



Chapter One: The Pressure

I had about six months left before I turned thirty, yet I had no child, no cat, no dog, and most certainly no husband.

Sometimes I wondered what happened to the life-plan I had in secondary school? You know, the ***"When I'm twenty-five I'll be***

living in a mansion, with my husband and two kids, driving a Range Rover" plan?

"What are you doing for your birthday Yaya?", my best friend Sindisiwe asked, disturbing my thoughts.

"I don't know... I haven't thought about it yet"

"You do realize that it's actually your crown birthday, right?" she asked and I nod, downing a glass of merlot.

"Maybe I should call Akho, you don't seem interested"

"I am" I said laughing, "I just... I have a lot going on right now Sindi, I'll probably think of something as it gets closer"

I was born on the 30th of March, so my coming 30th birthday would be my crown birthday, 30-30. I really had no plans, I was just frustrated. Sindisiwe was two years younger than I was, married, had three kids already and they were living their best lives. Akhonke who was my childhood friend was also married, had two kids and she was also living her best life. And then there was me, successful, beautiful, humble... No husband, no kids. *Kanti* how did this whole thing work?

I drove home that evening, after our drinks, feeling a bit frustrated. At the last traffic lights to my house, I saw a church poster about a revival-crusade that was coming to town in two weeks' time but I didn't really get all the details because the lights turned green while I was still reading so I drove off and

actually forgot about that. The post caught my attention because well, I grew up in church, my mother was a church treasurer for at least the five years I spent there. I later stopped attending church when I reached puberty, I got bored, and my church friends had no life. Every conversation revolved around the bible, cleaning the church, buying church clothes, going to outreaches. Some of them didn't even own a pair of jeans, who in their right minds don't own not even one pair of jeans?

I had received a call from my grandmother later that night asking the usual **"When are you getting married?"** and stating the never-ending tale: **"I got married when I was nineteen, your mother got married when she was 21, you're almost 30 and we still haven't seen a man pushing even a trolley walking in here."**

Those things were getting to me, and the worst part of it all I couldn't just blurt out to her or anyone else for that matter, that I almost got married three times already. The first time when I was 20, my college boyfriend wanted us to elope, I refused and he went ahead and married a white girl. They were still happily married. When I was 24 my *"fling"* got too attached and asked for my hand in marriage, I wasn't ready... Well I

wasn't serious about that relationship as a whole, he relocated and I never heard from him again. The last one, when I was 27... He came asking for my hand in marriage because his father wouldn't give him his shares unless he found a wife who would bare him a son to continue with the family lineage. Of course, I refused

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I had always said that I wanted to marry for love. Pure love, not money, not status but love.

Well... What if love didn't exist? But money and status did?

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Two weeks later on my way from work, I saw a tent structure at one of the nearest fields and a few teenagers handing out flyers at the same traffic lights so as I approached them I lowered my window and took one flyer. Ah, that revival. The pastor on the poster looked very handsome... I mean, very handsome.

"*Mh, Yandisa... Uzoya ecaweni girl!*"! (Mh, Yandisa... You're going to church girl) I said to myself smiling mischievously as I drove into my garage and parked. I freshened up and got into bed with a novel and a cup of coffee next to me, later on, I heard the church sound filling the neighborhood's atmosphere and then someone preached. I wasn't really listening to the preaching, but to the voice of the preacher. It was deep yet hoarse at the same time. When he hit low notes in his songs in between his word ministrations it sounded as though he was whispering.

On the third day of the revival I decided to attend, it started at 6 pm and I only walked in around 7 pm. I didn't want that whole noise of the dramatic "prayer warriors" , I just wanted to see the pastor... And maybe listen to the Praise and Worship team minister one or two songs. As I walked in, a young lady shook my hand smiling, I smiled back and she led me to the front row. I politely asked her if I could sit on the third row and she didn't seem to mind. Luckily for me the singers had already taken the stage, they were jumping up and down, waving their face cloths in the air... warming up? Maybe. I sat down and looked around, the place looked clean and beautiful. Well decorated, not too much on the Christmas lights around the stage and just enough draping at the back. They had a wooden backdrop where the pastor's seats were... No wait, I meant the

pastor's thrones. Everything looked neat. He must have good taste.

About thirty minutes later, he walked in. The whole tent shook as everyone started behaving as though they were seeing a celebrity of some sort. They were screaming, shouting, clapping, and throwing things around... Okay, maybe they were celebrating the man of the cloth. He walked straight to the thrones, the three ladies who walked in with him found seats on the front row. He knelt down and prayed, a few minutes

after that, he stood up and joined the rest of the congregation in worship.

He must have taken the mic to preach, I don't know when I was just glued to his body. Clothed in a Grey three-piece suit and white shirt, greyish black dotted tie and black shoes, he looked exquisite. I watched his biceps flex every time he lifted his arms, the grey fabric hugged at his thighs with every movement. I snapped out of it when our eyes locked, for a moment it seemed like it was just the two of us in that tent. I cleared my throat looking around but no one seemed to care

about what just happened. Which made me wonder, did we really just lock eyes or I was going crazy already?

After the closing prayer, the band started playing music and the young adults collected chairs, taking them to the already waiting bakkie. Other people were hugging and greeting each other so I guessed church was out. I grabbed my tablet and walked out, a bit disappointed that he disappeared within the crowd before I could catch one last glimpse of his handsome face.

"Molo sis'wam" (Hello my sister)

I turned to his hoarse voice behind me, he was smiling from ear to ear, offering me a handshake. I shook his hand, returning the favor.

"Hi mfundisi" (Hi Pastor)

"Uhamba nabani? Kurhatyele noko for uhamba wedwa" (Who did you come with? It's very late for you to go on your own) he asked, still smiling.

"I live just around the corner, thank you Pastor"

He spoke looking behind me unsure of what I had just said,
"Thank you for joining us tonight, we do hope to see you again"

"Absolutely Pastor, absolutely"

We both nod and then walked away from each other. I didn't walk home, I skipped.

Two: The Sweet Action Plan

After the tent/crusade had ended, I started attending church regularly. They had the main branch in Ghana and other sub-branches like this one all over South Africa. As I frequently attended church, I got used to the program, I got used to the once strange faces which were becoming familiar with the passing of time but what I still didn't know was whether the pastor had a wife or not. I was always in my corner, quiet and jotting down notes during the sermons, then I'd either walk home alone or on rainy days I'd offer a few people a hike and the go home.

A year later, after a Sunday service, we were asked to remain behind as the church executive wanted to put things into place.

They were planning a baptism, and a membership intake on the church's anniversary weekend and so they needed names of interested individuals. Another part of the agenda was that they wanted to appoint a committee, people were appointed and they seemed to be excited and happy about their new positions and responsibilities in the church. Then one of the elderly women introduced the pastor's wife to the new congregants (us), she looked young. Well, Pastor Mike looked young himself so it wasn't really a shocker. She was beautiful though, very classy and she had good taste. The elderly woman proceeded to enquire from us, who wanted to volunteer as the pastor's PA and a couple of hands flew up, mostly from the youth side. I just smiled at the eagerness.

Mam'Sihlaba: *bantabam, ayingo msebenzi ulula lona nizivolontiyela wona.* (My children, what you'll be volunteering to do is not an easy job)

I saw the excited faces changing as she went deeper into explaining the responsibilities of the pastor's PA, after she was done I lifted up my hand in suggestion. She looked at me and motioned for me to speak,

"Thank you, ma'am... Uhm, I wanted to suggest. Why not appoint two separate PAs for the pastor and his wife? From the breakdown you just gave us Mam'Sihlaba, this is quite a lot of work for one person who might actually have a daily job that is paying his or her bills and maybe other commitments. It's just a suggestion *mama*"

I heard approval from the house, then it was decided that there will be two PA's and then the executive committee said they

will choose and revert back with their conclusions the following Sunday. Meeting adjourned.

I walked out to my car, started it and as I was about to leave, Sikhona, the pastor's wife came running towards where I was so I lowered the window smiling at her.

"Hi Yandi, Mam'Sihlababa would like to have your number please"

I gave her my business card, she smiled at it and then she returned back to the church while I drove home.

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"So friend, how have you been? We haven't gotten a chance to get together lately especially with Akho working in Grahamstown this year", the ever so bubbly Sindy asked as we sat around a table sharing Buffalo wings.

"I've been good, a bit busy here and there, but I've been good *chomi*"

"Busy with work?"

"Yes, it's hectic"

"No new man I should know off?"

"Well..."

She screamed and I laughed at her, I hadn't even said what I wanted to say and she already thought far?

"Who is he? Where's he from? What does he do?" she asked excitedly.

"Calm down, *haibo*" I said, smiling at her.

"Okay

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how did you meet him?"

"He's just a crush Sindi. He's cute, handsome in fact and he's just... Oh gosh, can we not go into this?"

"Why not?"

"He's married"

"So?"

"*Hayi Sindisiwe*"! I exclaimed. You'd think a married woman would advocate for married women, in general, and here was my friend basically asking me "so what if he's married?"

"But *chomi* if he's into you as well... I mean..."

"You're married, you don't want the pain of having your husband cheat on you," I said, a bit concerned.

"He's a man Yaya, if he wants to cheat he will cheat. There's nothing I can do to stop him, the same goes for your crush. If he

wants you and you want him, his marital status is not going to stop him... But his principles and his respect for his wife will"

I didn't answer her... I was taking all of this in, then she added "You're not the perpetrator here if anything does materialize then it's all on him. You didn't make no vows before a congregation"

That was it!

I laughed as what she said dawned on me, I really didn't have to feel guilty about anything. I just had a simple crush on him and if he also felt the same way and acted on it then it's on him. Not me.

After a couple of drinks, and listening to her telling me how great the marriage life was, we departed. I got home and soaked in the bath thinking, so what if I flirt a bit, some

innocent and subtle flirting won't hurt. A little motivation, a little nudge in the right direction as Sindisiwe would say. My phone rang, I wiped my hands dry as I reached out to it and answered...

"Hello?"

"Hello sisi, am I speaking to Yandisa?"

"Yes ma'am, how can I help you?"

"It's Mrs. Sihlaba here from Orange Groove, how are you sisi?"

"I am good mam'Sihlaba, *unjani wena?* (How are you)

"I'm good my child, I hope I didn't catch you at a bad time?"

"Uhm no... We can talk ma"

"Alright then, we had a discussion as a board after the meeting we had last week Sunday and we have decided to appoint you as Pastor Mike's personal assistant"

Bam!

The universe did all the work for me!

"*Usekhona?*" (Are you still there) she asked nervously. I cleared my throat "*Ewe mama...* I'm just surprised, I mean, surely there

are many people who are actually unemployed who can do this and there are many people who have been at the church longer

than I have" I said, subduing all the excitement I was suddenly feeling.

"Ewe kaloku sisi, kodwa ke i executive ikhethe wena" (That's true, but the executive committee chose you)

"Can I atleast think about it?" I asked.

"Yes sisi, we can discuss any questions you may have, on Sunday after church"

"Alright ma"

"Goodnight ke sisi"

"Goodnight mama"

She hung up.

The universe took the first step for me, I didn't have to flirt my way into his life, I was basically going to plan his life for him. What a privilege!

"All I have to do now is to work closely with him, get him to actually see that he cannot live without me. It helps that he's

got a warm and accommodative personality, that will make the sweet plan easy to execute."

I threw the phone on the pile of clothes on the far corner of the room as I drained the water. Ever heard the saying "UThixo unceda umntu ozincedayo"? It actually sounded stupid until now.

Three: It's A Messy Bun

After accepting the role of being his personal assistant I had noticed on many occasions that everywhere Pastor Mike went, Mandilakhe was there, even if there was no need for a keyboard player but he'd be there and I never questioned it. That's just how things were.

One time Pastor Mike was going to a convention in Durban and I had to make all his bookings, he called to inform me that "Lakhe" as he called him, would be going with him and I asked why, he didn't give me any sort of explanation so I decided not to push it. I had just been appointed for this PA position and apparently that's how things had been, where Pastor Mike is, Mandilakhe is there. Not his wife, but his keyboard player.

I made all the necessary bookings and sent him references and confirmations (Prophet Jimu's PA was going to handle

accommodation bookings that side), and on the day of their departure, I called a cab to pick them up from his house because I was at work and it was the month-end rush so I couldn't leave to fetch them myself.

Later that night, his wife called me...

"Hello, Mama?"

"Hey, Yandi... I am sorry for calling you so late, can you talk?"

"Yeah sure, what's up?"

"I just got a call from Prophet Jimu, he says my husband arrived in Durban with a young man who wasn't booked for"

"Oh-Kay"

"Who's the young man and why wasn't he booked for?"

"It's Mandilakhe *mama* and I don't know why he wasn't booked for"

"Mandilakhe went to Durban?"

"Uhm... Yes"

"Why?"

"I don't know... Pastor Mike said I should book for him and I did. But unfortunately, the accommodation for all visiting

pastors was booked for by Musa, Prophet Jimu's PA, and I wasn't aware that she didn't book for Mandilakhe. I just made the flight and other relevant transportation bookings"

She sighed... That felt heavy.

"It's not your fault Yandi, Musa only books for the people she's given a list for. Obviously my husband didn't tell Prophet Jimu that he's coming with an extra person"

"oh okay"

"Don't worry, I'll talk to my husband after the service tonight. Good night"

"Alright... Goodnight"

We hung up.

Why would Pastor Mike not tell his wife that Mandilakhe was going with him? Why would she sound upset more than shocked? What was really going on here?

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They were returning from Durban and I was at the airport waiting to pick them up, I had their flight schedule with me. I

did the bookings, but after an hour of waiting, I decided to call Pastor Mike, his phone rang until it went to voice mail. I decided to just give them fifteen more minutes and browsed through social media just to pass time. I bumped onto Mandilakhe's check-in at Garden Court, East London. I checked the display picture just to be sure, it was him. What would he be doing at GC when I was waiting for them at the airport? I started the car and drove off, when I got to the hotel I gave the receptionist Mandilakhe's names as appearing in social media and as I thought, the room was booked under his name. I was given his room number but not the key so I walked to the room

and knocked, after a few minutes of knocking and no answer I gave up. I took a deep breath cursing silently and as luck would have it, a housekeeper was coming out of the opposite room so I politely asked if she could open the room for me, I told her I had locked my own key inside... She opened with hesitation and pushed her trolley as she walked away, disappearing in the corridors. I slowly walked in, put a door stopper so that the door doesn't shut completely and then I turned to be met by the shock of my life.

"Oh my God"!

I exclaimed, not even loudly but audible enough. They were in bed together, Mandilakhe's head on Pastor Mike's hairy chest. Luckily they had pulled the covers up to their waists but there were two used condoms on the floor...

Pastor Mike opened his eyes and almost jumped off the bed, startling a sleeping Mandilakhe whose eyes almost popped out as they met mine.

Mike: Yandi, what are you doing here? How did you even get in?

I turned to walk away, I couldn't say anything. I was too shocked to speak, I ran down the stairs, out of the building, and into my car. I wasn't necessarily disgusted, but I was shocked and ashamed on their behalf. I drove out and went straight home, got myself a glass of wine, and sat on the couch thinking. "*Heheheeeeeee! Yho hayini amadoda*"! I exclaimed out loud.

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"I understand you did not expect what you saw at the hotel

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but please, you can't tell anyone about it. Please Yandi"

I sat across this man, wondering what game was he really playing? You know, in my life I had come across gay men who date gay men, openly. Then there are gay men who marry females for the sake of status and the "What will people say?" saga, and then there are gay men who are in denial that they are gay... Where did he fit? Which category was Mandilakhe in?

"Yandi?" he said my name softly.

"Pastor Mike"

"Please, don't tell my wife what you saw"

"It's not my place sir"

"Oh thank you... Thank you"

"But why?"

He sighed.

Then took a sip of the bottled water that had been in his hands for the last twenty minutes.

"I don't have an answer for you" he answered.

"So you want me to keep your dirty little secret yet you don't have an answer to a simple question I'm asking?"

"I understand what I'm asking from you is too much, but this would kill my wife."

"But Pastor Mike you are sleeping with another man, the church's keyboard player mind you"

"I know that"

"That's wrong, in so many ways *Mfundisi* that is wrong"

"Yandi..."

"Now you want me to lie to your wife, your wife who seemed upset that you went to Durban with this same guy?"

He looked at his hands not answering me.

"Are you gay? Seriously?"

"With all due respect, that's, unfortunately, none of your business," he said, still not looking at me.

"I know that," I said, "But you've just made it mine"

"Yandi my wife has been through a lot already, she wouldn't survive this coming out, and I wouldn't want to add this to her plate so please"

"How long?"

"Huh?"

"How long have you two been doing that behind your wife's back?"

"It's been a year"

"And both of you have no intentions of stopping"?

He didn't answer me, I kept quiet for a while, assessing him and then I asked;

"Okay then, if I keep quiet, what's in it for me? Surely keeping a secret this huge can be beneficial to all three of us. What's in it for me?"

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The receptionist at work called me saying there's a gentleman who wanted to see me, at first I thought it was Pastor Mike but when I got there, it was a nervous Mandilakhe. I swallowed

hard as I walked closer, he was looking down as if ashamed so I just opened my arms and hugged him.

"What brings you here?", I asked, trying to sound excited. He sighed and ran his hand through his rich African hair.

"I haven't slept much since that day", he said.

"Mh, let's go to my office"

He followed me to my office and I closed the door behind us as I offered him a seat and a glass of water.

"I know it's none of my business, but please help me understand Lakhe, why?"

"I don't know... Because I like him, maybe? Or because he provides for me?" he answered with a shrug.

"Provides for you how?"

"He pays my rent and gives me allowance on a monthly basis"

"And your parents?"

"They pay the tuition fees only, I had to work two jobs before until I met Mike now I work one and he does the rest"

"But he doesn't work"

"His wife does, and the church tithes, pledges, and offerings"

"wow!"

I didn't even know what to say.

"I came here to plead with you not to tell his wife, I'd be dead. My father would kill me with his bare hands" he pleaded looking nervous and very concerned. Serious.

"What you guys are doing is wrong, but it's not my place to say anything. Ya'll are both grown men"

"Thank you"

"Don't you get paid for playing the keyboard at church?"

"No, it's voluntary work. I only charge when it's a conference, like three days upwards"

"I see"

"Let's just pretend everything is still normal, you never walked in on us and yeah... We swiftly move on from this" he suggested.

"Sure, why not," I answered that with my own smile.

He downed his water, we hugged then he left.

He didn't need to know that I'd also need something in return for my silence, it wasn't his business anyway.

Four: Sinking Claws

In order to keep the distance between Mandilakhe and Pastor Mike a reasonable one, I began attending conferences with him even though I still didn't understand why he wouldn't take his wife. That was one helluva mystery, one that I wasn't really interested in solving as yet. Mission number one was to get Mandilakhe a job and see if he's really sleeping with Pastor Mike because of the provision or he just liked him.

When he sent me his CV I realized that he wasn't stupid, he was a very smart kid. His school results were top standard, and when I called all three of his references they all spoke so highly of him. So I went to my manager with that CV and asked if we

could take him as an intern once he finished his studies or we could offer him a weekend job. Anything between those two would be appreciated, his CV was taken and I was told he'd be called once something came up so I let it be.

Mrs Ndizi called me to set up a meeting for both of us, in the church so I came out of work and went straight to meet her. We sat in her husband's office, door closed.

"I'm sorry for dragging you here, midweek. You must be tired", she said with a broad smile.

"When the pastor's wife calls, you drop everything", I answered jokingly and we both laughed.

"I wanted us to uhm, talk you know, get to know each other better"

"Oh really?"

"Yes, I mean, you'll be working hand-in-hand with my husband so I do have to know and understand you, what you do, I know where you live but you know, all the other stuff."

Okay... I wasn't really sure what that meant but I answered her.

"I'm just a debt collector, there's absolutely nothing special about my job I mean I just do cold calls most of the time. I have two friends, one sibling and one parent, my mother."

"Mh, I've never seen your mother, where does she stay?"

"She lives in the rural parts of the province, Transkei"

"She never visits?"

"She seldom does, but I visit her whenever I can. On my leaves and day-offs sometimes"

"Mh, any special person I haven't met?"

"Uhm no, I'm not married ma'am"

"Well are you dating?"

I smiled at this question, well in my mind, yes, I mean...

"Well no, I'm just too busy to be splitting myself between work and another human being"

"Hay Yandi, uyadingeka umlingane ntombi"

"Oh hay baby, not everyone wants to get married", we both turned at the voice of her husband. The door was still closed when he spoke, obviously, he was eavesdropping because we weren't loud, and when did he arrive? He walked in and kissed his wife's cheek and then sat down next to her.

"What are you two gossiping about in my office?"

She rolled her eyes at him smiling "you mean our office" she added.

They flirted for a while and I just sat there, smiling at my new set of nails. What else was I supposed to do?

She cleared her throat and then they went dead silent, I looked up and she was smiling at me, "We would like to invite you for dinner, Saturday at 7 pm" she said, excitedly. Her husband's eyes bore deep into my soul

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I swallowed hard. Why was I suddenly uncomfortable?

"I uhm , I have plans this Saturday ma'am"

"Oh... Okay, Sunday then?"

"Sundays are my resting days, let's rather reschedule for next weekend"

"Okay then, I'll hold you to it"

I nod with a smile, that meeting was over the minute Pastor Mike walked in. This was just a formality.

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I took late lunch at work because I had to accompany Pastor Mike to his meeting at his pastoral friend's house.

They were warm and friendly, I spent most of the time with the pastor's wife because the meeting was private, it took place in the study.

"So, are you currently permanently employed or you're solely his PA"?, the pastor's wife asked enthusiastically.

"I'm permanently employed ma'am"

"How do you juggle?"

"I guess I know how to manage my time and his diary as well"

"And your spouse?"

"I don't have one"

"Kids?"

"None"

She nod, looking impressed... Or suspicious? I don't know.

"Your *mam'mfundisi* is a very good friend of mine, we went to varsity together"

"Mmh, really?"

"Yeah"

"Well, maybe you should visit our church sometime", I invited her with a hint of excitement.

"Haha, I wish. My husband doesn't like visiting churches, even if those churches are Pastored by our very close friends. Something about alters he says"

"Oh-Kay"

"But we do attend birthday celebrations and anniversaries...
That sort of stuff"

"I see..."

Mh, alters she said.

That left a question mark in my head, after the meeting Pastor Mike suggested we grab lunch. He was paying so I didn't decline the offer to free food (and a little bit of more time with him). We placed our orders and our conversation started on a lighter note, very relaxed and unnerving until he brought up the spouse subject as well. It seemed as though marriage was a

very big part of the Christian life, almost everyone I had spoken to ever since I had started being serious at church would bring this up, and it seemed to shock all of them that I wasn't married yet. That I had no children yet.

It could have been me but on our way home, he seemed more relaxed than I'd ever seen him, maybe the meeting was successful. I dropped him off at his house and went home.

After that meeting, we began to spend more time together. We'd have lunch meetings, dinner meetings, and all sorts of

meetings at least two times in a week. We were really getting close, and so far our ethical standards were in check. Well, until he kissed me one night after he dropped me off at home.

We had gone to a conference in Queenstown driving his car, so he had to drop me off before driving back home and it was really late I couldn't even give him the option of taking me to the taxi rank. He parked outside my gate and walked me inside the yard, we were still chatting, well finishing off the conversation we'd had in the car. We stood a few centimeters apart as we said our goodbyes and before I could turn to leave, he kissed me and I froze.

He took a step back, waiting for me to say something, and when I eventually got the words I asked "What just happened?"

He sighed and ran a hand over his face.

"*Mfundisi?*"

"Yandi... I..."

And then he trailed off.

A part of my brain urged me to walk away, but another part of it had my feet stuck on the spot. I took a deep breath and a step closer to him, lifted my chin up, and planted a kiss on his lips. It might have been a moment of weakness for him, but it was now very clear that we were on the same page. I had to

grab that opportunity with both hands as immediate as it had presented itself. We kissed right there, my gate closed behind us and we continued with what we were doing until I pushed him off a little...

"This isn't right... You're married and you're my pastor. I'm sorry"

I grabbed my bag, opened the gate, and vanished behind it before he could say anything else. My mind told me he'd come back for more. Well, he had to come back for more.

Five: Deeper

We avoided each other without people noticing, I think I might have finally grown some conscious because I felt like his wife knew. She didn't say anything in indication to that, but it felt like she knew.

"Yandi?"

I stopped on my tracks, what was he doing here? It was my monthly medical checkup and I had no idea what he was doing there, or did we use the same doctor? I wasn't aware though... I turned to face him with a smile.

"Pastor Mike, nice to see you"

"You've been avoiding me lately"

"I have?"

He smirked, his hands finding comfort in the depths of his denim pockets.

"How have you been?"

"I'm good, I've been good. Yourself?"

"I'm okay"

"That's great to hear"

"Can we grab coffee?"

"Uhm..."

"Five minutes"

I sighed and agreed.

We followed each other to the coffee shop in that same building, he bought for the both of us while I waited at a corner table, hiding away from any possible recognition. He joined me and we started off on some lousy conversation then he stopped and touched my hand.

"I've been thinking about you since that night, I have tried to subdue the thoughts you know? I've tried everything but... I don't know."

I didn't answer him, he wasn't being clear to me. What was he really saying? He's been thinking about me so what? What must I do? What was he intending to do? He put his cup down and looked at me, giving me all his attention.

"I uhm, I like you and I know this will come as a shock to you but, I really can't stop thinking about you"

"I don't understand you *mfundisi*"

"Yandi... You've captivated me, even when I touch my wife, I think of you."

"Yho... So how do we unkiss ke? Because it was a mistake that shouldn't have happened in the first place"

"How about, how do we move on?"

I looked at him with my head cocked to the side. He read the question written all over my face.

"I want you in my life Yandi"

"You want me in your life? I'm already your PA *nje*, how more in your life can I be?"

"I want you to be more than that, I'd like to be more personal than that"

"You're married"

"Let me be concerned about that"

"Listen, as tempting as that idea is, I don't think anything could ever materialize between us, the board trusts me and I can't betray your wife like that"

"I'll let you think about it, I'm not in a hurry for an answer"

With that, he stood up, smiled at me, and mouthed a "Goodbye" before walking away. My coffee was now cold but I managed to gather myself and walked out to my car.

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He held my waist as we kissed in that darkness, we knew no one would follow us and we knew no one would suspect anything. This was the fourth time and I was starting to look forward to these kisses every time we had late meetings or evening conferences to attend.

"I love you", he said.

"No, you want me"

"Yandisa Nkosi, I love you... I really do"

"And your wife?"

"What about her?"

"You can't be serious"!

"I told you before, my wife shouldn't concern you. I know how to handle her... What you need to know right now is that I love you"

I bit my tongue, there's a way that he said those words that made me lose myself. He kissed my cheek on some "Allow me to love you right, you deserve to be loved and appreciated. Just allow me"

You know when you want to ask a question but in a split second everything else doesn't really matter because you're getting what you've been wanting, only on a silver platter now? If that ever makes sense. We kissed for a while and then I took a step back, touching my lips. He just watched me, with both hands in his pockets.

"Goodnight", I managed to say in that moment.

"Goodnight", he responded and waited for me to open the gate, close it and walk the distance to my door. The minute I put the light on, I heard his ignition warming up, I closed my door and heard him drive away. Deep down I knew I wanted to invite him in, but I wished he would have initiated that idea you know? But he didn't.

I made myself tea and sat there thinking about him, well not necessarily him, I mean I was just thinking. But my thoughts

derailed and I found myself thinking about him, I laughed at myself because "*ndi catch'ile*" and I wasn't really sure how badly this would end. I knew it wouldn't end on a high note, I was very aware he wouldn't leave his wife for me

he had made it clear the four times we kissed that she was his life. She was that important to him, the love of his life he said, but that couldn't stop him from philandering I guess.

I switched off the lights and took those few steps to my room, my phone beeped and I opened the message that came through...

"You're doing something to my mind, I'm not sure how long I'll be able to contain myself"

I laughed and called him,

"Yandi"

"I'm having tea, want one?"

He laughed and responded "Please open the gate" I threw the phone on the bed and ran to the front door. I thought he had left, when did he come back? Why would he come back?

I opened the gate for him in excitement, he drove in, parked, and walked up to me. His arms enfolded me, his lips smothering me with kisses. With the heel of my feet, I managed to close the door as we got lost in our own world of fornication. I had not even put on the kettle for his "tea", instead, our clothes made a trail from the front door up to my bedroom door.

He said all the right words, his actions met those words halfway throughout the night as he made love to me. For once, I didn't even think about his wife. I didn't even remember that he was a married man, my conscious died and I wasn't about to awaken it. It can rest, no problem.

His head on my bosom, and a soft snore escaping his lips, I found comfort in our sin. I found peace in our secret and I knew deep down that this was the first of many love-filled nights.

**** * * * * *

We had a great night, I called in sick and decided to pamper him with breakfast in bed before allowing him to go back home. He was all smiles as we shared the breakfast on my bed until my phone rang...

"Hello, *Mam'mfundisi?*"

"Yandi, how are you sisi?"

"I'm alright ma'am, how are you?"

"I'm okay, I just want to find out when last you spoke to my husband?"

"Last night ma after the conference"

"Oh..."

"Why, what's wrong?"

"He hasn't come home"

"Have you tried calling him?"

"His phone is off... Don't worry about it, maybe he's at the church. I'll ask mam Sihlaba to go and check for me"

"Oh okay, I'll try calling him on my side as well"

"Enkosi sisi"

We hung up, I looked at him and he just laughed, I joined him. Why would he do that to her though?

"You need to call her", I said.

"I will, but not now. Come here"

He pulled my chin, kissed me passionately that I even forgot he had "a thing" with Mandilakhe. After that, I went to wash the breakfast plates while he bathed and got ready to go home. I cleaned up, picking up our clothes, and waited for him to emerge from the bathroom. He came out and sat in front of the mirror.

"So how do we do this?"

"We do it discreetly of course", he answered.

"Oh, so we are doing it?"

"I want to... Unless you don't"

"I can't get over the fact that we're fornicating and we could get caught"

"We will apologize when we do, we're humans, we get tempted as well just like everybody else"

"So I'm a temptation to you?", I asked.

He turned around and looked at me.

"No you're not, but what else would we tell people if this were to come out?"

I didn't respond, but I was glad that he was making all the excuses and coming up with these ideas. It showed that he was never really faithful to his marriage, he was used to this. This wasn't new to him so why should I be bothered? Why should I worry myself about being caught when I should be enjoying the time, attention, and love I was being given? Sigh.

Six: CEMENTING MYSELF

Three years ago I would have never settled to be a side chick, I had a vision, a dream, and a whole potential to be someone's wife but I here I was...comfortable, happy, and loving being a pastor's side chick. We were preparing for his birthday,

everyone in the church was excited, being his personal assistant felt like a second job, that I wasn't getting paid for but I was enjoying it. Weird.

We had a meeting, we being the church executive, and I walked into the temporal structure of the church with my diary and a pen. Almost every one of the executive members was already waiting, chatting away, and luckily for me, I never made friends in the church. I spoke to whosoever I needed to speak to at any given moment, but my priorities were anything and everything that had to do with the "father of the house" and his wife had gotten used to my drill. She had accepted that I would assist her with anything she wanted assistance with, but she had her own PA who had to work for her, not me.

The meeting commenced, the planning of the birthday, they had great ideas that weren't really interesting but they were great. Especially for a small church that just branched out three years ago. I noted down everything I needed and then the meeting was adjourned. My own personal task was to buy him

a car, I could afford to, so why not? He needed an upgrade from that small Chevrolet he was sharing with his wife.

**** * * * * *

Akhonke had brought me lunch at work, the "newly found" church commitment had severely interfered with our friendship because I was always at church whether I was at a meeting or a convention or simply cleaning the church. That irritated both my friends but I couldn't really disclose to them the real reason I was always there. They'd never approve, and even if they were to approve, it wasn't something I could publicize.

"So church girl, are you really serious about this church thing?" she asked sipping on her cocktail, I smiled at her with a nod.

"What's in it for you? I know you, you never do anything non-beneficial to you" she added.

"Well, maybe I just needed to try something else"

"I get that, but church Yandisa? That's not you"

"I grew up in church, you know?"

"But you outgrew the church"

Okay I laughed at that.

"But babe, I'm happy at church. Things have been working out great for me there, I just have to prioritize a bit you know... Make time for you guys as well"

She looked at me surprised, so I added.

"In three months' time we're celebrating the pastor's birthday, don't you wanna come? For that one day"

"How much does he pay you?"

"For what?"

"For being his PA? That's an extra job besides the one that actually pays your bills Yaya"

"I know... I don't want to be paid though. I offered my free services"

She put her glass down and clapped three times dramatically.

"*Wena?* Free services? Noooo *chomi*. Are you sure you're okay?"

I laughed at her, I had no further explanation for her in as much as she dug and dug for answers I had none. When we were done I walked her out, then she left.

Two months later I went to fetch the blue Ranger I had bought for Pastor Mike, drove it to my place, and went to fetch my own car that I had left at the dealership. He didn't know I bought him a car, but I knew he'd be thrilled.

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His birthday was on a Thursday, the celebration planned by the church was on a Saturday, after that he would leave with his wife and spend the rest of the weekend at a secret location booked and paid for by the church executive. Then the following week I would have him all to myself for the whole week. He was set to attend a three-day conference in Johannesburg that would commence from Thursday to Saturday but he had scheduled to leave home on Monday afternoon and return on Sunday morning. In time for church.

Thursday morning I called him, to wish him a happy birthday and his wife answered

"Hello Yandi" she answered with excitement. I swallowed hard I didn't expect to hear her voice.

"Hello madam, *unjani?*"

"Siyaphila sisi, iNkosi isame nathi. Unjani wena?" (We are good thank you, the Lord is still on our side. How are you?)

"Ndibulela uvuka mama, bendifuna ukuthi happy birthday kutata" (I'm grateful for waking up today mother, well I called to wish the father a happy birthday)

"Usavasa sthandwa sam, ndicela uphinde u phone'e after ten minutes" (He is still bathing my love, please call him again after ten minutes)

"Hay wethu uyaw'mxelela ba bendiphone'ile" (That won't be necessary, please tell him I called)

"He wanted to call you about next week's arrangements anyway"

"Oh... Is he canceling?"

"No sisi, he just wants an update. I'm not sure about what exactly"

"Ooh okay I think it's about his accommodation. I'll send him an email once I get to work"

"Okay ke sisi, thank you man. For everything, you've made his load lighter ever since you accepted the appointment of being his PA"

I smiled... "Thank you for trusting me," I said, honestly. I wasn't going to work anyway, my two-weeks leave was approved and it was day one of it. I lay in bed wondering what she had planned for him, she was young and maybe a bit naive but she was a lover of nice things. You could tell by the shoes and handbags she owned, they didn't go unnoticed.

After thirty minutes he called me back and my heart jumped for joy.

"Hello *Mfundisi*" (Hello Pastor)

"Mh, you're in a good mood today"

"Because it's someone's special day"

"Do I know the someone?"

"Maybe, maybe not"

He chuckled, I closed my eyes with one hand on my forehead. I was really excited, excited to see his face when I gave him his gift(s).

"Your mother says you called"

"Yes... How busy is your day today?"

"Well, you know I'm never too busy for you"

"Are you driving?"

"No, my wife will be using the car today. I'm in a cab going to town. What's up?"

"Can you ask the driver to bring you here?"

"You're not joking, right?", he asked unsure.

"Why would I?"

"Are you at work?"

"No, I'm at home"

"Shuuu! Okay, I'm on my way"

"I'll be waiting"

I ran to the shower, quickly made the bed while the towel wrapped around my body, "fa fa" a little air freshener in the air, and then bandaged my body in fitted lacy lingerie. Brushed my teeth and wore a gown and went to make coffee, he buzzed the gate, I opened and he walked in dressed in denims and a navy golf shirt that I bought for him when we started out "seeing" each other. I briskly walked to the door and opened it before he knocked, we both smiled as I threw my arms around his neck and pulled us inside, closing the door behind him. I melted in his embrace, he was warm, as usual, and his touch was sincere. "Happy birthday baby" I mumbled and he squeezed my waist in response.

He pulled his head back, looked at me still smiling, lowered his lips onto mine and we kissed.

He kissed me with so much passion and hunger, every time. Sometimes I wondered if that's how he kissed her as well? Or was this specifically for me?

He lifted me up and put me on the counter, his lips not leaving mine. After a few minutes, he stopped and looked deep into my eyes asking "How much time do we have?". I immediately loosened the tie of my gown, and slowly took it off. I watched his eyes twinkle as my laced body became fully exposed to him and I answered his question "All the time we could ever need".

Seven: What Conscious?

We lay in bed, my weight on him and my head on his chest. Perfection in all aspects. He was snoring softly, and I was awake, playing with his nipple. My phone rang, Mrs Sihlaba, one of the executive members from church.

"Hello mam' Sihlaba" I answered trying to sound interested.

"Hello Yaya, I know you're busy *mntanam*... I just wanted to find out if you perhaps had plans in your schedule for Pastor Mike?"

"For today *mama*?"

"Yes nono"

"No *mama*, I only have plans for him next week. The convention in Johannesburg."

"Ooh okay, alright thank you Yaya"

"You sound disappointed ma, what's wrong?"

"I called him before calling you, his phone is on voice mail. I thought you'd know if he was in a meeting or something"

"Oh okay, call *mam'mfundisi*. Maybe she will know. "

"I'm with her, she doesn't know."

"That's weird"

"Don't worry about it, I'm sure he'll return our calls when he gets a chance"

"Okay ma, I'll also try contacting him"

We hung up and I woke him up. He looked at me with sleepy eyes, coupled with a smile

"Your wife is looking for you"

He reached for his phone and turned it on. Two missed call notifications came through and he called her back so I walked out to the bathroom, just to give them a bit of privacy. On my return, he was still on his back, seemingly thinking. I opened my curtains in silence.

"The water is still warm, you can take a shower. I'll prepare something to eat in the meantime", I said, not even looking at him. He didn't move, I turned and gave him a stern look, he turned his phone off and pulled his weight up, supporting his back with a pillow.

"Come join me," he said, not making any sort of indication that he might leave my bed anytime soon. With a sigh, I joined him and supported my back with a pillow just like him.

He entwined his hand into mine, "I thought you said we had all the time we could ever need?" he asked, playing with my hand.

"I thought you'd be heading out, maybe Sikhona wants to spend your birthday with you"

"She's going to spend the weekend with me"

"You don't have to rub it in"

"I'm not... And even if I was, you'll be spending a lot more time with me next week."

True.

So, I didn't answer that.

"Baby?"

I lifted my eyes and he pulled my chin towards him for a kiss.

He mumbled "I love you, and I want to spend my day with you.

Don't shut me out, please."

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In the afternoon, we had bathed, smelling fresh. I walked him out to the garage, told him my car had a problem and he said he wanted to check it before I took it to the mechanics. He was a very handyman. We got to my garage and I went straight to the covered car, it's keys in my pocket and I uncovered it. He didn't really notice it immediately because he was busy opening my car asking what was the matter with it until he realized that I was actually further up and he looked up surprised...

"Happy birthday Michael Ndizi" I said smiling from ear to ear. He froze, I laughed at him and he came forward, touched the car, walked around it still amazed and then he came to kiss me. Lifted me up and pinned me against the bonnet as he showered me with kisses, I was giggling, laughing and having the time of my life.

"Yandi"! He exclaimed.

"It's all yours"

"Oh my God! I don't believe this... Thank you baby"

He kissed me one last time, dragging it and then he asked for the keys, I gave him and went to move my own car since it was in the way. He took his beast for a test drive and I went back inside to make food for us. He came back, still excited, talking loudly and laughing like a three-year-old who just got candy. I felt his arms around me from behind, his wet kisses making a trail down my neck.

"Thank you", he mumbled between his kisses.

"You deserve it," I said, loosening his grip from my waist so that we could go and eat before he had to return to his wife.

My phone rang while we were eating, I looked at the screen and saw his wife's name. I cleared my throat and faked a smile as I answered "Hello mama"

"Hey, Yandi... Are you by any chance home?"

"Uhm, no mama. What's up? What can I do for you?"

"We are in church, preparing for tomorrow and we think we might need extra hands"

"Okay, but what still needs to be done?"

"Sivile and his team are almost done with the Deco, the kitchen needs extra hands in peeling veggies and I would like you to cancel all my husband's plans for tomorrow. If you hadn't already"

"I've already done that, Uhm let's see... I can come after 5 pm to help out at the kitchen"

"Alright ke sisi... Please buy the deco team some snacks, I haven't had a chance to go to the shops"

"No problem"

"Alright thank you sisi"

"You're welcome mama"

We hung up, he looked at me curiously and I ignored him with a smile.

"So, what are you going to tell people?" I asked.

"By people you mean my wife?"

"Your wife, the church executive, your friends, family. People"

"I'll tell them someone gave it to me as a gift"

"Someone?"

"Yes, someone I once prayed for years ago. It will make sense especially since I couldn't be reached today, don't worry about it"

"You are a man of many talents, you know that, right?"

He laughed, "Well, thank you. I'll take that as a compliment. And I guess I have to leave before 5pm"?

"Yes. I need to help out my friend's mom... She has a braai tomorrow"

"You have a beautiful heart you know that?"

"Even if I'm sleeping with a married man?"

"Even if you're sleeping with a married man, you have a beautiful heart."

I smiled to myself...

I couldn't tell him that was his wife on the phone, the celebration was still a surprise.

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I walked in carrying food for anyone who was hungry, I had bought more than the Deco team could eat. The place looked exquisite, Mrs. Ndizi was busy on her phone and everyone else was really busy, walking up and down. Once the food was safe on the table I went to mam'Tofuya who was the head of the

kitchen department. She said they didn't need much help, but if I could go and clean the pastor's office that would be very helpful, so I did that. Went to fetch a bucket, mop, and everything else I would need and started off by dusting the furniture. The pastor's wife walked in while I was mopping, she came to hug me and we started chatting like old buddies. She even helped me with putting up some birthday balloons and additional deco around the office, and when we were done she asked me to walk her to her car and I did.

"My husband's family is here, they arrived earlier today and his two friends and their wives will be arriving tomorrow morning."

"Oh-kay"

"Could you kindly accommodate the two friends for me, your place is much closer to the church. Please"

"That won't be a problem, as long as they're not coming with children. My house is not child friendly."

"One has an 8 months old baby"

"Alright, I'll prepare their rooms tonight"

"Thank you Yandi, Yho you're a lifesaver"

I just laughed that off.

Eight: Bitter-sweet

I prepared rooms for the two friends and their wives, and to my surprise, Pastor Mike's younger sister was also added to the number but I had no space for her. Luckily, she didn't mind sleeping on the couch, I really wasn't ready to share my bed with her as well. Sharing it with her brother was enough, even if we did that secretly.

They had supper at the "mission house" and only came over to sleep. The husbands seemed like friendly people, one of the wives was very preserved but smiling, and the other was grumpy. I showed them their rooms and gave Asekiwe (Mike's sister) her blanket then I vanished to my room. He called me as I turned off my light...

"Hello *Mfundisi*"

"Hey uhm, you're okay?"

"Yeah, why? "

"What I mean is, are you okay with so many people in your space?"

I kind of froze right there oh-kay... How did he know that these people were here? Wasn't this whole thing supposed to be a surprise?

"Yes I'm okay, I don't really mind"

"I'm sorry about this, I don't know why they weren't taken to Mam'Sihlaba's house"

"Your wife said it's because I'm closer to church"

"But what does the church have to do with them being here?"

"I don't know...look, it's okay."

He didn't respond.

"Really Pastor Mike, it's okay."

"Alright, thank you. I'll make up for it *uyevha*?"

"Haha, okay. Good night"

"Good night"

We hung up, I lay there replaying the whole conversation in my head. He asked what did church have to do with them being here? Kanti what was he told?

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I woke up and made breakfast for them, I didn't know what time *Mam'mfundisi* was going to come and fetch them if she was going to (*Maybe I was expected to take them to church, I don't know*) so I just started preparing breakfast. Asekiwe woke up and came to help me...

"So, I heard you're my brother's Personal Assistant", she asked smiling as she buttered the toasted bread.

"You heard right", I responded with my own smile.

"Does he not give you a hard time?"

"Not at all"

"And his wife?"

"What about her?"

"Does she not give you a hard time?"

"Not at all, and anyway she has her own PA so we don't necessarily cross-heads"

"Yhu u sisi e bossy enje? Hay inoba uyakoyika" (Maybe she's afraid of you, she's a very bossy person though).

I laughed at that, I had not seen that side of hers yet. The young woman continued...

"You're so warm and loving, unlike her."

"Well, I'm not the pastor's wife and I don't have peoples problems on my shoulders."

"What people?"

"The church, and maybe work you know? Those people"

"Ya'll have Mrs Hlangu and the board *nje*, why would she be carrying people's burdens on her? *Yho haike idrama ku sisi*"

I really laughed, before asking: "So ya'll don't get along really well?"

"We do, I just don't like it when she acts so innocent when she's not."

"Meaning?"

She sighed and shook her head, laughing. She wasn't going to continue with the conversation, especially since Liyakha (wife 2) walked in. She greeted and asked for plain hot water, Asekiwe gave her in a jug and then she walked back to the room again. Asekiwe waited for Liyakha to close the door before smirking.

"Uphakamile ke lo, indalo"

"I noticed, last night I thought maybe she's just tired "

"Nah, she's like that. That's her original face as Immanuela would say ."

"Mh, how long have they been friends. Your brother and them?"

"Since childhood, they even went to pastoral school together."

"And their wives get along?"

"Not necessarily, I mean, they are not best of friends but they do put up face"

I nod,

"Liyakha is a snob, she is a housewife *mam'mfundisi* and doesn't understand why other women have to work when they have husbands to do all of that"

"Her husband works?"

"Yep, he has his own companies"

"That's good, at least they are not dependent on the church."

"Unlike my brother"

"His wife is working, he's not entirely dependent on the church as well"

She rolled her eyes

and we laughed simultaneously.

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"I don't trust you... I'm not even sure how Sikhona does, especially with her husband"

I lifted my eyes and was met by Liyakha's fuming eyes.

"Excuse me?" I asked, with my head cocked to the side. She walked closer, almost as if sizing me up.

"You... I don't trust you"

"And I'm supposed to be sad about that, right?"

"No, but you should be careful."

I didn't respond, I was still unsure how we got to this tension. What did she know or what did she suspect?

"I get that you're his PA, you plan his church-life and stuff but I don't see why we're made to sleep at your house. What happened to the houses that used to accommodate us before?", she asked with her one hand on the hip.

"Well, my dear, you're asking the wrong person. I'm quite sure the person who drove you to my house is the relevant person to question"

"Where's your husband?"

"I don't have one"

"Why?"

"Why?"

"Yes, why don't you have a husband"

"Are you being serious right now?"

"You're beautiful, you seem to be well established judging by this house and the car you drive. Why haven't you settled down yet?"

My phone vibrated, I looked at the screen and smiled. Mrs. Sihlaba.

"Hello Mam'Sihlaba"

"Hello *ntombi yakwa* Nkosi... How are the visitors treating you? Are they ready to be fetched or will you drive them to church?"

"Well, I think it would be best if someone came to fetch them. A Mrs. Liyakha seems to be uncomfortable around me right now"

"Haibo, what do you mean?"

"I'm not really sure but I do think she's worried about her husband, she did say she doesn't understand

how *Mam'mfundisi* trusts me because she doesn't."

There was a moment of silence, the woman in front of me was shocked that I had actually said that, the woman on the other side of the line just went silent on me and I didn't care what either of them was thinking.

"I'm sorry *mntanam*, I don't even know what to say. But you do know that we trust you, right?"

"It's okay *wethu mama*, please fix them a room for tonight. I doubt she'll want to sleep here again"

"I'll have to talk to *Mam'mfundisi* about that"

"Please do"

"Okay ke sisi, I'll get back to you about their transportation in a minute"

"Alright, thank you ma"

She hung up, I folded my arms across my chest looking at the visitor in front of me.

"Did you have to tell her that?", she asked.

"Yes."

"You're too forward for your own good you know that"

"Mh, you better listen to me very carefully. I don't know you, you don't know me as well yet you have some nerve to cross-question me about my marital status as if there's a tree where ya'll cut off your husbands? Is that how you treat people at your own church?"

She didn't answer me, only because her husband had joined us.

" Is everything okay?" he asked.

We didn't answer him, I wasn't planning on answering him anyway. She sighed and hooked her arm on his, with one hand on his chest as she smiled at him "Yes baby, everything is okay" she said. He didn't look convinced, I smiled and looked at the time.

"Mam'Sihlaba will send someone to come and fetch you *Mfundisi* in no time"

"I was under the impression that you'll be taking us to church, well that's what Sikhona told us last night"

"There's been a change of plans sir, but it's nothing to worry about"

He looked at his wife, then back at me. I smiled and walked away. The other two were outside taking pictures in the garden, with Ase as their photographer. I went to my bathroom and ran myself a bath, then Pastor Mike called.

"*Mfundisi*"

"Hey, I just heard that you had a clash with one of my friends."

"*Uyandiqhela lamfazi and kengoku akanondixaka*"

"Please... Calm down"

"I'm calm, trust me. I'm calm"

"Okay, my wife will fetch them then I'll come over"

"You'll come over? For what?"

"I miss you"

I didn't respond.

Whenever he says that I get weak.

"Baby?"

"I'm still here"

"I really do miss you"

"I miss you too... Can't wait for next week"

He laughed, I just smiled.

I think that exact moment I realized how bitter-sweet my life was, I was in love with someone else's husband. He really made me happy but he wasn't mine. He had already found his missing rib and I was still on the lookout for my own Adam. But where will my life end up? What if we got caught? Yes, he had a fallback plan, his wife, but what did I have? Nothing. Oh, my career. Right.

Nine: Love-Trip

Pastor Mike's surprise birthday celebration was great, in fact, it was successful. Everything went according to plan, everyone from church, his friends and his family were happy and he was happy as well. That was very important, him being happy.

After the celebration he left with his wife for their weekend away, I drove Asekiwe and the second set of her brother's friends home (the kinder ones) and left Liyakha and her husband behind on purpose. And anyway, they were still mingling with some of the elders that they knew. Once the couple was settled and comfortable, I went back to church to assist with cleaning for Sunday service. After about two hours, Mrs Hlangu came to talk to me...

"Ma-Yandi? What time are you going home?"

"When we're done here, *mama*"

"Oh, don't you wanna take Pastor Khuriya home first?"

"Pastor who?"

She pointed at Liyakha and her husband, they were standing near the entrance chatting.

"Oh them?" I asked, "I think you should ask Mam'Sihlaba to come fetch them ma"

"Haibo ngoba? Kanti abafikelanga kwakho? Khona baphi abanye?"

"I've taken them home already, hence I'm suggesting you speak to Mam'Sihlaba about those two"

She looked at me quizzically, I chuckled and left her there. Fifteen minutes later I saw her walking up and down still looking for Mrs Sihlaba and I pretended as though I didn't see her. I wasn't going to have another woman disrespect me in my own house just because she's a pastor's wife, no, she had all the opportunity to do that in her own house and at her own church. Not here.

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Around 1 am we left the church spotless clean, I delivered everyone else that didn't have means to go home and then went back for the last trip: Pastor Khuriya and wife. As they got

in, I looked at his wife and asked "Where am I taking you, Mam'*mfundisi*?" she shifted uncomfortably before answering "I don't know". I drove out of the church and dialed Mam'Sihlaba on hands-free and she answered.

"Yandi?"

"Mamzo, we're on our way to your house"

"You and?"

"Pastor and Pastoress Khuriya"

"Yho! Yazi ndilibele nobalungiselela indawo yolala.... Heeeee

Yandi, yinto endizoyithini na lena ngelixesha?"

"Andiyazi mama, and ke andifuni umntu anyanzeleke ahlale kwam ibe intliziyo yakhe ingafuni so ndiyakucela wethu khawenze icebo"

"Hey bantwana ndini! Okay, yhiza nabo mntanam. Akhonto ngobusuku obunye"

"Enkosi mama"

I hung up and drove to Mam'Sihlaba's house in silence. There was tension in the car but I didn't care one bit, I didn't care what Pastor Khuriya thought of my attitude. I didn't give a rats

ass. I dropped them off and then Mam'Sihlaba said she'd send her son in the morning to fetch their bags. As I drove into my own garage, I received a text from Pastor Mike but I didn't open it. I was too tired and the worst part was that in a matter of five if not four hours I'd have to be up and prepare breakfast for the visitors before preparing for the church service.

I took a shower, I would have loved a soak in the bath but, I'd fall asleep in there. I was way too tired for it. Once in the warmth of my bed, I shut the whole world out and rested.

**** * * * * *

Mrs Sikhona Ndizi accompanied us to the airport as we embarked on a journey of solidifying our love well, of course, that's not true, we were going to the conference in Johannesburg. They must have had a great weekend, they were flirting and playing around, she was clingy and glowing. They seemed to be in a good place. Really.

"I wish I could go with you", *Mam'mfundisi* said in a sad tone. I lifted my eyes and asked the question I've been longing to ask since I got to know them; "Kanti Mama why don't you ever go with him?"

She shrugged, "I'm not much of a traveler, and anyway, one has to stay behind. We can't all be on the road at the same time" she answered. I decided not to ask further, she either really looked sad or it was the guilt inside of me speaking.

I left them as they kissed and hugged, they needed privacy anyway. Once we landed, I felt free. We were not in East London, it didn't matter who saw us here, they didn't know us. Well, there may be a few people who could know or rather recognize him but not me. I had booked two separate rooms for us, so we checked in and went to the same floor but my room was quicker to reach. I laughed as he moaned, walking further down the passage. I freshened up, put on some make-up and a pair of comfortable jeans and sneakers, and then I headed out. I was familiar with the city, even though I didn't have relatives in it. As I got to Maponya Mall, he called.

"Mfundisi?"

"Hay hay, u mfundisi use Monti"

"hehe! So ungubani ke?"

"My name is Michael"

"Mmmh

noted Ta Mike"

"Good, I've been knocking on your door, *uphi?*"

"Ndise mall, what's up?"

"Oh wow, I thought we'd be having dinner together"

"You can order from the kitchen, I'll be back in no time"

"Okay, see you"

"See you"

We hung up.

I knew we'd spend some "quality time" together but I didn't have a chance to get contraceptives before leaving home. That's why I needed to get to the mall before having dinner with him otherwise we'd find ourselves in deep trouble, three months down the line. After my "injection" I grabbed pills as well, it

never hurts to be double-protected, when I was done I returned to the hotel and went straight to his room for dinner. He was busy on a call, but the food was there so I just poured myself a glass of wine and waited for him to finish his call.

"Where did you vanish to?" he asked after putting his phone down.

"I had an errand to run"

"Mh"

He joined me, we ate planning his diary and when we were done I left him. In as much as we both couldn't wait to get here and be on our own, I still felt like I shouldn't bombard him with anything. He should be in a position to pursue me, this, whatever we called it.

I showered and got in bed with a book, two hours later, I heard a knock and opened up. It was him, no words spoken, no conversation whatsoever. As soon as I opened the door, he stepped in, grabbed my waist with one hand while the other closed the door so he could pin me against it. We kissed, his lips left mine, and wandered from my neck towards my chest and I felt my insides heating up.

With all the strength he had, he lifted me up and carried me to the bed, his lips back to their partnership with mine. As he lay me down, his wife's face flashed in my mind and shut that part of my mind off. He didn't have much to work on, there weren't any layers of fabric to seeth through so I wasn't surprised to hear him moan when his hand found my happy place.

We made love, right through the night, right through the following day. He did promise that he'd make up for everything, including his friend's attitude and he sure did pay me back. There was nothing cute about this room anymore because we had stayed in it from Monday night until Wednesday morning without cleaning it, or letting it breathe. Even then, he only left that morning because he had a breakfast meeting with some of the pastor's that would be preaching at the conference, otherwise, we would have just continued with that messy set-up.

Sindi called while I was still reminiscing on the previous night's deeds...

"Friendly"?

"Hey, bud, where you at?"

"I'm in Jo'burg, why?"

"What are you doing in Jo'burg? Are you on leave?"

"I took a special leave yes, I'm accompanying the man of cloth to a conference"

"Aaaaawwwwu! Uthini chomi yam?!"

I laughed so hard at that exclamation, I struggled to breathe.

"You guys left the wife behind, right?" she asked with excitement.

"Yes ma'am"

"Mmmh"

"But, don't get too excited. We have separate rooms, and they are very well far from each other"

"And you booked that, why?"

"Because Sindi, he's a married man. We can't get carried away"

"*Oksalayoooo* you're getting it this week, the whole lot of it, undiluted and fresh... When are you guys returning home?"

"Sunday morning he said"

"Heh, Lord! So he's basically spending the entire week with you? You lucky fish!"

I just laughed, she went on and on about how I should make this week one to remember and I won't lie, she had valid suggestions and honestly, I wasn't really against any of them. I had him here, with me, so why not?

Ten: He Went Back To His Wife

"I'm pregnant"

That's all I could think of.

Yes, I was pregnant, but I knew I shouldn't have allowed that kind of mistake to happen, which was why I felt the need to be double-protective that week, unfortunately, all that effort went down the drain. I was pregnant and he was the father, there was nothing exciting about it... This was reality. He made it very clear from the beginning of our affair that I couldn't allow myself to be pregnant as he was still trying for a baby with his wife of four years, they'd been unsuccessful all these years but they were still trusting God.

He sat there in silence, the atmosphere in the room suddenly too thick. I moved away from him and went to stand by the window, the sun was going down and the view was too beautiful.

"Are you sure?" he asked, very calm.

"Yes"

"So what do we do?"

"What do you mean what do we do?"

"Yandi you know I cannot have a child with you, we discussed this."

"I know that, and I thought we were careful. I don't know how it happened too"

He moved from the bed and stood against the bathroom door, then moved from there to the upper corner near the bed. Then he moved to the edge of the bed facing me, I was still looking outside.

"Yandi?"

I looked at him.

"You have to terminate... This baby will be the end of my marriage and I can't afford that."

"Abortion is a sin Michael"!

"That baby was conceived out of a sin Yandisa, no sin is greater than the other in the eyes of God" he hissed.

I moved from the window and sat down, facing the entrance.

"I don't think I can do that," I said in a very low tone.

"How far are you?"

"four weeks"

"It's not a baby yet, it's a fetus so you can actually do it."

"I can't"

"Dammit, Yandisa! Do you really want to ruin my life? Really? I asked you nicely, take the pill, do whatever you can to make sure that you don't fall pregnant but no. You had to fall pregnant, you had to get a hold over me. You had to make my wife a laughing stock. You had to make ME a laughing stock! "

I didn't answer him, he continued with his ranting.

"Do you think the church is going to celebrate this? Huh? What will the brethren say? About you? About me? About my family? Nooooo Yandisa. No, you cannot keep that baby"

I broke down.

I knew what was at stake but I didn't understand why it was my fault all of a sudden, we did this together. We had sex, he had

an affair with me. He's the married man here but now all of a sudden I was the one to blame? How? Why?

He grabbed his car keys and walked out on me and I bawled.

**** * * * * *

It had been three weeks since I saw him, it had been two weeks since I've been to church, and both those two weeks he wasn't at church. I was now due for my first ultrasound and because I didn't want to explain myself to everyone in church, I asked for a transfer at work so I moved to KWT. In as much as I wanted to move completely, I knew I wouldn't be able to live very far from home hence I chose the thirty to forty-five minute drive for whenever I missed home.

Akhonke found me a house to rent, Sindi came all the way to help me pack a couple of essentials then I emailed my resignation to the church executive committee and blocked all of them from my phone, well except for Mike, even though he had already blocked me. I settled in right after my ultrasound visit and tried my utmost best to forget about everything that I had left in East London.

Being a friendly "unfriendly" person was yet to be my biggest challenge because unlike the previous office I was in, the new

people I was going to work with didn't know me, they didn't know my personality, they didn't know my mood swings. I had to sort of accommodate them, keep my moods in check and that was difficult because no one controls their mood swings. Fortunately for me, I made a friend, Luzuko who was a general manager. In my fourth month working with them, he bullied me

into going out for lunch with him. I only agreed because I didn't want to come across as a snob of any sort.

"You had everything going well for you in East London, your rates show, why did you come here?", he asked after a couple of bites.

I took a long sip from my juice and contemplated on whether I should let him in or not. I decided not to, it's none of his business.

"I needed a change of scenery"

"I'm sure you know I've heard that a thousand times"

"Pretty much, but that's all there is to it"

He nod and continued eating, my phone rang so I excused myself and answered...

"Hello?", I knew it wasn't Pastor Michael, even though the call came from his phone.

"Hi Yandi... How are you sisi?"

"I'm good thank you, how are you mama"?

"I'm okay... *Yandi Ntombi uphi?*" (Yandi girl where are you?"

"I moved Mrs N, why do you ask?"

"When are you coming back? We need you, my husband needs you. Everything's a mess here, you're the only one who was eloquent with his diary"

I sighed and stole a look at Luzuko...

"I'm in the middle of something right now so I can't talk much, can I call you a bit later?"

"Yes please do"

"Alright, bye"

"Bye"

I hung up and returned my attention back to the friend in front of me. I didnt want to tell her that I won't be coming back, she'd want reasons and right now wasn't an ideal time to think of lies. The only question I had was why would Pastor Mike give

her his phone to call me when he knew very well the reason for my disappearance? What game was he playing?

After our lunch we departed, I went on a mini shopping spree, I needed a few warmer maternity clothes.

Right after that I went home.

**** **

Six months pregnant and my bump was showing, Luzuko turned out to be a great friend, always ready to go on beach trips with me and he was a fan of the atmosphere at Kidds Beach so that was a bonus for me. After my first lunch with him I did call Mrs Ndizi just to inform her that I won't be coming to church anytime soon, they must just appoint someone else as her

husband's PA and she wanted reasons which I didn't have. I just told her my reasons were personal and I wasn't ready to discuss them as yet, she thankfully dropped it.

I opened the gate to let the gardener out, he only came once every two months (which was basically when I was back from KWT for a weekend), and as I was about to close it, I saw the Ranger and my heart stopped. He drove in, parked, and got out of the car while I was still frozen and in shock.

"Hi", he said.

I swallowed hard, suddenly becoming emotional and I wasn't going to allow myself to be. Not now.

"I see you kept the baby"

"What are you doing here?" I asked without even looking at him.

"I saw your gardener when he came in and I thought maybe I could come and see you"

"Great, you've seen me now please leave", I opened the gate for him as it had automatically closed after my freezing moment.

"Yandi"

I felt my nose twitch!

He took a few steps closer, just enough for me to smell his cologne. My nostrils betrayed me and flared open, drawing in his scent and immediately when it registered, my knees felt weak.

"I'm sorry... I was scared, afraid... I just want to make things right. Please give me a chance"

"You practically told me to abort and you didn't even check on me to find out how I was doing for the past six months

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now all of a sudden I must give you a chance? What kinda crack do you smoke?"

"You being pregnant felt like we were rubbing my wife's pain on her face, it still feels like that. I know she will be hurt when she finds out but please, I don't want my child to grow up without a father"

"You've got some nerve Michael! A damn nerve!"

I re-opened the gate and looked at him, he got the grip and walked back to his car, got in and drove out. I closed the gate and ran to my room without even closing the kitchen door. I flopped on the bed and cried. I wasn't crying because he finally wanted to be a father no, I was crying because now it all registered that my child's a result of fornication. She'd have to carry that stigma her whole life, that her mother broke a pastor's marriage and then she was conceived. How would Sikhona even look at me? Mam'Sihlaba, Mam'Hlangu? They trusted me, and I betrayed them.

I sat up and cleaned myself, I wasn't about to have a break down now. I've been strong for the past six months, surely I can still continue with that strength. I went to make myself tea, chamomile tea, took a shawl and went to lounge on the sofa for the rest of the day. I had nothing better to do.

Later that afternoon, Pastor Mike called, as much as I didn't want to answer him, curiosity got the better of me. What if he

really went ahead and told his wife about us? He did say that the truth would hurt her, what if...

"Hello?"

"Please don't hang up..."

I sighed, he sounded sad... Down, defeated.

"I know I failed you, I know I don't deserve what I'm asking from you but Yandi please, forgive me and give me a chance to make things right. I'm begging you"

"Things will never be right, you're a married man and you love your wife. Focus on that."

"And I love you"

"And you love Mandilakhe"

He went silent... Before saying: "Mandilakhe gave his life to Christ four months ago, he's fully transformed and he moved away from East London to begin a clean life elsewhere".

"Good for him", I said not even surprised.

"Yandisa"

"Focus on your marriage Michael, I will take care of my child the best way I know how. Focus on your marriage, focus on your church or better yet, find another Mandilakhe. Anything to make you forget about me."

"My marriage is fine, the church is fine, its doing great in fact... I just want to be part of my baby's life. That's all I'm asking for."

I didn't answer him, he sounded desperate and I hated that.

"I know I hurt you but deep down you know I love you, and you know I mean what I'm saying. I won't push you, but when you need me just know I'll be there anytime of the day or night. Yandisa I know the pain of growing up without a father, I know

the pain of looking at and listening admiringly to other kids telling stories of their great dads, I know the pain of giving mom a father's day card when I should have given it to dad... so I don't want my child to go through that, please, that will scar him or her for life."

A tear rolled down my cheek and I opened my mouth to breathe but not give away the fact that I'm actually crying. I felt like he finally understood why I needed him without me even spelling it out for him, I knew everything he had just said all too well and I also didn't want my child to go through it. But at the same time, I didn't want my child to grow up with both parents who resented each other. I didn't resent him, but what if he did? What if he was saying all these things just for the sake of the child? What if *uzixelile* and this is what they advised him to do, to say?

I finally managed to say "Okay" then he told me he'd book us a doctors appointment, I allowed him to. He wanted to make up for the lost time and I wasn't about to stand in his way, I just needed to be careful.

**** **

I had contractions in the middle of the night, and because Michael said I should call him whenever I needed him, I did exactly that. I called him, but did he answer his phone? No. So I ended up driving myself to the hospital because waiting for an ambulance would take the whole night and I didn't have that much time or patience.

I gave birth to a bouncing baby boy who looked nothing like me but everything like him. Sindisiwe skipped work and came bearing gifts for the little one, she's the first person I texted when I woke up and the excitement on her face was all I needed.

"Oh and Akho said I must tell you she will come after 12, she has a presentation this morning. That's why she couldn't come with me", Sindi chipped in while dressing my son up after bathing him.

"It's okay, you being here is enough"

"Mh, so where's the man of cloth?"

"I don't know, he still hasn't returned my calls"

Just then, he called me so I looked at Sindi who just rolled her eyes at me.

"Hi?"

"Hi uhm, I missed your calls."

"Mh"

"What can I help you with?"

"I wanted you to drive me to the hospital, but it's a bit too late now"

"Oh, I see. So everything is okay?"

"Yes. I gave birth, to a boy"

He went silent on me, I knew it, this was all too good to be true.

"Congratulations", he said. Coldly.

"That's it? You're not going to come and see him?"

"Uhm, no"

"Wow!"

"Look, my wife is pregnant and she's having complications, we're currently at the gynecologist right now so I can't really talk."

"So I must wait? Your son, must take the backseat?"

"As I said, I'm with my wife right now. Anything else I will deal with when I get a chance"

Then he hung up, I looked at the phone and thought "He went back to his wife"

"That scum!" Sindi disturbed my thoughts with that outburst, I smiled knowing fully well that I had just said that outloud. It wasn't an internal thought at all.

"What are you smiling at?"

"You" I answered her, I guess I expected this. I wasn't really hurt but I was disappointed.

She paced around the room, biting the corner of her bottom lip.

I looked at her and told her to "Relax", she stopped and looked at me furiously.

"He made you depend on him and then when you really need him he ghosts you? I'm not saying he shouldn't be with his wife, but right now you need him you're a first-time mother, his son needs him for heaven's sake!"

"He's not worth the anger babe, just relax"

"Hay tsek man that's bullshit!"

Mmmh-kay... I decided not to defend him.

He had made his bed, but I was the one to lie on it. Before he came with that speech, I had everything planned out and I put the plan on hold after his emotional session but now there was nothing stopping me. It was me and my son all the way, just as I thought it would be.

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This is to show appreciation to the people who made this first edition/part possible (the pushers/motivators, the editors, and the proofreaders). I won't call anyone by name but thank you guys.

"Church Chronicles" is a five-part series that contains roughly ten chapters each. It is by no means an aim to demolish the church image, or anyone else's image for that matter but it is fictional work with hope to entertain and maybe educate. All characters are fictional and so is the storyline.

To the reader, thank you for showing interest in this work of art, your reviews are obviously welcome but most importantly... be on the lookout for the second edition/part, and thank you once again.

.....THE END.....