't swipe here. this is not Steers,"

Sigh.

I don't think I have enough cash.

R180, I have R150.

"I have R150,"-he

He tosses one container aside, he's not even feeling sorry for me.

"How much do you need?" someone asks behind me.

It's that taxi driver I saw earlier.

"R90," the counter guy says before I can answer.

It gives him the R90.

"Thank you,"-me

He nods.

Whew!

"This is the boss's wife," he shouts.

Really man? Did he really have to?

I have to go, now all these people are looking at me and telling me "makosi".

They're still watching when I drive away, it must be the Maserati fascinating them.

I guess then being the wife of a taxi owner comes with perks. I didn't even ask this guy how he's going to get his R90 back. I must tell Qwaqwe about this, he'll know

which of the drivers the guy is.

Now, where are these people going to sit? I have only three hours left.

I have to make a plan, even if it means borrowing or hiring chairs. I should have called Gugu. I hear she's the master of outsourcing. She can go as far as outsourcing people to wake her breakfast.

I'm going to try my luck on Goulgie. Yes, chairs for hire in Johannesburg South.

"Hi, I need 15 chairs."

I have no time to greet and be nice.

"Only 15? For when?" she asks.

She sounds annoyed. Isn't she supposed to have that "customer service" attitude?

"Today, at 1.30pm,"-me

I still sense attitude in her breathing.

"Are you serious, we work with bookings here, we can't just..."

"I need 15 chairs delivered to Qhawe Zulu's house at 1.30pm today, will that be possible?"

Silence.

"Tiffany chairs or wimbledon chairs mam?" she asks

Oh, I'm 'mam' now!

"Tiffany chairs, here is the address, bring an invoice and speed-point with you.

Oh and I'm going to need table-cloths too. I will email you the address." I say and hang up

This rich housewife life is not so bad after all.

Now, let me start cooking, painful as it is going to be. Forget that I'm just gonna be throwing stuff in the oven, there's that gravy thing too.

"I love you. How's my son?"-an SMS from him.

He sends these random messages often.

"I love you more. Son is fine, only three kicks today so far, including the one that woke you,"-sent.

"He's going to kick when I get home. How's my property?"

He's starting.

"Aren't you supposed to be busy working?"-me

"I'd rather be working you right now."

What is wrong with him?

"Why are you so hurry?"-me

"Can you blame me? Your thing is hot, is it because you're pregnant? Is that why it's so hot?"

Oh My God!!!

I'm blushing and smiling to myself. What is wrong with me?

"I'll let you have it if you bring me Laro,"-me

I'm just playing with him.

"Go to the bar and look inside the small cupboard," him

He is such a.....

"How long has it been here?"-me

"Long enough. I want to find you naked and waking when I get home."

He's such an idiot.

I have to shower and look fresh before the chair people arrive. After that I'll have only 30 minutes before the whole taxi rank invades my house.

The butcher guy was right, the meat he gave me made my job very easy. I think I have everything now. The table, the chairs, yes Tiffany chairs. I know Qhawe is going to wonder where the heck they came from and how they got in his house.

The taxi association people, I know they don't know these are Tiffany chairs and that they cost \$35 to hire each.

The food is ready and so am I. I even covered my head. I hear it's the right thing to do when you have guests, especially the ones I'm about to have.

Great, they're here.

They came in a taxi?

Oh, it's one taxi and about eight cars.

Qhawe is among the first group approaching the door.

I look around the house one last time, it's spotless.

Fic opens the door, his eyes go all over the house and he frowns.

It must be the chairs.

"Hi," he says.

There are men behind him before I can respond.

I greet them, they greet me back, some shake my hand.

"You can come in. I've prepared that table," I say directing them to the dining area.

Why does Qhawe look so confused?

Err... Brentwood leather jackets, those sandals that we all know and soccer jerseys, that's the dress code here.

Even Qhawe fits right in with that tracksuit he's wearing.

Some look elderly and others could be Qhawe's age. The elderly ones all have thick beards. They have notepads and pens with them. It must be a serious meeting.

They all sit in the table.

I don't think they care at all that I'm here. It's like they expected me to be. Only Qhawe's big eyes are all over the place, I knew he was going to be hell confused.

I've put bottled water on the table.

This is my cue to leave, I'm going to sit in the cinema and watch whatever is there to watch.

"Call me when the meeting is over," I SMS him.

He doesn't reply.

Oh, the gravy, I almost forgot. I have to leave it on the stove so that it doesn't get cold. So it's back to the kitchen for me. I can hear they are disagreeing about something. Some old man is doing all the talking about routes and how some people are trying to take over. My Zulu is not perfect but I know that when you call other people "izinja" you are swearing at them.

"We're going to deal with them, they must know who is in charge here," Qhawe says.

His tone is rather... threatening.

I'm listening to the conversation and I know that he is totally different from the Qhawe I know. He's not the crispy white shirt expensive perfume smelling business man I know right now, he is cursing and threatening.

The other men are equally militant

The sooner I get out of here the better, I have a feeling I'm about to get to the part where it's revealed how those people are going to be "lead with".

It looks like someone was here watching something, the sound system is on.

I hope it's a movie

No it's not, it's pictures. A slide show of pictures of me. I don't know when and how they were taken but I know some of them were taken on the two months that I was away.

The slide show ends and a video starts playing. That place looks familiar. It's my house, my bedroom.

I already know Qhawe was watching my every move during that time. I figured that out on the night Sambule showed up at my house. But this here is just wrong, did he have people follow me?

The scent and heavy presence behind me. I feel him coming closer. The kick.

He takes the remote from my hand and switches the screen off.

He probably thinks I'm going to throw a fit, I won't.

"Is the meeting over?" me

He shakes his head

"I just came to check on you," he says.

I stand up.

I see a bit of fear in his eyes.

"There aren't any pictures of me naked right?" I ask.

He shakes his head.

I won't ask who took them, it won't make any difference. I'm not even angry.

"You're the only person who had access to this right?" I ask.

He knows what I'm talking about.

"I just wanted to make sure you were okay," he says.

By planting cameras in my house and watching me 24-hours?

"I prepared lunch, call me when you're done," I say.

He blocks me with one arm when I try to walk to the door.

I stop. But he doesn't say anything.

I try to walk but he blocks me again.

He puts one arm around me and places his forehead on top of my head.

Why doesn't he just talk, just say what he wants to say?

Sometimes I think I understand Qhawe and then he does something to prove me wrong. He's not this person that just keeps quiet like this when he knows he's done something wrong.

"I'm not upset Qhawe."

Silence.

"You have to go back to the meeting," -me

Those people are loud. I don't understand much of what they're saying because they're speaking serious Zulu.

"We're almost done," he says.

Great, I'll go to the kitchen and start preparing to serve them.

"Let's go," I say. He follows. I'm pulling him by hand.

They stop talking and stare at us when we appear. I let go of his hand very quickly.

He joins them at the table and they start talking again.

How do I do this? Buffet. But is it proper? I'm not good at these things. I was raised by a man after all.  
There are papers and documents all over the table. They're still talking. I'm just gonna be here waiting.  
Oh, they're standing up.  
"My wife prepared us lunch, please stay," Qhawe.  
They look very happy, looks like I didn't waste my time after all.  
Now what?  
Oh, water to wash their hands and dishcloth to wipe them.  
Ooph! would freak if she saw me doing this. But Qhawe looks impressed so here I go, Dr. Montsha domesticated.  
I hear "thank you makoti" here and there. Okay.  
I put everything on the table and go back to my designated kitchen. They're still loud.  
I'm going upstairs.

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It's almost an hour before the noise dies down.  
I hear him coming up the stairs, he's rushing.  
He opens the door and stops.  
"I thought you were asleep," he says.  
I sleep a lot these days.  
He's still a little too cautious.  
"This air-conditioner is going to block your nose."  
Sigh. I have two daddies now.  
"It's hot Chawe,"  
He must understand that the heat is two times worse with me, I'm technically two people. He's still standing at the door.  
"We're going swimming," he says.  
Is he serious?  
"It's not safe for me, I can't get in the pool."  
I'd expected him to know this.  
"I'll be there with you, come on, let's go,"  
I shake my head.  
"Please, I promise I won't let you fall,"  
I knew he won't let me fall. He'd never let me fall but...  
He pulls out my bikini. I don't think I'll fit in it.  
"Put it on," he says. He seems excited all of a sudden.  
How can I say no now?  
The bikini top is small, my boobs are spilling out. He doesn't seem to notice.  
Walking up the stairs has become far harder than walking down. I have to hold on to the rails and make sure I don't look down just to survive the ordeal.  
He puts his arm around my waist when he sees me struggling.  
"Maybe we should move to the bedroom downstairs," he says.  
It's too early for that. I have another two-and-a-half months to go.  
"It's fine I can still manage baby."  
He's wearing shorts and carrying all the towels. I have one around me.



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"You can take that off, this is your home you can walk around naked anytime," he says with a smile.

I forgot he's been heavy all day.

I'm scared, what if I slip and fall? I haven't been in this pool in a while.

He gets in first and opens his arms for me.

"Watch the steps," he says.

It's only four steps but I could slip anytime.

He stands on the bottom one and holds me by my arms. I walk down slowly.

He holds me from behind.

I can't swim, he can't swim, so we're just standing inside the pool with the water almost as high as our shoulders, him leaning against its wall and me leaning on him.

His hands brush my belly.

"I can't wait to meet him," he says.

Me too.

"I can just imagine the big eyes and big head."

He laughs.

"And your big forehead,"-he says.

I still maintain I don't have a big forehead. I have never been accused of having a big forehead, until now.

"You know he'll look nothing like me. And I still find the genes in your family very freaky. How is it that you can all look exactly the same? It's like one person being born over and over again..."

"We all look like Stopho," he says.

Sometimes they do that, call their father by name. It's their way of trying to detach themselves from him. I think they're still angry at him for some reason.

"Did he have a family? As in, do you have relatives at all?"

I don't know if asking these questions is a good idea. I don't know all the boundaries yet but he's always been open on the subject.

"I remember an uncle when we were kids. But by the time my parents died we had not seen him in years. By the time he died it was just him and us, but we were happy kids, we had a happy home. I think that's why when everything changed we..." he stops.

"You're a good man Chawe. You're going to be a good husband and a great father, I know that."

He's quiet, but he kisses my shoulder.

"Thank you for today. You're becoming a real Mbaba makoti."

I laugh. Mbaba makoti? I don't think I'll ever get anywhere near meeting the Zulu rural makoti requirements.

"Did they like the food?"

He laughs.

"Yes they did, and the Tswana makoti."

"Okay, I brought the steamed bread."

He laughs. I'm sure he didn't think I cooked it myself.

"Where?"

"Southgate, at some shop full of taxi drivers. I was R30 short and this driver, one of yours, he recognised me and gave me the R30."

"R30 short? Are you serious?"

He's about to laugh at me I know.

"I had my card with me, I thought they had a speed-point."

He laughs out loud, I know this was going to happen.

"I don't know what I'm going to do with your Model-C ass."

Oh he's gonna be like that now?

"And I love your anal, car stealing, crazy ass."

"I stopped stealing."

"No you didn't you stole my heart and turned me into a crazy woman."

He laughs.

"I'm glad you acknowledge that you're crazy. Oh and Nandi is still scared of you."

I'm still embarrassed by that incident.

"I freaked out, but yes, I'd beat any girl who comes near you. You're my man and mine alone."

He tightens his arms around me.

"I am."

He will never understand how deeply I love him, I can't explain it in words, they're just not enough.

"So is this it? What I did today? Is it what you expect of me?" I ask.

I need to know these things. He takes a deep breath.

"I expect you to be who you are. But also, I expect you to be make our home warm, to know your duties and to come through for me and the family, like you did today."

I guess I did right then.

"You hired chairs?" he asks.

Oh that...

"Yep, we have only eight chairs in this house," -me

Not that it's a problem, there are only two of us living here.

"I wish the Moulder River house was here," -me

I've been thinking a lot about this.

"Why?" -him

"Because it's a normal house, a proper house to raise a child in,"

He nods.

"We can start tomorrow," he says.

Huh? I turn to face him.

"House hunting. Budget is unlimited, anything you want, you'll get," he says.

I've excited, strange, normally I'd argue.

I don't know what it is exactly, but I've started to see things differently. His wealth is blood money, but then, he did work hard for it.

"Okay, I'll start on the internet."

He smiles. He's impressed with himself.

"Hornu said I must spend the money, that it makes you all happy," -me

There's suddenly a serious look on his face.

"It does. Because at the end of the day, there's only so much you can buy with money. I want to sit back and watch you be happy and be spent and comfortable so that I can say it was all worth it, the hard work and the time."

This thing is deeper than I thought.

"Do you think we should tell him? When he's older, do you think we should tell him about his brother?" I ask.

We don't talk much about that.

He shakes his head.

"I don't think it's necessary, he's enough, just him."

I'm happy to hear him say that. I didn't think he was over it.

"I want three more," he says.

Never!

"Mageba, listen to me. The first thing I do when I wake up is to throw up. Most of the time I have heartburn, my feet are always swollen. I eat peanut butter and tomato sauce, in two months' time I will be walking like a penguin, I have a person kicking me every chance he gets and right now, as we stand here I want bread and polony, that's what I'm craving. Does that sound like something you'd want to experience four times in your lifetime?"

He's trying to stop himself from laughing.

"That's what happens when you like sex," he says.

I pinch him.

"I'm going to tell your father that you abuse me," he says.

I forget they are friends now, they even call each other and talk about buffaloes and this nature stuff that they both love so much. I think my father has found a son he never had in Qhawe. He admires him and Qhawe respects him a lot.

"My love, I have a few things I want to get out of the way before the baby comes and before I change my surname. I want us to start our family on a clean slate. I don't want to bring baggage." -me

He's quiet, that kiss on my shoulder again.

"She's alive," he says.

He's just read my mind. I must do this, I'm ready to do it.

"I want to meet her," I say.

Just saying it gives me that feeling in my stomach.

"I'm not sure if that's a good idea," he says.

Hmm?

"Why?"

He shakes his head.

I'm not sure how I'm feeling right now. Just hearing that she is alive is shocking on its own. She's always been some kind of a myth to me, something that exists, only I have never seen it with my own eyes.

"I don't know baby, maybe after the baby comes. I don't know if his..."

"I want to do all this before the baby comes Qhawe. I don't want him to find me with all this baggage. I want a new start."

Why do I get a feeling that there's something he's not telling me?

"Did you speak to your father?" he asks. Should I?

"No, I spoke to Mame, I know she told him. My father doesn't want to talk about this issue and I respect that, but this is as much about me as it is about him, I want to do this for myself."

That kiss on my shoulder again. The sun has set, the water is getting cold.

"Come on, let's get out of here," he says.

My thought's exactly.

"We'll go after lunch also," he says.

That's in two weeks.

# Twenty-Six

**N**o I'll be here, outside," he says and pulls the door closed.

The noise is deafening. I haven't turned around but I just know they are all over the place.

"Mama can we please go to the lake?" one asks, I'm not sure which one it is between Mvoio and Mabutho.

"No, homework," -Phakeme

The command that this child had

He turned on last weekend and I promise you, two months ago he wasn't this tall.

"We've just come back from school Phakeme, now we have to do homework?" -

Mabutho, he just generally doesn't understand what this life and discipline thing is all about, and he is not trying to.

He always has a comeback, say something to him and I promise you, you will get a response.

But as always, he has a point.

"You can't play at the lake, but you can go to the stadium," I say.

"But we want to play outside," -Miseba

Heba Ngecha's voice, Mvoio and Mabutho, I heard their grandfather had the same hoarse voice.

"Okay go, but to the backyard, away from the people area

They all run out at once. Phakeme stays on the couch. He has an iPad and a smartphone. Ngecha told me that the plan was to buy him a cellphone when he starts high school, but somehow he negotiated his way into owning an iPhone at 12 years-old.

It worries Ngecha, she doesn't want her kids to grow up believing they can have anything they want, when they want it. But I just think she's being merciful, because this is the only life they know. And besides, they take Phakeme with them when they have to work on weekends. I think they are grooming him.

Back to the issue at hand, I don't know why the kids are here, nobody told me they were coming here after school, and nobody asked me if I'd be home, not even Qhawa. I just saw the car parking outside and small people standing by my front door.

Nya and Salunga are the only two missing. I'm not complaining, they both demand too much attention. Salunga is worse, he needs nothing.

"Mama, they don't want me to watch cartoons," -Mvoio, he's the youngest here

I don't know how to resolve Mvobwa's dispute. That's why I'm standing here

Match

trying to think up an excuse.

"Come and watch the one," Phakane says pointing at the TV in front of him. (Want, even he is better than me at this.

"Are you hungry?" I ask.

That's all I have to offer, food, otherwise I have no idea what to do with them.

"Eh thank you maama," they both say at the same time.

They all know when to say "thank you" and "please". They're not exactly normal kids but they are respectful kids.

I'm tempted to ask Phakane why they are here but that would be shady of me, he's just a kid. So I'll wait.

The security guy is still outside. I wonder if he stands like this and waits for them at school all day.

"Mama, Phakane is chatting to girls on his phone," - Sisekelo walks in and says. I didn't see him coming.

Phakane looks at him once and goes back to his phone.

I laugh. I mean, what girls? He's only 12.

"You can sit mama, I'll do that!" -Sisekelo says taking the broom from me. He touches my arm, the baby kicks

I really do need to sit

He's as bad at sweeping as I am. I can't wait for Mphahle to come and clean this house tomorrow. I'm a neat freak by nature but these days I have no problems sitting in a dirty house, I just can't function.

"Here," I say putting three big packets of chips and biscuits on the table.

Mvelo is the first to jump from his seat. I thought they weren't hungry.

"Um going to order pizza."

They look excited. It's strange, I thought they were used to these things.

My phone. It's Hlonou.

"Girl," she says.

She likes calling everyone "girl".

"How are the nassals treating you?" she asks.

She calls them that.

"They're good, is everything okay?" I ask. I'm always worried because there's always something going on in this family.

"I think you might have to keep them overnight, I'll call you later to confirm," she says.

What? Why?

"Can I call you back? Chase is calling ..."

She hangs up before I finish.

"Babe," he says,

He sounds like...

"Are you okay? -me

"Yes. Gugu's mother is gone. She died two hours ago"

Oh my God!

"Ncedo! How is Gugu? My God! Did you tell her? Does she know yet? Where is she?"

This is bad

"We're trying to fly her home. Hlonou might go with her so the kids are going to be there for a while..."

## The Home Games

"It's fine baby. Where are you?" moe  
I don't even know why I'm asking, it doesn't matter really.  
"Okay, I'll see you later," I say.  
He sounds distressed.  
My dad. poor Gugu.  
She didn't come to my memorial because her mother was sick. She'd been in and out of hospital lately.  
She was her only child, but there was a brother her father had from his cheating. They were close, very close. She wasn't a fan of Ngoba but she tried to be civil with him.  
I don't know what it's like to lose a mother because I've never had one but I know that I'd probably end up in a coma if I received a phone call saying my father is dead. Just thinking about it makes me cringe.  
I told him that he was having a grandson, the first grandson and he's been excited from that day on.  
He's only ever been surrounded by girls and he knows exactly how to handle no females. I'm not sure how he's going to deal with not being the only man in the family anymore, not that my child is going to be a full-time Mosebe family member. I just don't see it happening. My dad will be lucky if he's allowed to contribute at all, even with a middle name, at least.  
"You're sleeping here tonight, knockwork at 6pm," I say.  
I might as well start practising.  
The only experience I've had with kids has been during Christmas holidays when my sisters were back home. Tshidi would leave me with the girls all day and disappear to Lord knows where.  
Now that I know her shady ways, she was probably entertaining Mavadona in a bus somewhere.  
She's my maid of honour and yes, she thinks it's her wedding.  
I want to ask Lerato to be one of the bridesmaids but I'm not sure because she always makes excuses to not show up at our family functions. She cancelled attending my memorial at last minute.  
"Mama, the pizza guy is here," Phakeme  
Do I even have cash?  
I don't hear a knock. Oh, he's still in the driveway. But...wow...he's being searched by the security guy. He's even searching the bag.  
I look at Phakeme. He's watching this, too.  
"It happens all the time," he says, does that? He has a poor smile and walks back to the lounge.  
This poor guy, he must be wondering what this is all about.  
I'm waiting for him to knock, but he doesn't, instead the security guy pushes the door and gives me five boxes of pizza.  
"The money...?"  
He shakes his head and pulls the door closed.  
Oh well, that's weird.  
"Call the others," I say to Phakeme.  
He gets up very slowly, his eyes on the phone. Now I know why Kofie doesn't want him to have gadgets.  
"Baby, how is it going?" I call him.

"It's going, I'm trying to reach Nkosuna and Mandisa. The not even which part of the world they're in, -hina  
I want to ask how Gugu is, but the answer is obvious.  
"I'll try to be back early," he says.  
We already going for spin.  
The little smurfs come banging in, noise and all.  
They're going to eat from boxes, I'm not washing dishes tonight.  
"Phokeme this is yours, it's chicken and mushroom!" Lango says. I know it's him because he has a normal voice.  
"I want that one too, -Mabuthu  
"Do you eat red meat, Phakame doesn't," -Lango  
-Did say these kids were remarkable.  
"Mama, why do you have a big stomach like Mawira?" Mvelo, I ord!  
"There's a baby in the stomach," -Mabuthu  
"Why is...?"  
I'm going to leave them to it, I'm nine months pregnant and this chaos is not what I should be dealing with. Kids will drive you crazy I tell you.  
"There work right after you finish eating," I say.  
They ignore me. They're all still in school uniform.  
I'm off to the bedroom.  
I have to tell my family about Gugu's mother. I know my dad will ask me "which one is Gugu's mother?" He only knows Mfama. His face still lights up when he sees her. Mphela finds it funny, which is strange because he is the passive type and would probably skin alive any man who trace his back with felines.

"Skkkkh, I didn't mean to wake you,"  
I didn't hear him come in.  
"You're back? How's Gugu?"  
I gave up and went to bed when he still wasn't back home at night.  
"She went home with Mfama. Go to sleep we'll talk in the morning," he says.  
I'm already awake.  
"The kids don't have uniforms for school tomorrow. I must..."  
"No it's fine, I brought them uniforms. I'll drive them to school tomorrow," he says patting my back.  
He really doesn't want to talk tonight.  
"I didn't make dinner, I bought pizza."  
"It's fine I ate at Mawira's home," he says.  
That's where he was?  
I need to pee.  
"Where are you going?" him  
"To the loo,"  
I'm stretched on the side-lung as I try to find my way in the dark. I feel a bit heavy.  
My left side of the body is a little painful.  
"Are you okay?" -hina  
"Yes, I have a bit of pain here..."  
I'm hanging actually. The doctor did say the baby was too big.

He's next to me...

He has one arm around me.

"I think he moved today. I think his head is here," I say, touching the left side of my belly.

I don't think he orders leads at all. He's just worried.

It's too early for his head to be there. I must call my gynae in the morning.

He stands in front of me even when I'm sitting on the toilet.

How am I supposed to pee now?

Oh well, I'm peeing. I can't hold it back. He's watching. Sigh.

"Fl' flush," he says.

Is he crazy?

I jump all the way back to the bed.

"Shouldn't we call the doctor?"-him

I shake my head. I'm not exactly sick.

He still looks worried.

Are you interested in what's going on with Gogo Qun? what's happening to me now

"How did Gogo get home? Did you get a flight for her?"

His hand is on my tummy.

"We got the last flight to Durban. they'll drive to Ulundi from there. Don't you want to sleep on your back?"

Sigh.

"No baby, sleeping on my side is fine,"

The lick. He feels it

"He's alright. I don't know why he's not sleeping. I'll call the doctor in the morning but don't worry. Everything is fine,"-me

Sometimes I think he forgets I'm a doctor too.

He's still not convinced. I put my hand over his, on my tummy, and close my eyes. I know I won't fall asleep anytime soon. It's after midnight.

Does it mean I have to wake up early in the morning and get the kids ready for school? There are six of them. Where am I even going to begin? And what are the other two?

"Chawo..."

He doesn't respond. He's fallen asleep.

This morning before he left for work we talked about finding a wedding venue. We don't have a date yet but we know it's going to be soon after the baby comes. I need at least three months to lose some weight but he wants it to be sooner than that. As in how? I'm supposed to plan a wedding with a new born baby? I don't know. But Gogo wants what he wants and khulu is not used to not getting what he wants.

I need white traditionalists because apparently it is tradition in this family that when one gets married, all the brothers are circumcised. This includes Shani and Lwandle.

I might have to hire some of my sisters' khondis and some distant cousins, whom I'm not even close to.

We are basically having three weddings, one in the North West because well, the country is not will be the white wedding, which I still have to negotiate for with my dad because he's convinced it's going to be in the North West, while the man fire



marrying is talking about Wood River and Pleasantburg. And comes to think of it, that's the only thing he has contributed to the wedding planning, venue suggestions, no actually area suggestions.

He's more interested in the traditional wedding, which will be in Liberia and where I'll officially become Nkechi Ezie.

I have a picture of what my wedding will look like on my mind, it's a recent picture. They say every girl dreams about her wedding day all her life but that was not the case with me. I never thought I'd be someone's bride or wife. I used to tell Tsieta that all the time in bed, sun puffing, cigarettes and uninking on weekdays, and he agreed with me.

We don't communicate at all. I think he was more pissed about me leaving my job for a man than me getting back together with Qhawe. I was never the housewife type, that was never my aim in life.

He shifts closer and puts one leg over me. Does this mean know how long his legs are? He's fast asleep, if I remove it he'll wake up. Not one just suffer.

Oh shit! I didn't hear the alarm clock!

He's already dressed.

"Are they ready for school?"

He turns around.

"You're awake. How are you? Are you still feeling pain?" he asks.

Not really.

I jump out of bed, I have to make them breakfast!

"I just woke them now, they're showering. Are you still in pain?"

"No," I say putting on a robe.

I still feel heavy though. I have to open my legs when I walk. He looks worried.

"I'm fine Qhawe," I say walking out of the bedroom.

I can hear the noise in the other bedroom. I think Mivelo still needs to be helped with getting dressed.

"No Meebe those are my shoes!" someone is shouting. It's the other twin. They are the same height and same size so the clothes dispute is expected.

Phukame is already dressed, blazer and tie and all.

Mivelo is in pre-school so his uniform is different, but they all wear hats.

"Man a where is my truck! M!?" Sisekoto

Cricket M!

I didn't even hear a good morning. Let chaos all over.

"Eli aak haan," I say.

Phalame is helping Mivelo get dressed. I'm going to put together breakfast.

Just walking down the stairs is a mission. We really need to get a new house because this place mine is not going to work with a new born baby.

Cereal, yes, that's breakfast.

I'm still pouring out the bowls when the first three come running down the stairs with backpacks.

"Baba which car are we using?" one shouts.

"The Jeep, it's ocean," Qhawe shouts from upstairs. They run to the garage.

I don't know how often we go to church every morning.

I hand them the bowls when they walk back in.

Phake me and Mvelo are the last to come downstairs.

"My cricket kit!" - Shakahe.

"I'll bring it to school later. Hurry up we're going to be late." Qhawe

Some are sitting, others are standing and eating.

Qhawe doesn't like cereal.

"I'll grab something in the office canteen." he says.

He always complains about canteen food being awful, but, this is not a normal morning.

"I'll drop them off, go to the office briefly and come back. Okay?" he says and kisses me briefly.

"Let's go!" he says.

Cereal bowls are left all over the place and I'm immediately all alone.

I must call Gugu. But no, maybe not. I'll call Hlorou instead, or Keli.

I forgot to ask if they found Zandile and Nkosana. I haven't seen them in a while.

Last week Zandile sent pictures of them riding elephants. Imogin Nkosana riding an elephant!

It's Tuesday today, the funeral will probably be this Saturday seeing as Gugu doesn't have to wait for funeral policies to payout and all that stuff.

I'm not sure if I should go, but if I don't that would mean Qhawe can't go as well because he will never leave me alone for the whole weekend.

I'm going to suggest spending the weekend at Gugu's so he can go to the funeral and not worry about me being alone.

It's Hlorou, I was about to call her.

"God, are you okay? I forgot to brief you about what they need for school today," she says.

She doesn't sound stressed at all so I take it things are not too bad.

"It's okay, how's Gugu?"

"She's bad, really bad and her family drama is not helping either."

Oh, but her mother passed away yesterday afternoon, and there's already family drama?"

"Is it wise to call her?" -me

"No, not now, maybe later in the week. She cries more than she talks," it makes sense.

"Niye and Shingane are with Keli. You'll keep the older ones throughout the week because I'm not coming back until after the funeral, at least they can take care of the children. I also need you to contact some of Gugu's friends, I'll send you their numbers."

"I'll see you on Friday," she says.

I'm not sure but I don't tell her that.

I don't know any of Gugu's friends, I'll just send GWSs when I get their numbers. Estine is here.

She looks around the house and throws.

"The kids were here," I say.

She doesn't talk much and I have a feeling she doesn't like me very much. But Qhawe likes her, apparently she's been with him for years and has cleaned every loose end he's lived in. He can't tell me how much he pays her and there's no way of finding out because her salary comes from the company. She has a passlip and medical-aid. It must be nice working for the Kulus.

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She probably thought I was going to change things around here and push her out of her job, especially when I told her to keep out of the main bedroom.  
Also, I have a feeling she was used to Qhawe being alone and her not having to take instructions from anyone but him.  
I'm going to take a nap. I slept at zero.

-----  
I need water and chips and a chicken burger.

"Hi, I was about to come upstairs," Qhawe says when he sees me walking down the stairs.

I want my burger.

They're both here, him and Michele.

"Where's my burger? You didn't bring it?" my

He frowns. Why is he frowning?

"Chawe, you forgot? What am I going to eat now?"

"Get you ..." he stops talking and looks at Michele who's just nudged him on the arm.

For crying, I'm not sure how this is happening.

How could he forget? I can't eat anything else I want a burger!

"Muleti ..."

Michele slaps his arm.

"Miquoj is on his way, he has the burger, we bought it but we had to change cars now..."

Whew! I almost want crazy!

Qhawe looks confused.

"Okay I'll wait for it," I say walking out the sliding door.

"What burger?" I hear Qhawe whispering.

"Shhhhhhhhh, tell Miquoj, tell him to go, here now before she kills us," Michele I can hear them but they probably don't know that.

"But..." Qhawe

"Eadu, she's pregnant and crazy, trust me I have experience, get the burger here! Now!" Michele

Oh wow! The crazy ones?

They freeze when I walk back in.

I fold my arms and stare at them.

"Miquoj will be here just now... with the burger," Qhawe

Shouldn't be! And why do they look so scared?

They step back when I walk towards them.

They look shocked when I take mayonnaise out of the fridge and start eating it from the container.

I need chips with this.

"Where's the General?" I ask.

Silence.

They're still staring.

I raise my eyebrows.

"Saturday," Michele

"Okay," I say putting the mayonaisse back in the fridge.

"I'm going to check on Mifey, she's on the other side of the house. Please get my

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burger in the fridge or I don't get cold." They climb the stairs.  
They look at each other.

One simple thing! a burger! They couldn't do that one simple thing!

Oh wow! She's watching Anoush Majeed with the broom next to her!

She jumps up when she sees me walking by.

"I'm done here, I'm going to do something new," she says walking past me.  
It must be nice.

I'm going to comb my hair and put on some perfume seeing as we have a guest  
and another one coming, and six more coming later this afternoon.

I'm going to have to cook too.

It's too quiet. Are they gone?

No they're not. They're still down stairs, standing where I left them.

Miguel is with them.

"Here," (Chase says as I approach). He has a KFC bag. It's my burger.

"Thank you," I say taking it.

"Take one bite... nope...I can't!

I turn to look at them, they're still standing, staring at me.

"I want wings," I say.

I see big eyes widening

They stand still.

Are they trying to ruin my life?

"Sambou is on his way with the wings," Stéphane

That's great.

"Thank you," I say smiling.

He's so considerate.

They walk out to the veranda.

"I'm getting out of here," one says.

"Me too."-Miguel

"Don't leave me alone here with her."-Obawa.

They must learn to whisper properly because I can hear everything they're saying.  
I want my wings now. I don't know what I was thinking asking him to bring me a  
chicken burger.

I almost forget to RSVP the friends.

Someone is here! It's Sambou, that was quick.

"I had to run around at the gate to go outside of Chicken Licken for stupid wings!  
What is wrong with you people?" he shouts when he walks in.

Chase is the first to rush back inside.

"Thank you, baby," he says taking the wings from him.

He hands them to me, in a bag.

Sambou looks at him, and then me, and then at all of them.

"I was joking. I didn't have to run back at the gate, I brought them on my way  
here," he says

I don't care.

"Is it one of those days where she tries to murder you?"-Sambou says as they  
walk out the door.

They laugh.

Ohax!

These wings are very nice.

Meloni

The kids are back.

~~~~~

My plan didn't really work out. So yes, I'm on a flight to Ulundi.

Qhawe didn't want to leave me at all, not even with Gamphi.

I tried to negotiate and explain to him that travelling in any condition was okay but he said leaving the phone in Joburg was even worse risky.

We, Nene and I, even though she is a month behind me had to go to our gymnas to make sure that we were okay to fly.

They wanted to pay them to travel with us but they obviously said no. I'm a doctor myself, and I know I will never allow myself to be someone's babysitter just because they can pay me ten times more than I can.

We took the private jet, with the kids and Makhungu. We are staying in Richard Bay. A lodge has been booked exclusively for the Zolile because...well, I've tried a few times to count how many we are but I always give up along the way. But, the real reason we booked a lodge instead of a hotel was that the kids will need to play outdoors while we are away at the funeral. No, don't start blaming the men, this came from the woman.

I've spoken to Gugu only once this week. I spoke, she responded with one-word answers, so I realised she needed space more than anything. And besides, I really didn't know what to say to her.

Nqoha has been in Ulundi the whole week. Qhawe says Gugu's family was frustrating him that's why Mpeqi had to go there and join him, just to make sure he doesn't lose it and turn things into a disaster.

There's a debate over whether we should go to Mbaba after the funeral because we haven't been there in a while. Mpanza, however, is there every other weekend, for obvious reasons.

His girlfriend, Mhoni, lives in Durban but is from Mbaba. I've seen her father a few times at family functions. Apparently when she started dating Mpanza they had to hide things from her father because although he works for them, they still have no right to be bumping his daughter.

And so, when Mpanza decided he was serious, the delegation led by Nqoha, because we don't know where Ekosana lives anymore, went to the father and explained things. They take reasons very seriously.

We all thought they met at Zondile's traditional wedding. Nene said the reason it she walked in Mpanza's house but later we found out that Mpanza had been pursuing her for over a year she had none of it until that day.

I've met her only once and it was brief. All I can tell you is that she is nothing like I expected. Nothing like Mhanda. She's soft-spoken, very humble and very reserved. She's basically everything I'm not. Well, I can blame it on the hormones for now, like I did with that chicken burger and chicken wings episode. I figured out I never asked Qhawe to bring me a burger. I don't even know where I got the idea that I did.

He laughed when I apologised later. Today, when I walked in here Mhona made some stupid joke about it.

My feet are swollen and I can't wait to get out of this plane so I can lay on my back and let Qhawe massage them. That's become his full-time job, massaging and helping me up the stairs and helping me out of bed. He wants to stop going to

## The April 5<sup>th</sup>

work but I insist on it, I love him but my hormones are a bit evil.

"Mama, where are we going?" - Mafurha

He's sitting next to me. (They've become so close it's hard to believe she once wanted to strangle the poor child.)

"We're going on holiday, to catch animals." - Mofe

That's always a good reason for trying to kidnap.

"Nice?" - Sam

"No, rabbits." - Mofe

I hope that's not going to be followed by another question. No? Thank you.

We've landed.

The usual cars are outside, big, black and tinted windows. The kids are used to this. They all look like that Jeep I once stole in Kimberley.

The kids are all put in one car with Mpanzé and Mphahle.

Qhawe, me, Mofe and Sanfelo and Mafurhuni are in the other one.

I hope we're not driving far because I need to stretch my legs.

"Are you tired?" he asks when I rest my head on his shoulder.

I'm always tired.

"Yes, I think it's the flight."

He brushes my arm.

"I thought it would be better than driving. The lodge is 15 minutes away," he says and kisses my forehead.

We had something to eat on the flight but I know I'll be hungry again in the next few hours, it's only 8pm.

The noble thing would be to go to Gugu's tonight just to see her before the funeral but I doubt Qhawe would say yes to that. Besides, it's another long drive from here.

Zandile is already there, they came straight to KwaZulu-Natal from the Victoria Falls.

"We're here," he says

I'm glad.

We're sleeping in the bush. Great.

"It's a lovely place."

"I wish we could be able to travel to these types of places when the baby can walk," he says

I smile and nod but I don't think we're going to have time for that.

It really is a nice place. The room is beautiful but I have no time to stand here and admire it. I throw myself on the bed.

He sits and puts my one foot on his thigh.

"What shoe size do you wear now?" he asks with a smile on his face.

I give him a look.

He laughs.

"I had no idea pregnancy was this tough, otherwise I would have done it when I was younger." - me

He frowns

"With whom?" he asks.

Oh Lord?

"If you weren't going around kissing frogs I don't know, I would have done it with you."

The female nurse takes my other foot.

It's good at this messaging thing.

"I can't wait to see him," he says after a long silence.

See too.

"Just three weeks to go and you will officially be a daddy."

He looks excited.

"You can still change your mind you know. I still don't think you should be in the delivery room. Childbirth is hectic, it's not for men Chawe."

He shakes his head. I've been trying to make him change his mind since he mentioned it but he's hell-bent on experiencing everything.

"I want to be the first to see him and to hold him and to kiss him," he says.

He's going to be such a good father, I just know that.

I've decided on natural birth. The doctor suggested C-section because the baby is big, but I want to push him out. I'm a tough girl like that.

The nursery is ready. We went shopping together. He didn't know what half the stuff we bought was for but he was happy to pay for whatever I picked.

He goes to the nursery every night before we sleep. I go there too sometimes and I never leave the room without thinking that there should be two cot-beds in it. I

think that's because I'm still pregnant. That maybe when the baby is born the bed will be filled and I will learn to appreciate that this was the only one I was meant to have.

I wonder what Nkosana will name him.

"You're going to be a great father Chawe, you anxiety are," I say.

He really is. He's even a good father to Agape.

"You think?" he asks.

Surely he knows this.

"Yes, you're going to teach him good values and humbleness and the importance of knowing self-worth."

He's blushing.

"And I know that even though he'll grow up knowing he can have anything or money can buy, with you around, he'll still know the value of hard work and the

importance of giving to those that don't have much." I say.

He's still blushing.

"And you, you are going to teach him to be fierce and smart not to take shit from anyone," he says smiling.

Now it's my turn to blush.

"I find your feistiness attractive. It borders on wantonly irresistible, but you wouldn't be my Naledi, the one I fell in love with if you weren't a bit crazy."

Oh, he's starting I see.

"Oh and the fact that you left, for two whole months. It was painful and there were times when I got really depressed because I thought "what if she never comes back", but I held on to hope. You know, I've been with a lot of women in my life, some I thought I really had a chance to make things work with but it always boiled down to one thing, this," he says waving his hand in the air.

I know what he means by "this". He's talking about the vesicle.

"Except for Oleta. I've always had the feeling that every woman I've been with saw me as a "fixing guy", a doctor, a solution to their problems and not just Oshawa Yaku who makes stupid mistakes sometimes. There was this girl once, we were

## The Elton Series

supposed to meet someone for lunch and she came with her friends. I was with the drivers having drinks. The drivers left as soon as they arrived and when we were seated one of her friends asked who those were and she raised her hand and said: "they're just taxi drivers, I don't know why you hang out with them. Oh well, they must know their place."

I shook.

"I stood up huh," he says

Yeah I know how important their employees are to them especially the rank staff. They even pay for some of their children's schooling.

"I have to say, I was a bit overwhelmed at first by all this. I was worried because obviously you could have any woman you want, I couldn't understand why you wanted me, especially after I found out who you were and..."

It seems like a long time ago.

"There's something about you that I just couldn't resist. It drives me crazy," he says.

I smile.

"I met one of your skank exes."

He raises his eyebrows.

"Yes I was having lunch with Filomena and the girls this other day and she was there looking at me and talking about me with her friends. Filomena got her kicked out of the restaurant."

He frown-smiles.

"I don't even want to know. I take it Filomena told you who she was?"

I nod.

"Thanks to Filomena I didn't end up with cops on my doorstep looking for 'you know who'..." he says laughing.

Good, he knows I'm ghetto.

"I can't guarantee it won't happen in future. I'll slap anyone who tries to steal my baby-daddy," he laughs.

"I don't want to be stolen from you, trust me,"-him.

Good.

What's he doing?

"It's not gonna happen, you might as well go to sleep," I say.

"Just a little, I promise I'll be gentle," he says slipping his hand under my panties.

Hee kick.

I laugh.

"He doesn't want anything coming of there," I say.

"Hey hey hey this is my wife and this is mine," he says looking at my belly

I'm still laughing.

"I think he's been listening to us,"-me

"Don't listen to adult conversations. Stupid," he says.

Wahaaa???



148601

# Twenty-Seven

The first and last time I went to a family funeral, we were burying Zandile's father.

I never got over the fact that it started at noon and ended after 3pm. Where I come from, by this time the yard is empty and people are packing away already washed pots and plates.

But here, the coffin is still inside the house and we are waiting for the hearse to arrive and transport it to the church.

I haven't seen Gugu, but I saw Hlonu and Zandile, briefly when we drove in, wearing aprons.

We met Nkosana and Ntsika at breakfast this morning. I didn't know they slept at the lodge too.

Ntsika flew all the way from London just for the funeral. Now I know they're serious when they say family comes before everything.

I thought about not coming but I was worried that Qhawe would want to stay behind too, so I put on my pumps, braved the two-hour drive and dragged my whole self to this very hot dry place.

I've always had this feeling that Gugu came from humble beginnings. Well, it's not exactly the bottom of the poverty barrel but I grew up privileged so I notice these things.

"I just want my wife now," Mqhele says.

He's been like this all week. "Hlonu withdrawal symptoms," they call it.

"But you saw her last night," -Mpanda.

He gives him a look.

Apparently he drove all the way here last night just to see Hlonu and drove back to Richardsbay again.

"She's in the kitchen. Cooking. For the funeral," Qhawe.

"Mnx!" -Mqhele.

We're sitting in the tent waiting for things to start happening.

Nqoba appears. He doesn't look happy at all. He and Mqogi have been staying at a Holiday Inn around here.

"Where the fuck is that hearse now?" he asks.

Okay. Wrong question to wrong people. We just got here.

The dean in this tent definitely does not scream "funeral". It's too fancy and expensive. There are even flowers on tables. But, it has Gugu written all over it. I

guess she wanted to give her mother a fitting funeral.

What???

I look at Qhawe. He doesn't look surprised.

"Is the funeral over?" he asks.

"No it hasn't started." Qhawe says standing up to shake his hand.

They all stand up and shake his hand.

"This is KwaZulu-Natal kgosi, we take our time," -Nkosiua says in Setswana.

Why didn't anyone tell me my father was coming?

He sits next to me.

"You look like Tshedi when she was pregnant. When is my grandson coming?" he asks.

This old man!

"A dien' kooe you were coming," I say trying to lean over to hug him. He looks really great.

"Mimo, how are you?"

She smiles.

You'd swear this is her funeral. She's on some serious six-inch heels and pantyhose and a hat that can give shelter to all of us in this tent.

"I should have brought you some herbs for those feet. How is your blood pressure? Have you been monitoring it?"

Here we go. The last time I checked I was the doctor here.

"Yes, it's fine, I know how to manage it," me

Qhawe side-eyes me.

Did that come out right? I've been saying, my hormones are not very friendly.

I'm wondering...

"You drove all the way here..."

"My favourite." Qhawe says.

Really? Is this a confuse Naledi campaign?

"It's here." Mqhele says

Oh great, this funeral can start now

They are singing church songs inside the house.

The smile on my father's face can only mean one thing...Hicron is here.

She greets him first, and then mine and then Tshedi.

"Gal, how are you? How crazy did the cascade drive you?" she asks me.

Actually, I'm going to miss them.

"No they weren't so bad. I actually enjoyed having them around."

Mqhele is standing next to her.

He hugs her and kisses the top of her head.

We are at a funeral for crying out loud.

"Why aren't you dressed?" he asks.

"I'm not going to the funeral, we're staying behind to make sure lunch will be ready when they come back," -Mloana

He doesn't look happy.

Now we're all sitting here watching Miquele being a baby.

"I'm staying here with you," he says.

"No, we're going," Samoulo says pulling his arm.

The coffin is coming out.

Silence.

Naled:

Keoba is among the men carrying it. He's in front.

My heart skips a bit when I realize Gugu is going to appear anytime from now.

She does. She looks beautiful, but despondent. She looks like she's had a tough time, her face says that. She's wearing black. Her make-up is flawless and her skin is lighter than normal, pale rather. Her eyes are red. She's been crying. She's still crying.

I look at mine and my eyes get wet immediately. It will be me in Gugu's shoes one day. I don't even want to imagine it.

Qhawe puts his arm around my shoulders. I can't stop crying.

"Let's go to the car, there's water there," he says.

I don't think I need water. What I need is to not be at a funeral and nine-months pregnant.

"Can I go with Tshedi and Ntate please?" me

I hope he won't mind.

I think he does mind.

"Okay."

I don't trust that okay...but I'm going with them anyway.

This is a township, but it's small, far smaller than Mankeng. There's remarkable difference between the houses. Some are big, too big. Others look like little white boxes.

"I read somewhere that almost all the people that lived here were cops," Tshedi says.

I doubt that.

We drive past a huge building. You can tell it used to be beautiful but now it looks like it's been neglected for years.

"That used to be the provincial parliament when the IFP was still in charge of the province," Ntate

Oh, now I remember.

"So what is it being used for now?" Mine

"I'm not sure," Ntate

We are leaving the township behind and driving to a rural area. The sign said Mashona.

The car Qhawe is driving is right behind us.

Tshedi is constantly typing on her phone. She's not her usual talking come-stop self.

Now I'm really confused as to where we are going because we are driving through a forest.

"What's the name of the church we're going to?" Tshedi

I have no idea.

"Let's just follow the other cars," me

We pass a hospital or clinic, and then a school, and then...it's a church.

Why do they like putting these convents deep in the forest?

There must be over 100 cars already here. My guess is some people came straight to church.

"It's rram already," Tshedi

Yes and according to people here it's still early

I don't see Qhawe when we walk inside the church, but I think that was Mqoqi I saw.

I haven't seen the other kids and I'm not sure if they're coming.  
The coffin is already here, inside the church. I don't know Gugu was Catholic.  
"Tshedì, we're inside a church, stop with the phone."  
She rolls her eyes, sends out last text and puts it in the handbag.  
I still don't get why she's here. She didn't even know Gugu's mother and she didn't seem to be that concerned when I told her about her death.  
Gugu and the rest of her family are sitting on the front row. There are some with small blankets over their shoulders whom I figured are her aunts. There's also a grey-haired old man, I think it's her uncle because he's been talking a lot with Nqoba.  
"Where's Xolie?" Tshedì whispers to me.  
"She stayed behind with Brown and Zain."  
I think I should have done the same.  
The service is about to start.  
Now that Tshedì is here, we must decide on a date. On the one I suggested Lesedi was not available. The second date we agreed on Tshedì had to go to a family function at her in-laws. Qhawe said he'll hear from us. I want to do it before I give birth and I have only three weeks left, and I can barely stand for more than ten minutes.  
I'm scared but I know this is something I need to do, something we need to do for the sake of moving on.

---

There are women, elderly and middle aged women wearing opes of all colours. They're sitting around the grave. And by sitting I mean sitting butt-flat on the grass around the grave.  
I've never seen anything like it, I didn't even know there was a custom like this.  
Funerals in this place, they take long but they are conducted with dignity. It's like they pay as much respect to the person being buried as they possibly can.  
The priest has started talking, I'm about to switch off because my concentration span is not so great currently. Now I believe everything they say about pregnant women, their sanity is questionable.  
We spent three hours in the church.  
When everybody stood up to view the body I sat still, not because I don't believe in looking at dead people but because I didn't want to see Gugu.  
The wailing and the screams she occasionally broke into during the service cut my heart into pieces. I just couldn't risk having to look her in the eye.  
Qhawe is there with his brothers. Our eyes have been moving now and again. So actually, he's been staring at me and I've been catching him staring at me.  
All the women stand up when the men approach with shovels. I think the first group to shovel the soil are Gugu's male cousins, they have a strong resemblance.  
Gugu's younger brother looks broken.  
"Oh look, the millionaires are about to shovel," Tshedì.  
Can she stop now?  
They really are shovelling.  
"So since you're here, I was thinking that I could talk to Chawe to fly us to Pietermaritzburg tomorrow morning so we can go and see wedding venues around that area. It won't take long."

...

shadi

She frowns and shakes her head.

"Hope. I'm busy too-owns."

Huh?

"Busy doing what? What time is your flight back to Joburg? You arrived with ntaxo right?" me

She doesn't answer me.

"Ishadi!"

"What? No they were already here, they're staying at some jungle guesthouse. I drove from Durban and I have to go back right after this."

What is she on about?

"Why?"

She looks at me and rolls her eyes

"I have things to do Ledi. I'm only going back to Bloemfontein on Tuesday."

What?

"But where are you staying?" me

She's being shady about all this.

"Durban North. I told Sello I'd be with you the whole time, don't answer your phone if he calls," she says.

The strangest thing is that she's saying this with a hard face. But then, I sense a bit of "I don't care" attitude in her right now.

"Ishadi wi o are you in Durban with?"-

She raises one eyebrow.

Lord!!

"You're doing this live now? You don't even care about what people are going to say? What if Sello finds out? How are you going to explain this to him? To his family?"

"You have no business judging me Ledi, you don't know the life I live."

I know but going on holiday for five days with the man you're cheating with? No, it's not just wrong, it's downright suicidal.

"I think you're making a mistake. I mean, why not just divorce the guy instead of...?"

"Ledi, come back and ask me that question when you've been married for ten years and have children. Trust me, the answer you have in your head now will be totally different than."

What does she mean? I'll never cheat on Chawe.

Ifo's behind us.

"Ledi's, please drive in my car? I want to speak to ntaxo, I'll drive back with him," he says.

I hope they're not going to make any plans that involve me without me.

"I hope you won't be scheming against me with that old man."

"Why not?" he asks, kisses me on the lips when I least expect it and rushes off

Now people are looking at me.

"Are they all like this?" Ishadi.

Like what?

I give her a confused look?

"Do they all show affection in public? The outcast Hlamba and Mqhele are like this too, random kisses and holding hands and all that, you and Chawe too."

They are actually. Xosha and Sanyahle have gotten worse since that almost-divorce saga

The 46th Series

they're always together.

People are walking back to their cars. It's over.

Now Gugu will have to face reality. It all begins now and she's going to have to do it alone because nothing anybody can do or say will bring back her mother.

I most commended Ngoba for being the husband that he is, he's been supportive throughout this. He even managed not to lose his temper during family dramas that I understand has been happening here.

"Tshedi you're driving,"-me

She's still on her phone, typing. She's not even listening to me.

Mine is not happy about being separated from her boyfriend but what can she do? The big-eyed Zulu man wants what he wants.

"There's no signal in this car. How is that possible?"-Tshedi!

I would explain but I don't understand it myself.

I wonder where they keep these Jeeps and why the signal is always jammed inside them.

"When are you coming home Ledi? It should be at least a week before you're due.

It's a pity we had to cancel the baby shower, I had already bought..."

Huh? Whoah!

First, who said I was coming home? Secondly, what baby shower?

She looks like she's just remembered something.

"Baby shower?"-me

She tries to change the subject.

Tshedi clears her throat.

"It was supposed to be today but...you know," she says shrugging.

Oh wow! I had no idea.

"You can still have the presents though, they're at Omphi's house," Mine

I'm hurt a little. A baby shower would have been nice.

"Was it going to be at Omphi's house?"

"No, at your beauty spa," Tshedi says and looks at me briefly.

"Don't worry we can still do a baby welcoming party next month," she says.

But...I would have loved a baby-shower.

I wonder who was going to be there and if Qhawe was in favour of it. He's very traditional and I doubt he believes in stuff like baby showers.

I wanted to talk to Tshedi about the "Shopko problem" but we haven't had much privacy today.

We are among the last people to arrive because we got stuck in traffic coming out of the graveyard.

I expected a queue for food but ashe's a Zulu wife, there are waiters, there are energy drinks, there's bottled water, there are set tables...

"I've been looking for you,"-Zah

I didn't even go inside the house when I arrived in the morning.

"You look great," she says brushing my tummy.

She looks...like a hand-crafted human being.

"How have you been? I only see you in pictures lately,"-me

We're following her to the main house. I take it that's where all the others are.

We walk past the brothers occupying our table, with my dad. He's talking, they're listening. I wonder what dull story he's reciting this time.

We leave Mine with some elderly women in the lounge and walk on to the

nahidi

bedroom

My eyes meet Gugu's the moment I walk in.

Not much has changed. She still looks as stressed as she was at the graveyard.

She's barefoot and has taken off the black scarf she was wearing

"Hey babe," she says.

She likes calling us ladies "babe".

Tshedi walks in and sits on the bed.

"Hi Tshedi, thank you for coming."-Gugu

I can tell Tshedi feels as awkward as I do here. We just don't know what to say to her.

Koile is here too. I must say she's carrying her baby better than I am. She looks good, slimmer and less frustrated.

"Where's Ilom?"-Tshedi

"Outside, she's seeing her mother out," Koile

Oh, I saw her mother briefly, with that cousin that shagged my sister.

I understand the cousin and Nqoba are very nice.

"I can't wait to see my baby. How is he? Has he been fine?"-Gugu

She left Shingiru behind when she left Joburg. He's been living with Koile, him and Niya while I've been dealing with the older rascals.

Koile nods.

"I'll come back sometime during the week. There's already drama in this family, my aunts are the worst I tell you. They want to control everything," she says.

I wonder what this is about. I just don't think that anyone should be dealing with drama while dealing with losing their mother.

The door opens and a young girl walks in with a tray of food. It's ours, good, because I'm starving.

My phone.

"Are you okay?"

It's Ohawe

"Yes, we're in the bedroom with Gugu"

"The old man thinks you're going to the North West to give birth. Is that what you told him?"

Fish..

"No," I reply.

He made it clear that his son will go straight to our house from hospital. My family on the other hand, probably because that's what Tshedi did, assumes that I'll give birth at home and stay with them for the first three months.

I don't even know how I'm going to explain that to my dad and Mine because they are very ready for grand-parenting

He doesn't say anything more. I hope he's not angry about this.

This food was definitely cooked by Helum. I would have expected a catering company to be hired but..

"People are leaving, I'm glad,"-Ilomso walks in and says.

She's dressed very casually and looks like she hasn't had much sleep lately.

She gives Gugu a big brown envelope.

"Keep it for now please."-Gugu

"Okay just tell me if you need it" Ilomso

I wonder...

"Oh and I saw her going inside your mother's bedroom, just now." Mlomo Gugu brushes her forehead and frowns.

Zah grabs her just as she's about to walk out the door.

"No leave it, not now," Zah

"They've been all over my mother's things all week. She wanted to wear her shoes to the funeral. Why can't they respect her?" she's says. She's visibly upset.

"It's fine Gugu you'll talk to them later when all these people are gone." Mlomo

It looks like things have been really hectic here. It's crazy how family will turn on you when you need them the most.

These aunts she's talking about must be her father's sisters because I don't remember her ever talking about her mother's side of the family.

The reality is, Gugu is now an orphan. Her father died years ago. It was just the three of them now. Her brother is also actually her half-brother but Gugu's mother raised him from when he was young.

She once told me that her mother loved the boy but she has never gotten over her father's betrayal.

It's a Nolie and Mabutho kind of situation. The worst thing that can ever happen to a married woman.

I can hear the guys laughing with my father outside. This means that the yard is empty except for them and a few people, relatives I assume.

The door opens and Mme peeps in.

She walks in and stands behind the door.

"We think we must leave now," she says looking at me and Tshedi.

It's really getting late.

"My dear," she says looking at Gugu.

"You will be fine. God will be with you. Just pray as much as you can," she says.

I'd expect her to say that. Her generation thinks prayer fixes everything when in fact, sometimes all you need is a whole bottle of obanogaine and shopping.

"Thank you mame,"-Gugu

I follow her and Tshedi out. I must say it was great seeing them after such a long time, although I didn't get to update Tshedi about the craziness that is my life. She's still scrolling through her phone even now.

My dad is already standing next to the car, with Qhawe. Their friendship is starting to cramp my style. I liked them better when they hated each other because it meant they couldn't make decisions without involving me.

Somehow I feel like I'm caught in between with this going home to give birth thing.

I hope my dad doesn't raise it now, here.

"Thank you again for coming," Qhawe says shaking Mme's hand.

"Tshedi, it's always great seeing you. Send my regards to Sello," he says.

For a moment there I think she's going to roll her eyes but she smiles briefly.

Qhawe and Sello have met a few times but I don't think they clicked at all.

Sello is more of the Nkosana type.

They will all drive to Mtuzini where the parents are staying. Tshedi will then take her hired car and drive on to Durban where she's probably going to have sex with her fellow cheater.

Up in denial of the fact that her youngest daughter looks nothing like Sello.

"Don't forget what I told you," she says before getting in the car.



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Sigh.

Qhawe pulls me to him just as I'm about to walk back to the house.

He's leaning on the Jeep.

"Are you okay? You look tired."-him

Daubhh..

"No I'm fine."

"You don't look fine," he says rubbing my back.

He's too fussy, but he's right. I'd really like to leave this place now.

The only cars left are ours and it's going to get dark soon. But there are still some locals sitting behind the house eating meat and drinking traditional beer.

"What's going to happen to Gugu's brother now? Is he going to live here alone now?"

He shakes his head and takes a deep breath.

"Gugu's aunts have already positioned themselves. One is already asking about the car that Nqoba bought for Gugu's mother. There's a cousin who came with three suitcases yesterday and is already occupying the outside building."

What?

"I'm telling you. Nqoba is pissed because all of this is adding to Gugu's stress. Sae's worried about what's going to happen to her brother and her mother's house after she leaves," he says.

"No that is wrong baby. They must just lock it up and move to Joburg. Gugu's brother will study or do something there. maybe work for you," -me

He shakes his head.

"You can't just leave your home my love. He understands that he is the man of this house now and has to take responsibility," he says.

But he's so young, how's he going to do all that?

Hah?

There's shouting coming from...

He pulls me by hand and rushes inside the gate.

It sounds like an argument. Inside the house.

"Gugu! No! Come out!"

It's Nqoba's voice. What's going on?

"No! I'm tired of these people! You abused my mother when she was still alive and now you think you can abuse me? I'm not my mother! You can forget it!" she's screaming!

Nqoba is trying to calm her down.

Everyone is standing behind them trying to calm the situation.

"If you are tired then why are you still here? Why are you still here?"- a very big woman asks.

What kind of question is that?

"This is my mother's house!" she shouts again.

"This is my parents' house. It's my home!"-Gugu

This is going to be bad.

"Everyone please calm down,"-Qhawe

Nqoba is not talking anymore. He's just holding Gugu back. Mphahle has gone outside. Good.

I'm not sure where Mlosane is. He should be here.

"You are not getting my mother's death certificate and you are not bringing your

## The Home Series

useless kids to live here. I don't care who you think you are. My parents worked for everything they had while the rest of you kept demanding things from them. I won't allow it." Gugu. She's screaming louder now.

"Your parents?" she now says. She's speaking loudly now.

Someone touches her shoulder, it's that grey haired uncle.

"Please don't do this," he whispers to her

she pushes him away.

"Your parents Gugu? What parents...?"

Silence.

"You should have asked your mother who she stole you before she died," she says.

I feel my stomach knotting!

Did she just say what I think she said?

"Go!" Qhawe says pointing me to the door.

"Go to the car!" he shouts.

"Follow her," he says to Hlonu and Zulu.

What is...?

"Hlonu get Gugu's things,"-Sambulo says.

I look at Gugu. She's literally standing there like an ice statue.

Mkhasana! I don't know where he came from but he's standing between Nqoba and the aunt.

"Mchhele,"-Nqoba says.

He's back.

"Get my wife out of here,"-Nqoba.

Oh crap!

"Get her out!" he shouts.

"Baso!"-Sambulo.

Nqoba pushes Gugu off him, slowly.

Everyone is standing in silence.

"All of you, there are two exit doors in this house, choose one closest to you,"-

"Let's go," someone says before they grab my arm and pull me outside.

It's Zulu. We are rushing to the cars. Hlonu is behind us with Gugu. Kofie is walking behind them.

A woman screams...

naled

# Twenty-Eight

Aaaaaawwwwwwwiiii  
"Ntsika, where's Chawe?"  
He widens his eyes.  
He's snuck. But, where's everyone?  
"What are you doing up?" he asks.  
1...2...3...4...breathe Naledi.  
"Where is Chawe?"  
It's hot, I'm sweating.  
Keep counting Naledi...keep counting...  
"They want to...they went out. They left me alone here at the bar and..." he says.  
He's stammering.  
I'm trying to stay calm. I made it all the way down the passage to the bar so I'm still capable...  
"Listen, my water just broke.."  
He looks confused.  
I'm calm...very calm. I'm in control.  
"You want water?"  
Motherfucker!  
"Ntsika, listen to me. my water just broke,"  
I'm putting his arm and speaking in a soft voice. We can't afford to panic. He can't afford to panic and lose focus...  
Breathe in...out...in...  
"Okay I'll get you water," he says  
Fucking hell!  
"Ntsikal! My water just fucking broke! I'm about to give birth! Drive me to the fucking hospital!"  
He jumps! Opens his mouth and closes it again. He runs. Where's he running to?  
Breathe Led!...the contractions have started. I need to stay calm.  
What am I going to do? He ran away. Breathe...  
He comes back...  
"Okay, I'm going to wake everyone and..."  
Is he crazy?  
"No! You're going to drive me to hospital! Ntsika! Ntsika!" I say throwing him car keys.

## The Horror Series

I swear I can feel this baby's head inside my vagina right now! The bloody thing is trying to murder me!

"Aaaaaww!"

This is beyond painful!

"Stand here. I'm going to get the car, stand here." He says and runs off.

I have to sit! No I have to lie down! I have to open my legs!

"Aaaaawwaww!"

I must walk! Yes walk! It's helping!

"Aawwwaww!"

"Um here! I'm here...do you want to sit on the front seat? The back seat is bigger..."

I'm going to slap him so hard...! I know how to do this! I know this. I've told women to do this many times...yes...count down...breathe in...breathe out...back up...back down...

"Auuuuuuuuu!"

This shit is not working!

"You must relax..." he says

What??

I give him a look and he raises his arms.

Is he raising his arms at me?

Awwwwwwwww

"Push,"-he says.

I'm going to murder this man!

"Push what? Drive faster!" I scream and slap him on the shoulder.

He's driving and trying to dial on his phone at the same time.

Jikes! I don't even know where I am! I'm going to give birth here? I don't even know how to get to Richardsbay from Gauteng!

"Drive faster!!!"

"We're... almost there." he stammers.

My back! That sharp pain on my back!

Why are these contractions so quick and so close? My spine has flames coming out, it's burning!

"We're here!"

That was the worst 45 minutes of my life!

"We're here, it took us ten minutes..." he says standing at my door.

He has no clue! Absolutely no clue!

"Ntsika, I have to go inside..."-

Be calm Naledi...be calm...

He opens the door very quickly.

"Where the fuck is Chawe??"

He doesn't answer me. He's walking ahead of me! He's supposed to be walking behind me.

He's running!

"The baby! She's pregnant, the baby is coming now!" I find him screaming at reception.

I have to sit down.

"Aaaaawwaww!"

I'm going to sit on the floor.

Silence.

"No mam, don't do that. Someone is coming to get you now, don't sit there."

I'm not going to be told what to do.

"What's the patient's name?"

Really?

"Dr Nakali Mout-hu,"-Ntsika

ID number?

"I don't know," Ntsika

"Medical Aid number?"

What the hell?

"I don't know. Can't we do this later?"-Ntsika.

There's someone in front of me with a wheelchair. I can feel my abdomen burning. My back feels like it's going to open up like a freakin' volcano!

They'd better get this baby out now!

"Ntsika where's your brother?"

This is starting to piss me off now!

"I'm going to call him...he's coming now!"

I'm going to kill Oluwe for making me go through this alone! I'm going to murder him!!

"Must I get her something? Water? Food?"-Ntsika.

I give up!

It's walking alongside the wheelchair. I have no idea where the labour ward is!

We meet a doctor on the passage. I want to pull him by those scrubs he's wearing!

"How far apart are the contractions mam?" he asks.

How should I know? I'm not counting minutes!

"Awwwwww."

"She's screamed like this three times in the past 30 minutes," Ntsika.

At least someone has been counting!

The doctor pushes my shoulder down when I try to stand.

"Get her out of those clothes," the doctor says when we enter the ward.

There are other people here, about five women, they look as crazy as I am.

"We want a single ward," Ntsika says.

Yes, this is a private hospital, I'm supposed to be in a single ward.

"We're having some problems at the moment,"-doctor.

I'm not interested.

Silence.

"This is the labour ward for now,"-Dr

"Yes, but we want a single ward," Ntsika

I don't care what ward I'm in! I just want to give birth! Now!

"Awwwwww."

I'm helped into bed. Whew! This is it! I open my legs wide.

The doctor looks at me and shakes his head.

I don't care that Ntsika is here.

He leaves the ward.

"Let me see," the doctor

See what? Push the baby out woman!

There's this woman who's walking back and forth, talking to herself and screaming and scratching at it ...

Another one is on her knees, as in crawling on the floor with her robe open on

front. She's not even wearing underwear.  
I used to laugh at this. I thought the women were exaggerating but now...  
"Hope, we're not there yet," he says taking off the gloves.  
"What do you mean we're not there yet?"-me  
"You are in labour but you're not ready yet. I'll check you again in an hour or so,"  
An hour? An hour of what?  
"I can't wait an hour...awwww"  
He's gone.  
How can Chawe just disappear and leave me alone like this?  
I feel like there's a flame on my back! I have to stand.  
Awwwwwwww...  
"Mam let me help you out of these clothes..." someone says.  
It's a nurse I think.  
She hands me a hospital gown.  
I'm not wearing underwear.  
"No this goes to the front,"  
"I know!" I snap.  
I want to wear it back wards. My back needs to get some cool air.  
"Woooooooooooo!" the woman on her knees screams.  
This is not how I imagined this!  
Someone walks in, it's another doctor.  
"Ms Xaba, how are we doing?" he asks.  
The look on Ms Xaba's face is deadly.  
"Where have you been?" she screams at the doctor.  
He smiles.  
Is he serious?  
She's still pacing around the room.  
"We can go to theatre now,"-doctor.  
I should have opted for caesarean too! This hell I'm going through is not worth it!  
I want caesarean now!  
It's been 30 minutes and this is getting worse and worse. It's only two of us here  
now.  
I've been to the bathroom twice. The first time I thought I had to pee but nothing  
came out. The second time was to wash my face, I don't know why because it  
didn't help me at all.  
I have to sit. The tiles are cold on my butt, it's a nice feeling. Let me lie on my  
back.  
"Naledi!"  
He's standing over me. I'm lying on my back, on the floor, with my legs wide  
open. My vagina is staring back at him.  
"Where have you been Chawe??" I scream.  
He steps back a little.  
I want to throw something at him!  
He's looking at this other semi-skid woman in the room.  
"I'm here. What's going on? What did the doctor say?" he asks.  
"Awwwwwwwwwww"  
He bends over me.  
"Let me help you up,"-him

Heed!

I don't want to get up.

"Get your child out of me Qhawe!"

He widens his eyes.

I will have him forever for this!

"If you ever get me pregnant again Qhawe I will kill you! I swear!"

He looks scared all of a sudden.

"Sir you can't be here, please leave," - a nurse comes in and says.

He looks at her and frowns. He doesn't move.

"Sir there are other people here. This is a female ward, please leave. You will be allowed in once we move Mrs Zulu to a private ward," she says.

That back pain again!

"Baby we're moving you to a private ward, now,"-him

It won't make any difference!

"Is that ward going to get this baby out?"

"I'll be back," he says and leaves.

Is he running away?

I'm still fine here on the floor but I know it won't last very long

The doctor from earlier walks in. I guess I've been in labour for an hour then.

"How are the contractions Dr Zulu?"

Oh, now he's calling me by my "job name"?

I'd love to answer him but I can't speak right now.

"Is this your first child?" he asks.

I nod.

There's a slight smile on his face. I hate him!

"Back to the bed, let's see,"-him

We're still "seeing"?

I drag my heavy frustrated self up from the floor and onto the bed.

I will never have sex again in my life! Never!

"Nope, not there yet," he says.

I'm going to die if this baby doesn't come out now!

"I want caesarean," I say. I'm begging.

He looks at me once and shakes his head.

"You don't need a caesarean. You're doing great. Your husband asked us to move you to a private ward immediately. The porter will be here just now,"

This private ward nonsense is not going to help me with anything!!

They are outside, I hear them talking when the porter opens the door.

"Mrs Zulu," he says.

I guess then that Qhawe pulled some "I'm Qhawe Zulu" stunt when he arrived, judging by the way I'm suddenly being addressed.

"You might want to tie that around you," - the porter

Voortsekl!

I don't know what's worse, my back or the feeling in my stomach.

I sit on the wheelchair with my legs wide open.

It's Qhawe and Ntsika outside the ward.

I give them one look and Ntsika moves away

Qhawe follows me to the lift.

"Are you okay?" he asks.

What shitty question is this?

"I don't have baby clothes, I left the bag in Joburg,"  
That's all I'm thinking about!  
"Don't worry Hleam will sort that out for the staying. How is the pain? Is it bad?"  
he asks.  
The porter looks at him. I think he's telling him to shut up.  
It's quieter on this floor. There are no nurses and patients walking around.  
"What time is it?"-me  
He looks at his watch.  
"Almost 3am," he says.  
I've been in labour for three hours! No four hours!  
He walks in first and I find him already throwing the pillows to the floor.  
"Do you want to lie down?"  
I don't answer.  
"Aaaaawwwww,"  
"Call the doctor!" he shouts at the porter.  
I'm going to give birth here, everything I'm going to need is here  
A nurse walks in instead.  
I'm sitting on the floor.  
"Are you going to stay?" the nurse.  
He ignores her.  
"Yes, he wants to be present,"-me  
I still think it's a bad idea.  
She looks at him from head to toe.  
"You have to change clothes then,"  
She's so grumpy you'd swear she's the one in labour!  
"When is the doctor coming?"-him  
She shrugs.  
Really?  
I wonder if they've called my dad and Tsheti. And how am I going to travel back  
to Joburg with a new born baby? This changes my plans, totally.  
"Please come with me," the nurse says to him.  
He looks at me, I nod, he follows her out.  
I have no energy to scream, not anymore, I'm just clenching my teeth and holding  
my breath now. That's all I have energy for.  
Good, the doctor is back.  
"You don't look too bad," he says.  
They should have given me a female doctor.  
"I can't do this anymore. Take me to theatre please,"  
He won't, I can just see it in his eyes.  
"You're almost there," he says.  
"Almost?"  
"Yes, it won't be long now."  
Qhawe walks in just as this man's face is in-between my thighs.  
He doesn't look happy, and that's because he's stupid.  
"I'll come back in another hour," the doctor says and leaves.  
Qhawe is wearing hospital theatre clothes. He even has the shower cap on.  
The pants are too short, they're above his ankles. He looks funny.  
"Are you sure you want to be here?"-me





## The Homecoming

"Come and see," one nurse says to Qibawa.  
He lets go of my hand quickly and goes to where they all are.  
I get distracted and stop pushing.  
"Not not! no! I told you not to come here!" doctor.  
Someone slaps my thigh! I push immediately!  
There's chaos and noise and I can't see what's happening.  
I can't see Qibawa!  
"Don't touch that! Get him out of here! Get him out!" someone screams.  
The slap again.  
I hold my breath and push with all the strength I have.  
I feel relief in my lower body before I hear the first loud cry, but it sounds like it's disappearing.

-----  
I'm cold.  
"Ouch!"  
Ugh! I have a drip on.  
The last thing I remember is...  
Huh? Qibawa? What happened to him?  
"Chawa! Chawa!"  
He doesn't respond. Why is he here? Why did they put a drip on him?  
"Chawa!"  
He won't wake up!  
I press the bell frantically until the door swings open.  
"What's wrong with him? What happened to him?"  
He's lying still, his eyes are closed.  
This nurse looks too calm.  
"Nothing. Don't worry he's fine," she says.  
What does she mean he's fine? He's lying on a hospital bed with a drip in his arm.  
"He'll wake up soon. He just had a little episode in the delivery room but he's okay," she says.  
I don't understand. I remember someone shouting for him to get up but I didn't see what happened after that.  
"Did you have to put a drip...?"  
"Yes, like I said, he had an episode. Don't worry it's just water in there,"-nurse.  
I'm lost.  
"I can bring the baby now," she says.  
The baby. I'm a mother. I haven't met my baby yet. The only thing I heard was a cry.  
I nod.  
"Your family is here, but I won't let them come in yet," she says and leaves.  
Not all of them will be allowed in anyway, just one of them and my dad if he's here.  
I feel sticky all over.  
"Neledi!" he shouts.  
Huh? He's awake.  
He jumps out of bed.

"Don't!-me

He's stopped by the needle in his arm.

There's a frantic look on his face.

"Sit down," I say.

I guess this is the episode they were talking about.

He looks at the bed behind him, then at me then around the room.

"They're bringing the baby,"-me

I have to calm him down

"Is he okay? The baby?"

"Yes, I haven't seen him either, but they're bringing him now."-me

He looks crazy right now.

"It's okay, we don't have to have another one. We can have one child that's fine with me," he says.

What is he on about?

The door opens and the nurse walks in pushing a small cot bed.

We look at each other.

"He can't stay long," the nurse says.

"Get this thing out of my arm." Qhawe says to the nurse pointing at the drip.

I had not decided on whether to breast feed or not.

She picks the baby up and tries to put him on my chest.

"No let him hold him first," I say, pointing at Qhawe with my head.

It's what he wanted, he wanted to be the first to hold him, that's why he was in the delivery room in the first place.

She looks unsure.

I nod.

She hands him the little man wrapped in a blue blanket.

He hesitates.

"Take him Qhawe."

I don't know what's going on but he is not the man he was when we entered that delivery room. It's like something happened to him in there.

He looks at me first, and then stretches his arms.

The nurse hands him the baby and leaves immediately.

"What happened to you?" I ask.

I'm starting to worry about this now.

"I don't know, I saw... a head coming out," he says, but he's not looking at me, he's looking at the baby in his arms.

Oh that's what this is about? I did say child birth was not a man thing. Some are able to stay and be comfortable throughout but others are left traumatised for the rest of their lives.

But, we have a baby now. It's here and it's alive and it's healthy. It came earlier than expected but it's perfect. And I haven't even seen its face.

He's holding him like he's scared or something.

"Hold him with your one hand behind his head," I say.

He doesn't know how to hold a baby?

He's still looking at him. I'm going to let him have his moment.

"He has your big forehead," he says.

Whew! I think he's coming back, now that he's cracking jokes.

"You can touch his fingers,"

He looks at me briefly, like he was asking for assurance.

"They're so small," he says about the hands.

He obviously has never seen a new born premature baby if he thinks these hands are small.

I want to hold the baby too but he's hogging him now.

He comes and sits on the edge of the bed.

I stretch my arms but he's not even looking at me.

I lean over to look at his face.

Oh well, he looks exactly like we all expected.

I still don't know how he ended up lying on a hospital bed, next to mine. And I think this bed was put in here just for him because this is a single ward. And it's a different ward, not the one I was in earlier.

"Can I see him?"-me

He's totally forgotten about me or that I'm the mother of this baby and I want to see him too.

He looks exactly like him. He hasn't opened his eyes but his face is exactly like the many faces I see every day.

I kiss his tiny fist and open it with my thumb.

"He's so big,"-me

He's supposed to be premature but he is just perfect and beautiful.

He has an armband written "baby Zulu".

Oh by the way.

"Chawa,"

"Mmmm," he says.

His eyes are on the baby. I can already see the gallons of love written all over his face.

"He doesn't have a name,"-me

Silence.

"We agreed on Shopho, me and Nkosana."

I get this feeling in my stomach. I don't know why. No actually, I know why. They say sometimes people live up to their names. He might just grow up to be exactly like the original Shopho Zulu.

I'm not happy. But I've learned a lot in the almost two years that we've been together. I've learned to look beyond myself and what I want.

I don't know why he chose this name, but this is his son. His first son.

When he feels that it's important to explain, he will explain. I'm comforted by the fact that I know he's going to be the best father in the world and that he is going to love this child like he's never loved before.

So, let me give him this.

I raise my eyes, they meet his.

"He's beautiful. Shopho Zulu, it's a beautiful name." I say.

He smiles back.

I expected to see relief on his face, but it's not there, which means he wasn't worried, which means it was not negotiable in the first place.

Shopho opens his eyes.

We look at each other, and laugh.

"He couldn't he saved could he?"-me

"Saved from what? This is Zulu, we come with zoom lenses." he says laughing.

# Twenty-Nine

We pick up all three of them from Omphi's house.

I expected this trip to be like all others, tinted cars in front and behind us but no, not today, it's just the four of us and Qhawe.

What happened with Gugu freaked me out enough to want to do this now, soon, when my baby is only three months old.

I can't say I'm prepared or ready to deal with whatever I will find, wherever we are going, but what has to be done must be done.

I'm getting married in a couple of months and when I come back from wherever we are going, I'll know whether I want my mother at my wedding or not.

They say I look exactly like her, but I can't build a picture of her in my mind.

I try to imagine myself as her but it never works, in my mind she exists only in words, in what I have heard from people.

Ntata knows about this. He said it was our choice to make. In fact he wasn't even worried. That's what happens when someone is over you, they stop caring all together.

I don't know who is more worried between Tshedi and Lesedi, the two who remember her, Omphi the one that resents her and me, the one that doesn't know her at all.

Qhawe has been quiet today. My feeling is, he knows exactly what lies ahead and he is worried about how we are going to handle it.

Family issues are always the worst to deal with, evidence of that is all the nonsense Gugu has had to deal with after finding out her mother was not her biological parent but a baby thief who stole her from some woman. She's not mad at her mother, no, she said it herself that she was the best mother in the world. She's angry about the way she found out and she's mad about what her family members, whom she thought were her people, have turned out to be.

That night, Nqoba did the unthinkable.

I don't want to go into deeper details but it was one of those incidents that make Monday news headlines.

The house is empty and locked. Gugu's mother's car is parked in the garage. Her brother is somewhere in Durban. There's peace. No actually there's fear. But that has not stopped some of them from trying to steal what belongs to Gugu and her brother.

Mazisi

We're quiet again and just staring at this little thing we created.

"I don't regret stealing your parking," he says.

I laugh.

"I don't regret blocking your car."

The nurse comes back. She's here to take him away.

I don't want to let go.

"Are you okay now Mr Zulu?"-nurse

She sounds a little sarcastic.

Qhawe doesn't answer her, he's still looking at the baby.

"What happened?" I ask.

There's a brief smirk on the nurse's face.

"He fainted. He saw the head coming out and he fainted," she says, takes the baby and leaves.

Whaaaaat?

"You fainted??? What happened to the car thief taxi driver thug who got me pregnant?"

The door opens and the whole of Mbumba walks in, big eyes and all.

I'm not looking forward to when his brothers find out about the faking, they are going to laugh at him for the next 20 years.

They're looking around the ward.

"They've taken him for feeding," Qhawe

They look disappointed.

"I have the clothes,"-Ukham

Oh yah I forgot my baby had no clothes.

"You can take them to the nurses, tell them they are for baby Sbophi Zulu,"-me

Silence. Awkward silence.

Ntate is here. I'm only seeing him now.

The look on his face!

There's a two-plate stove on top of a small cupboard. Somewhere there is a basin full of unwashed dishes. That's the kitchen, it begins and ends there. In front of us is a curtain, or what is supposed to be a curtain. It separates the shack into two rooms.

"I don't think there's someone here," Lesodi says.

Qhawe rubs his hands together.

"Don't worry someone will walk in anytime from now," he says.

Yeah but we are sitting in someone's house, and they're not even here.

"I came from this. I grew up in a place like this so I know the life," he says.

My sisters don't understand.

I remember he said when they arrived in Joburg they lived in an informal settlement with a certain woman they shared a surname with.

There are people talking outside, women, and they are coming here.

"Whose car is this?" one asks in SePedi.

"It's the police," another says.

Police? It's a Range Rover.

"What do they want from Bettina?" another

There are three of them.

No actually it sounds like a lot of them. It sounds like a crowd has gathered outside.

There are two standing at the door with their hands on their hips, looking at us like we are aliens.

"Where is Bettina?" one asks. She has pantyhose on her head and is wearing only a skirt which could be mistaken for a dress because she's pulled it up to her chest.

But...who is Bettina? Tshedi said our mother's name was Matobello.

We don't answer, simply because we don't know the answer.

"We're looking for her too," Qhawe says

I did say he knew everything about this place and what we are about to experience.

"Bettina!" the same woman shouts.

No answer.

"Bettina!" she shouts again, coming in this time.

She opens the curtain and I get a glimpse of a bed.

"Bettina wake up!" she shouts.

She's here?

Another woman comes in, walks past us and straight to the "bedroom".

"Aish...pull her from that side," - we hear her say.

She's being pulled out of bed? Is she sick?

"Bettina!"

It sounds like they're slapping her now.

I hear a "mummmmmmm".

"There are people here looking for you, wake up!"

This is not what I expected at all.

I wish Qhawe could hold my hand but I know he's going to make me do this on my own.

We wait while the women try to convince her to put on something presentable, she's been swearing at them since she woke up and started talking.

When the curtain finally opens one of the women comes and stands at the center

I also have my own problems, my father has a serious issue with his grandchild being named after a famous killer, or that he hasn't been to the North West since he was born, or that he doesn't have a single Tswana name.

But I'm a mother now, my priorities have changed, and so the number of battles I find worth fighting has dropped.

We turn right after a sign that reads Zandspruit. It hasn't even been ten minutes since we left Omphi's house in Northridge.

I assume that there's a short-cut going through this very overcrowded informal settlement which will take us to wherever we are going.

Qhawe reaches my hand and squeezes it. He's communicating, I think he's telling me to be strong.

We turn left on the next street. There are people, too many people doing too many things. Every business is run from a shack, be it a hair salon, a shebeen a Pakistanti shop...everything! It's shacks everywhere!

"Is this where...?" Omphi is the first to ask.

I was about to ask too.

Qhawe nods.

This is where our mother lives? Ten minutes away from Omphi's house?

My gut tells me Qhawe has been here before because he is just driving, he's not asking anyone for directions. He knows exactly where we are going and he knows exactly what we are going to find there.

I expected a lot of things but not this, especially not this tin shack we've just parked in front of.

He looks at me, and then turns to look at my sisters at the back.

"I'm going to go in with you. But, I will leave as soon as you start talking to her."

Omphi gulps.

"No don't worry I'll wait for you here, outside, I won't leave you," he says.

Whew!

There is a group of kids gathered next to the car when we come out, we don't know where they came from. Some of them look like they haven't taken a bath in days.

"Hello." Qhawe greets them, with a big smile. He even shakes one's hand. Call me a snob but I'm not touching any of them.

He leads, we follow.

He knocks, but the door is already open, that's if you can call what we see here a door.

Tsbedi has been too quiet, which is strange because she's the free spirit of the family.

Lusedi is...I'm unable to figure her out right now, but her face is hard!

Omphi looks disgusted. Me, I'm shocked and lost.

There is one very old sofa, it looks like it has a hole where there is supposed to be a cushion.

Qhawe pulls an empty beer crate from somewhere and sits.

We are still standing. The truth is, we are royalty, we are princesses and no matter how much we want to be humble, we can never humble ourselves enough to be able to adjust to what we are seeing here.

It's just not happening.

We are inside. But we haven't seen anyone.



always thought I would ask have suddenly escaped me, they are not relevant anymore. I don't want to know, whatever happened, I don't want to know about it.

From what I know, she was fine when she left my father. She was a smart woman with class and grace. So I'm thinking that whatever happened to her to make her end up like this had nothing to do with my father. She must have lost herself along the way.

"Why did you leave?"-Omphfi

Does it matter anymore? The person she's asking doesn't look bothered at all.

"Where is your father?" she asks just after burping again.

The two women are seated next to her. They look surprised, shocked that "Bettina" has daughters, daughters like us.

She hasn't answered the question.

"Ntate is fine, he's at home. Why did you leave us?"-Lesedi

He's pointless really. She's not showing any remorse at all, there is just no emotion in her.

"Do you have children...?" -another.

Omphfi takes a deep sigh, she's getting irritated.

"Why did you abandon us? I asked you that question please answer!"-Omphfi

She frowns. I see a bit of me there somewhere. We do look alike, or at least we used to look alike before life dealt with her.

"Abandoned you? How did I abandon you?"

She mustn't do this! We didn't come all the way here to hear her deny doing us wrong.

"You left us and never came back. What kind of a mother leaves her four children just like that? Who do you think was taking care of us?"-Tshedi, she's still teary.

I'm not there yet.

She raises one hand and puts the almost empty beer bottle on the floor.

"Don't come here and accuse me of things please..."

"Bettina the children want to know..."

"Hey hey! Do you want me to stab you?" she asks pointing a finger at this woman.

"I said to you this is my house, and these are my daughters. This is my business. Do you know them?"

The woman shakes her head.

"Good," she says and comes back to looking at the four of us.

"What do you mean I abandoned you?"

She's in denial I see.

"Did I leave you on the side of the road? Did I leave you in an orphanage...or dump you under a bridge or something?" she asks, drunken tone and all.

Sigh.

"No I didn't do that, I left you at your home, with your people, the people you share a surname with. You are related to them, not me. You are all Mchashes and I'm the one that is not royalty, or Tswana or good enough for your father."

Is that why she left us? Because of the in-laws?

"I don't understand this "abandon" word that you are using Omphemetse. I left you with your family, not my family, your family. What was I supposed to do? Take you with me? Your father and I would have divorced eventually, we were never going to last, one of us was always going to leave. If I had taken you with

of the room. The second one follows her and then...

I hear my sisters gulping.

She is definitely our mother. I don't remember her but I know she is our mother.

She's standing with her hands on her hips and is looking at all four of us.

Qhawe looks at me briefly, I think he's telling me this is his cue to leave.

I don't want him to leave.

She's still just standing, even her eyes going through all four of us. It's like she doesn't see Qhawe at all.

"Matshediso," she says, finally. She's looking at Tshedi.

Qhawe tries to stand up but I grab his arm and hold on to it for dear life.

"Naledi, no I'm going."

He can't leave me here!

"I'll be outside," he says.

No! He is the only thing that makes sense to me right now. He can't leave.

"Led!"-Lesedi says and holds my hand. Let him go.

After what felt like years, she pulls a chair and sits.

It's one of those plastic chairs, I don't know where it came from.

She's sitting next to that only cupboard, and she's still looking at us.

We don't know what to say.

She opens the cupboard and pulls something out.

"Bettina, not now," one of the women says.

It's a beer, a sort of Castle Milk Stout.

We look at each other.

"Bettina..."

"Voetsuk!!" she shouts.

And then she opens the beer bottle with her teeth...

"I will stab you, this is my house," she says to the two women before taking the first sip, straight from the bottle.

She burps.

"Lesedi," she says looking at her.

We're still quiet.

"Omphemetse," she says and takes another sip.

She looks at me longer than the others.

I'm beginning to think she doesn't remember my name.

"Naledi,"

I'm not sure anymore if coming here was a good idea.

She looks...ravaged. It's like she's given up on life altogether, in fact it looks like she gave up a long time ago. To say that her face is evidence of a drinking problem would be an understatement. It's like she washes her face with alcohol every day.

"These are my daughters," she says.

Tshedi breaks. She's the first to break.

"You have daughters?" one of the women asks.

I feel neither love nor hate for her. Like I always say, I don't know her.

"Don't say my dear," one of the women says to Tshedi.

Mother is still sipping and burping. She's drinking that beer like it is water.

We are probably supposed to be comforting Tshedi, or even crying too. But...

The funny thing is that I don't want any answers from her, all the questions I

Naledi

me, we would be sitting here asking your father why he "abandoned" you," she says.

The sad thing about all this is she sees nothing wrong with what..

"I'm not saying I was right, no. I'm not saying that. What I'm saying is that you all turned out right, you look like you have good lives, so I don't understand why you are stressing yourselves about the past," she says.

These women here have stopped trying to reprimand her. She is who she is, I have accepted this.

"Who do you live with here?" I ask.

This is the first time I've said anything.

She looks at me from head to toe, and smiles. Some teeth are missing.

"You look just like me," she says.

I feel a wave of emotion, for the first time. I look outside. The car is still there, Chance is still here.

It's clear we are not going to get any answers from her, not today. She still hasn't answered my question.

Does she live with a man? Does she have other children? How did she end up here? Like this.

"We have four children, I have two, Lesedi has one and Naledi had her first child recently," Tshedi says.

I'd forgotten she asked us if we had children.

All I know is I don't want this woman in my son's life. I don't care that she gave birth to me, I don't want her and that's it.

"That is nice, I have grandchildren," she says to these two women next to her.

They are still shocked as hell.

"We didn't know she had children, or any family for that matter. She's been living here, alone, for years," one woman says.

But why?

"Have you ever thought about going back home? To your family?" Lesedi asks her.

She shakes her head and drinks up what's left of her beer.

"What home?" she asks.

And then she pulls a R20 from her boots.

"Get me another beer," she says giving it to one of the women.

I guess then this is her life, this is how she lives and she doesn't care at all if the world is judging her.

I've seen enough I think. I don't care to know more. Whatever it is that brought her here had nothing to do with me or my sisters.

"I live ten minutes away from here," Ouphi says to her.

I don't think she cares at all.

"Oh really? Where?" she asks.

Wow. She's interested in something.

"Northriding, Silverlakes Estate," Ouphi.

She frowns.

"Oh, the one close to the shopping centre, I used to work in one of the houses there as a domestic worker," she says.

A domestic worker? She has a degree.

Ouphi breaks, she's the second one to break.

I'm not there yet. I don't think I'm going to get there today.

"I found the letter you wrote before you left,"-Lesedi says.

We all look at her. What letter? How come we don't know anything about a letter?

"You know what the great thing is?" Lesedi.

She raises her eyebrows, she's showing interest.

"The great thing is that ntate still loved me like I was his own. He loves me with all his heart and I'm glad that you are the one that tell not him. Your life now, this..." Lesedi says looking around the shack.

"You deserve it, you deserve all of it..." she says.

No wait, what does she mean ntate loved her like she was her own?

"Lesedi?"-Tshedi

What is Lesedi talking about?

"I don't know about you but I'm done here. I'm ready to go,"-i-Lesedi

No, she just dropped a bomb here!

"You will never understand, and I'm not going to try to make you understand," mother says.

The beer arrives. She opens it with her teeth again.

Qhawe walks in. I think he's been worried about what is happening here.

He looks at all four of us.

Tshedi and Omphi are emotional. Lesedi and I, well, we just want to get out of here.

Qhawe stands next to me and holds my hand. There is nowhere for him to sit.

"I want to go home," I look up at him and say.

That's what I want, to go home to my son, to call my father and tell him that I love and appreciate him, to start my life with my husband, to do introspection and to let go of the anger I've held for so many years for a woman who doesn't care about me.

I want to live and I want to be free.

Lesedi is the first to stand up, I follow.

We leave her still sitting there, sipping beer and swearing at anyone who speaks.

If this was supposed to be closure, then closure is what I got.

This chapter is closed.

"Lesedi," - Tshedi says as we drive out of the yard.

"I'll tell you all about it, but not now, I can't now," Lesedi.

This is going to be the most painful thing about this reunion, truths. Truths that should have remained buried.

The ten minutes back to Northriding are silent.

"Qhawe, thank you for this, thank you very much," Tshedi says when they get out of the car.

We don't talk about when we will see each other again.

Now it's just the two of us

"How are you doing?" he asks.

How am I doing? I don't know

"I'm fine. I don't want to see her again,"

He takes my hand and kisses it.

I look into his eyes.

He puts his arm around my shoulders and rests my head on his left shoulder.

"I'm fine with whatever you decide," he says.

said

Now I can focus on moving forward.

"Lesedi is not Ntate's daughter," I say.

Maybe I shouldn't tell him this but I rely so much on him for everything, emotionally, somehow he always knows what to do.

"Mmmmmmm," he says.

I know that "mmmmmm". It means he knows.

"How did you know Chawo?"

He brushes my arm.

"I had a talk with Ntate," he says.

Ntate. This must have been really painful for him.

"When?"

He takes a deep breath. I know what that means, he doesn't want me to know.

"I don't remember, some time ago. He asked me if it was a good idea to let you and your mother, he wanted advice. So I explained a few things to him and he understood why it was important for you to do this."

Okay.

"Explained a few things?" I ask.

He doesn't answer immediately but I know he's thinking, probably trying to find an easier way to say what he wants to say.

"Yes, I explained how this whole thing about your mother affected you and our relationship in the beginning. How you are quick to walk away from people and things because you expect them to disappoint you or leave you in the end."

I never saw it like that, not even once. In fact, I've been convinced all my life that my mother's absence had very little effect on how I turned out.

"Is that what it is? This? My mother? Did it have that much effect on me?"

Why am I asking him this? Why have I never looked at myself and tried to figure out why I am the way I am?

He nods.

"I think so. Not that there is something wrong with you, you're perfect baby, you're perfect for me because you are open and emotional. You let me in. I don't have to figure you out, you show yourself to me, the good and the bad," he says.

He does know me better than I know myself.

"How did you find her?"

I'm asking too many questions aren't I?

He kisses my forehead.

"Mpande, he's good at tracking people."

That means all his brothers know about my dead-mother.

I won't ask how she ended up like this but I have a feeling he knows, Ntate told him what happened.

"I can't wait for us to move to our new house,"-me  
I'm random, I know.

He pushes my face up and looks into my eyes.

It's probably about my sudden change of topic.

"We're moving forward Chawo. I want us to focus on the future, you, me and Shopho, that's the future."

He's quiet.

Oh I forgot, and the 21 other people.

When I think about those two months that I wasted thinking I had left him. I ask

myself why I was so stupid.

I love this man with everything I have. It's not just his good looks and his success and his status and amazing sex, it's the wisdom that he carries naturally. The way he looks at life, his simple soul, his generosity and his love for me. It's beautiful.

The glass house. We're not going to sell it but we are definitely vacating it soon. It's just going to be here, empty, just like my house in Kimberley.

"I'm going to miss the glass house, it has so many memories," I say.

"Good and bad hey," him.

Yes. Good and bad.

We confirmed our relationship in that house, made love for the first time in that house, lost our baby in that house, broke up in that house, got back together in that house, it is our first child's first home...

"I can't believe I once left you..." I say.

I expect him to laugh and make some silly joke about it.

But he's hard-faced.

"I knew you'd come back. You love me, I've always known that. Do you remember when you came to my house for the first time..."

I nod.

"And you asked me why I did 'this' to you?"

I remember that.

"You said I had made you love me, and I believed you," he says.

Maybe that's why he's been patient with me. But, I've also been patient with him, the guy is a screw up. He once walked into my father's house like a big-eyed fool. Oh and he kicked me out of his house when I was pregnant.

I suggested that we rent my Kimberley house out but he said no, he doesn't want strangers in our property. So now, it's registered under a Trust along with many other things.

We're home.

He gets out of the car very quick. I'm used to it.

I must accept that I'm not number-one in this union anymore.

He's awake.

Hlonani is looking at me like she's trying to figure me out.

"It went well," I say.

Um-ying, I still have to lock myself in the bedroom and let it all out. I have to come to terms with the Lesedi situation. I have to call my dad.

They came here in the morning to babysit while we went on this difficult journey. We didn't even ask them, they volunteered because Mqhele believes Shopho is his fourth child, he loves him that much.

I've always found him to be the most interest but I see a totally different side of him when he is with the kids.

"Here is your fainting father," he says handing the baby to Qhawe.

That has become a family joke. There's a video but nobody knows about it except us.

Qhawe organised that the whole process be documented but he didn't tell me about it, he said he wanted to make it a surprise. And now, he doesn't want us to watch it because I end up laughing at him. Things were going fairly smooth until that nurse called him to "see". From then, things went laywire. There is a point where he is wearing an enamel bowl over his head, yes the one we use in hospitals

dale01

to sterilise equipment. Then, those him (at) when he started patting up and down the ward screaming with his hands over his head.

"MaMonshe." - Mqhele.

I expect him to ask something but he doesn't, he just looks at me. The look in his eyes says he's asking something, I know what it is.

"Too fine, I'm glad I did it and I think I've found closure," I say.

He nods.

Shopho is on his father's chest. He won't last long, it happens all the time. He listens to his father's heartbeat and falls asleep.

Next step is Mbuba next weekend. We are doing a small traditional ceremony for Shopho. Apparently he has to be introduced to the ancestors since he was born before we get married.

It's a goat thing.

# Thirty

I've lost only 5kg.

Okay, I lost most of the baby-fat in the first four months after giving birth, and then Lloyd started making my wedding dress, it was perfect.

I went for a final fitting two weeks ago. It was a little tight.

Today, it is really tight.

"Tuck your stomach in, it's going to fit, we will not be defeated by a dress!"

I will be dead by the end of today I swear!

"Here!"-Lloyd walks in and throws something at me.

"It's a waist-trainer, wear it under the dress," he says.

Oh wow! Now I have to take it off and start all over again?

"I don't judge people for being big but you, I should be slapping your face right now,"-Lloyd.

Ugh!

And where are my sisters?

I'm being abused by these two guys here when they should be here helping me put this wedding dress on.

I haven't finished doing my hair and make up and I'm left with just two hours before the wedding starts.

I know that Qhawe is ready wherever he is. I haven't seen him since breakfast this morning although we are all staying in this hotel.

This is our second wedding. The first was in the North West last weekend, a traditional Tswana wedding.

Everyone, and I mean everyone showed up, even the dandachag who got my husband beaten up by my father was there acting important.

There were various completely different crowds. Tswana royalty, taxi industry royalty, money royalty and Mbuba in large numbers.

I don't think the family invites any of their business associates to private family functions except the taxi people. Oh and the family tokoloshe, Peter.

It was a beautiful ceremony and my father looked happy to give me away. But I know Qhawe didn't really see it as his wedding. His wedding is next weekend, at his home, in Mbuba.

Today, well, it's just to make me happy because you know, every girl wants to be in a white dress and look glamorous and take beautiful pictures on one special day.



Oh, another guy comes in.

"What is going on? You're sweating," he says to Langa.

He's sweating alright. He's been jumping and pulling and pushing to try and be my dress at the back.

"Here, it's your turn," he says to Tsietzi.

The dress is beautiful, more beautiful than I imagined it.

It's mermaid-shaped.

I wanted a big skirt but Langa talked me out of it.

I'm just standing here trying to imagine what the venue looks like after the decorating. I wonder if the food is going to be nice. I wonder how many people will show up. I wonder if they will dress up and look nice like I specified in the invitation.

We chose Isibaya Casino. Actually I chose Isibaya Casino. No it was Tshedii.

She saw pictures of some wedding on the internet and decided it was exactly the place "she wanted".

I hate to admit it but she was right, it is exactly what I want too.

"Where is your maid-of-honor?" Langa

I don't know. Where is my mother? I call her mother in my head, but when I'm addressing her I call her Mine Menkwa.

I talk to her a lot. We've been so really close since I had the baby. She was at my house for the first two weeks and I must say, I would have really struggled without her.

Ever since that day of my biological mother, whom I don't plan on seeing again, and the birth of my son, my look at life is totally different. I don't do petty any more. I don't flinch at things that are less important. I've learned to listen and think before reacting and I've learned not to judge.

Just now I'm going to be officially someone's wife. I'm going to be officially a Zulu. Mbuba is going to be my home now and Gshawe is going to be my husband. My loving husband who treats me like I'm perfect in every possible way.

My dad, he calls the baby "boy" because he just can't get himself to say "Sbuphe".

He doesn't approve and he is disappointed that I allowed it to happen. He says the child is going carry a stigma with him all his life.

But I think he's overreacting, the children of that family know who they are and they are not ashamed of it.

I've made peace with that they are going to raise him a certain way, but I find joy in knowing that he is going to be loved and protected and taught values. He's going to be part of a family that excels in everything. He is going to know who he is and he is going to be proud of his identity.

This waist-trainer thing is really working. I thought it was going to tie my intestines but no, I feel more comfortable than I expected.

"Whew! My work here is done, I need just one flute of champagne," Langa says picking up a bottle.

They left three bottles here and the first thing Ekhomu did when she walked in earlier was open one and drink.

She said she was going to check on the venue when she left but she never came back, and the venue is downstairs.

"We have two hours, I suggest we do make-up at least 45 minutes before the wedding starts,"-Lloyd.

It's cold, so I'm not sure what inspired his suggestion but I'm in no position to argue.

"You look beautiful," Tsistsi says, randomly.

I smile.

I called him a few days after that mother episode. When he was cold towards me Qhawe called him. A few days later he showed up at the glass house with baby clothes.

I laughed when Qhawe reminded me how many times he told me Tsistsi was gay and I denied it.

I have time to spare.

"Guys, I'm going to go across the corridor. I want to see my dad before everything starts," I say.

Lloyd doesn't look happy. He must be worried that I'm going to mess the dress before people see it. Forget that I paid him thousands for it so basically it is my dress.

When news broke that we were getting married, I was flooded by calls from designers offering to make my dress, some for free.

But, Lloyd is practically family, and he doesn't ask, he tells you that he's making you a dress.

We accepted an offer from a TV show, a lifestyle show to cover this wedding ceremony. The traditional two was a no, Qhawe wouldn't allow it, but with this one, since he doesn't care much about it anyway, he easily agreed.

I hope I'll find Nate alone in his room because I want him to be honest with me. I want him to complain if he wants to and tell me whatever he wants to tell me.

Great, he's here, the door is slightly open. But...he's with someone. There are voices coming from inside.

It's Qhawe's voice...

I stop.

"Yes, I understand nate."-Qhawe.

Nate: "Take care of my girls Zai'n, all five of them. No actually all eight of them, I don't trust Nello at all.

Huh?

"I'll do that nate, I'll do that,"-Qhawe.

What are they talking about?

"We must go now, I hope Naledi is ready..."

Oh shit!

I make it back to my room before they get to the passage.

"And then?"-Langa.

I'm trying to catch my breath.

"I need to use the loo," I say.

The door opens.

"You don't look ready," nate says.

He's right, I don't.

What did he mean Qhawe must take care of his girls?

Tseddi is the first to walk in with her dress in a suit-cover over her arm. The rest follows and it's chaos all over.

Nate is gone by the time I lock up.

"Niya and Agape are with their granmas, they'll dress them up," Lasedi.

Oh yah, the flower girls.

Xolile is here so that means the babies are somewhere with their grannies too. Nkosane named Xolile's baby Nsingizi. Apparently it's a special kind of bird that was known for communicating messages between the heavens and the people. They said when Nsingizi was heard singing, it meant that rain was coming. I don't know if the bird still exists.

We call him Nsingi.

The make-up lady is here. I don't know her, she's one of Uloyal's people.

Our rings are custom-made. His is a simple silver band, mine is a band with just one diamond. Yes, it did cost almost half-a-million like Gugu once warned me.

Where is my phone? I've just heard it beeping.

Oh. Here.

"I love you big forehead"

And then he makes me blush with all this make-up on my face.

"I love you too big-eyed fainting thing."

I know his response is going to be simple, I just know it.

**"And just for that, I'm going to fuck you until your knees break tonight."**

I told you.

He was here last night. We were supposed to sleep in separate rooms but he said he missed his son. So I had to kick everyone out with their alcohol. As soon as the baby fell asleep we put him in the bedroom and he chased me all over this hotel room.

It reminds me of the time we started having sex again, which was just days after I gave birth. He wanted it all the time, everywhere.

Everybody is ready.

I look great if I may say so myself.

Mme is here.

"Let's say a prayer," she says.

Totally expected of her.

She prays, we listen.

I'm just going to block that conversation I overheard. I'll push it back until my wedding day is over.

"They are already waiting. The priest is here," she says.

We had to fly a priest from my father's church all the way from North West to Durban.

I'm ready.

"You're still going to come home often right?"

Ntate though. He's supposed to be quiet and walking me down the aisle but he's busy whispering instructions to me.

"Yes ntate, I'll come home."

"Okay good. You're going to tell me if he mistreats you right?"

Really? I thought he trusted him.

"Yes, I'll tell you."

We're almost there.

Qbwe is standing with his brothers, Mqhele next to him. The boys are, Sango and

They are standing with them.  
The boys are all page-boys, Sizakele is playing the piano  
Yes, it looks like a choir.  
The closer I get to the love of my life the more my heart pounds.  
This is us, the crazy duo, we made it this far.  
My dad is holding my hand very tight.  
"I hope you still remember those slaps," he whispers to Qhawe.  
He smiles and nods.  
My dad lets go.  
I take my man's hand.  
"You're beautiful," he whispers.  
We're not supposed to be talking, the priest is right in front of us and everybody  
is watching us.  
I squeeze his hand.  
These tiffany chains remind me of that afternoon where I had to run around like a  
headless chicken to prepare for a taxi association meeting.  
They are here, all those taxi people, they are here with their Brentwoods and  
leather jackets.  
We're holding hands as the priest speaks. He keeps squeezing mine tight.  
"You're wearing them?" I whisper.  
He smiles and nods. He knows what I'm talking about.  
It feels like a long time ago since I gave him these cuff-links for his birthday.  
It's time for the vows. We stand up.  
I'll go first, no, he'll go first.  
He says them with such sincerity and I know he means every word.  
He promises to love and cherish and provide...  
"Yeeesss." Tshedzi says out loud when that word "provide" is said.  
People must be allowed to choose family. God must make it like that.  
It's my turn.  
"Naledi Momo, do you take Qhawe Zulu to be your wedded husband...to love  
him, comfort him, honor and keep him for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in  
sickness and health...?"  
I do. I agree to all of it.  
But I have more.  
I raise my hand to stop the priest.  
The pause on his face!  
"Can I...?" I ask.  
He hands me the microphone.  
I didn't plan this but I have to tell him. I'm going to speak from my heart.  
  
"Change,"  
Everybody laughs. Too fast.  
Oh, it's the "Change" thing  
  
"My love. My husband. Father of my child. My everything."  
Silence.  
"If I said I loved you I'd be lying. What I feel for you is more than just love, it  
cannot be described in words or measured by how many times I tell you so how

Naieli

*much I try to show you. My life changed the moment I stopped fighting it and admitted to myself that I was not complete without you. The first time we met, I wanted to strangle you..."*

Laughter.

*"And later on I realized that everything I was going through at that time was part of the journey to you. I was there, at that mall in Kimberley, on that day because it was God's plan that I'd meet the love of my life right at that moment. The best thing that has ever happened to me, the best and strongest love I've ever experienced. A beautiful and wise and intelligent man who has a good heart and who gives meaning to the word selflessness."*

He is looking into my eyes. I can see deep his soul. He's looking deep into mine.

*"You've loved me for who I am from the beginning. I'm beautiful and I believe that now because of you, because you let me know every chance you get and because you show me how beautiful I am. You see me, you talk to me, you put me first, most of the time before yourself."*

*"I'm thankful to God for many things, but mostly for giving me a great man like you to love me. For giving my son a great father and for trusting me enough to put me in charge of your heart and your well being."*

He's blinking, a lot.

*"You made me quit my job and made me pregnant very quickly and..."*

Laughter

He's also laughing.

*"But...you were worth it all. I'd do it all over again. I'd block your car at the mall and throw your flowers out the windows and leave you hanging again... just to be with you, here, at this moment."*

Okay now I'm getting emotional because he's crying.

*"Thank you for your patience Maseho. For not giving up on me, on us, and for doing everything you can to make me happy. Thank you. And yes, I do take you as my husband, my soulmate, my big eyes, my love, until death do us part"*

I can't continue...

I give the microphone back to the priest.

There's a long silence.

"Kings please,"-priest.

Oh, we have to put on rings by the way.

Sblanga is the ring-bearer. I hope he didn't chew them.

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"Chawe don't let him eat that,"

As to why Sangu is sitting with us at the table when he should be there with other guests, I don't know.

He took him from Mama when we entered the reception hall.

"It's food," he says.

Yes I know but...

"He's five months old Chawe he can't eat meat,"

We've been married for a few hours and already we are having "married couple fights".

Ngobho is also not helping with his long speech. He's all about how he met Qhawe when he was a young boy and how, from that young age, he proved to be a great thinker.

It's a great speech but I don't trust Ngobho, he seems like a chauvinist.

Tsietzi is the next speaker, I wonder what he is going to say.

He clears his throat before he speaks.

"Qhawe and I hated each other at first. We were basically fighting over Naledi,"

Oh no!

"Naledi and I have been best friends for years so you will understand why I thought it was my duty to protect her. I was convinced that Qhawe was no good, that he was going to break her heart and leave me to pick up the pieces. There were times where I thought it was going there, but he kept proving me wrong time and time again. I remember this one time, I'm not sure if Naledi remembers but I pointed out to her that she did not complain about being overweight as much as she used to, and she said to me "Qhawe loves my body".

He looks at me and squeezes my hand.

This is sweet of Tsietzi, although I know that if Qhawe put one foot wrong he will hate him again.

The nice thing about afternoon weddings is that people leave, they go home, early.

The hall starts clearing after dinner is served.

The wives of this family and my sisters have gathered in one place, featuring the guys.

There's Ndlovu too, Langa is interrogating her. She was unlucky enough to be asked to fetch Hlonu's aunt from KwaMashu this morning. The experience, as she described it, was traumatic.

She told her not to give Mpenda sex until he pays lobola.

My husband is talking to people, I don't know them.

His brothers are gathered at the bar, drinking of course.

"I made it," she says.

Where did she come from?

I hear a spoon dropping, it's Hlonu's.

She's here? The wedding is already over.

Hlonu puts her plate aside and looks at her. The look on her face says a lot.

"Hi ladies," she says.

She's still standing

Kolie frowns. She looks at Hlonu and then at Lerato.

They must be wondering who the heck this is now.

"Guys, this is my step sister Lerato Mlalo. She knows a lot about all of you, I

Naied.

guess she's a fool," I say jokingly.

Nobody is laughing. Oh well.

"Why are you so late anyway?" Babedi asks Lerato.

She looks at Hlonu and smiles.

"I was here. Okay I missed the ceremony but I made it to the reception. I was sitting there at the back," she says.

I didn't see her at all.

Something is going on here. I don't know what it is but there's something going on.

"Lerato?"

And who is this now?

Lerato's eyes are all over the place. She looks uncomfortable and anxious.

"I thought you were bluffing. Oh my God! Send your manuscript! We will gladly publish your book. I didn't know your book was based on personal encounters with the Xulus," she says.

It's a white woman. I don't know her.

She leaves.

Hlonu's face!

Lerato has a book?

Qhawe pulls me away from whatever it is that is happening here.

"I want my wife to myself now," he says.

There are a few people left. The granies left a long time ago with the kids.

Hlonu's cousin is at the bar. He came with a woman. Comphi is just going to have to be strong because I told her to stay away from this guy.

"Let's sneak out of here."

Yeah. I know exactly what we're going to do.

He's holding my dress up as we climb the stairs.

Our room is only two floors up.

"Today was great," he says closing the door.

It was perfect.

"I loved your vows," he says.

I blush.

He hugs me.

"So how are you? Are you good?"

Yes.

"I'm good, really good and just pregnant that's all,"

"What?? Again??"

# Thirty One

**W**hat did you do Miquqi?"  
He's still not talking. He keeps rubbing the palms of his hands together.

He walked in here like a crazy man and now he's just sitting on my couch and not talking?

"Tell me what you did so I know how to help you."

He raises his eyes.

"I don't want help Mama."

I'm supposed to be at Zandile's house and he's supposed to be wherever his brothers are, but he's here, on my couch, looking like he just did something evil. We have enough troubles with that girl thinking she's going to publish a book about us without our consent. The bitch doesn't even know us.

And by the way, that could have something to do with why Miquqi is here. She is his ex.

"You can talk to me," I say.

I know this behaviour, Mphahle brings it home sometimes and I always know he did something bad when he behaves like this.

"Is it about this book thing? Don't worry about that, we'll close the publishing company down if we have to," I say.

He's acting really strange.

He looks at me briefly.

"Don't worry about that, there will be no book," he says.

But...

"I had a talk with her," he says.

Huh?

"A talk?"

He doesn't respond.

"A talk Miquqi?"

Silence.

Please land! Please tell me this is not what I think it is!





"Why does it always have to come down to women?"

Wisdom has come back.

"It doesn't always come down to women, it comes down to what you want. What do you want Mqoqi..?"

"I want you!"

Excuse me?

"You heard me. I want you Mqoqi, that's what I want."

I take a few steps back, there's a wall behind me.

I have to say something but...he's going to say he's joking, I know he is.

He's not joking.

"Is that why you came here?"

I'm looking into his eyes and I see Mqhele. I see Mqhele when he was younger.

He has the same depth and mystery in his eyes. He has the same nicotine scent.

he is the same height and same size.

Why is he coming closer?

My back is pressed on the wall. I'm looking at his chest. I can feel the air he's breathing out over my head.

"Mqoqi, get away from me,"

He hasn't touched me, but he's too close.

He's silent but I can hear him breathing.

Suddenly he steps back.

"I didn't mean to say it out loud. I'm sorry. Mami," he says and walks out the door.

I'm still leaning against the wall. The bike takes off in high speed.

What just happened here?

Mqhele is home.

His face says he's about to ask something.

"Mqoqi was here looking for you. I think he did something to Lerato," I say before he asks.

I know he saw his bike somewhere on his way here.

"Shit! I told him not to go there," he says.

I hope they haven't graduated to murdering anything that upsets them, including women.

He calls him, his phone rings unanswered.

"You look...are you okay?" he asks

I'm not okay.

"I'm just worried. Mqoqi seemed...I think he did something to that girl,"-I'm lying.

He hugs me and kisses my forehead.

I couldn't care less about Lerato. My problem is...what am I going to do now?

How do I look at Mqoqi after tonight?

No, no!

Albany, Henry! He's shaking me.

"Your phone is ringing, where is it?" he asks.

I don't know, it's on the floor.

"Hi."

"Speaking.."

"What???"

I feel every single bone in my body trembling

No!

My hands are shaking.

"Henry, who's that? What's going on?"

No!!

I can't speak!

We're having another funeral.

Naledi His Love is the third of the Hlonu Series Books. The Story is pure fiction, but some of the places mentioned do exist. The Zala brothers, however, are a fiction of the author's imagination, but you are welcome to turn any man into one.



