

Dudu Busani-Dube

Naledi

His love

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.

“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 gossip 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?

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.

Noooooooo! 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.

“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 “ncoooohhhhhh”.

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.

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 nogal.

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.

"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....."

"Tsietsi 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.

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.

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.

—————

“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 pulls 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 byeeeeeeeeeeee’,”

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 ‘whooooosaaaa’

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!

"Arrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr" 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! Whyyyyyyyyyyy???

“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!

"Tsietsi please open,"

"Open what?"

"The gate Tsietsi, 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 Tsietsi. 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.

“Tsietsi 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.

"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.

"Chawe 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....

“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

Screeeechhhhh.....

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.

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 makgaba(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 makgaba, 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 Tsietzi 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 ntate, 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 Qhawé 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.

“Naledi, 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 ntate, 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?

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...

"Ahhhhhh...."

“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.

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 him. 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 your 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.

Errrrrr 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 after all.

Now I have to watch him eat because he can't finish his sentences, he keeps popping spoonfuls 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.....

I'm not sure anymore if taking the advise 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 atleast 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.

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 at 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.

“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.

Awwwwwww.....

"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

Ummmmmm

"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!!!!

Urghhhhhhhh!!!

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.....

"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?

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.

Hmmmmmmmm.

"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 30th 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 30th, 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 30th. 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.

Omphi 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 30th 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?

"Tsietso 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, ntate 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 ntate 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 ntate 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.

My phone.

“Chawe?”

“Shhhhhhhhh....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.

"Mmmmmmmm," 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.....

"Mmmmmmmmm,"

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"

"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 ntate 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 ntate 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 ntate,” -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.

Whaaaaaaaaat???

“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

“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”

“Ohhhhhhh” 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!!

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1.



ur work is amazing cc Dudu, I'm addicted to ur books, well done.

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[posted September 23, 2015 at 6:20 pm by Naledi last QZ Reply](#)



2.

I love this, qhawe is my favourite zulu brother, naledi needs to be strong, the is more to come I can just feel it.

[Like](#)Like

[posted September 23, 2015 at 8:38 pm by Nelly Reply](#)



3.

At first didn't make sense why the twins were separated but when I read it again I realised this is Mabutho hence Qhawe didn't want to say the name and the Zulu's knew Naledi can't tell who is who so she was their best option coz she won't ask too many questions and won't notice much hahahaha izigebengu zamadoda weeeee hhayi shem kanti kwenzeka kanje

[Like](#)Like

[posted September 23, 2015 at 9:25 pm by Phozisa Reply](#)



o

Now that you mention it, n he also said he is 6 and the twins are 7... hehehe amadoda nkosi yam

[Like](#)Like

[posted September 24, 2015 at 6:01 am by Phumzile in reply to PhozisaReply](#)

4.



Lovely read. I think Qhawe and Naledi's love is rare and real... as for Mrs Dynamite she must just be strong, her weight will be the media's play ground.

[Like](#)Like

[posted September 24, 2015 at 6:05 am by Phumzile Reply](#)

5.



I need more from Qhawe and Naledi, amazing work..

[Like](#)Like

[posted September 25, 2015 at 8:22 am by Tammy Reply](#)

6.



Hi Dudu,

Your writing will be the death of me I tell you..You are too good. Keep up the good work.

Can you please confirm how we can get the rest of the book. I also have friends outside GP who are looking to buy the books. Please e-mail me your details so that I can confirm the number of copies. And how we can meet for collection am around Centurion also.

Anxiously waiting to hear from you.

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[posted September 28, 2015 at 9:53 am by Namile Reply](#)

7.



Something also strange is the child who looks like Hlomu in Lesedi's grade 9 class, could be Hlomu's sister hmmm

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[posted September 28, 2015 at 5:56 pm by Stha Reply](#)



8.

Aibo Qhawe has a child and who is the mother? I still love Hlomu though

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[posted October 1, 2015 at 11:07 am by Nomfundo Reply](#)



9.

Hayi this book is my first book to read and i am enjoying every charpter ,keep up the good work cc

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[posted October 13, 2015 at 2:12 am by ritta hadebe Reply](#)



10.

i am looking forward to the next book, i have read all 3 and now i want more please.

you are really good girl.

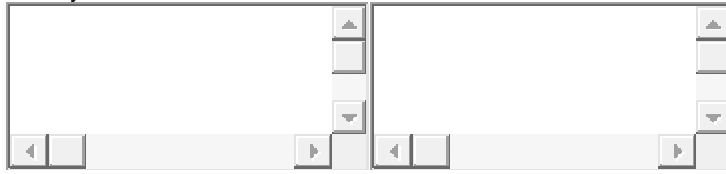
when can we expect the next book.

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[posted October 16, 2015 at 8:43 am by Fikiswa Mthethwa Reply](#)

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1.

M not new but I can read this everyday.

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2.

Hi Dudu,

Thanks for this.

Where can we get the rest of the book?

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[posted September 16, 2015 at 6:17 am by *brandedayanda* Reply](#)



It will be available at my book launch on September 26

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[posted September 16, 2015 at 7:29 am by *dudubusanidube* in reply to *brandedayanda*Reply](#)



3.

thank you so much Dudu.

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[posted September 16, 2015 at 7:13 am by *mnyamana* Reply](#)



4.

Ayeye! Yhuu this will keep me going 4 the next days! Read all chapters in 1 day!

Dudu the 26th is next week, what about Cape Town?

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[posted September 18, 2015 at 10:53 am by *Pam* Reply](#)



5.

I would love to buy all your books. Where do i get them in Pretoria

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[posted September 19, 2015 at 7:48 pm by Dineo Reply](#)



Hi Dino, I will be hosting a pop-up sale of all three book next Saturday in Centurion

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[posted September 19, 2015 at 8:34 pm by dudubusanidube in reply to DineoReply](#)



6.

I keep popping in hoping to find chapter 11 but dololo... Niway will wait for the full book.

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[posted September 23, 2015 at 12:33 pm by Phumzile Reply](#)



7.

Hi Dudu,I'm based in Mpumalanga so I couldn't make it to the pop up sale,is there a way I can buy the book and have it couried to me.

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Hi Stha. I have someone in Nelspruit. contact me on hlomuthewife@gmail.com

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8.



love ur work cc dudu kip it up.

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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

"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.

"Whaaaaat??" 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"

"Ohhhhhhh" 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 QHAWWE 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!!